Men's consumption of fitness and exercise: An exploration of motivations for exercise and fitness involvement

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Men’s consumption of fitness and exercise: An exploration of motivations for exercise and fitness involvement

by

Melissa Lynne Jakubauskas

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Apparel, Merchandising and Design

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

2010

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ABSTRACT

Individuals in the U.S. have become increasingly involved in fitness and exercise within the last decade. As health of Americans decreases due to unhealthy diets and stresses of family and career coupled with society’s obsession with attractiveness and physical appearance, more individuals are turning to exercise and fitness to get healthy and enhance the physical appearance of the body (Bordo, 1999). Men, in particular, have increasingly become a target for the fitness industry as more and more men spend money on fitness, diet and appearance products (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). The purpose of this research was to understand men’s use of exercise, fitness and health club memberships, as well as the meanings behind their participation in these activities. In addition, men’s fitness and exercise behavior as it relates to appearance, body image and the muscular male body ideal were examined. Ten men, who were regular exercisers, were interviewed for this study. The men’s motivations for engaging in exercise centered on health, appearance as it relates to both muscularity and weight management and desire to engage in athletic activities. Participation and involvement in exercise and fitness was very important for participants and was a significant part of their identities and lifestyle. Several related theoretical frameworks including Foucault and the “Docile Body,” Symbolic Interaction (SI) Theory of Fashion, Bourdieu and Social Capital and Postmodernism were used to interpret and provide meaning to participants’ responses.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Individuals in the United States have become increasingly involved in fitness and exercise within the last decade. Both men and women have been caught up in the fitness craze as obesity rates in the U.S. have climbed and overall health of Americans has decreased (The Obesity Society, 2007). In addition, U.S. society has become obsessed with physical appearance, attractiveness and the pursuit of youth and beauty (Bordo, 1999; Sharma & Black, 2001). Television, internet and popular publications extol the social benefits of physical attractiveness and its achievability with the right exercises and fitness routines, as evidenced by beauty magazine covers advertising the latest way to lose those last ten pounds or reduce inches on the belly (Bordo, 1999; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Many individuals in the U.S. have taken up regular exercise to enhance their appearance and attractiveness with exercise to lose weight and tone muscles as well as increase cardiovascular and overall health.

In what many scholars and practitioners are calling a crisis of obesity or obesity epidemic, individuals are being called to take control of their bodies and their fat (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Many Americans are regularly exercising and enrolling in gyms and fitness classes, in part because clinical research suggests that severe obesity is linked to heart disease, diabetes, cancer and various other ailments (The Obesity Society, 2007). Stresses of careers, families and everyday obligations have put Americans at a greater risk for health problems in recent years, according to the Handbook of Stress, Medicine and Health (1996). Subsequently, Americans have attempted to increase their levels of physical fitness and health to avoid chronic disease in future years (Cooper, 1996).
American men are spending more of their money and time on fitness and exercise than ever before (Luciano, 2001; Silva, 2006). It is estimated that approximately 85 million Americans are participating in weight-training activities, with men constituting the vast majority of participants (Luciano, 2001). In the last ten years, men have spent approximately $4 billion on commercial and home gym equipment (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Silva, 2006). Currently, one of the most popular magazines in the country, *Men’s Health*, has seen its circulation increase from 250,000 to 1.8 billion making it more popular than *GQ* and *Esquire* combined (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009).

Since the 1970s, men in the U.S. have been exposed to an increasingly muscular and lean body ideal (Pope, Gruber, Mangweth, Bureau, deCol, Jourvent, & Hudson, 2000a). For over two decades, media has been bombarding men with muscular, fit images that virtually no man can live up to (Bordo, 1999; McClelland, 1999; Pope, Olivardia, Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999). Magazines and other popular media outlets have inundated men with fitness tips, regimens and pictures of what the perfect male body is and how, with hard work and dedication, the perfect body is portrayed as possible (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001; McClelland, 1999).

**Achieving the “Perfect Body”**

Obsession with the “perfect” male body has led some men to extreme behavior in which sacrificing the healthy body for the perfect and, so called “fit and athletic body,” has become the ultimate goal (Barlett, Vowels, & Saucier, 2008; McCarthy, 2001; Mosley, 2008; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000b; Silva, 2006). Probably as a consequence, an increase in male eating disorders and psychological conditions, such as muscle dysmorphia, has been documented more frequently among medical clinicians in the last two decades (Davey & Bishop, 2006; McClelland, 1999; Mosley, 2008; Pope et al., 2000a).
The growing problems associated with men’s obsession with exercise and conforming to the new muscular male body ideal are rivaling diseases and disorders associated with women’s body dissatisfaction (Bordo, 1999; Davey & Bishop, 2006; Keim, 2006; McCarthy, 2001; Mosley, 2009; Silva, 2006). Recent studies have uncovered the importance of addressing these body image issues that used to be considered strictly female related (Gough, 2007; Olivardia, Pope, & Hudson, 2000; Pope et al., 2000b) but further research is needed to illustrate the importance of addressing these issues for American men. The evolution and popularity of the muscular male body ideal and the relationship between that ideal and increase in men’s fitness and exercise consumption is also largely uninvestigated and warrants further research (Barlett et al., 2008; Bordo, 1999; McCarthy, 2001; Pope et al., 2000a).

Increasing popular literature depictions of the physical appearance benefits of exercise paralleled with increasing rates of male body image and eating disorders suggests that there is a distinct possibility that American men’s exercise consumption behaviors and evolution of the muscular male body ideal are related (Barlett et al., 2008; Davey & Bishop, 2006; McClelland, 1999; Morry & Staska, 2001; Mosley, 2009). Popular publications such as health and beauty magazines seen on newsstands and in grocery stores also indicate that exercise and fitness are not solely for health benefits but for appearance-related issues (Bordo, 1999; Olivaridia, 2001; Pope et al., 2000b). Books, magazines, television shows and internet sites dedicated to improving the appearance of the body through physical fitness are growing steadily (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Celebrity endorsers for miracle supplements and exercise products have increased. For example, professional football player Vernon Davis endorses Force Factor, a supplement designed to increase the intensity of workouts and ultimately, muscle size (ARAlifestyle.com, 2010). Numerous studies have also reported that the purchase of products by men for hair care,
skin care and other cosmetics have increased drastically as companies have introduced men’s skin and hair care lines (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009), further indicating an increase in men’s attention to their appearance. Pope et al. (2000) also reported a 3% increase in men undergoing cosmetic surgery from 2002 to 2006, a trend identified in the early 1990s (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Pope et al., 2000). Up until the last few years, few studies have focused on men, gym use and their motivations for fitness and exercise. Although popular and scientific literature extol the virtues of exercise and maintaining a certain level of physical fitness for a healthy body, men’s motivations for gym use and fitness activities have been largely unexplored in comparison to women and their motives for exercise and fitness activities. In addition, questions regarding men’s motivations for use of gym facilities and gym equipment have yet to be studied. This research was an attempt to understand the meanings associated with men’s exercise consumption behavior as it relates to U.S. society’s relatively new obsession with the male body and its appearance.

**Purpose**

Although there has been much research on women and their attitudes and motivations for exercise and fitness, there is still little research as to why men participate in fitness activities and their involvement with appearance. The purpose of this research was to understand men’s use of exercise, fitness and health club memberships, as well as the meanings behind their participation in these activities. Motivations to exercise and how exercise and fitness may be related to appearance and the muscular male body ideal were explored. Overall, men’s fitness and exercise behavior as it relates to appearance, body image and the muscular male body ideal were examined.
Research Questions

(1) What motivates men to exercise?

(2) How do men feel about exercising?

(3) How do men feel about their bodies in relation to body image and body dissatisfaction?

(4) Does society’s cultural standard of muscul arity for men play a role in their exercise behavior?

(5) Do sociocultural forces and normative gender roles influence men’s motivations to engage in exercise and fitness activities in addition to health and fitness reasons?
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature begins with an overview of the fitness industry and fitness consumption in the United States. In addition, motivations and reasons for exercise are discussed. The third and fourth sections focus on the evolution of the muscular male body ideal and male body image dissatisfaction. Lastly, theoretical perspectives and applications regarding the body and exercise are examined.

American Fitness Consumption and Motivations for Exercise

According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association’s (SGMA) international report, Tracking the Fitness Movement (2002), the number of members of health clubs rose from 32.8 million in 2001 to 33.8 million in 2002. For the 11-year period of 1990 to 2001, health club memberships rose 63%--an increase of 13 million members from the previous decade (SGMA, 2002). The International Health, Racquet and Sports Club Association also reported that 33 million Americans who currently belong to fitness centers or health clubs visited their gyms an average of 89 times during the year, translating into approximately 3 billion visits in one year (IRHSA Annual Consumer Report, 2008). In addition, fitness club members reported an average of 93 days at the gym, and the number of members who went to the gym 100 or more days during the year reached a record high of 13.9 million people (IRHSA Annual Consumer Report, 2008).

North American culture’s obsession with physical appearance has increased over the last several decades. Physical attractiveness has become one of the most highly desired and essential aspects of peoples’ lives, with men’s bodies becoming a rising target for the appearance market (Black & Sharma, 2001; Bordo, 1999; Gough, 2007; Luciano, 2001; Pope et al., 2000b).
Although there is a lack of statistics on the presence of men in gyms and their use of gyms and fitness-related equipment, popular culture, including magazines, television shows, infomercials and internet sites, constantly bombards men with appearance and fitness-related products and routines, indicating that men have become greatly involved in fitness and physical appearance (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001; McClelland, 1999; Morry & Staska, 2001; Mosley, 2009).

Individuals in the U.S. exercise for many reasons. As mentioned previously, obesity rates are continuing to climb and North American culture’s obsession with appearance continues to intensify, thereby increasing the desire for many individuals to take up regular exercise and fitness routines. Some scholars have investigated reasons why individuals take on exercise routines and participate in athletic activities with many finding self-presentational motives for exercise (Leary, 1992; Markland & Hardy, 1993; Ryan, Frederick, Lepes, Rubio, & Sheldon, 1997). Physical appearance is and continues to be an important reason for exercise, as evidenced by advertisements and commercials for gyms and home gym equipment featuring incredibly fit and muscular individuals (Barlett et al., 2008). North American culture is preoccupied with beauty and a youthful appearance, and exercise is one way to enhance and manipulate one’s physical appearance to achieve the cultural physical beauty standard (Leary, 1992).

Social identity also plays a role in the decision to participate in fitness activities (Leary, 1992). Individuals who wish to appear fit or athletic may participate in exercise and fitness activities because it will help to enhance one’s self-esteem and social image (Leary, 1992; Ryan et al., 1997). Many individuals thrive on the attention and social recognition garnered from participation in fitness and athletic-type activities (Leary, 1992). The desire to maintain a particular social image is the primary motivation underlying exercising by individuals for whom social identity is dependent on their fit or athletic appearance (Leary, 1992; Ryan et al., 1997).
Those who wish to identify themselves as athletic, fit or in-shape may also use the gym as a place to cultivate interpersonal relationships that are important for reinforcing fitness and exercise behavior. As Anderson and Stone (1981) contend, quasi-intimate relationships often help individuals develop their identities within a particular community.

There are also individual differences that play an important role in motivations to take on exercise. Not everyone is motivated to exercise strictly for appearance management reasons or for maintaining particular social identities (Leary, 1992; Markland & Hardy, 1993; Ryan et al., 1997). According to Leary’s (1992) study entitled “Self-Presentational Processes in Exercise and Sport,” individuals who identify reasons pertaining to personal values, such as valuing a well-functioning body or being able to participate in particular physical activities, are more likely to cite enjoyment, health and fitness and personal satisfaction as motivations for exercise and fitness activities. Conversely, individuals who cited social reasons or social aspects of their personalities are more likely to undertake fitness activities for appearance and social image motives (Leary, 1992). For example, individuals who value being the center of attention or maintaining particular social groups would be more likely to undertake fitness and exercise activities for appearance or social image reasons (Leary, 1992).

North American society is also characterized by consumerism, defined as an intense desire to consume an array of products and services (Bordo, 1999; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Consumerism extends to body-related products and services. Every day Americans are inundated with advertisements of a wide variety of products and services that claim to be the next miracle product for some part of the body (Black & Sharma, 2001) and corroborate the cultural obsession with physical appearance, individuals continually test and try out products that claim to make them “look good and feel great!” Gyms and health and fitness products garner a major share of
the products that Americans consume to enhance appearance and increase physical fitness (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009).

**Muscular Male Body Ideal**

For the last three decades, and increasingly within the last two decades, men have been exposed to a muscular body ideal (Bordo, 1999; Pope et al., 2000a). The meaning of masculinity has evolved through the years while social discourse, centered around gender roles and the creation of identity through physical appearance modification, led U.S. society to a new standard of ideal physical attractiveness for men (Bordo, 1999; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). The new ideal, envisioned as a muscular man with broad shoulders, narrow waist and highly developed chest and arm muscles, pervades popular culture images of men and forces a particular body image upon men, telling them what a man’s body should look like (Barlett et al., 2008; Gough, 2007; McClelland, 1999; Pope et al., 2000a; Pope et al., 2000b; Silva, 2006). Magazines and advertisements in particular have forced this image upon men, and in many cases men have internalized these images as what they should and want to look like (Barlett et al., 2008; Luciano, 2001; McClelland, 1999; Morry & Staska, 2001). The importance of men’s physical appearance has allowed the beauty and health industry to capitalize on this new obsession and help perpetuate a new attractiveness ideal for men. A lean, muscular and defined body is what is desired. The culturally accepted muscular physical standard for men was confirmed by Pope et al.’s (1998) study examining ideals of male body image through action toys.

It is estimated that the muscular male body ideal has been evolving over the course of about 100 years (McClelland, 1999), but the strong emphasis on a lean, defined, muscular look has been most prevalent in U.S. culture within the last three decades (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001; Olivardia et al., 2001; Pope et al., 1999; Pope et al., 2000a; Pope et al., 2000b). The male
body has become increasingly objectified and sexualized in advertising and the fashion industry (Silva, 2006), since Calvin Klein’s 1974 provocative male underwear advertisement (Bordo, 1999). Prior to that, men’s bodies were used in advertising, but were not nearly as undressed and, if they were, the practicality of the half-naked male body was made evident in the advertisement itself. For example, an advertisement with a shirtless male would be used to market a skincare product such as sunscreen, thus the half-naked male body was seen as practical and related to the use of the product (Halliwell, Dittmar, & Orsborn, 2007). Men are looking at their bodies in new ways, focusing on their bodies as symbols of their own masculinity and key components of their social identity and acceptance (Black & Sharma, 2001; Bordo, 1999; Davey & Bishop, 2006; Pope et al., 2000b). The fashion industry has been a key player in the evolution of the muscular male ideal as images of male models have become increasingly lean, muscular and undressed (McClelland, 1999; Silva, 2006). Men’s bodies have become the object of social gaze since the 1970s, with men’s undressed bodies used to promote products and services that have nothing to do with the male body (Bordo, 1999; McClelland, 1999).

In addition to the fashion industry as a key promoter of the muscular ideal, changing gender roles and women’s liberation have played a major part in the evolution of the muscular male body ideal (Bordo, 1999; Drummond, 2005; McClelland, 1999; Perschuk et al., 1993; Silva, 2006). The advancement and equality of women in society have left men with merely their appearance as a sign of their masculinity and what they are able to offer women (Bordo, 1999; Drummond, 2005; Perschuk et al., 1993). The development of muscle and decrease in body fat for men serves as the most prominent display of masculinity and also a reaffirmation of the strength and traditional “superiority” of men in North American society (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). As women are approaching equality with men in their careers and ability to obtain
financial stability, men are less relied upon to be breadwinners and providers; this has left men with only their muscles as a symbol of their masculinity (Thompson & Cafri, 2007). Men are now caught in a complicated net that involves media’s representation of masculinity, muscularity standards and society’s new desire to gaze upon the male body as the female body has been traditionally gazed upon for many years. Society’s increasing gaze upon the male body reflects a shift to more hedonic roles for men (Bordo, 1999). In contrast to hedonic roles for women that encourage feminine behavior such as helplessness and submissiveness, men’s hedonic roles serve as ways of communicating hyper-masculinity through the display of a lean and muscular body (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001; Pope, 2000) As thinness has come to represent femininity for women, muscularity has come to represent masculinity for men (Black & Sharma, 2001; Bordo, 1999; Davey & Bishop, 2006; Drummond, 2005; McClelland, 1999; Morry & Staska, 2001).

The muscular male ideal is having a tremendous impact on the self esteem and body satisfaction of today’s men. Adolescent boys and adult men are going to extremes to attain society’s muscular ideal, resulting sometimes in damage to their bodies, as well as increasing rates of body dissatisfaction and poor body image (Mosley, 2009; Pope et. al, 1999; Pope et al., 2000a; Pope et al., 2000b). Barlett et al.’s (2008) study of the effects of media images on men’s body image concerns illustrates the profound effect society’s cultural standard for muscularity has on men. Their study illustrated the increased rates of body dissatisfaction and decreased body esteem, self-esteem and other psychological disorders because of constant exposure to muscular male images. Pope et al.’s (2000a) findings of body image perceptions of men parallel those of Barlett et al. (2008) as men reported wanting an additional 27 pounds of muscle on their bodies to appear attractive to women. Paralleling similar studies performed with women and fashion models, exposure to muscular media images of men does make men feel inadequate about their
physical appearance, more specifically, their musculature (Halliwell et al., 2007). Increasing numbers of American men are engaging in excessive exercise, anabolic steroid use and eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia in an attempt to attain this ideal (Halliwell et al., 2007). Davey and Bishop (2006) reported that nearly 50% of young men using dietary supplements are using those supplements to increase their muscle mass. Olivardia et al. (2000) reported a positive correlation between muscle dysmorphia and eating disorders among men with 54% of men sampled reporting having little to no control over their compulsive weight lifting and dieting activities.

**A Sociocultural Perspective on the Body**

The sociocultural perspective or model posits that men are experiencing societal and cultural pressures to maintain physical appearance pressures similar to those women have experienced for years (Olivardia, 2001). The media and other sources such as family, friends and significant others, are powerful communicators and reinforcers of cultural body ideals (Dittmar, 2005). The sociocultural model claim is that men and women begin to feel bad about their bodies when they are exposed to unrealistic images of the ideal body, usually occurring at an early age (Dittmar, 2005; Olivardia, 2001). Individuals subsequently internalize these ideals from unrealistic images in the media as well as comments and ideas from family and peer groups (Dittmar, 2005). Those internalized ideals are used in the construction of body image and how individuals interact with their bodies (Bordo, 1999; Dittmar, 2005; Olivardia, 2001). The mass media, peer groups, significant others and family are powerful reinforcers of sociocultural body ideals as men are being exposed to media images that extol the advantages of the muscular male body and its achievability (Dittmar, 2005; Thompson & Cafri, 2007).
For over a half-century, women have been exposed to media images that promote thinness, but men are more recently being exposed to images that promote muscularity that is virtually unattainable without the assistance of steroids and other substance abuse (Olivardia, 2001; Pope et al., 2000a). U.S. society’s preoccupation with consumerism and consuming products that alter the body to increase attractiveness and youthfulness has created an environment where bodies are put on display to promote U.S. society’s obsession with appearance and appearance transforming products (Bordo, 1999; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Men’s bodies are now being put on display, attracting the societal gaze which was once solely directed at women’s bodies, and the perfection that could be attained with cosmetics and body altering beauty and exercise routines (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001). A fit, lean and attractive body, devoid of fat and imperfections, is the mark of a successful individual who is able to maintain control and discipline over the body (Bordo, 1999; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009).

Western society’s obsession with appearance in combination with the fear of weight gain and health problems associated with obesity has encouraged many individuals to pay attention to their physical appearance (Dittmar, 2005). Men and women feel bad about their bodies because of the images presented before them by the media; the media perpetuates an already existing cultural standard of muscularity for men and thinness for women (Dittmar, 2005). A combination of social and cultural factors are encouraging men to exercise and diet to conform to masculinity standards, which have become more rigid within the past few decades (Bordo, 1999; Dittmar, 2005; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). As men lose the ability to distinguish themselves as breadwinners and leaders of the family unit, a muscular appearance is becoming an important indicator of masculinity in today’s society, and the most logical way to achieve muscularity and
shape the body according to cultural standards is through exercise and fitness activities (Dittmar, 2005; Thompson & Cafri, 2007).

**Consequences of Male Body Dissatisfaction**

Today’s men are becoming more and more dissatisfied with their bodies as the emphasis on a perfect body symbolically equaling perfect health, strength and masculinity intensifies (Barlett et al., 2008; Bordo, 1999; Davey & Bishop, 2006; Olivardia, 2001; Pope et al., 1999; Pope et al., 2000a). According to a national body image survey conducted in 1972, 25% of men were dissatisfied with their bodies (McCarthy, 2001). That percentage rose to 67% in 1997 (McCarthy, 2001). Mirroring women’s feelings about their bodies, men are becoming more aware of the inadequacy of their bodies compared to the cultural standard (Davey & Bishop, 2006; Drummond, 2005; Olivardia, 2001; Pope et al., 2000b; Silva, 2006). Pope et al. (2000a) reported that of their entire male sample, 17% would give up three years for their lives and 11% would give up five years of their lives to achieve the muscular ideal they wanted. Magazines such as *Men’s Fitness* and *Men’s Health* proclaim the necessity of “burn fat, build muscle,” “nutrition tips every man must know” and “fight fat and win!” (Gough, 2007, p. 328) creating a notion that the ideal body is attainable and morally obligatory (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001; Olivardia, 2001; Morry & Staska, 2001).

The drive for muscularity is part of a cultural ideal that emphasizes physical attractiveness and youthful appearance (Luciano, 2001; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). North American culture stresses the idea that our lives are completely open to change, including our bodies (Thompson & Cafri, 2007). Manipulation of our homes, careers and even bodies has become a deep-rooted American value (Black & Sharma, 2001; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). Coupled with growing obesity rates in the U.S., men and women are taking their exercise and
dieting habits to the extreme to remain within the accepted cultural ideal of thin for women and muscular for men (The Obesity Society, 2007; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). The cultural muscular male body ideal has become an ubiquitous symbolic expression of masculinity and what it means to be male, and has led many men to extremes to attain this virtually impossible physical ideal (Bordo, 1999; Gough, 2007; Olivardia, 2001; Morry & Staska, 2001; Walker et al., 2009).

Anabolic steroid use is on the rise with approximately 3% of 12th grade young men admitting to steroid use in 2008 (NIDA, 2008); that percentage is likely to increase as more young men go to extremes to build muscle and achieve the muscular ideal (Luciano, 2001; McClelland, 1999; Olivardia et al., 2000; Olivardia, 2001; Pope et al., 2000b). Even though the risks of steroid use are widely known, society’s standard of masculinity and focus on physical appearance is motivating enough for men to go to these extremes to attain this image (Brunet & Sabiston, 2009; Luciano, 2001; McClelland, 1999; Pope et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2009). Society’s cultural standard of muscularity has encouraged the widespread use of supplements and steroids in fitness centers (Pope et al., 1999). Morrison, Gizis and Shorter’s (2004) study on supplement use found 41% of gym attendees had engaged in some form of supplement use to build muscle. Athletes, as well as men in general simply want to look bigger and more muscular (Bordo, 1999; Davey & Bishop, 2006; McClelland, 1999; Pope et al., 1999; Walker et al., 2009). Mosley’s qualitative study (2008) on bodybuilding and muscle dysmorphia highlighted that many men are not worried about the harmful side effects of steroids in the long-term, so long as their bodies look good now and meet the cultural standard of muscularity. One man stated, “I know steroids are bad…but frankly I’m not that bothered about how healthy I am in twenty years; I want to feel good about myself now” (p. 194). This statement illustrates the central importance that having a muscular and fit body is to feeling good about one’s body and self in
the current cultural moment in North American society and explains the extremes that men are willing to go to achieve this virtually unattainable muscular ideal.

Psychological disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder and, more recently, muscle dysmorphia are affecting men psychologically and socially (Davey & Bishop, 2006; McCarthy, 2001; Olivardia et al., 2000; Pope et al., 1999; Pope et al., 2000a; Walker et al., 2009). Muscle dysmorphia is characterized as a psychological disorder in which males believe they are too small and, as a result, exercise and lift weights excessively in order to achieve a more muscular stature (Davey & Bishop, 2006; Olivardia, 2001; Pope et al., 2000a). Also termed “reverse anorexia nervosa” because of the intense desire to gain muscle as opposed to losing fat, muscle dysmorphia is most common among athletes for whom physical appearance and physique are highly important. However, muscle dysmorphia is increasing among men who do not participate in athletic competition (Olivardia et al., 2000). Sociocultural factors such as highly muscular images of men in media are suggested to be leading contributors to muscle dysmorphia as men internalize images of muscular bodies (Barlett et al., 2008, & Olivardia et al., 2000). Barlett et al. (2008) reported that men’s exposure to muscular media stimuli increased body dissatisfaction, lowered body esteem and increased the propensity for psychological disorders relating to poor body image.

Muscle dysmorphia disorder affects men’s social lives, as sufferers will avoid social situations in which the body might be revealed; the disorder affects careers and personal lives, as sufferers will do almost anything to spend time exercising and lifting weights to increase muscle size (Brunet & Sabiston, 2009; Olivardia, 2001; Pope et al., 2000b; Walker et al., 2009). Olivardia et al. (2000) found men who would give up well-paid established careers to be able to work at gyms or fitness centers where they could lift weights and exercise constantly. Shifting
cultural ideals towards excessive muscularity have led to an increase in muscle dysmorphia diagnoses among young men and adolescents (Davey & Bishop, 2006).

In addition, eating disorders among men are increasing at an alarming rate. Coinciding with muscle dysmorphia in many cases, men are engaging in disordered eating in their attempts to lose weight to define muscles (Mosley, 2008). Despite the reluctance of men to seek help for these disorders because of society’s stigma attached to men with these types of problems (Davey & Bishop, 2006; Silva, 2006), approximately 10-15% of reported anorexia or bulimia cases are identified among male individuals, and that percentage is steadily growing (Carlat, Camargo, & Herzog, 1997; Davey & Bishop, 2006; Pope et al., 1999). The physical ideal that society says is attainable and required for acceptance in U.S. society has been internalized by many men, making it of vital importance to their body image satisfaction, self esteem and overall productiveness as a human being (Barlett et al., 2008; Bordo, 1999; Drummond, 2005; Luciano, 2001). Even though the desire to put on lean muscle mass is of leading importance in the drive for the muscular ideal, men are using starvation diets and bingeing and purging in attempts to eliminate body fat and achieve the trim and “cut” physique found in popular culture (Bordo, 1999; Drummond, 2005; Olivardia, 2001; Silva, 2006).

**Foucault and the “Docile Body”**

Foucault argues that the body is both a biological entity as well as a socially constructed entity (Wilson, 1992). Foucault’s ideas focus on the discourse of power in society and how the body has become a site for coercion and manipulation (Entwistle, 2000; Foucault, 1984). The body is very difficult to alter in extreme ways, but cultures have been attempting to manipulate the body in extreme ways for centuries (Wilson, 1992). Discipline of the body has become more intrinsically based in the 20th and 21st centuries, as individuals seek to alter the body through diet
and exercise rather than through restrictive clothing, such as corsets in the 18th and 19th centuries (Wilson, 1992). According to Foucault (1984), the meanings behind the alteration and manipulation of the body have remained relatively the same throughout centuries; rather, the means of doing so have changed.

Foucault sees the manipulation of the body as a form of discipline that “produces subjected and practiced bodies” (Foucault, 1984, p. 182) or, in other words, docile bodies. Dissociation of power from the body is occurring while at the same time the body serves to control and manipulate an individual’s actions and feelings (Foucault, 1984). The discipline of the body creates order and predictability in society (Foucault, 1984) resulting in management of society in which individual bodies are managed through diet and exercise (Entwistle, 2000). This management of society is important because the key to this management is what Foucault refers to as surveillance or panopticism (Entwistle, 2000; Foucault, 1984).

Panopticism is the idea of surveillance or constant monitoring of individuals to encourage them to adhere to cultural norms and practices (Entwistle, 2000). Foucault argued that society calls upon individuals to discipline the body through diet and exercise as a means of managing order in society (Entwistle, 2000). Control and discipline of the body is achieved via surveillance (Foucault, 1984) achieved through the constant eye of others and society at large that keeps us adhering to cultural norms about the body, exercising appropriate care of the body and expressing attitudes that are consistent with society’s ideas about manipulating and altering the body (Foucault, 1984; Wilson, 1992). Panopticism encourages one to take pride in his or her personal appearance (Foucault, 1984; Wilson, 1992). Failure to do so results in the viewing of that individual as inadequate, lacking in discipline and thus, not in control of the body (Wilson, 1992). The individual internalizes the panoptic eye and monitors and disciplines the self.
Symbolic Interaction (SI) Theory of Fashion

The symbolic interaction (SI) theory of fashion attempts to explain the process of negotiation of meanings involving dress and modifications to the body that results in fashion change (Kasier et al., 1995). Underlying every aspect of appearance modification is symbolic meaning that is socially constructed (Kaiser et al., 1995). Fashion evolves over time resulting from negotiation of appearances and the meanings assigned to those appearances (Kaiser, 1997). The SI theory of fashion focuses on the concepts of human ambivalence, appearance-modifying commodities and an “ongoing dialectic between human ambivalence and appearance-modifying commodities” (Kaiser et al., 1995, p. 177).

Human ambivalence can be defined as the experience of conflicting emotions or wants, while appearance-modifying commodities are objects, treatments or devices that modify appearance and serve as an outlet for human ambivalence (Kasier et al., 1995). These appearance-modifying commodities are prevalent in the capitalistic marketplaces of many countries, including the U.S., where consumption, particularly consumption of health and beauty products, is an important and valued cultural practice (Baudrillard, 1998; Kaiser, 1997; Kaiser et al., 1995). Consumption is stimulated by the concept of human ambivalence, a state of being in which the plethora of appearance-modifying commodities constantly reminds individuals of their need to improve and re-negotiate the meanings of their appearance (Baudrillard, 1998; Kaiser, 1995). This re-negotiation is the ongoing dialectic in which ambivalence towards one’s appearance helps to stimulate the demand for appearance-modifying commodities in a capitalistic, consumption-driven marketplace (Kaiser et al., 1995).

Fitness and exercise have become a fundamental part of the North American lifestyle (Bordo, 1999; Smith-Maguire, 2008). Not only do fitness and exercise activities serve to improve
physical health, they have become a vital component of maintaining a socially acceptable outward appearance. Participating in regular exercise and fitness regimens has become a lifestyle, and that lifestyle has been commodified into fitness clubs, equipment, apparel and instruction (Smith-Maguire, 2008). The culture of exercise encourages ambivalence towards the body and creates an environment in which dissatisfaction with one’s physical appearance fuels use of fitness activities and exercise as appearance-modifying commodities to reshape the body and maintain a disciplined self. The fitness culture perpetuates the notion that the body is in need of constant improvement and can be manipulated as long as one follows a prescribed fitness routine.

**Bourdieu: Social Capital and the Body**

Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and social capital can be applied to the body and its interaction in the social world. Bourdieu (1984) defines habitus as a mental structure for classifying and defining social practices. It helps an individual create meaning in the social world and serves as a vehicle for understanding cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus is a device by which individuals understand society and cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1984). The development of habitus is an unconscious process that occurs through socialization and links the internal with external, the subjective and objective and the individual with the social (Bourdieu, 1977; Entwistle, 2000). Habitus is an internalization of cultural standards and practices that becomes so ingrained that they are operationalized in behavior unconsciously (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984).

Social capital, as understood by Bourdieu, refers to the accumulation of prestige or status for membership in a particular group of society (Bourdieu, 1977; Lee, Macdonald, & Wright, 2009). Social capital is acquired through the adoption and mastery of actions that are the
identifying characteristics of a particular group (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984). These
c characteristics become the basis of a social network and constitute membership within a
particular network (Bourdieu, 1977; Lee et al., 2009). Social capital serves an important purpose
because it reflects an individual’s values and is indicative of an individual’s acceptance and
participation in societal groups (Entwistle, 2000; Lee et al., 2009).

The body is a social product and a tangible representation of a person’s identity
(Bourdieu, 1984). In North American culture, displays and demonstrations of strength and
athleticism are highly valued and represent a well-socialized male. In particular, among the
middle classes in which the body is used for less instrumental purposes (i.e., manual labor), the
body has become symbolic of membership in a more distinct segment of society. Engaging in
sport, fitness and exercise for the middle classes has become a cultural practice that helps
distinguish the middle and upper classes from the lower or working classes (Bourdieu, 1984).
Although the working classes do participate in physical activity, the end goal of the activity is
often different; the body is used not to distinguish oneself in terms of attractiveness, but rather as
an instrument to achieve a task such as performance in athletic competition or in manual labor
(Lee et al., 2009). The middle class, in contrast, uses the achievement of physical fitness and
attractiveness as a form of social capital. The prestige garnered from a muscular, fit and athletic
body can be used for upward mobility both socially (such as attraction) and economically (such
as appearing successful in a job role), facilitating acceptance in prestigious groups and access to
economic privilege.

**Postmodernism and the Body**

In postmodern culture in North America, the body has become a consumer object
(Baudrillard, 1998) that is invested in to an extent greater than in other eras of history. The
postmodern period has been widely agreed upon as beginning sometime after the 1950s (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). The consumption of products and services that improve the body continues to increase during this era (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Manipulating the structure and appearance of the body through beauty rituals such as diet and exercise has evolved into a mandatory regimen that reflects an individual’s devotion to discipline in all facets of life (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). The body has become an object that signifies social status, much as in Bourdieu’s concept of social capital (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998). More specifically, the obsession with achieving the fit and lean body and its ability to be manipulated and transformed has become a reflection of wealth, success and discipline in postmodern society (Baudrillard, 1998). Engaging in a variety of ways to manipulate and transform the body has become reflective action in postmodern culture (Baudrillard, 1998; Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998).

Unlike the discipline required over the body in the past, discipline over the body in postmodern society is not centered around Puritan morality, in which control and discipline was a reflection of spiritual discipline and control over pleasures and temptations of the flesh (Baudrillard, 1998; Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998). Rather, as Baudrillard (1998) states, discipline today is based on the idea that an individual is only given one body, and if not taken care of, that body can and will rebel against a person, resulting in a life marred by an unsightly body and health problems (Baudrillard, 1998). In postmodern society, fitness of the body has shifted from being exclusively linked to health and biological functioning to a vehicle for social status and prestige (Baudrillard, 1998).

The idea of the body as transformable and “plastic” in postmodern society is illustrated in the media images presented to society (Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998). Celebrities and
entertainers are examples of the body’s ability to be transformed and the refusal of accepting the body as is (Thompson & Hirschman, 1998). The body has become a site of identity creation and a center for reinforcement of cultural norms (Baudrillard, 1998; Thompson & Hirschman, 1998). The symbolic value of appearance in North American culture has made the fit body a means for upward social mobility and display of prestige and status (Baudrillard, 1998; Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998). Fitness, dieting and other means of manipulating the body have become an integral component of maintaining an ideal appearance and symbolize the resounding cultural norms that emphasize bodily perfection (Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998).
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This study employed in-depth, one-on-one interviews in order to understand men’s beliefs about exercise and fitness and what it means to their lives. A qualitative method employing in-depth interviews was selected because it allows the participant to share their experiences and understanding of the phenomena in their own words, as well as allows the researcher to ascertain the meaning of the participants’ lived experience (McCracken, 1988). The ability to clarify meaning and ask additional questions of participants about their experiences is another primary reason for the use of a qualitative method of inquiry (Spiggle, 1994). The in-depth, one-on-one interviews allowed for an easy exchange of dialogue between researcher and participant and the asking of additional questions for clarification of meaning of participants’ responses (McCracken, 1988). An open-ended question framework was used to guide the researcher during the interview (see Appendix A). Additionally, each participant completed a questionnaire containing demographic questions to acquire necessary background information on the participant (see Appendix B).

Questions used in the interview schedule were grouped into categories including general description of exercise background, gym selection, motivations and importance of exercise, exercise equipment used, exercise history, social influences and appearance issues. Participants were also asked to rate the importance of exercise in their lives on a 5-point Likert type scale, with 1 indicating “not at all important” and 5 indicating “most important” in their life. In addition, participants were also asked to identify their ideal body shape as well as perceived body shape using the muscularity scale in Appendix G.
Sample and Data Collection

The sample for this study (n=10) was obtained using purposive methods, specifically, a
snowball sampling method. This approach was ideal for this type of qualitative research because
the researcher was looking for a specific group of individuals: men who exercise and/or attend
gyms regularly. Prior to contact with participants, the researcher obtained Institutional Review
Board (IRB) approval to conduct this study (see Appendix E). Initially, the researcher
approached men at local area gyms and fitness centers as well as acquaintances who were known
regular exercisers and gym attendees. A screening process ensued as the researcher asked some
general questions of the individual to ensure they were eligible for participation in the study (see
Appendix C). If the individual was eligible for the study and agreed to participate, a location for
the interview was arranged either on campus or a location that was convenient for both
participant and researcher. The researcher also asked if the participant knew any other
individuals who might be interested in participating in the study. This allowed the researcher to
find a group that fit the research sampling goals. Ten was the final number of participants who
agreed to take part in the study. Ten participants were deemed sufficient for this study because
recurring statements and themes were emerging among participants’ responses to suggest that ten
would provide appropriate understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Inclusion criteria for the study was men between the ages 25-40 who exercise regularly,
i.e…at least three times per week on average and/or those who have attended a gym for at least 6
months. This age group was selected because it includes young adults who will more likely be
out of school and who fit gym usage into their lives outside of work. As most studies to date
have relied heavily on student populations (e.g., Peterson, 2001; Wells, 1993) this study sought
insights into another age group. This age range was also expected to be the most likely to
frequent fitness centers such as gyms and health clubs and be highly concerned about physical appearance (Bordo, 1999).

The interviews lasted approximately one half hour to one hour and were audio taped for transcription, at the permission of the participant. Before each interview, each participant was asked to sign a consent form outlining the content of the interview and the participants’ rights during the study (see Appendix D), as well as to complete the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). During the interview, participants were also asked to identify their ideal body shape and current body shape based on a scale used by Lynch and Zellner (1999) (see Appendix G). Attitudinal data regarding exercise importance was also collected using a 5-point Likert type scale. Quotations or excerpts from transcripts are used in the final analysis, but names have been changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of participants.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed through interpretive analysis utilizing a procedure that categorizes and classifies qualitative data into parts while simultaneously relating those parts back to the whole (Spiggle, 1994). Continual review of the transcripts, beginning during data collection, allowed for themes to emerge. Triangulation of methods, using in-depth interviews, demographic questionnaire and qualitative responses to the muscularity scale allowed for increased reliability in data collection, analysis and study of emergent themes (Spiggle, 1994). Those themes were then grouped together by an even broader classification to find connections among themes, starting with particular elements of an interview and moving to more general themes (McCracken, 1988; Spiggle, 1994).

The five stages, as suggested by McCracken (1988) were used to guide the analysis and interpretation of the data. These stages include: (1) treating each word or statement in the
interview as separate from the rest of the data, (2) taking those “observations” and relating them to the review of literature, (3) determining the relationships between the second stage observations and relating them back to the literature, (4) using the observations made at previous stages and analyzing them collectively and, lastly, (5) taking the themes and overall patterns in the data and forming a final analysis. This particular approach allowed the researcher to identify themes using a step-by-step approach while continuously comparing each part or theme to the whole data (Spiggle, 1994). Axial coding was used to understand the data and how each piece fit within the larger data set, as well as to identify connections among themes and how those themes fit into particular patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The coding guide used by the researcher was developed using the observations made at previous stages in the analysis process, relating them back to the literature and the data set and lastly, developing themes related to the data in the context of the literature and theoretical frameworks.

Multiple steps were taken to ensure that the data collection and analysis processes were both reliable and trustworthy. First, the coding guide was checked several times by the major professor to ensure accuracy and meaning of each theme. Coding of data was also checked for trustworthiness by a fellow graduate student, well versed in coding of data. The coding check or auditing was conducted on 30% of the data already coded by the primary researcher. Intercoder reliability was calculated by subtracting total disagreements from total agreements and dividing that number by total number of agreements (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Campanella-Bracken, 2002). The intercoder reliability for 30% of the entire data set was 90%. All disagreements in coding were negotiated between the primary researcher and coding auditor. The negotiations informed adjustments in coding of the remaining unaudited data. Additionally, a triangulation approach was used to analyze data. The researcher employed multiple theories to help explain
and understand the participants’ lived experience, as well as allow the inductive emergence of new theoretical ideas.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes discussion of research results and findings from the current study. The chapter begins with a description of participants who partook in the study, followed by an in-depth discussion and analysis of major themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis. The major findings acquired from the data related to: (a) the role and importance of exercise and fitness, (b) experiences and feelings surrounding exercise activities and (c) the role of appearance and attractiveness in exercise and fitness involvement. Although each superordinate topic will be treated separately, these topics are not discrete. The topics are all interconnected, but will be discussed separately to understand the participants’ motivations and reasons behind their involvement in fitness and exercise, as well as the evolution of their participation in fitness and identification with an exercise and fitness identity.

Overview of Participants

Participants in the study included 10 men between the ages of 25-33 who were residents of Iowa, Nebraska and California. Seven of the participants were in their mid to late 20s and three participants were in their early 30s. The average age was 27.5 years. Six participants resided in the state of Iowa, two in Nebraska and two in California. Of the 10 participants, six identified themselves as white/Caucasian, two Hispanic, one white/Hispanic and one Asian.

Each participant had some college education with four participants holding a bachelor’s degree and five holding a Master’s degree. One participant had a high school diploma and had attended multiple years of college. Only one participant was married; the remainder of the participants identified themselves as single or never married. All but one participant belonged to a gym or fitness facility. The one participant who did not belong to a gym exercised at home with his home gym equipment and ran on a regular basis.
Thematic Analysis Among Major Topic Findings

The results and discussion chapter are organized around major themes from participants’ responses to the qualitative questions. In addition, scaled responses are interspersed to add additional clarification and information to the qualitative findings. Statements from participants that help illustrate major themes are quoted and ages are used in parentheses next to participant pseudonyms to provide age perspective.

The Role and Importance of Exercise and Fitness

Importance of Exercise

Participants unanimously expressed that they held a high level of importance for exercise and fitness in their lives. When asked about the frequency of their workouts, most participants reported that they went to the gym or worked out at least three days per week, with many frequenting their fitness facility or exercising around four to five times per week. Two respondents visited their gyms seven times per week.

When asked to rank the importance of working out and exercising on a 5-point Likert scale with 5 indicating “extremely important” and 1 meaning that exercise was “not at all important.” All respondents expressed that exercise was at least a 4, indicating that the role of exercise and fitness was an important component of their lives. Matt (33) stated, “It’s important but it’s not going to rule my life. If there’s something else I want to do more, then I’m going to do it.” Matt’s statement illustrates the commitment and importance of exercise, but also his ability to balance life’s other commitments with the importance of exercise. Many participants expressed this balance, but also noted that working out or exercising was always on the mind and a critical component of their weekly or daily routines. Participants did not feel that exercise ruled their lives; they indicated that they pursued a healthy balance of exercise, social life and career.
Motivations for Exercise

Paralleled with the frequency and importance of participants’ workout schedules was enjoyment of exercise and working out. Although all participants spoke of the importance of exercise in their lives, the enjoyment factor was varied and often involved mentally convincing the self to get to the gym or out exercising. Once participants had made the conscious effort to get out and/or to the gym, they felt better about themselves. As Matt (33) said about his ability to get to the gym, “It’s hard for me to get there but when I get there, I enjoy it. It’s the initial hump when I get there but I’m like, this is good for me when I get there.” Conversely, Luke (26) expressed his difficulty in enjoying working out because of the level of physical exertion:

“I hate it sometimes while I’m exercising…especially when I’ve got a trainer telling me that I’ve got to do another ten push-ups and I can’t move my arms.”

Many of the participants expressed similar sentiments as they engaged in exercise, noting that they knew how much better they would feel physically and mentally once they decided to get to the gym and into their routines. Even though most spoke of the enjoyment they felt because of exercise, there was often a hesitation when describing the enjoyment during workout routines. When asked about going to the gym and how much he enjoyed it, Trent (26) responded, “I don’t look forward to any of them (days) really. Well, if I have days off, I look forward to going and playing basketball at 11:00.” Participants responded in similar ways, noting that routines such as lifting weights or using the cardio machines were not as enjoyable and added more to the monotony and obligation of having to be at the gym to keep oneself in good physical shape. Interestingly, if the workout involved sport or athletic competition participants were more apt to express enjoyment about going to the gym and working out. Comments made by participants about using sport and athletic competition as part of exercise routines were seen not
as a workout routine per se, but an activity that participants enjoyed both physically and psychologically. This enjoyment of sport as exercise and involvement in competitive activities will be addressed in a later section of this thesis.

**Physical Activity in Childhood**

Corresponding to participants’ level of activity in adulthood was their level of activity during childhood. Participants who expressed the highest levels of activity and commitment to regular exercise as adults also noted that they had high levels of activity as children and adolescents. As Luke (26) expressed about his activity level as a child,

“(I was) very active from the age of four or five; my parents put me into YMCA sports. All the way up through my sophomore year of college and even my last two years of my undergrad I was very active.”

Even though there was a time during early adulthood in which his participation in exercise and fitness ceased to a great extent, childhood activity levels were reflective of the commitment level and enjoyment of exercise now, and also the impetus to start exercising on a regular basis again. Luke’s reflection on childhood activity and exercise during adolescent and college years was a major factor in motivating himself to begin exercising again after a period of inactivity, “…part of it is I still want to feel like an athlete. I want to go out, I want to be able to play baseball…” Luke expressed his desire to return to the former “athlete” stage of his life, reflecting on how he felt about being able to play sports, particularly baseball, and how he wanted to be able to embrace that part of his identity once again.

John (26) conveyed similar sentiments as he talked about his participation in exercise and fitness as an adult and his physical activity levels as a child, “I would say I was more active than most kids. I grew up on a farm, so I had chores every day, and then when that cycled out, I
started sports and I was always out for a sport…so pretty active I guess.” John’s statements echo those of most of the participants, as most were very active as children. Although most participants had experienced a lapse in their exercise routines at some point in their early adulthood or late adolescence, followed by subsequent return to regular physical activity, a common theme expressed by participants was their high activity levels as children and commitment to regular exercise participation now.

Conversely, the two participants who thought they were not particularly active when they were children had a harder time engaging in physical activity as adults. Although very active and committed to exercise at this point in their lives, finding the path towards fitness was much more delayed and not as clear a process for feeling better physically and mentally. For these individuals, involvement in physical fitness and regular exercise was centered on the appearance of the body and how one felt because of lack of exercise, rather than the desire to return to a more athletic state or frame of mind. As Rob (27) said about his desire to get active and exercise,

…I was sick and tired of looking down on myself because I was fat. I had really bad self-confidence. I had pretty much no self-confidence and I would look in the mirror and be disgusted with myself. So time to change.

Statements such as this are in stark contrast to responses of the participants who, for the most part, were highly active as children. Statements made by participants who were highly active as children and active in fitness and exercise activities as adults reflected a desire to return to the athleticism of their younger years and feel a connection to their past that involved sport and athletics. This in part, could be attributed to the value of exercise and being active these men held while growing up as contended by Bordo (1999) and Dworkin and Wachs (2009). Socialization into the culture of exercise and fitness, particularly sports for men, is a value that
receives much emphasis in North American society (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Taking part in sport and displays of athleticism is seen as a necessary part of masculine socialization and “normal” boyhood (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009) as is evident in the societal emphasis on development of athletic ability in boys at a young age. The evolution of that development into displays of athleticism emphasized in high school athletic programs along with value placed on college and professional athletics for men are also indicators of the importance of male participation in athletics ingrained in U.S. society (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001). The participants who did not participate actively in sports or athletics as children or adolescents did not express any feelings about feeling less male or masculine because of their lack of participation in childhood sports. Some participants who were active as children and participated in sports experienced some of the same self confidence issues experienced by participants who were not active participators in athletics.

*Exercises and Activities for Altering the Body*

All participants reported engaging in both weight-lifting and cardio-type fitness activities as part of their usual workout routines. Weight-lifting activities were much more structured than cardio based fitness activities. When asked about the routines for their weight-lifting activities, most participants noted that the focus was on the upper body, including exercises that focused on the chest, arms, shoulders and back. Some variation did occur, with a few respondents noting core or abdominal work. One respondent described that his focus on lower body workouts was because of his line of work that involved extensive use of the lower body. The majority, however, expressed a desire to build up the upper body with programs that regularly varied across days. For example, the chest and arms would be worked out one day, followed by a day of rest, followed up with a day of working on the back and shoulders.
When asked about participants’ reasoning behind their focus on upper body workouts, nearly all responded similar to Jose (31) “I want to get bigger arms.” It is a widely known fact that the ability for men to build up their upper bodies is much less difficult than trying to increase the muscle size of the lower body (Miller, MacDougall, Tarnopolsky & Sale, 1993), and this could be a possible reason why participants noted a desire to increase the size of their upper bodies. Marcus (25) shared similar sentiments regarding his weight-training of the upper body, I like to bench, benchpress. I like to obviously do curls, it makes your muscles look bigger, you get a little swollen.”

His idea is consistent with the rest of participants as their feelings regarding upper body workouts were to look bigger, increase muscle size and look stronger.

Interestingly, participants continually expressed a desire to increase their muscle size and look bigger, as well as “look stronger.” Participants did not always say they wanted to “be” stronger, but “looking stronger” was prevalent throughout the interviews. It could be suggested that looking stronger is synonymous with being stronger in the minds of these men, but the fact that many used the expression, “look” stronger, rather than “be” stronger, is worth noting and alludes to the idea that there might be connections among fitness and strength of the body and appearance, and what is a culturally acceptable standard of appearance for men (Bordo, 1999; Luciano, 2001). The focus of most participants’ workouts on the upper body does support the idea that men could be influenced by the ever-increasing popularity of a muscular ideal for men, in particular the shirtless, muscular male pictured in both men’s and women’s popular magazines (Bordo, 1999; Pope 2001; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). This idea also parallels the fact that the size of men’s upper bodies are able to be increased more easily than the lower body, as well as the biological fact that men, on average, are superior in physical strength and muscle size to
women. These ideas, combined with the evolution of the desire to look at the male body as an object of strength and muscularity (Bordo, 1999) could explain the motivation to focus on the upper body during workouts and desire to see its increase in size and muscularity.

Although participants said the primary focus of their weight-training workouts was on the upper body and were much more enthusiastic and articulate about their routines for the upper body, lower body workouts did have their importance for participants. Interestingly, these workouts were put into a particular context for importance, with leg or lower-body workouts as a means to achieve a particular physical task, such as increased endurance in sports or work, rather than to achieve a particular look. As Marcus (25) stated, “I like to work on my legs for basketball…” James (31) also conveyed similar sentiments, “Pretty much a lot of legs. A lot of legs…to stay in top peak performance shape.” James’ reasons for focusing his exercise routines on his legs stems from his line of work as a professional athlete in which his legs are vital to his performance. Some participants included running as part of a lower body workout, in addition to considering it a cardio workout. They considered running activities as high-energy workouts to increase leg strength and endurance for sports or work. Participants expressed little about how their legs looked or felt after working them out, as opposed to their upper bodies, about which they frequently expressed how they felt physically, such as bigger or more muscular. Feelings about lower bodies were rarely mentioned and core, or abdominal workout routines were hardly ever discussed in detail or enthusiastically by participants. Reasons for this focus on upper body workouts could be attributed to the focus on the shirtless upper bodies of men in media (Bordo, 1999) and the muscul arity presented in images of men strengthening the argument that a strong male is one who has a well-developed upper body (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Luciano, 2001).
Experiences and Feelings Surrounding Exercise Activities

Athletic Involvement and Competition

Involvement in fitness and exercise was often related to participation in sport-related activities. When asked about participants’ activity levels and the types of activities they participated in as part of their fitness routines, many were eager to speak about their athletic experiences as late adolescents in high school or college years. Much of their enjoyment of fitness and exercise was derived from their participation in sport activities that involved competition. References were often made to the enjoyment of gym time as long as it involved playing sports or engaging in competitive activities. For many, the idea of working out or exercising because it was necessary for health, weight or appearance management was second to being able to play sports and compete. As Marcus (25) said,

I like playing basketball, I like competing. In order to compete you got to stay in shape you know what I mean, so that’s mainly the reason why [I workout].

Marcus’ comments reveal his enjoyment of exercise because of his ability to be able to participate in sports. Other participants expressed similar feelings revealing the connection between sports and exercise that many participants shared. Trent (26) who specifically said that he really did not enjoy going to the gym to lift was specific in expressing his enjoyment of sport-related activities,

…I don’t look forward to any of them (gym days) really, well if I have days off, I look forward to going and playing basketball.

These statements reflect participants’ distinction between gym workout routines and sport-related activities. Throughout the interviews participants were specific about separating playing sports from workout routines such as lifting weights or cardio activities on the machines.
at their gyms. If gym attendance involved being able to compete, whether it was team or individual based sporting activities, there was an enjoyment factor that was not present when participants discussed their exercise activities in the context of exercise and fitness as a necessary component of a healthy lifestyle or part of appearance management. Participants’ responses took on a different dimension when discussing sport activity, reflecting a shift away from thinking about exercise as work and an obligatory activity versus an enjoyable activity where exercise was not about fitness as much as it was about competition and the experience of participating in and being involved in athletic sporting competitions.

These ideas can be put into a sociocultural context in U.S. society in which the emphasis on athletic competition is extremely high, particularly for boys and men (Dworkin & Wachs 2009). Starting as infants and toddlers, boys are socialized into the arena of sports and competition, hence men’s typically competitive nature in school and work (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Luciano, 2001). The different levels of competition and displays of athleticism increase as boys get older, becoming more intense and more strongly identified with masculine traits. According to Phillips (2006) and Pleck (1995), as gender roles shift and more women take on traditionally men’s roles as breadwinners and providers for the family unit, hyper displays of masculinity have become more prevalent within U.S. society as men seek to hold onto the last few masculine characteristics that have not been, for the most part, adopted or attainable by women and that therefore differentiate them from women. Men over the last 25 or so years subscribe to more obvious and exaggerated masculine body ideals than were present before the 1980s (Bordo, 1999) as well as participate in activities that are clear reflections of their masculinity and dominant-sex characteristics such as competitive athletic activities that are displays of strength, speed and agility (Luciano, 2001; Phillips, 2006). Participants’ immense
enjoyment and involvement in athletic competition could also be an indicator of their desire to
display their own masculine identities. Men primarily dominate displays of athleticism, as is
evident by male-dominated professional sports and collegiate athletic programs (Dworkin &
Wachs, 2009; Pope et al., 2000). As these men are of the generation where much of their lives
include female counterparts in school and the workplace (Pleck, 2005), their displays of
athleticism and desire to compete may be part of an underlying need to understand and affirm
their own masculine identities in an attempt to clearly identify themselves as male (Phillips,
2006). Many of the participants were actively involved in the athletic programs at their high
schools and colleges, thus involvement in competition in these activities now could be seen as an
avenue to reflect on past experiences. Also, participants might use athletics and competition as
an escapist tool that takes them away from the realities and stresses of life and to a place where
the competition and winning the game are priorities and essence of enjoyment and pleasure.

The competitive atmosphere of sports was an integral part of making fitness activities
enjoyable and was often an important factor in selection of a particular gym over another. Many
respondents stated that being able to attend fitness classes or having courts to play basketball or
other sports was an important factor in gym selection. As Marcus (25) stated, “what influences
my decision is competition. You know, where are the best games (basketball) going to be.”
Although not a salient factor in the motivation to participate in exercise and fitness, type of gym
that participants chose to attend was often influenced by the amenities offered that were geared
toward group or competitive activities. Respondents made nearly no mention of quality or
quantity of weight-lifting equipment as important even though for many of the participants,
much of their workout routines were focused on strength training. The most important factors in
gym choice were price and convenience with convenience meaning the gym offered facilities
that included athletic competition areas for sports within a reasonable proximity to home. Convenience is highlighted by Matt (33): “It’s close and convenient. I don’t have to spend gas money to get there.” Mark (25) also added in the cost factor in his reasoning. “It’s the cheapest and it has everything I want…” Participants were very expressive about the role competitive and athletic activities played in their fitness routines. They expressed deep enjoyment of sports because of the level of competition and the feel of sports as almost not like exercise, but more of a time to engage in athleticism, and interact socially with others at the gym who might be engaging in competitive sports with them.

It can also be suggested that athletic competition and participating in sports is part of participants’ identities. As Bourdieu (1984) reminds us, the body is a social product and tangible representation of a person’s identity. As contended by Ryan et al. (1997), in this case, participants’ involvement in athletic competition represents a significant portion of their identities. Sport and competition play a two-fold role in participants’ lives: (1) symbolizing their masculine identities while (2) simultaneously marking them as members of postmodern middle-class consumers who value the importance of a healthy-looking, attractive body and use sport as a vehicle for achieving that body. As members of the middle class they have the time available and financial resources to obtain that body. Although mentioned previously that sport and competition were not seen as exercise in the same way that weight lifting or use of cardio machines was, participants expressed their awareness of the importance of sport as integral to maintaining a fit and attractive body.

**Post-workout feelings.** Related to the enjoyment of athletic activity and competition was the theme of post workout feelings. Participants expressed many similar feelings regarding how
they felt after exercising or working out. Participants described themselves as feeling good and relaxed after a workout as Jose (31) described:

It’s a good way for me to relax and get my mind off things. It’s a good stress reliever for me, and then just the feeling I get after a nice workout is just relaxing. My whole body feels relaxed. I feel like it gives me more energy, too. The next day when I go to work, I’m not so tired. I feel more energetic.

Many of the other participants expressed similar feelings about working out and how they felt post-workout. They felt good physically, meaning they felt energetic and more relaxed because of exercise. This in turn led to a better mental state with participants feeling refreshed, recharged mentally and able to think more clearly. As Mark (25) said, “I feel mentally refreshed, I feel energized and just happier in general.” Mark’s statement echoes what many participants said about how they felt mentally after working out. Steven’s (25) comments about post workout feelings were similar to Mark’s: “I feel kind of refreshed…it’s kind of a stress reliever too. You’re full of energy, not droopy or tired. It’s quite energetic, I would say it that way.”

Participants noted how much better they felt after working out, even though getting to the gym was often hard, as discussed earlier. Once they got there and engaged in their workout routines, the physical and mental benefits became tangible to participants.

After workouts, participants noted that they felt a sense of accomplishment for what they had done. Many expressed that they felt accomplished because they had put forth hard work and substantial effort into their fitness routines. Common throughout participants’ responses was the feeling of a “good” tired after working out, as expressed by Marcus (25) “…exhausted! But like a good exhausted, like a good tired.” Ben (25) also said, “…it’s a good pain!” Referring to how he feels after an intense workout session, “Like I said, it’s one where you know, if I’m hurting, I
know I did something right. (I’m) happy that I just worked as hard as I did.” These statements about accomplishment and hard work found in exercise are indicative of the value U.S. society places on hard work and sacrifice (Smith-Maguire, 2008). As alluded to by Bordo (1999) and Thompson & Cafri (2007), children are socialized in U.S. society that anything can be accomplished with hard work, and hard work is thus indicative of success. U.S. society has become plagued by the idea that anything is possible with hard work, dedication and most importantly, discipline (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). This idea stems from the Puritan philosophy of bodily discipline for spiritual growth and resistance to temptation (Lee, Macdonald & Wirght, 2009), and has been transformed in the Postmodern era into the notion that the body is transformable and “plastic” and in need of constant improvement (Baudrillard, 1998). As stated by Baudrillard (1998), the manipulation of the body in a fitness context does not come without a price of physical sacrifice and pain. These are seen as necessary components to a good workout; pain and exhaustion are indicators of hard work and dedication, and this is reflected in participants’ responses to their feelings about working out and how they feel after a “good” workout. In the words of Rob (27), “I’m tired, but I’m the good kind of tired. It’s the ‘my muscles are so fatigued because I actually did something today’ type of thing and so I feel great I love it…” Pain and fatigue are symbolic of hard work and discipline, and the belief that there is a transformation of the self (Baudrillard, 1998) that occurs with the discipline of the body through exercise and fitness persists perhaps because it fits the U.S. ideal of working hard to achieve goals. This Puritan work ethic of belief in transformation and improvement is reflected in participants feelings expressed about how the mind and body feel differently because of exercise and the hard work that goes into it.
The Gym Serving as a Social Network

The social atmosphere of the gym was important to participants in different ways. First, many participants expressed a desire to workout alone if they were engaging in particular routines such as weight-lifting or using the machines at the gym. Some reported that having a spotter was important during weight-lifting, but that was essentially the only time that they had a partner at the gym. Most preferred going to the gym, switching on their ipod and doing their workout, As James (31) said,

I prefer working by myself because I listen to music while I work out. You get easily distracted when you work out with other people.

Participants said that it would be nice if they had someone to work out with and to keep them accountable for their efforts, but, conversely, working out with others was distracting and kept them from having a focused workout and reaching their workout goals.

Although participants expressed a desire to engage in their workout routines alone, many appreciated the gym for its social network characteristics. Many found that the gym was part of their social life in the sense that it provided a network where participants could see and converse with individuals they did not see outside the gym on a regular basis. As John (26) said about the gym as part of his social life,

There’s people that I consider friends or good acquaintances that I only see when I go to the gym, a couple of trainers there, some people at the front desk I rarely run into or see. But when I’m at the gym, you know, I’ll talk to them for a little bit and say “hi” that kind of thing, you know mild conversation with them. And then I got a couple of my friends that I work out with.
John’s statements reflect the social network atmosphere that the gym has for him. Many participants also expressed similar ideas about the gym as part of a larger social network that allowed them to keep in touch with others they may not see on a regular basis, but still wished to remain in casual contact with. Although seemingly contradictory to the statement above about participants’ wanting to workout alone, this concept of the gym as a social network differs from actively engaging in relationship building with other gym goers. Participants felt that the gym was a good place to keep in contact with others they may not see regularly, but it was clearly not a place where participants actively sought out close relationship-building opportunities with others. The gym served as a place where participants’ quasi-intimate relationships with other gym attendees were cultivated. As stated by Anderson and Stone (1981) participants’ quasi-intimate relationships were fostered and reinforced through their identities as members of a gym and regular exercisers.

**A fitness community.** Participants also noted that engaging in sports at the gym was part of the social nature of the gym. Many looked forward to playing basketball or organized sports because they were able to catch up with individuals that they did not see except for when they participated in these activities at the gym. Similar to what participants expressed about using the gym as a social network, Mark (25) said,

There’s certainly a social aspect, particularly the gym basketball I play, I look forward to every week and seeing those guys and chatting it up and talking about you know, this and that, what’s going on with sports or what’s happening.

Trent (26) also expressed similar feelings about participating in sport-related activities at the gym,
I don’t know as many people and I go to workout and leave, unless I play basketball, then its more of a social thing cause you can talk to more people when you’re not playing basketball and sitting on the sideline to get into the next game.

In this context the gym became more of a social environment when communicating with others was an acceptable and anticipated aspect of gym attendance.

Often incorporated into the social nature of the gym was the feedback that participants received from individuals because of their gym attendance. Interestingly, participants received more feedback about their workout activities or appearance from strangers rather than family members. Contrary to popular sociocultural perspectives from sources such as Dittmar (2005) and Thompson and Cafri (2007) on body ideals, feedback was received mostly from strangers or acquaintances commenting on the transformation of their bodies or workout habits. Dominant sociocultural perspectives related to appearance and body ideals stress the importance of reinforcement of body ideals through family members and close peers. In this study, the opposite was found to be most prevalent with participants who noted that family, friends and significant others tended to comment least on workout habits and appearance. Participants noted that family and friends did not comment on appearance or workout habits because of their inability to identify with the participant’s exercise identity and scope of fitness activities or because they felt those close to them were accepting of their routines and bodies as is. Rather, other gym attendees that the participant did not know well or only knew from the gym were most likely to comment or provide feedback about workout routines or appearance. When comments were made about appearance, they more often reflected perceptions about weight, as reflected in Trent’s (26) comments about the responses he received from acquaintances, almost strangers, about his loss of weight.
They saw that I lost weight. You know somebody was watching, not watching, but noticing that I lost weight. And I didn’t know who they were for the longest time.

Another participant said that comments he received at the gym were often questions about diet and particular exercises he did to gain muscle mass as he is an avid heavy weight-lifter and recognized expert because of his physical achievements.

The gym as a social network also played a role in keeping many participants motivated to go to the gym. As Ben (26) expressed,

I’m good friends with my trainer, good friends with the other trainers that are at the gym.
I’m friends with some of the guys that I work out with. So yeah, I would say it’s part of my social life. I feel like I miss out on some things if I don’t go to the gym that week, if I have to travel [for work]

Many participants knew that they would see people they were acquainted with at the gym. That was an influencing factor in gym attendance because they knew, not directly, but indirectly, they would be held accountable because acquaintances may ask them where they had been if they missed a day or if they had been keeping up with workout schedules while traveling as in Ben’s case.

They also wanted to be able to have those individuals continue to offer feedback about their bodily improvement and transformation. Knowing that someone else was identifying and praising their discipline and hard work was a motivating factor in continuing gym attendance and particular workout routines. Receiving that approval from others was affirmation that physical achievement was occurring. That recognition was also symbolic of social status and prestige. As stated by Baudrillard (1998), in today’s society, physical fitness and a lean body signify membership in an elite group of those who can control and manipulate the body to fit into
prevailing cultural body norms. With membership in that group comes access to social and
economic privilege because of the value placed on maintaining an attractive and for men
muscular, physical appearance in U.S. society (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Thompson &
Hirschmann, 1998).

Participants’ responses from others at the gym also indicated that the gym serves an
important role in legitimizing their efforts in exercise and fitness and serves as an indicator that
those efforts are worthwhile. As contended by Bourdieu (1984), the body has become an object
of social capital. The fitness of the body has shifted from being seen as linked exclusively to
health and proper biological functioning, to a vehicle for social status and prestige (Baudrillard,
1998). As participants discussed their exercise and fitness routines and efforts, it became clear
that using the gym served a two-fold purpose; the first being the practical use of the gym as a
place for engaging in fitness activities and second, as a place where their efforts could be
reaffirmed by others. This was noted by participants in various ways, including Trent (26) who
mentioned above, that feeling good and knowing that his hard work was paying off because
acquaintances or strangers, in essence, people he did not have close relationships with, were
noticing his bodily transformation.

The noticing of the transformation by other gym goers also served as a vital role in
reinforcing athletic and fitness identities for these participants. As argued by Dworkin and
Wachs (2009), fitness identity formation involves receiving feedback from others at the gym
regarding fitness activities. Participants found the gym as an affirming and reaffirming institution
where “experts” commented on bodily discipline, transformation and ongoing fulfillment of
fitness goals. Interestingly, there was never a complete accomplishment of a fitness goal by
participants. The process was never ending; the body could always be improved and manipulated
more, which shares a commonality to Baudrillard’s (1998) argument that the body has become seen as always in need of improvement and individuals engage in a continual process of manipulation and improvement. As alluded to by Bourdieu (1984), those who continually seek improvement and take the body to its physical limits are truly the ones who belong to the elite group. So, membership in the fitness group is not without constant evaluation and appraisal from others in the fitness arena. The process of constant monitoring of the self and others is a vital component in the formation of a fitness identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). The continued belonging in the elite group of fitness individuals who have “mastered,” (Bourdieu, 1977) to an extent, the manipulation and discipline of the body, is also a critical component of membership and maintenance of the fitness and exerciser identity.

Guilt Arising from Missed Workouts and Diet Choices

Equally important to how participants felt about being active members of a fitness or exercise community were feelings expressed when they missed a workout or were forced to alter their workout schedule. Participants described both physical and mental repercussions when they skipped workouts. Most interesting among participants’ responses was the idea of guilt after either skipping, missing or being forced to alter their workout schedule. Many responded to missing a workout with mild to extreme feelings of guilt as Mark (25) did: “I’ll feel guilty or if I’ve gone a few days without doing something, I’ll feel guilty, like a sloth. Like I need to go do something.” Matt (33) expressed similar thoughts as well, “I feel like I should’ve gone and I feel bad about it and I know I’d feel better if I had gone.” Rob (27) felt more of an extreme sense of guilt if he missed a workout in that he felt that he had let people down for not going to the gym,
I really hate it…especially that I do the group classes. I almost feel like I let the instructor down because I’m friends with them and so…when I miss the classes or miss the workout, I feel bad that I let them down.

Statements such as these were very common throughout the interviews indicating participants felt an extreme sense of guilt because of a lack of physical activity or slip from regular physical activity. The idea of guilt was often expressed in two ways: (1) guilt for not being physically active and (2) emotional guilt of letting others down or oneself down for not keeping to a routine and following through with pre-set goals. Guilt for not being physically active was related to feeling tired, lethargic and less energized. Mental clarity was also not as good as when participants had not engaged in exercise. The latter sense of guilt was related to feelings of neglect of appearance centered on fear of weight gain or muscle atrophy and shrinkage. As Jose (31) expressed after missing a workout,

I tend to feel more tired the next day. I don’t know, overall I just feel fat. I know my belly is bigger and I think it’s ginormous (big) when I don’t workout.

Feelings such as these were a main component of participants’ guilt and reflective of the cultural value placed on being active and maintaining physical fitness for overall health and well-being (Bordo, 1999). In addition, participants’ guilt could be seen as anxiety that involves a fear of weight gain and diminished muscle mass.

Foucault’s ideas about the body as a site of discipline and control help in understanding participants’ feelings about the guilt they experience from missing a workout. As reflected in Jose’s (31) comment above, there is a loss of control that participants feel when they are unable to work out as suggested by Foucault (1984). Participants feel guilty because they have not taken the time to attend to their bodies and participate in the daily ritual of bodily alteration and
improvement. Losing control of the body produces a certain amount of stress for these individuals as reflected by the comments about feelings of laziness and lack of discipline in one’s life. As described by many participants, there were feelings of inadequacy because they did not exercise resulting in emotional guilt characterized by feelings of inadequacy and disappointment in oneself for not following through with exercise goals. As stated by Rob (27), “I don’t like missing workouts, emotionally, physically! My muscles are like ‘where’d our work go?’” Rob’s feelings about missing a workout illustrate his disappointment in himself both mentally and physically as well as the desire to get back to working out as soon as possible to get his muscles working again.

As suggested by Foucault (1984) members of society are aware of the constant surveillance that serves to encourage and regulate social behavior. Participants’ responses about guilt reflect the value society places on exercise as a means of controlling the body (Entwistle, 2000). Their feelings about not following through with exercise goals and letting others down for missing workouts suggests that participants are subconsciously aware of this surveillance that occurs in society and the role that they themselves play in that surveillance. Not only are they being noticed when they miss workouts as reflected in Rob’s (27) previous statement, they recognize that they serve to monitor others as well. Their guilt is reflective of a belief about lack of discipline because they have not actively participated in ongoing rituals involving alteration and manipulation of the body (i.e…exercise). Also, it could be suggested that participants are aware of their role in the process of surveillance and monitoring of others’ behavior (Foucault, 1984).

Still, other participants felt a sense of guilt because they would often miss workouts or alter their workout schedules to meet up with friends or family. There were instances when many
participants felt conflicted about compromising their workouts to participate in social activities with friends or family. As expressed by Trent (27),

If it’s something local I’ll go to the gym and meet up with them, but if it’s something where it’s a different town I might skip the gym or do a real quick workout, half the workout at home, just to get something in to make it feel like I did something. I feel guilty for doing that because it’s not the full workout I planned on doing. Like if you set a goal and you don’t get it all done.

Jose (31) expressed similar feelings about missing workouts and feeling conflict between his social life and exercise,

[working out] does interfere with my social life. If I get off work and want to go running, or…and then someone says we’re going to go out for Taco Tuesday or go grab a beer or something, I’ll say well I got to do this and I’ll go running, but sometimes it’s vice versa and I’ll skip a workout to hang out with them, so yeah, I do feel guilty sometimes.

Many participants felt the same way, wanting to socialize with friends but still understanding the importance exercise has for them and wanting to fulfill their workout goals, often putting friends and socializing first on one occasion, and then on the next occasion, putting exercise and fitness goals first.

Placing these ideas into the context of Kaiser et al.’s (1995) symbolic interaction theory of fashion, participants are expressing a type of cultural ambivalence where this idea of guilt overshadows their decisions about exercise and how they feel when they do not exercise when the choice between exercise or social activities is placed before them. It could be said that participants are experiencing ambivalence towards the body perpetuated by society’s values about discipline of the body and improving oneself (Kaiser et al., 1995). When participants were
not engaged in physical activities to improve the body, a sense of guilt pervaded their psyche and how they felt about themselves both on a physical and emotional level. Participants alluded to concern about loss of control over their bodies, and thus losing control over the discipline in other facets of their lives. As mentioned by Trent (26), losing control was represented by not reaching the goals he had set for himself. Participants often expressed anxiety and aggravation because of not having that control over their own bodies when they chose to forgo or alter the workout, even if it was for just a day or two.

Participants were concerned that missing a workout and then engaging in activity that was detrimental to their bodies (i.e…extensive drinking and eating) would harm or impede the effects of their workouts and fitness goals. Conflicting emotions were prevalent in participants’ responses as they described enjoying the company of friends and being social but also felt guilty about not engaging in a disciplined activity such as fitness and spending time improving the body. These responses indicate that maintaining physical activity is important and that the importance of fitness and looking fit in participants’ lives is far-reaching for their identities. It affects them on a variety of levels, leading to experiences of ambivalence about their bodies, and subsequently, making them more aware, if not anxious, about maintaining or improving their bodies through appearance modifying commodities such as going to the gym, use of supplements and diets and purchase of exercise and fitness related products.

The Role of Appearance and Attractiveness in Exercise Involvement

Appearance as a Motivating Factor in Exercise and Fitness Participation

Participants’ reasons for involvement in exercise did include an appearance component. There were a variety of reasons for exercise and a myriad of ways appearance or weight management played a role in motivations to work out and be physically fit. Overall, appearance
was a motivating factor for gym attendance and participation in sport-related activities, as well as a factor in dieting or restricting food intake. Most of the participants acknowledged and were aware of society’s cultural standard and were consistent in their responses describing a lean, muscular ideal for men prevalent in popular culture and media.

All but one participant noted that appearance did play a role in their decision to exercise and stay active. Some noted it as extremely important, for example, Trent (26),

[I am] 85% motivated by appearances…cause everybody wants to look good. If someone says they don’t want to look good, they’re lying to you. If you walked up to someone and said would you rather be fat or skinny or would you rather be 400 lbs. and look like a cow and pig combined, or do you want to look like 180-200 lbs., or how can I put this, like a shiny piece of gold?

Ben (26) also expressed the importance of improving his appearance in his decision to exercise,

I was really unhappy with the way that I looked and got to the point where I finally realized it’s time to do something or I’ll be in trouble. I think it happened after I saw our engagement photos and it…everybody has their own self-perception and it can be completely different from reality. When I actually saw those pictures it made me realize how out of shape I really was…

These are examples of fairly extreme cases of the importance of appearance in the decision to work out. Others expressed motivations similar to Jose (31),

A combination of both (health and appearance) and then I think it’s more health at my age you know, I got to be more mindful of my cholesterol, my diet you know.

Most participants’ responses reflected ideas similar to Jose, where appearance was important, but a combination of both appearance and health was apparent. Responses about the influence
appearance and/or health had for participants’ motivation to engage in physical activity were varied and best represented by a continuum with appearance as an extremely important motivator for exercise involvement at one end and not at all important on the other end with participants falling somewhere along that continuum. One participant, Matt (33), expressed that appearance did not play a role at all in his motivation to engage in fitness: “No, I don’t buy into any of that crap. I have a pretty positive body image. If you dwell on the bad, then what’s the point, right?” Matt was the only participant who stated that media and appearance had no influence on his motivation to participate in exercise and fitness. Most participants’ responses, however, were congruent with society’s values placed on health and fitness, and participants did make a connection between appearance and fitness and often noted that the lean, fit appearance of an individual was indicative of fitness level or overall health.

It was clear that participants understood society as placing importance on physical attractiveness and looking good. They had incorporated that notion in their habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). As noted by Dittmar (2005), participants’ ideas about working out and exercise have been influenced by sociocultural ideas regarding attractiveness and its influencing role in society, particularly if one wishes to be accepted into particular social groups (Bourdieu, 1984; Lee, Macdonald & Wright, 2009). The social capital acquired from being physically attractive is reflected in participants’ responses. Even those individuals who did not place appearance management as an important reason for working out noted the importance of appearance in life and the benefit exercise did provide in maintaining or improving physical appearance. For example, James (31) stated,
I don’t work out for the appearance. I mean, it’s nice to be skinny, lean and in shape. For me, it’s, you know, I like to stay in shape, I like to look a certain way, but I also know I’m working out for a bigger purpose.

Although he said his main motivation for physical activity was not appearance, he was quick to acknowledge the benefit exercise did have in appearance management and maintaining attractiveness. For almost all participants, an awareness of physical attractiveness standards was present and did provide a reference point for participants and their understanding of the importance of appearance in their exercise choices.

There was a definite awareness expressed by participants of the importance of physical attractiveness in social interaction and acceptance into mainstream society. This importance can be viewed as a tool for participants to gain access to social and economic privilege (Bourdieu, 1984) as many expressed the benefits of looking good and the difference being fit would make in their lives socially as Steven (25) stated, “I want to be fit. People appreciate me and that kind of stuff…and nice clothes fit me.” Steven’s feelings are indicative of many participants as they shared their feelings regarding the benefits of being lean and fit. Rob (27) also expressed similar ideas about the importance of physical attractiveness and being fit in society,

“It’s [exercise] really helped my self-confidence. I used to hide all the time and now I say what the heck with hiding. I like to be the center of attention now.

Rob’s (27) comments reflect the importance his leaner appearance has had for his social life. Before his weight loss and improved appearance, he was socially withdrawn and uncomfortable in situations with large groups of strangers or acquaintances. Now, with weight loss and improved physical attractiveness, he has more confidence and uses his better physical appearance to improve his social status. As Bourdieu (1984) alludes, the middle class uses the
body as a means of social mobility. A fit, attractive body identifies an individual as belonging to a particular social group (Bourdieu, 1984; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009) and in the case of participants, it could be said that they use their fit bodies to identify themselves as belonging to a prestigious group of individuals—a group that lives by a code of bodily discipline and belief that the body is transformable with the right amounts of discipline (Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998).

**Anxiety surrounding weight gain.** Also present in participants discussion of appearance and attractiveness, was the idea of fear of fat and fear of weight gain. Participants’ responses expressed a fear of weight gain or returning to a previous “fat” self. Many said that appearance was a factor in their motivation to work out, in particular, weight management and not wanting to either gain weight or return to a previous state where weight was an issue for them. Rob (27) mentions appearance as a reason for his continuation of working out and exercise,

> My appearance affects how much I work out because it keeps me pushing myself. Like I said, before I worked out, I looked in the mirror and was disgusted with myself and so I said, “time to change.” I like the way I’ve changed and I like the way I wear two sizes smaller shirts, almost three now. Appearance definitely makes an impact.

Rob’s response highlights the impact weight loss has had for his motivation to continue his exercise routine. Trent (27) also expressed similar ideas about the influence of appearance in his reasons to work out, “I don’t want to be fat! cause everybody else is skinny…I looked fat [before exercising]. My big belly.” Both John and Trent share similar feelings regarding a fear of weight regain and the feelings associated with being overweight or fat. Participants, in one way or another, all shared feelings about using exercise and fitness as a means for weight management, either citing not wanting to gain weight or regain weight from previous weight loss.
Paralleling the idea of fear of fat and weight gain, every participant said that they needed to diet more and felt guilty for either the type of food they ate or the amount. Every single participant expressed some level of guilt for not restricting food intake more than they were currently doing. Marcus (25) expressed his guilt about not watching what he eats more, “No, I don’t actually (watch what I eat). I eat whatever I want when I want. That’s the problem I’m having right now. It is seriously bad.” Each participant expressed something similar to Marcus (25), reinforcing the importance of dieting and restricting food intake in U.S. society (Luciano, 2001). Participants’ feelings about dieting and food were reflective of society’s ideas about the importance of restricting food intake to maintain weight. Responses indicated that diet was linked to weight control, which was linked to appearance. Participants rarely indicated that they enjoyed dieting or watching what they ate. They rarely expressed that dieting is a means for achieving a more balanced or healthy body. Those who took dietary supplements or pills to control weight were also more likely to feel bad about their weight and appearance and often expressed intense negative feelings regarding their appearance either now or at a previous time in their life which parallels current literature on body image in both males and females in which males and females who have intense negative feelings about their bodies are more likely to engage in extreme dieting or disordered eating (Barlett et al., 2008; Thompson & Cafri, 2007). These individuals also seemed most motivated by appearance to engage in exercise.

The idea of dieting and restricting food intake is important because it relates to the idea of discipline in one’s life. Control over food and the body has become synonymous with good moral character and discipline in all facets of life. Dieting, restricting food intake and taking dietary supplements has reached an almost obsessive incidence in U.S. society (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Cultural norms state the importance of putting the right foods in the body at the
right time, not just for health reasons, but for the purpose of manipulating the body to achieve a desired look. Participants responses about the guilt for not participating in dieting fully reflects society’s obsession with food and its portrayal as the enemy when not controlled (Carlat et al., 1997).

**Internalization of Media Images**

There were a variety of responses surrounding the issues of appearance and attractiveness in the media and its salience for each participant. Although every participant was aware of a particular ideal male image in the media, participants varied as to how much they believed that ideal image impacted how they felt about their own bodies and their motivation to engage in exercise. As mentioned previously, participants were aware of the ideal male image in the media and all described that image as fit, lean and more muscular than the average male. Participants expressed a conscious awareness of this muscular ideal and most tended to internalize images of muscular male bodies and use them as reference points in the survey of their own bodies’ adequacy.

The impact of this internalization varied among participants. Some individuals were highly affected by the images presented in the media, like Trent (26),

The media? Well, obviously it does. Take the Biggest Loser show, they’ve taken large obese people, morbidly obese, and change them into normal to average human beings. Appearance-wise, not personality. So they fit in more with society, with what they want society to look like, which is what you see on TV. They want attractive, nice looking people.

Trent’s statement reflects the deep impact media has on his views about attractiveness and the body. His response about the media’s role in his decision to work out further recognizes the
importance that lean, attractive images have on his motivation to exercise. Other participants acknowledged fit and attractive images in the media but were not as motivated in their exercise behavior because of these images. Mark (25) said about the role of media in his motivation to engage in exercise and fitness,

To be honest, I don’t feel like it influences it that much. If I’m watching a TV show or movie or something like that, and there’s a guy and it’s pretty obvious he works out, I’ll take note and, say ‘yeah, he looks good. He puts his time in at the gym.’ I wouldn’t mind looking like that, but it’s not something that motivates me per se to workout and go to the gym.

Mark’s statement reflects much of what other participants said about the role of the media in their motivation to workout. Participants recognized that the media did have an impact in their lives and how they perceived their own bodies in light of media standards, but had come to an acceptance of the limitations of their own physical stature, noting genetics and general body type had a significant impact on whether they could actually exercise and workout enough to achieve the images presented to them in the media. In the words of James (31),

I want to be in shape. Just in shape. Not overweight, good body fat. If I got a belly, I got a belly, it doesn’t matter cause I could have 10% body fat. You know, for me, it’s just being in shape and eating right, eating healthy...I mean, it’s nice to be skinny and lean but you know everybody’s body type is different and as you get older your body changes.

Many participants expressed similar ideas, realizing that their bodies could only be transformed so much and that being fit and healthy was not measured solely on appearance but involved both appearance and overall feelings about oneself as a healthy individual actively engaging in fitness and exercise activities on a regular basis. Nonetheless, the idealized male
images were often a motivator to get moving and get active. Even though not all expressed a
desire to look like the men that the media presented, the images did motivate individuals to want
to get healthy and improve their physical appearance in such a way that it would improve their
overall health and feelings about their bodies.

As participants discussed the role of media in their motivations to exercise, many
respondents noted that they were fans of or read health and fitness publications. The majority of
participants did not read health and fitness magazines or books on a regular basis, but did refer to
them on occasion for health, fitness and exercise routine tips. When participants were asked
which publications they read, most responded, *Men’s Health* or *Men’s Fitness* as their most
frequently read men’s magazines. They noted that they used the fitness tips to try and change up
their routine or improve on their routines. More specifically, participants read tips for weight
training and how to improve muscul arity in the upper body, which, interestingly, was the part of
the body most participants focused on during their workouts. Or, they looked for ways to
improve their core or abdominal muscles. Participants were quick to point out that the covers and
content of the magazines looked similar for each month and were sometimes ridiculous in their
claims about particular exercises or routines. As Steven (25) noted, “The last one I saw at the
checkout counter or some place like that, it was how to get eight pack abs. Now six is not
enough, you need an 8 pack!” Steven’s comment describes how many of the participants felt
about the content of the publications. Although they appreciated some of the articles and tips for
how to improve workouts or particular areas of the body, as well as diet and cooking tips, most
were quick to recognize that the content was often over the top and unrealistic in its claims.

Although there were an array of responses surrounding the idea of media influence in
participants’ lives and its influence on their motivation to work out, common to all participants’
was the acknowledgement and recognition of a particular ideal in the media and constant awareness of that ideal. There was a definite awareness expressed by participants of the importance of maintaining a healthy body, and part of that healthy body involved an appearance component. All described a healthy individual in terms of an appearance component, describing a healthy individual as “looking fit” and “looking lean” reinforcing society’s belief that a thin body or lean body is a healthy body. Looking at this phenomenon through a postmodern lens, participants have realized that the looks of their body are seemingly correlated with the overall health of their body, reinforcing the idea that the unsightly body is not a healthy body and must be altered and/or maintained to prevent “health” problems. The discipline of the outer façade of the body has become symbolic of the discipline individuals have in other areas of their life and symbolizes strength of character and moral virtue (Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998).

**Bodily Discipline as Life Discipline**

When participants spoke of the in shape and fit or disciplined body, they made a clear connection between the fit body and how that body is reflection of discipline in other areas of an individual’s life. As Marcus (25) said,

> I think if you take care of your body, I think it’s a direct sign of how you’ll take care of business, other things, yourself, you know what I mean.

His statement echoes what many participants had to say about taking care of their body and taking care of the rest of their lives. They made a direct connection to the discipline of the body and discipline at work and providing for families and significant others. Seeing the body as symbolic representation of discipline is well connected to postmodern thought and the body’s role as an vehicle for upward social mobility and signifier of social status (Baudrillard, 1998). U.S. culture values discipline and hard work (Bordo, 1999) and that discipline is seen as a vital
aspect of being a productive human being in society. With very few areas of life that are left to manipulate and transform into perfection, the body has become the last frontier. The complete discipline of the body signifies control over one’s life in its entirety. As Baudrillard (1998) stated, the fit and lean body has become a symbol in U.S. society of wealth, success and discipline. It is the reflection of complete mastery over imperfection, temptation and distraction.

**The masculine body.** Looking at the discipline of the body as a reflection of life discipline through a socio-cultural lens, it could be said that participants’ association of the fit, disciplined body with discipline in life is a reflection of an attempt to hold onto one of the last strongholds of male identity. As gender roles become blurred (Dittmar, 2005) and men lose the ability to distinguish themselves as provider and head of the family unit, developing a fit, athletic and muscular body is an easily identifiable way to distinguish oneself as male and masculine. As Thompson and Cafri (2007) contended, one of the most logical ways for men to express masculinity in contemporary society is through a muscular and fit body. In combination with society’s expectation for an attractive body, men engaging in fitness and exercise to achieve a fit, lean and muscular body is the easiest and most economical way to do live up to two important cultural expectations: (1) achieving an attractive body and (2) expressing male identity.

In an attempt to understand men’s ideal image of muscularity clearly and quantify the degree of muscularity that participants found most appealing, participants were shown a muscularity scale adopted from Lynch and Zellner (1999). The muscularity scale (see Appendix G) illustrated nine different bodies with increasing degrees of muscularity, ranging from skinny or extremely lean to profound muscular definition. Participants were shown the scale and asked to identify their ideal body shape and what they believed their own body looked like according to the scale. Eight out of the 10 participants noted that their ideal body shape was between 60 and
70 on the scale, which would be identified as society’s ideal body type for men according to popular media images and scholarly literature (Bordo, 1999; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). In addition to identifying their ideal body shape, participants were also asked to identify what they perceived to be their actual body type or shape. Interestingly, participants, as a whole perceived actual body shape as significantly less muscular than their ideal paralleling previous studies of young men and their perceptions about muscularity standards (Olivardia, 2001). Half of participants stated they perceived their actual body shape to be between 40 and 50, which shows significantly less muscle definition than 60 to 70, which most described as their ideal body shape. One person described their actual body at 55, somewhere between 50 and 60; three participants described their actual bodies as 60 and one said 70.

The difference between participants’ ideal and perceived actual body shape is important because of the growing dissatisfaction men have developed with their bodies (Bordo, 1999; Silva, 2006). Participants’ responses may indicate that the discrepancy between perceived and ideal could be attributed to the muscular images presented to men in the media and popular culture. According to Luciano (2001) the standard of attractiveness for men’s bodies has evolved through the decades into a much leaner and muscular body emphasizing larger and more defined musculature. The images presented to men today by media and reinforced through socialization, emphasize a fit and athletic body, with athletic being synonymous with lean and muscular, even though many professional and high profile athletes do not fit this stereotype (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). This discrepancy may also emphasize the extent to which men internalize the images of muscular men in the media.

Although many participants mentioned that the media did not have a profound influence in their decision to exercise, participants’ selection of a lean, muscular body type may indicate
that the media has more of an influence on them than they would like to acknowledge. As participants identified their ideal body types they were asked if they were working to achieve that ideal body type. Most participants responded that they were working to achieve that ideal body type and it served as a goal for their workouts. Knowing that they had an ideal body type they wanted, there was motivation to continue exercising and engaging in fitness activities.

These responses, coupled with the identification of an ideal body type that fits society’s standard for male physical attractiveness, illustrates a possible connection between the media’s images of masculinity and participants’ perceptions about their own bodies. It is possible that men have internalized media images of masculinity and use them as standards for their own bodies in ways that they do not recognize because they have no other standard to compare to.

Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus provides a useful framework for understanding this possible phenomenon. Used as a framework for understanding the social world (Bourdieu, 1984), habitus is a product of social interactions, both consciously and unconsciously, and helps an individual understand cultural practices. According to Bordo (1999), participants have been socialized to recognize a lean, fit, athletic and muscular body as the most acceptable male body and the attainment of that body is representative of ideal masculine behavior. Although participants describe their reasons for engaging in exercise and fitness as motivated mainly by health, there is an outward physical measure of health that society holds (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). When participants were asked what health or “being healthy” meant to them, nearly all described a physical appearance entirely or first, in their description of a picture of a healthy male. This illustrates participants’ perceptions about health and appearance and how both are intertwined in U.S. society (Bordo, 1999; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Health for participants was related to appearance and appearance was subsequently pertinent in their decisions to engage in
exercise and fitness because of the relationship a lean, fit body has in the perception of a healthy appearance. Seemingly unconsciously, participants recognized the importance a fit, lean and muscular body has in the overall picture of health (Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998).
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to understand men’s use of exercise, fitness and health club memberships, as well as the meanings and perceptions behind their participation in those activities. Motivations to exercise and how exercise and fitness may be involved with appearance and the muscular male body ideal were also explored. Men’s fitness and exercise behavior, as it relates to appearance, body image and the muscular male body ideal were also examined. Major research questions to be answered included:

1. What motivates men to exercise?
2. How do men feel about exercising?
3. How do men feel about their bodies in relation to body image and body dissatisfaction?
4. Does society’s cultural standard of muscularity for men play a role in their exercise behavior?
5. Do sociocultural forces and gender roles influence men’s motivations to engage in exercise and fitness activities in addition to health and fitness reasons?

This research afforded an opportunity to explore men’s use of exercise and fitness and understand why men exercise, their beliefs about exercise and fitness, and how the body and its appearance may play a role in men’s attitudes about fitness and exercise. Little research to date has explored the topic of men and their motivations to engage in fitness and the possible connections between exercise and appearance management. A qualitative approach utilizing semi-structured interviews with 10 participants was used to explore the meanings behind men’s engagement in exercise and fitness as well as understand the feelings and perceptions behind those motivations and any possible connections they may have to appearance and attractiveness.
The Role and Importance of in Exercise and Fitness

It was found that men exercise and engage in fitness activities for a variety of reasons, but primarily for health and appearance and weight management. Participants’ feelings about exercise reflected the importance exercise has in their lives in maintaining overall health and fitness. Participants used exercise as means for relaxation and coping with the stresses of life and typically looked forward to going to the gym or engaging in their workouts. They engaged in a variety of activities during their workouts including weight-lifting, sport and cardiovascular activities. Reasons for participating in these activities shared focused on building muscle in the upper body and maintaining strength, while cardiovascular activities were limited unless related to athletic competition or sport. Physical activity levels of participants as children also served as indicators of the level activity participants engaged in as adults.

Experiences and Feelings Surrounding Exercise Activities

It was found that participants derived immense satisfaction from their exercise and fitness activities when they involved sport and/or athletic competition. Participants expressed more feelings of enjoyment of exercise when it involved sport because it did not seem as obligatory as other gym activities such as weight-lifting or using the cardio machines. Missed workouts were also an important component of how participants felt about exercise and fitness in their lives. Guilt was a predominant feeling or emotion expressed by participants in the event of missed or altered workout schedule. Participants also found the gym to be a type of social network that allowed them the opportunity to keep in contact with others they may not see on a regular basis outside of the gym setting. The gym was also a place where individuals could receive feedback about their routines and bodily transformation, indicating membership in an informal club elite
fitness individuals for whom significant bodily improvement and manipulation is the goal and signifier of membership.

The Role of Appearance and Attractiveness in Exercise Involvement

It was also found that these men placed an importance on physical attractiveness and maintaining a particular physical appearance and use exercise as a means to accomplish that. The men in this study acknowledged and described a certain male ideal that is prevalent in media and popular culture that does influence some of their ideas about exercising and engaging in fitness activities. Many expressed that the media did have an influence in some facet of their exercise and fitness identities and used the muscular male ideal as a standard for personal fitness goal setting. Some used society’s muscular male ideal as a loose standard for what they hoped to accomplish in terms of appearance, at the gym, while others used the muscular male ideal as a rigid standard for what they felt their body should look like. The identification of ideal and perceived body shapes on the Lynch and Zellner (1999) scale helped gain clarity and uniformity in participants’ descriptions of ideal male bodies and how they view their own bodies in relation to other male bodies. In addition, exploring participants’ understandings of attractiveness and appearance management in relation to fitness underscored the importance society places the appearance of the body in defining health and overall physical fitness.

Men’s Bodies in Social Context

Participation in exercise and fitness has become a part of the cultural identity of U.S. society (Bordo, 1999) and has become a central component of many individuals’ lifestyles. In particular, sport and athletic competition are a vital part of the socialization process of males in U.S. society and serve as a key indicator of mainstream masculine identity. Participation in exercise and fitness for men has become a way for men to be male in a world of changing gender
roles and responsibilities (Pleck, 2005). As mentioned by Bordo (1999), the body’s facade has become the last frontier for distinguishing between the sexes and preserving the last remnants of masculinity. Paralleling the idea of the body as a last frontier for distinction between the sexes, the body has also become the last frontier for alteration and manipulation. The postmodern world sees the body as transformable in any way. With appropriate discipline in undertaking these transformations, these men achieve North American ideals of modernistic perfection that focus on bodily health, functioning and strength. Participants translated the notion of discipline into other facets of their lives; they saw the discipline of the body as a reflection of their discipline and responsibility in other areas of life such as family and career. The men accomplished both modernistic (disciplined, functional) and postmodern (excess attention to surfaces and appearance) goals through their devotion to exercise.

The body, in particular, the male body has also become the last domain for alteration, manipulation and discipline. The postmodern, as opposed to the modern, world sees the body as transformable in any way with the appropriate amounts of discipline. Continual perfection of the body is seen as mandatory in a society obsessed with physical appearance (Baudrillard, 1998). Physical appearance has become linked to health in society and the maintenance of the outer façade of the body is seen as part of a healthy lifestyle and key component to overall bodily health (Baudrillard, 1998; Thompson & Hirschmann, 1998). The discipline of the body is reflective of overall social order as described by Foucault (1984). Coercing and manipulating the body through exercise and diet has become reflective of taking pride in one’s appearance and the neglect of the body has come to signal inadequacy in society. Participants have replicated this idea about discipline into other facets of their lives where they see the discipline of the body as reflective of the discipline and responsibility given in other areas of life such as family and
career as well as a reflection of good moral character. According to Baudrillard (1998) the loss of control over the body is seen as a character flaw resulting in poor discipline in one’s life and lack of moral virtue.

Lastly, the body has also become an object to be manipulated and used for social advancement. As stated by Baudrillard (1998) and Bourdieu (1984), the body has become social capital. A fit body and an attractive body has become a means for upward social mobility and membership within a group of individuals who have mastered the manipulation and improvement of the body, an important U.S. cultural ideal. Involvement in exercise and fitness has become a means for not only maintaining overall health, but, more importantly, to gain access to social and economic groups. The attractive body helps one to fit into mainstream society and ultimately gain access and membership to important social and economic groups. The hedonic roles men take on are a reflection of the value society continues to place on the fit and attractive male body and symbolizes the ultimate physical representation of masculinity.

**Implications**

Paralleling research about the influence of appearance and attractiveness in motivations for women to engage in exercise and fitness, this qualitative study suggests there may be a similar relationship between women’s and men’s motivations to participate in fitness regimens. The growing number of men dissatisfied with their bodies and increase prevalence of eating disorders among men (Silva, 2006) is causing concern among clinicians and educators. Understanding the context behind men’s use of exercise and fitness is an important step in understanding men’s motivations behind involvement in exercise and the role that appearance and attractiveness may play in their motivations to engage in fitness activities. Understanding
why men participate in exercise and fitness could be an important step in understanding why an increase in body image and eating disorders is on the rise for adolescent and young men.

**Limitations**

As with any study, there are many limitations. First, a limited sample size that is not representative of the general U.S. population prohibits generalization of findings to other groups or society at large. Secondly, the use of in-person interviews does pose the problem of honesty and openness on behalf of the participant, in particular, discussion of uncomfortable or personal feelings related to the body and attractiveness. The potential lack of openness could be enhanced by the female gender of the interviewer. The interviewer also has the potential to influence the responses of participants possibly leading them to answer some questions in certain ways. All but one participant were single/never married, consequently, responses may be different from individuals who are in married relationships and in a different life stage. Although, responses from the single individuals in the sample did not differ significantly from the married individual suggesting that marital status may not have a significant impact on participants responses. Lastly, the element of subjectivity on behalf of the interviewer is of great concern in the analysis and interpretation of findings. Attempts to limit subjectivity included asking participants to explain meaning in situations that were unclear to the researcher or may be interpreted in the context of the researcher’s personal understandings or experiences rather than the participant’s understanding. In addition, the rating of the importance of exercise in the participant’s life 5-point Likert scale and muscularity scale for participants to objectively identify ideal and perceived body shapes were used to decrease subjectivity.
Future Research

Findings from this study suggest men’s motivations for exercise and fitness involve the elements of health, fitness and appearance management but differ in importance for each individual. The results of this study suggest a relationship between participation in exercise and fitness and appearance and weight and strength management behavior. Future quantitative studies would be warranted to understand the relationship between exercise involvement and appearance. In addition, a comparison between the role of appearance and weight management between men and women would also be warranted. Because the men who participated in this study were young adults, research identifying differences in attitudes about fitness and the body according to age would also provide interesting avenues for research.
Interview Schedule

General Description
- How often do you exercise?
- What made you start exercising regularly?
- Do you go to a gym? Do you exercise at home/park/etc.?
- Do you have a routine that you use for exercising? What is that routine?
- What exercises do you prefer to do?
- Do you diet or watch what you eat in addition to your exercise routine? Why or why not?
- Did/do you participate in any organized sports or exercise-related activities?

Gym Selection
- Why do you attend the gym that you do?
- Are there a certain type of people who go to your gym?
- Does that influence your decision to go to that gym?
- Have you switched gyms before? Why?

Motivations and Importance
- What makes you want to exercise?
- Is it for health or appearance reasons? Or both?
- How important is exercising in your life?
- How do you rank the importance of exercising in your life on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being extremely important and 1 being not at all important? Why?
- Do you enjoy or like exercising?
- How do you feel after working out or going to the gym?
- How do you feel when you miss a workout?

Exercise Equipment
- Do you own any exercise equipment? What kinds?
- Do you use it regularly? Why or why not?

Exercise History
- How long have you been working out or exercising regularly?
- How active were you as a child?
- How old were you when you starting exercising/going to the gym on a regular basis?

Influences
- Do you read fitness magazines for advice or tips on exercising? If so, which ones?
- Do you read or own books about diet and health or exercising? If so, which ones?
- Does the media influence your decision to exercise? How so?
- Who do you workout with? Why?
- What kind of encouragement do you get from family or friends?
- What kind of feedback do you get from friends or family after working out?
- Does exercising interfere with your social life? If so, how?
- Is going to the gym a part of your social life?
Appearance Issues

- How does appearance influence your motivation to work out?
- Are you satisfied with your body? Do you like the way it looks?
- What is your ideal body type? (showing participant pictures of different body types, see Appendix E)? Are you working to achieve that or have you achieved that? If you have not reached your ideal, where do you think your body is now [on the scale]?
- How does the media influence how you feel about your body?
- Does your ideal body type influence your motivation to exercise or go to the gym?
- What type of body do you think women prefer?
- What would you describe as a masculine appearance?
Demographic Questionnaire

Age____________

City and State where you reside_______________________

Highest level of education____________________________

Occupation_________________________________________

Ethnic Background (Circle all that apply)

Caucasian/White
African American
Latino/Hispanic
Asian/Pacific Islander
Native American
Other (Please specify)_____________

Marital Status (Circle One)

Single/Never Married
Single/Divorced
Married
Domestic Partnership (not married)
Widowed
APPENDIX C
Recruiting Script

Hi, my name is Melissa Jakubauskas, I am conducting a research study of men, how much they exercise and attitudes about going to the gym and working out. It is hoped that this study will provide insight and information about fitness, exercise motivations and attitudes of men toward exercising and musculardity.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you exercise at a gym or fitness facility.

If you would like to participate in this study, you will be interviewed about how much you exercise and go to the gym, how you feel about exercising and fitness and what motivates you to participate in these activities. You will also be asked about how you feel about your body and the media’s representation of the male body and musculardity. The interview will last approximately one half hour to one hour. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your name and responses will be kept confidential at all times.

If you are considering participation in my study, I am going to ask a couple questions to make sure you fit the group I am choosing to research:

1. Are you between the ages of 25-40?
2. Have you belonged to a gym or fitness facility for at least six months or exercised regularly? (i.e., an average of 3 times or more per week)

Outcome 1: You have met the qualifications for my study. The interview will be held at MacKay Hall on ISU’s campus. What time will be the most convenient to conduct the interview?

Outcome 2: You have not met the qualifications for my study, but thank you for your time and interest in my study.
Title of Study: Male fitness and exercise behavior

Investigators: Melissa L. Jakubauskas, Master’s Student and Dr. Mary Lynn Damhorst, Major Professor and supervising professor

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This is a research study. Please take time to decide if you are willing to participate. The purpose of this study is to explore men’s exercise and fitness behavior and the reasons why men choose to exercise. Please feel free to ask any questions at any time about the study. This study was approved by the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board on_______. ID#_______.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be participating in an approximately one hour to two hour interview about your exercise and fitness habits and motivations to exercise, as well as attitudes towards the body. You are not required to answer every question and you are able to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study.

You will not be compensated for participation in this study, however, your responses and input will provide valuable information and insight about male physical and psychological involvement in and attitudes toward exercise and fitness.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Your individual responses will be kept strictly confidential and will be protected by a file password. Your identity will remain confidential and any direct quotations used in the research report will remain anonymous.

For further information about the study, please contact Melissa Jakubauskas (909) 957-7941, mljak@iastate.edu, 28 MacKay Hall, Ames, IA. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ___________________________________________________________

__________________________________________  __________

(Participant’s Signature) (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT
I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

__________________________________________  __________

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent) (Date)
APPENDIX E
The project referenced above has undergone review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application, including obtaining and documenting informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes, to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.
APPENDIX F
CODING GUIDE

1. **Frequency of workouts**
   Number of times participants frequented the gym or participated in exercise on a weekly basis.
   (a) 1-2 times per week
   (b) 2-3 times per week
   (c) 3-4 times per week
   (d) 4-5 times per week
   (e) 6-7 times per week

2. **Enjoyment level of working out/exercising**
   Expression of participants’ enjoyment of exercise and working out. Feelings related to enjoyment of gym or exercise-based activities including participation in sports.
   (a) no, not at all
   (b) sometimes
   (c) yes, the majority of the time
   (d) yes, all the time

3. **Participation in sport-related/competitive activities**
   References made to participation in sport-related activities at a gym or outside of a gym facility. Feelings of enjoyment related to sports and competition.
   (a) team-based sports
   (b) individual based sports
       (i) expression of feelings related to enjoyment of competition of competitive atmosphere in gym or exercise activities

4. **Reasons for exercise/working out**
   References to reasons for participation in exercise on a regular basis and continued participation in gym workouts and/or exercise.
   (a) exercise as stress reliever
   (b) weight management
       (i) tired of looking “fat” or feeling “fat”
       (ii) lose weight
       (iii) maintain current weight
   (c) looking good or improving physical appearance; appearing fit and lean
       (i) looking cut, defined, athletic, in-shape or healthy
   (d) important for long-term health:
       (i) family history of health problems and desire to prevent those same health problems from occurring
       (ii) exercise as an avenue to prevent injury

5. **Focus of workouts**
   Participants’ expression of workout or gym session focus.
   (a) upper body (arms, chest, shoulders and back)
   (b) lower body (legs)
(c) core (abdominal “abs” area)
(d) cardio (non-sport related)
(e) cardio (sport-related)
(f) relaxation (i.e. sauna, steam room, jacuzzi/spa)

6. Post-workout/exercise feelings
   Feelings expressed by participants soon after exercising or working out.
   (a) sense of accomplishment
   (b) put forth effort/hard work
   (c) “good” tired
   (d) energized/refreshed
   (e) in pain/“good” pain

7. Missed workouts
   Mental feelings expressed by participants if they missed a work-out(s)/exercising.
   (a) sense of guilt; should be doing something physical and making the body work hard
   (b) feeling lethargic and sensing a lack of focus on work or school
   (c) physical tiredness and fatigue

8. Childhood physical activity
   Participants’ expression of childhood physical activity levels and length of time of participation.
   (a) no; no participation or very little participation in sports or games as a child or adolescent
   (b) yes; moderate participation in sports or games as a child or adolescent
   (c) yes; high participation in sports or games as a child or adolescent with continuation through young adulthood and/or college

9. Gym choice
   Participants expression of factors influencing or impacting gym selection. Feelings related to overall satisfaction with gym choice including gym equipment and atmosphere.
   (a) convenience or close proximity to home
   (b) price or value of gym
   (c) satisfaction with gym

10. Social aspects of gym
    Feelings related to social role that gym plays in participants’ lives.
    (a) no social aspect to the gym; just go there to workout and leave
    (b) socializing with others important role of gym, especially during sports competition
    (c) gym helps maintain relationships with others that participants would not see on a regular basis
    (d) gym not usually a place for socializing but will converse with others if they are seen

11. Feedback/comments on exercise/working out
    Comments received by participants regarding effects of exercise and working out.
    (a) sources of feedback
(i) acquaintances
(ii) strangers
(iii) friends
(iv) family/significant others

(b) type of feedback
(i) observed weight loss
(ii) observed better physical shape or fitness

12. Media influence
Feelings related to media images of muscularity and leanness. Expression of awareness of a particular male image in media. Feelings related to fat and the negativity or social stigma implied with being fat or overweight.
(a) Conscious awareness and internalization of a muscular male body in media
   (i) non-internalization; had no effect on perception of own body or what own body should look like
   (ii) internalization of images; muscular male bodies in media had impact on perception of own body and its inadequacy according to media standards; feelings of inadequacy and lack of discipline or self-control
   (iii) internalization of images but an acceptance of the limitations of one’s own physical stature and the ability to manipulate it to achieve the muscularity portrayed in media

13. Media publications
References to media publications read by participants about fitness and/or health. Evaluation of those publications and their benefits.
(a) did not read at all or so occasionally the title or content could not be recalled
(b) read occasionally
(c) read on a regular or consistent basis
(d) publications read:
   (i) magazines (i.e Men’s Health, Men’s Fitness periodicals)
   (ii) books (i.e. Men’s Health special publications such as “Abs diet,” “6-pack abs” or other miscellaneous books)
(e) reason for reading:
   (i) exercise tips
   (ii) diet tips

14. Link between care of the body and other facets of life
Feelings related to the care of the body and its reflection of how one takes care of the rest of their life, including family and career. Degree of care, discipline and attention to the body through physical fitness seen as a direct reflection of discipline in other areas of life. An undisciplined or out of shape body an implication of laziness.

15. Appearance and attractiveness
Feelings about appearance of the body and its importance in participants’ lives. Appearance as a motivating factor for gym attendance and participating in exercise and sport-related activities as well as the importance of dieting or restricting food intake as
part of gym or exercise routine. Media as creator and perpetuator of lean, muscular image for men.
(a) fear of fat and not wanting to get fat or return to previous “fat” self
(b) attractive means to have a lean body, look healthy and fit
(c) dieting, restricting caloric intake, use of protein shakes/supplements
   (i) yes; sense of guilt for not dieting as much as one should
   (ii) no

16. Muscularity Scale
    see attached scales

17. Importance of exercise in life
    (a) 1
    (b) 2
    (c) 3
    (d) 4
    (e) 5

18. Miscellaneous
    References or expressions not otherwise able to be categorized in the above categories.
APPENDIX G
Muscularity Scale
Lynch & Zellner, 1999
REFERENCES


