Motivation in Exercise: The Influence of Social Networks and Social Strangers
Helaine Meyer
Sociology
Brandeis University
May 2014
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of Professor Sarah Shostak. Her expert guidance has shaped my entire experience and made the process of learning and writing extremely smooth and I never felt at a loss. The only reason I kept saying, “I can do that” is because she made it simple, thank you for everything. I would like to thank my committee members Professor Ellen Wright and Professor Karen Hansen for agreeing to read and provide constructive feedback. Thank you to Catherine Tan for sitting with me and talking through each one of my ideas and allowing me to brainstorm out loud with side notes about baking and shopping. Without my 16 amazing participants, there would be no data to write about, so I have the greatest appreciation for each and every one.

Thank you to my family for the unwavering support throughout my entire life, but specifically through my most trying academic experience. The long nights and frustrating moments would have been much more difficult without the laughter and empathy provided by my friends each and every day. Lastly, thank you to all the people who I creepily watched in the gym.
Abstract

The purpose of this research is to understand the way that social networks and strangers influence an individual’s motivation in exercise. This includes the creation of healthy habits and the motivation throughout the act of exercising. Sixteen interviews and eight hours of fieldwork were conducted in order to collect data on people’s perceptions as well as an objective view of what happens in the exercise environment. Through the analysis of this data, it was found that families have the most significant impact on the creation of exercise habits while friends do not play a big role due to the personal autonomy of individuals. Societal pressures influence people to choose which facilities to use while other people within these settings create social comparison and competition working to alter the motivation during exercise.
Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................5
Chapter 2: Literature Review ..............................................................................................9
Chapter 3: Methodology ....................................................................................................30
Chapter 4: Social Networks and Motivation in Exercise ..................................................37
  Family ..........................................................................................................................38
  Friends ..........................................................................................................................47
  Romantic Partners .......................................................................................................54
Chapter 5: General Fitness Patterns ..................................................................................62
  How and why we Exercise ...............................................................................................63
  Motivations ....................................................................................................................67
  Classes, Cardio, and Getting Cut .....................................................................................73
  Avoidance: Lack of Knowledge and Stereotyped Fitness Resources .............................87
Chapter 6: Comparison and Competition .........................................................................96
  Comparison ....................................................................................................................97
  Competition ..................................................................................................................106
Chapter 7: Conclusion ......................................................................................................119
Appendix A: IRB Protocol ..............................................................................................129
Appendix B: Interview Guide ..........................................................................................135
Works Cited ......................................................................................................................137
Chapter 1: Introduction

Exercise. Working out. Physical activity. Fitness. Training. Playing. Whichever way you think about it, exercise is a key component to living a healthy life. The choice to make it a part of your life is created through personal motivation, but other people have a significant role in formation of these healthy habits. By studying the way that social networks and strangers influence motivation to exercise both in the creation of habits and in the actual act, we can gain insight on the factors driving people to work more or less.

Through my experience, I have found that my exercise participation has fluctuated significantly depending on where I am located and with whom. From family life to school life, the people I surround myself with have been instrumental in my personal journey to make exercise a frequent part of my life. Beginning with my father taking me camping and biking for multiple sclerosis, I found a love for the outdoors. Being involved in school sports teams influenced me to engage in frequent exercise while expanding my social circle. With the transition into college and the increased freedom accompanied by the changes in body image, I found the need to exercise on a regular basis, but my friends helped me get to the point where I am today.

Those around me affected each stage in my journey as I was working to strengthen my own personal drive. From my dad waking me up on the weekends to go biking, my friends inviting me to fitness classes, and my boyfriend and I striking a deal to exercise at least three times a week, I have found myself constantly surrounded by talk of exercise which I know has influenced my habits significantly. I did observe that in each situation that I engaged in with people I knew or people I did not, I was constantly looking at people around me to see what they
were doing. It seemed that other people significantly affected the creation of exercise habits and the actual motivation during exercise. By working to understand these forces, I believe that we can cultivate change in our workout culture in order to influence people to make exercising a more significant part of everyday life.

The goal of this study is to examine the lives of sixteen college students to see if they have patterns in their exercise habits and to examine what creates their drive to start exercising and continue to work hard in the act. Regular exercise has been established as a positive health habit that assists in the prevention of many diseases and improves mental health (O’Connor, Rousseau & Maki, 2004; Pauline, 2013); yet physical activity declines significantly with age, specifically in the transition to college (Pauline, 2013). Whether this is a result of the lack of time due to busy schedules or the general lack of interest, the impact that others have may influence the end to the decrease in physical activity.

Healthy relationships that people have can influence a person’s sense of self and therefore have higher self-esteem and more positive health behaviors (Ulrich-French et al., 2011). As a result, social people may have a higher drive to make decisions to change behavior for the better and have a greater motivation to succeed (Gibbison, Godfrey & Johnson, 2012). Health habits are generally created during childhood and based on parents’ habits (Theodorakis et al., 2004), but friends may be considered a stronger source of motivation over time (Gruber, 2008). As a result, social networks foster different dynamics working to create healthy habits. This study works to understand the interplay between family, friends, and romantic relationships as social support in the influence of healthy habits and what this means for a college student. The data has shown that family has had the most significant impact in the creation of motivation to
Meyer, H.

exercise and influences the individual to find an identity and preferences in which exercise to participate in.

When employing the self-determination theory in which humans inherently desire autonomy, competence, and social relatedness (Kilpatrick, Herbert, & Bartholomew, 2005; Chu-Hsin et al., 2007), we see that people need to feel competent, free to do as they see fit, and connected to others in every situation. Regarding exercise, social networks clearly have an influence on habits, but competence and autonomy created by societal pressure influence the way people are motivated to participate in certain exercises. The mechanisms of competition and social comparison also enter the mind to change the way people perceive others within the setting (Möller & Marsh, 2013). With all of these devices working together to influence the motivation during exercise, interviews make it possible to identify the internal dialogues regarding each subject.

No previous research has combined the way other people influence an individual’s motivation in exercise both in habits and in the moment. Some studies have discussed social networks, some have discussed societal pressures, and other have discussed social comparisons and competition with friends and strangers, but this data set combines them all to understand how dynamics change. Through both interviews and fieldwork it has been found that families have the greatest impact on habits by setting up exercise values. While friends have the ability to influence minor changes, given the age of participants, respondents were predominantly secure in their habits created previously. Societal pressures and stereotypes work to direct individuals into specific fitness facilities based on the lack of knowledge of resources. Once the individuals are in the exercise setting they have the opportunity to view other people exercising and use their activity as a source of comparison or competition as a means of motivation. In this way, social
families play the most predominant role in the creation of habits that lead individuals to form their own exercise identities that are further shaped by individuals within the environment.

By studying each of the dynamics presented, it is possible to understand the lives of a college student and therefore cater the environment to give students access to facilities and resources that may be used to increase motivation over a lifetime. Through understanding previous research conducted, we can work to expand the knowledge of how people create habits and how they are maintained using of other people, those who are a part of the social networks and those who are not.
Exercise is widely discussed as a positive health habit that assists in the risk reduction of diseases such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, early death, stroke, high blood pressure, adverse blood lipid profile, colon and breast cancer, prevention of weight gain, and more (Huddelston, Mertesdorf, & Araki, 2002; Nguyen-Michel, et. al, 2006; O’Connor, Rousseau & Maki, 2004; Pauline, 2013). It not only target physiological diseases, exercise can also have positive effects on mental health and mood in regards to reduced depression and anxiety, positive wellbeing, and better cognitive function more (Huddelston, Mertesdorf, & Araki, 2002; Nguyen-Michel, et. al, 2006; O’Connor, Rousseau & Maki, 2004; Pauline, 2013). As a result, the American Heart Association recommends engaging in physical activity at least 3 times a week more (Huddelston, Mertesdorf, & Araki, 2002; Nguyen-Michel, et. al, 2006; O’Connor, Rousseau & Maki, 2004; Pauline, 2013). It is clear that doing so can have many positive effects on a person’s health in the present and in the far future. While this is demonstrated, many people do not meet the guidelines and this is undoubtedly seen on college campuses. Studies have shown that one fifth of college students do not engage in physical activity at all and only about 40% of college students meet the guidelines set (Doerkson, Umsttatltd, & McAuley, 2009). Even as all of the benefits are clearly defined, there is a discrepancy within the current generation of college students in what is actually being accomplished and what the guidelines recommend.

To understand why these goals are not being met, we can examine the sources of motivation for individuals: why they exercise and what helps them begin and then continue to push themselves throughout each individual workout. My main research question is “how do
social networks and the presence of other individuals influence motivation in exercise?” By understanding the role of social networks in regards to exercise, we are able to see where the initial motivation stems from, how people can work with others around them to continue pushing themselves, and how other people influence productivity during the action. This chapter will review the literature of how social networks are structured to provide support to those needing a source of motivation, how people find motivation through the individual social network combined with societal pressures, what effects working out with others have on motivation, and what that means in each fitness location on a college campus.

Social Networks

Social relationships can be defined as intimate ties, extended community ties, and participation and social integration (Ertel, Glymour & Berkman, 2009). Social networks consist of the social ties and web of relations that surround an individual (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2009). They are specific sets of connections between people in a group and they evolve from the natural tendency of each person to seek out and make many or few new friends, work in a social or anonymous workplace, and have a small or large family (Christakis & Fowler, 2011) With the changes of settings and experiences throughout life, there are shifts within this network depending on the situation. For examples, when a person moves her living situation, she is now surrounded by many new neighbors and if she has to change schools or jobs, she will have new classmates or coworkers. Studies have shown that even though the actual individuals will change throughout life, the number of social ties and social support will remain stable (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2009).
Meyer, H.

The social network has many different components in relation to each aspect of life. In family life, the network consists of parents, siblings, grandparents, and extended family. Within social life, the network consists of friends, colleagues, romantic partners, teammates and so on. Each of these relationships fosters different kinds of communication and trust that allow for a wide array of social support or lack thereof. Parents, friends and romantic partners are the key attachment relationships linked to perceived self-relatedness, autonomy, and well-being (Ulrich-French, Smith & Cox, 2011).

Social networks influence people within every facet of life from motivation to emotions to thoughts to behaviors. The mere presence of another person is enough to cause a difference in the thoughts and behaviors of an individual. This influence starts at the basis of every interaction a person may have with someone they know or a complete stranger. According to Christakis & Fowler (2011), human beings inherently mimic others outwardly and through this behavior, we come to adopt their inward states. This can be seen through the synchronization of facial expressions, vocalizations, and postures that are exchanged between people (Christakis & Fowler, 2011). These exchanges may result in emotional contagion between the subject and the person whom she is mimicking. Because both people end up performing certain actions and feeling the same way, they can serve as social support for one another.

Social support can be described as the function that social networks serve (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2009). The purpose of social networks in the lives of people everywhere is to enable and transmit positive and desirable outcomes regarding behaviors (Christakis & Fowler, 2011). We see the positive effect that social networks have and the support that they provide through the general health benefits that are received because of these social ties. Bowlby’s attachment theory suggests that an individual can have secure or insecure attachment
that influences independent actions that have a positive influence on the perceptions of self and others (Ulrich-French et al., 2011).

Individuals with secure attachment to significant others have shown higher self-esteem and positive health behaviors than those with insecure attachment styles (Ulrich-French et al., 2011). Studies have shown that both men and women with social ties had a decreased risk of dying from cardiovascular related deaths and that there are positive physiological changes created by networks and support (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2009). The effects described are not localized in health over the course of a lifetime, as social networks and the support they provide have been known to lessen the negative effects of stressful tasks (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2009).

Social support goes beyond physiological health benefits. It works to help individuals make the decision to change for the better. Self-efficacy, or the belief that one has control over one’s own actions, is the first step in being able to motivate yourself to adapt healthier habits (Gibbison, Godfrey & Johnson, 2012). Once an individual has self-efficacy, it becomes possible to direct these actions to be on the right track. Social support plays the role of stimulating the initial interest in behavioral change, providing additional motivation to both succeed and recover from periods of failure (Gibbison, Godfrey, & Johnson, 2012). The effectiveness of this support can clearly be seen through its influence within exercise motivation.

*Social networks and social support in exercise*

In the life of a college student, participating in exercise can easily drop to the bottom of a list of priorities for the day. How can someone fathom the idea of taking an hour out of their day to run around when there is so much work to be done, things to be taken care of and sleep to be
had? When an individual is not doing her daily mandatory activities of school, homework, paid work, and making sure her basic needs are taken care of, there are varieties of activities that fill the excess time. Sedentary activities can easily compete with exercise in making the decision of how to spend the excess time in a day, if there is any at all (Buckworth & Nigg, 2004). Research suggests that the decision to exercise becomes significantly easier when surrounded by a group of people within the primary social network promoting these healthy activities.

Healthy habits are generally developed during childhood and are predominantly based on the habits that are taught by parents (Theodorakis, Papaioannou, & Karastogianidou, 2004). These healthy habits not only refer to regular physical activity, but to other important parts of daily life as well. Some examples include putting on a seatbelt in the car, not smoking, eating fruits and vegetables, and so on. Socialization, or the acquiring of habits, beliefs, and knowledge of a society, begins at birth and shapes the individual’s personal identity in relation to the society her or she belongs to (Arnon, Shamai, & Ilatov, 2008). It leads to the adoption of health related behaviors as a reflection of the behaviors of parents who are looked to as role models (Theodorakis et al., 2004). As a result, the first habits regarding physical activity are determined within the family setting. Because socialization teaches the culture of society, it also works to teach societal norms in regards to body image and therefore has the ability to influence the creation of a child’s self-image (George, 2005).

Social connections act a support to personal autonomy, which is created over time (Ulrich-French et al., 2011). As an individual matures, familial support remains present, but it becomes increasingly complicated based on the effectiveness of the acting parties involved. For example, George (2005) describes how interactions between collegiate athletes and their parents can vary in how constructive they are because of parental involvement in the sport. Meaning, the
parents can be involved and aware of the complexities of soccer or completely clueless as to what the sport demands. Parents would make comments on the athletes’ bodies based on their own knowledge of the sport, which ranged from minimal to very involved. George (2005) recounts experiences in which the evaluations of performance and appearance by the parents proved to be important to the players and made a tremendous difference on the support received. For parents who were knowledgeable about the efforts necessary to achieve a high level of performance, there was support for the training and increase of muscle for women, but those who did not know about the sport would encourage their daughters to be more feminine. The athletes had to learn to navigate the comments made by parents regardless of the level of support received in order to maintain a high-level activity. The girls lacking parental support had a harder time with this.

George’s example of differences in parental support provides a basic understanding of the way that family can truly influence the way people think of themselves because of how much these people mean to them, even if the support is not consistent with their needs. Even though maintaining familial support is beneficial, it may not have the same effects of the support of other people within the social network. Within a family relationship, created at birth and continuing to be a strong influence throughout every aspect of life, the parents’ point of view can sometimes lose objectivity. This may be a result of parents imposing personal opinions because they only want the best for their children, which can occur by sacrificing the positive comments used to drive motivation for the ones they believe are correct. The relationship created between an individual and her family over a lifetime lacks the need for mutual positive exchanges that make a support system more productive (Gruber, 2008). As a result, an individual might turn to a friend for support instead of looking straight to family members.
Studies have shown that the objective relationships of friends have proven to be a stronger source of motivation than family member relationships have when discussing physical activity (Gruber, 2008). In some cases as an individual matures, parental influence starts to decrease as the support of others in the social network begin to hold importance due to most physical activity taking place in team, classroom, or group settings (Theodorakis et al., 2004). When a person leaves the family setting and enters into a college community, there is generally more immediate access to a social support group involving friends and peers (Gruber, 2008).

The need for these positive exchanges allows both people in a friendly relationship to benefit and help each other. Because of the encouraging factors of a friendship in general, friendships between people who participate in exercise programs or classes are promoted for the sake of common weight management goals. Females have reported receiving greater support for actions than males did and this may be a direct reflection of the gender differences between exercise motivations in general (Gruber, 2008). Males have been seen to give the most support and receive the most support when interacting predominantly with girls (Gruber, 2008).

In George’s study of a women’s collegiate soccer team, teammates and peers were the main domain in which the athletes looked to for support as well as evaluation (2005). In this case, the team was considered the main network of friends. George (2005) describes how the athletes were constantly aware of their teammates’ bodies and how they all worked together to negotiate the difficult subject of training to become the best soccer players possible while still maintaining their feminine physique, which introduces the idea of societal pressures. Another common motivational factor to have friends as a source of support is the help in holding the individual accountable to their goals (LaCaille et al., 2011). By confiding personal goals to a close friend, the friend has the ability to remind her of what she wants to accomplish. Most of the
friendly relationships described were between females or males receiving support from females because males are less likely to look for this type of support from their friends.

In the aerobics classes that Gimlin (2002) observed, she identified the important role of the connections with people in the class as well as with the friends who accompany the participants. By attending the class with a friend, the class transcends the line between the roles of exercise and the importance of the social activity and remains consistent with holding the individual accountable (LaCaille et al., 2011). Instead of approaching exercise as a time for personal reflection or stress relief, it is a shared time with others. Gimlin (2002) describes the experience as an experience with special purpose for the relationship. With this function, making it a point to exercise with a friend can allow the necessity of exercise to fall into a source of a positive relationship. If friends and families have the ability to provide an individual with both objective and subjective perspectives of motivation, what effect does a significant other have?

The role of the romantic significant other revolves around the idea of the gaze (Glassner, 1989; George, 2005). These partners provide motivation and support, or lack thereof, in exercise by vocal judging of the progress and physical appearance of the individual. Glassner (1989) explains this through the concept of the “conceptual looking glasses” in which fitness can be compared to what is expected by society and eventually by how significant others comment on it. Gimlin (2002) describes how the negative comments of significant others about bodies failing to meet the cultural standards of beauty can work to deteriorate the conceptualized body image by the individuals. In this sense, exercise is no longer a personal experience, but an experience of those around you as well. In George’s (2005) example, men were one of the most prominent topics of conversation within an all-female team of soccer players. In this case, they acted as another source perpetuating the gender stereotypes. The men were critical of the female athlete’s
muscles and those who did not appreciate their bodies were thought of as insecure. It seems likely that significant others would play a large role in motivation to exercise, as they can be considered the focus of a perspective partner’s gaze.

The judgment provided by all aspects of the social network allows people to internalize the objective gaze in order to monitor their own actions and appearances (George, 2005). These judgments can be negative, but they still provide some kind of mechanism of motivation to maintain exercise and healthy habits. The reference group theory can be applied to combine the perspectives by allowing an individual to take the values or standards within the groups to be used as a comparative frame of reference for self-evaluation

Each relationship has the ability to promote healthy habits within actual fitness settings like the cardio room or fitness classes, but gender differences start to emerge. When participating in programs aimed at fitness or weight reduction, social support has been shown to promote adherence to dieting and exercise in pursuit of the goal (Gruber, 2008). Fitness/aerobics classes can act as a primary example of this phenomenon for those working towards the same goal. When considering the idea of empowerment in these classes, the context of social support may actually be very helpful because of the group effort involved in these classes. As the participants are predominantly women, the environment may foster a safe environment in which each person supports the weight loss of others as they empathize with each other over a common goal and a common hatred for activities (Leeds & Liberti, 2007). The group cohesion that is created is significantly related to exercise adherence as well (Gruber, 2008). Because the fitness classes are mostly attended by females, other contexts must be examined to understand the social support that influences male activity level.
Because of men’s exercise choices being driven mostly by strength and competition, their social support can be found in the context of activities. Men tend to see enjoyment as more of a motivator for sport participation rather than for exercise, which contributes to the idea that men are motivated by activity that include some performance factor (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Bartholomew, 2005). By looking at group activities and sports, researchers have found that men use these environments to push themselves to reach the highest level of performance in this specific context and are more likely to change behaviors to prepare for competition rather than personal health reasons (Gruber, 2008). Men’s social networks tend to be less encouraging of healthful behaviors than those of women, but whatever support that is available is less helpful as a result of the greater inclination for men to be physically active (Gruber, 2008).

Social networks clearly have an impact on individuals. From family to friends to romantic partners, each type of relationship contributes a complex feature in regards to finding the motivation to exercise. In the contexts described, social networks have the potential to inspire motivation in individuals based on the creation of healthy habits when young, providing positive support, and promoting adherence to exercise programs. Beyond the social relationships shaping individual motivation, extrinsic motivation is advanced through the pressures of societal norms.

Societal Influence

Our society perpetuates gender stereotypes through many different facets of life. These range from household duties, to the work place, to childcare, to fitness. Societal pressures to conform to the standard, as in the expectation states theory, puts stress on both males and females to exercise and shape their bodies to the way that they “should” look (Ridgeway, 1978).
Women in particular have struggled to navigate these social expectations of the ideal body type because the ideal is not the average size of a woman. Many women strive for an ultra-slim body regardless of the health consequences of getting to that point as well as maintaining it (Davis & Cowles, 1991). Recently the ultra-skinny ideal is starting to transform into one that requires women to be more muscular and toned, but finding the medium between being slender as well as fit is exceedingly difficult to accomplish (George, 2005). George (2005) suggests that having too much muscle is a violation of ideal body type similar to the violation of having excessive body fat. With the need to be slender but the avoidance of too much muscle or too much fat, women end up dealing with a variety of difficulties regarding their appearance and their intrinsic view of themselves.

In her historical analysis, Brumberg (1997) states that girls worry about their bodies in reference to shape, size, and muscle tone. Psychologists find that women evaluate their bodies less favorable, convey more dissatisfaction, place a great deal of importance on appearance, find a greater discrepancy between body image and body ideal, and are more likely to suffer from eating disorders in comparison to men (Jackson, Sullivan & Rostker, 1988). A further complication in this area is the addition of concerns about what others think of them, or evaluation concerns. Salvatore & Marecek (2010) argue that girls tend to experience stronger social evaluation concerns than boys do and are more focused on body weight. It seems as if women have a very difficult balance to find in order to suit the needs of society while being critical of themselves. To cope with these issues revolving around body image, women tend to differentiate between body and personality by aligning identity with the admirable traits they use to alter the body (Gimlin, 2002). These may revolve around persistence, will power, and strength.
Men, on the other hand, have the pressure to uphold the idea of “hegemonic masculinity”, but they seemingly have fewer consequences of social judgment if they are not upheld than those for females (Washington & Karen, 2001). Men seem to have a fear of being perceived as feminine, which causes them to define themselves in opposition of women and therefore participate in high-risk behavior as well as working to maintain the body that gives them the ability to partake in the activities (Mahalik, Shaun, & Syzdek, 2007). Men are expected to build muscle and are more motivated by performance and ego-related factors of challenge, strength, and competition (Salvatore & Marecek, 2007; Kilpatrick, Hebert & Bartholomew, 2005). In regards to social evaluation concerns, it has been discussed that men exercise in order to satisfy self-imposed pressures rather than pressures imposed by society (LaCaille, et al., 2011).

In both situations, men and women are striving to reach the ideal gender role as defined by society. Meaning, women are trying to adhere to femininity and men are trying to adhere to masculinity (Jackson, Sullivan & Rostker, 1988). The physical activity that results from this process is catered to the reaching of this ideal and the body image that prevails. While the women are looking to find the proper balance and men are trying to reach the highest level of performance for competition, we see the difference in motivational theories at play (Jackson, Sullivan & Rostker, 1988). Sport participation is linked with the intrinsic motivations of challenge, social recognition, and enjoyment, while exercise motivation is tied to the extrinsic motivations of appearance, health pressures, stress management, and social recognition (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Bartholomew, 2005).

The difference between the perceptions of end goals and the motivation it implies encourages the participation in different exercise activities for women and men. In understanding the idea of “hegemonic masculinity,” we see the need for men to be strong, goal-oriented, and
unemotional while women need to be uninterested in sports and physical activity (Washington & Karen, 2001). With this traditional and antiquated view of sports and exercise, the issue of unequal resources for men and women arises. Leeds and Liberti (2007) describe how gyms were historically masculine institutions that promoted the physical dominance of men while excluding women. Traditionally, women have been described as physically inferior and dependent on men while men are free to take advantage of this stance and exert their dominance by maintaining the physique to do so, but this has changed significantly (Li, Lee, & Solmon, 2006).

Recently, women have outnumbered men in fitness clubs and women-only gyms are the fastest growing segment of the fitness industry and outnumber men-only gyms (Leeds & Liberti, 2007). Women’s athletics are becoming more popular as well, as women athletes are increasingly being embraced as cultural icons and the amount of resources given to women’s sports teams and scholarships (George, 2005; Washington & Karen, 2009). While exercise popularity and amount of resources available may be growing for women, disparities are still present in regards to how the facilities are being used and what the implications are for each gender.

In general, fitness institutions provide a variety of resources to those who pay in order to gain access to them. These include cardio facilities, weight rooms, and a variety of fitness classes, personal trainers, a pool, sports facilities as well as equipment, and more. With access to all of these resources, people have the opportunity to take advantage of them all. In actuality, people hardly get the chance to use the variety of different facilities in which they have access. There are significant gender differences in the way that these facilities are used. It can be argued that the difference in usage is a way of perpetuating the gender stereotypes regardless of the strides made in reaching an equal opportunity environment.
The differences stem from the same idea of hegemonic masculinity that was expected to decrease when women became integrated as a normal aspect of these institutions. Leeds and Liberti (2007) recount Dworkin’s studies with results indicating that there were few women in weight rooms, more women than men in cardio rooms, and almost exclusively women in aerobics classes. Exercise is beneficial in general, so what causes women to stay away from weight rooms and flock to aerobics classes while men stay away from aerobics classes and flock to the weight room?

Aerobics classes put an emphasis on body size reduction and reshaping to limit muscularity (Leeds & Liberti, 2007). These classes provide a location for women to work together to reach their body goals. Within a fitness class, people are performing the same exact movements and going through the same physical strain, which allows for a sense of empathy for one another. Many people view this as a positive aspect of taking classes. Gimlin (2002) has done extensive studies of interactions within aerobics classes. She believes that the classes she observed were truly harmful to those involved because of the stress that they put on the need to lose weight to be toned, rather than focusing on enjoyment or healthy competition. She cites the use of the term “empowerment” frequently to describe these classes as a way to escape traditional femininity, but many argue that this environment is only reinforcing the oppressive ideals of physical beauty (Gimlin, 2002).

While the use of fitness classes may not always be perpetuating these ideas of weight loss and reaching societal norms, the avoidance of weight rooms and increasing use of cardio rooms more accurately displays how women do not want to stray from the norm of feminine appearance. George (2005) describes how collegiate female athletes are trying to rid themselves of all fat through exercise and diet while training to build the right amount of feminine muscle;
having too much of this muscle can be seen as a violation of society’s view of the ideal body. Lifting weights has biophysical benefits and can provide a partial buffer against psychological conditions, but women are underrepresented in weight lifting areas of the gym (Salvatore & Marecek, 2010). This may be due to the cultural ideal of feminine bodies, the perception that weight lifting is a masculine activity, and that by doing these activities, actions will not be perceived in accordance to gender norms (Salvatore & Marecek, 2010).

In contrast, men perceive gaining muscle weight as a positive while gaining fat or losing tone can be seen as a negative (LaCaille et al., 2011). As described before, men put a greater emphasis on the role of personal responsibility and they are constantly working to satisfy self-imposed pressures to fit the ideal masculinity (LaCaille et al., 2011). In order to allow these values expressed by men to be carried through, the avoidance of fitness classes and less use of the cardio rooms may be necessary. It is possible that these two environments do not put enough emphasis on gaining muscle to make them a worthwhile experience for men.

Regardless of the type of goals that males and females are trying to reach, the motivation to participate stem from the same mechanisms. These include challenge, social recognition, enjoyment, appearance, health pressures, stress management, and social recognition (Kilpatrick, Hebert, & Bartholomew). Social networks combined with societal pressures influence individuals in making choices about healthy habits and preference of exercise, but dynamics change once the individual enters the actual fitness setting.

**Personal Motivation**

The self-determination theory states that humans inherently possess psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and social relatedness (Kilpatrick, Herbert, & Bartholomew, 2005;
Meyer, H.

Chu-Hsin, et al., 2007). In the attempt to fulfill these needs, individuals adopt behaviors and activities. The need for autonomy is the need to be self-initiating; the need for competence is the need to interact efficiently with the environment; and the need for relatedness is the need to feel connected to those around you (Wilson & Brookfield, 2009). What appear to be individual choices emerge from complex desires in interaction with socially structured opportunities for fulfilling these needs. These three goals not only influence an individual’s personal motivation to exercise in general, but also the motivation to exercise in specific settings.

Humans have three driving factors to take action: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement allows an action to recur based on the notion that it generated a positive reaction the first time it was performed (Gove, 1994). For example, exercise can make a person feel energized which inspires repetition of the action. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something for its own sake (Lavigne, et al., 2009). Extrinsic motivation refers to doing something for instrumental reasons (Lavigne, et al., 2009). Positive reinforcement combined with extrinsic and intrinsic motivation is the basic mechanisms described in both the utilitarian and behaviorist perspectives. In both perspectives of motivation, individuals are striving for maximum gratification and the avoidance of deprivations or punishments (Turner, 1987). These underlying theories of motivation become significantly complicated with the addition of other people into the immediate environment.

When applying these theories of motivation in the exercise setting, it is possible to see how choices are made regarding where to exercise and with whom. In accordance with the self-determination theory, competence as an inherent need within life is something that each person strives for in order to be successful. In relation to exercise, concepts of ability to perform the exercises have a large impact on motivation to reach one’s goal (Li, Lee, & Solmon, 2009).
Lacaille, et al. (2011) describes some challenges that women encounter in daily fitness activities including the lack of knowledge of fitness equipment, which may have a direct link to perception of ability. By being knowledgeable of how to use equipment and what is expected in certain areas of the gym there is increased personal autonomy. Autonomy in this context allows free choice of when and where to exercise without being dependent on other people. The final part of self-determination theory revolves around the need for social relatedness. Having other people in the fitness setting creates a more complex dynamic in motivation.

*Exercising With Others*

The presence of other individuals in a workout setting provides an opportunity for an individual to involve those around her. Interactions can be intentional or subconscious, but each has an effect on the productivity of the present exercise. Christakis & Fowler (2011) argue that human beings are biologically hardwired to mimic others outwardly and through this behavior, we come to adopt their inward states. As a result, the behaviors as well as emotions and moods are adopted. It is also possible to mimic the behaviors of those in relative proximity, but the person does not have to be close (Christakis & Fowler, 2011). Therefore, just having people in the general area is one example of how individuals may affect each other’s motivation.

The adoption of these internal drives becomes less subconscious in the context of comparison and competition within exercise. Comparison exists in two facets: social comparisons and temporal comparisons (Möller & Marsh, 2013). Social comparisons refer to the use of others as the standard and temporal comparisons refer to the use of self-related information as the standard (Möller & Marsh, 2013). Furthering the idea of social comparison, social comparison theory argues that people prefer to compare themselves with those who are
similar in order to get accurate self-appraisals (Datta & Kulik, 2012). By working out in a setting that includes someone of a different ability level, the individual is likely to change the workout being done. Exercising with a fit peer generally leads to decreased workout time and exercising with an unfit peer generally leads to a longer workout time due to the negative feelings about oneself induced by exercising with someone more fit and choosing to reduce exposure to the situation (Datta & Kulik, 2012). This idea remains consistent with the expectancy-value perspective in which people assess their own skills by comparing their performances with those of others, but when this comparison is upward, being outperformed threatens the sense of self (Möller & Marsh, 2013; Normand & Croizet, 2013; Smith-Jackson & Reel, 2012).

These data show that comparing with others around allows for self-assessment, but may be threatening depending on the situation. According to the achievement goal theory, individuals participate in achievement settings, or competition, to demonstrate or develop self-confidence, which can be displayed through either accomplishment of a task or the ability to outperform others (Dewar & Kavussanu, 2012). Competition, like comparison, has the ability to influence and individual’s experience positively or negatively. Cooke et al., (2011) provide data supporting competition as inducing pressure, which leads to positive and negative effects. The processing efficiency theory attributes pressure-induced changes in performance to effects on anxiety, but this can either make an individual do poorly in competition or better because of increased mental effort (Cooke, et al., 2011).

Through the mimicking of others, comparison, and competition, exercising in the presence of others creates opportunity for change in workout dynamic. It is clear that social networks and exercising in the presence of others both have impacts on motivation in exercise, but these effects might change when looked at on a college campus.
Health within the college community

The years spent in college provide a transition for many young adults because of the new lifestyle and it is the first time that many students are living away from home (Harring, Montgomery, & Hardin, 2010). The major changes involved in this transition challenge students to take control of their daily activities as well as healthy behaviors. As noted before, physical activity is associated with a variety of positive health attributes, but the amount of physical activity decreases with age (Huddelston, Mertesdorf, & Araki, 2002; Nguyen-Michel, et al, 2006; O’Connor, Rousseau & Maki, 2004; Pauline, 2013). Physical inactivity has been associated with the risk of numerous chronic diseases and health conditions (Buckworth & Nigg, 2004). Even though physical activity does decline when entering college, the college environment provides many resources that are generally not available to those who are not a part of a college community.

According to the 2000 census data, over 2 million students lived on the campus of the school they are attending. Living on campus requires students to be in school-sanctioned housing usually in dorm or apartment styles. From the day students move in, they are surrounded by peers; they can potentially live a matter of seconds from their best friends. As a result, college students tend to have a more natural and more immediate social support group at their disposal (Gruber, 2008). When leaving home for the first time, students are forced to make an entirely new group of friends. This allows a social network to grow substantially. By combing this new group of friends and peers with those already established at home, the amount of people to turn to for support is exponentially bigger.

With this increase in network size, the amount of social support is expected to increase, but studies have found that motivation in relation to exercise actually decreases. During the first
eight weeks of college, average physical activity decreases dramatically and weight gain is a common occurrence (Jung, Bray & Martin Ginis, 2008). “Freshman 15” is a common phrase within American society in regards to a dramatic increase in weight with the start of college. More than 90% of first year students are aware of this phenomenon and college services do their best to help avoid it, but it happens nonetheless (Jung, Bray, & Martin Ginis, 2008). Some theories as to why this weight gain is so common reference the increase of calories consumed because of alcohol consumption and the dietary change associated with college culture. If weight gain is expected, an increase in physical activity may be associated, but this is not the case.

Environmental support related to physical activity behavior consists of awareness, accessibility, opportunities to be active, and aesthetic attributes (Reed, 2007). Many college campuses have at least one main gym on campus. These facilities are made available to students, staff and faculty for free or at a very low cost. With students living on campus or in close proximity, there is most likely a high quality, free gym within walking distance or a short drive from the living situations. The convenience makes it easier to exercise on a regular basis (LaCaille et al., 2011). Studies have shown that students living closer to the physical activity facilities engaged in exercise more often than those who were far away.

Despite the convenience and availability of facilities on college campuses, there are also barriers to exercise. Because of the dense population of the college campus, it is common for the facilities to be crowded and therefore harder to use. It is possible for the schools to charge an extra fee to participate in fitness classes, which can be an undesirable trait as well. Lastly, in reflection of the motivational aspect of competence, feelings of intimidation of unfamiliar equipment can discourage people from using the facilities made available to them.
Conclusion

Exercise has been proven to have many significant positive effects on physiological and psychological health. While this remains a fact, rates of physical activity decrease with age regardless of the resources available. It is clear that there is significant data supporting the fact that social networks influence health habits including physical activity. This impact combines with societal pressures to direct people to working out in certain locations for the purposes of conforming to the societal norms. In regards to social networks, the above studies support the basic idea that other people influence exercise patterns throughout life and within actual exercise, but they neglect to combine the data of how perceptions of social networks influence motivation with the actual exercise experience with people in those social networks. Similarly, the above studies neglect to combine the data of working out in the presence of others with perceptions of those experiences. This study will work to transcend these boundaries and find a relationship between perceptions and experiences.
Chapter 3: Methodology

When deciding which research methods to use for this study, the focus and research questions of the study were examined to find the most productive methods to answer them. The central research question is “how do social networks and the presence of others influence motivation in exercise?” Even though quantitative methods could be used to gather statistical data in basic questions about personal history and exercise routine, to be able to understand the complex relationships between people, exercise, and individuals within networks, qualitative methods were necessary. Interviews were conducted to gather subjective reflections while fieldwork was conducted to gather an objective view on people’s experiences in the different areas of campus fitness. Archival research was also considered as a method to be used to understand change over time, but was decided against based on the need to study college students currently. Qualitative methods are the best way to study this subject based on the need to gain a background in people’s lives with detailed descriptions and reflections in order to gain insight on the complete history and opinions of each participant. The data for this study came from 16, hour-long qualitative interviews and 8 hours of fieldwork.

Interviews

Interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection for this study based on the need to access the observations of others. Through interviewing, we can learn about an individual’s past, present, perceptions, how events can affect feeling and thoughts, what different people mean to them and more (Weiss, 1994). Some reasons to conduct interviews include developing detailed descriptions, integrating multiple perspectives, describing process,
developing holistic description, learning how events are interpreted, and bridging intersubjectivities (Weiss, 1994). All of these motives are encompassed in my research as I strive to gain a holistic view on each subject’s personal lives and experiences while comparing the participants to each other to find trends within gender, location, experiences, and so on.

All interview participants were over 18 years of age and students at Brandeis University and consisted of eight males and eight females. All participants were 18 years or older to be able to speak freely without consent of a parent or guardian. It was decided that the study would involve only students from Brandeis University because of availability of the subject pool, a focus on college campuses and lifestyles and the specific age group that is included in this population.

Participants were recruited through flyers throughout Academic buildings and fitness facilities on campus, emails made to the sociology major list-serve, announcements made in select classes, and snowball sampling (see appendix A). Of these methods, convenience sampling, or choosing whomever is available, was implemented in order to schedule times that fit within both my and the participants’ schedules (Weiss, 1994). These methods allowed access to a wide range of students, but the volunteers resulted in mostly upperclassmen. The participant pool consisted of 13 upperclassmen and 3 underclassmen. As a result, the data set included mostly students who have been on campus for at least 2 years and therefore have a more in depth perspective habits and affects that being on a college campus for an extended period of time has on them. The underclassmen involved had newer perspective regarding college life and exercise. (See Table 1)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year, Age</th>
<th>Physical Activity Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Freshman, Age 18</td>
<td>Varsity track team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Prefers to run outside; will participate in swimming, hiking, elliptical, fitness classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittnay</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Dancer; will go to fitness classes and use elliptical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Prefers the recumbent bike; will go to fitness classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackenzie</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Club field hockey captain; runs, elliptical, fitness classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghan</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Yoga; Cardio Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Freshman, Age 18</td>
<td>Treadmill, yoga, fitness classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Zumba instructor; runs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Prefers the weight room and cardio room; has been to one fitness class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Hockey player, swimmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Plays sports, tennis; has gone to multiple fitness classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Ultimate Frisbee captain; works out intensely on his own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Varsity basketball team; personal trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Runner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Senior, Age 21</td>
<td>Non-exerciser; basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Freshman, Age 18</td>
<td>Long distance runner, yoga, crew team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When sitting down for the interview, I opened with a brief introduction about my study and presented the participant with two informed consent documents, one for each of us (see appendix A). By signing this document, the participant agreed to have the interview recorded and allowed notes to be taken. Each interview was recorded on an iPhone and then transcribed. The interview followed an interview guide that was designed to go through many different types of fitness and discuss how other people fit into the experiences within each type. The interview guide was approved by the Brandeis IRB (see appendix B). After allowing for any questions, we began the interview, each one lasting between 30 and 60 minutes.

The interview guide was divided into three major sections: why and how you like to exercise, the use of different facilities, and the way different people contribute to these
experiences or do not. After discussing all the questions posited, I allowed time for any extra reflections or questions the subject might have. The guide was set up to allow for each interview to be examined and compared as accurately and closely as possible through the fixed-question open response method, or one that predominantly remains the same for each interview (Weiss, 1994). While each interviewed allowed for personal reflections and anecdotes, no interview was the same, nor could they be generalized as views for an entire population.

While each interview was with a student at Brandeis University, there was significant diversity in responses. Each individual brought personal opinions and experiences into view that result from the individuals’ backgrounds, values, and lifestyles. As a result, the combination of all 16 interviews can be combined as a data set reflecting many different perspectives of this generation, yet it cannot be generalized to the university or the population as a whole. Because of the general nature of an interview, biases may be present regarding a multitude of areas. Throughout the responses, it is likely that there is a recall bias present because of the retrospective accounts of experiences and previous opinions. In this respect, there may be selective memory in which details of these experiences may be forgotten.

Regarding the participants themselves, there may be selection bias because of the self-selection in response to the recruiting strategies used. The people who volunteered themselves may have had an interest in the subject, a relationship with me, or had greater exposure to the recruiting strategies. Using of snowball sampling, volunteers recommended individuals who may be willing and interested to participate. This narrows the array of participants further because of the use of social networks. Therefore, the participants involved in this study reflect a smaller population from within the Brandeis Community.
After all of the interviews were completed and transcribed, the data was analyzed to find patterns and eventually theories using of coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration. The first step is to read each interview transcription to code and sort the data. By executing this step, local integration was employed. Through local integration, the interview transcripts were scanned and interpreted to find trends within the documents. Each interview brought a unique perspective to the trends. In some cases they point out conflicting trends, in which case complications could be examined. After the data was analyzed, inclusive integration was employed to put each piece into logical sequence and create a set direction.

**Fieldwork**

Fieldwork was chosen to supplement the 16 interviews completed as a way to understand the spoken and unspoken dialogue between people within the fitness setting. Ethnographic research involves entering the social setting and getting involved in what is going on as well as getting to know the people and then leaving the situation to write field notes as a written account of what happened (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). I chose to conduct ethnographic research to be able to see how people interact objectively rather than solely looking at personal accounts.

Fieldwork was completed at Brandeis University throughout the different facilities accessed by students. These included Gosman cardio room, Gosman weight room, fitness classes, and the Village Gym. For the weight room and cardio rooms, access was granted to me as a Brandeis student and therefore I did not need consent to complete fieldwork in these settings. In the fitness classes I completed participant fieldwork and gained permission to do this through individual emails sent to the fitness instructor (see appendix A). Fieldwork was done at Brandeis University because this study focuses on this college campus.
Fieldwork was completed over the course of 8 hours with portions done on different days and at different times throughout the day. These times and classes were chosen through convenience sampling because of the availability in my schedule. I chose to continue going to the same fitness class to observe if there are trends from week to week. Because the class that was chosen focuses on muscle toning, it is possible people may be interested in participating regardless of stereotypes based on the idea that weight use is something useful for both genders, unlike a class like Zumba, which is stereotypically done by females only. Being a part of the activity enabled a naturalistic viewing of those around me. In the individual exercise areas of the weight room and cardio room, I would write jottings on my cell phone with each observation. Once I left, I would return to a private location and convert my jottings into field notes. I was not able to create jottings when in the group fitness setting. As a result, I would write down as much as I could remember of what happened directly after class to later convert into field notes.

I chose to do fieldwork in these three settings, the weight room, cardio room, and fitness classes because they are the main forms of fitness opportunities available on this campus to all students. Sports teams and physical education classes were avoided because of their exclusive nature, strict schedule, and because they are led by coaches or teachers. By studying only environments that are accessible by all students, there is a greater possibility of finding patterns that reflect the student population as a whole.

The data collected through fieldwork was analyzed through coding and sorting to find trends. Similarly to the interview transcript, field notes were read line-by-line and categorized to be able to detect any patterns present. This process consisted of open coding, or reading to identify any ideas regardless of how varied, and focused coding, or reading to identify importance within a particular area (Emerson et al., 1995). The coding and categories were
compared to those found within the interviews to find overlapping and complimentary data that support each other.

By examining the same phenomenon recounted by participants and shown by those in the gym, the two methods of study can be used to support each other. The fieldwork can also be a mechanism to understand the way people interact with others in these specific settings that may not have been recounted through the interviews. It is possible a subconscious occurrence of using others for motivation will be seen through the objective point of view, but not the subjective.

While the field notes provided a new perspective on students’ interactions, there are many limitations to this process in fieldwork. Within each setting, I was exercising at the same time as those around me, which may have taken my focus away from everyone else in order to make sure that I was doing everything properly in this strenuous situation. As a result, details may have been missed. In each setting, I was unable to see everyone due to the room setup and unable to hear everything being said due to the music and noise of the machines. Therefore, important communication between subjects may have been lost. Another downfall of this method is that an observer is unable to actually know what is going on within the minds of each of the subjects to understand thought processes about the environment and those around them.

By combining the study of people from all different backgrounds and experiences with those in which I have no knowledge of who they are, I hope to be able to further understand the idea of people utilizing others; those you know and those you do not, as means to motivate themselves within the exercise setting.
Chapter 4: Social networks and Motivation in Exercise

Research in the social sciences demonstrates that the people who surround us play a very important role in decision-making and habit formation, with real consequences for health. The social network, defined as the social ties and web or relations that surround an individual, consists of those within one’s family, friends, romantic relationships, co-workers, peers, and others that a person might be in contact with on a daily basis (Ertel, Glymour & Berkman, 2009). Each individual within the network has a unique relationship with the subject and these relationships may influence him or her in both positive and negative ways depending on the context. People both consciously and unconsciously construct social networks over time in order to create a sense of social support, and the function that Networks play may enable positive or negative outcomes regarding health related behaviors (Chrsitakis & Fowler, 2011).

This chapter describes the function of social networks in creating exercise values and how relationships work to perpetuate both positive and negative aspects of these habits. Through the interview data, I show that the three main areas of the social networks, family, friends, and romantic partners, each play a different role in the motivation for exercise. Based on the analysis of these data, I argue that the family is the most important component in the creation of healthy habits and that friends and romantic partners do influence motivation, but that the act of exercising with the individuals brings a different dynamic of motivation as well as complications within the setting. This chapter begins with the discussion of how the family influences exercise motivation, describes how core values work to establish an individual’s patterns to be continued with age, and then considers the influence of friends, roommates, and romantic partners, or lack thereof. The data suggests that there is a difference in how people within the social network
Meyer, H.

influence motivation in exercise throughout daily life, but also works to complicate motivation within the actual act of working out.

*Family*

Immediate family generally consists of parents and siblings, but parents have the strongest familial influence on the creation and maintenance of health habits. Research has found that healthy habits develop in childhood and begin to stabilize around the ages of 11 or 12 years old with parents as role models being the most important factor in their creation (Theodorakis et al., 2004). Parents provide social support through the acts of verbal encouragement, logistical and financial support, and parental modeling (Thompson et al., 2010). Parental modeling is the act of parents as a role model for healthy habits such as eating healthy and exercising regularly (Thompson et al., 2010). Throughout the sixteen interviews we see that families, specifically parents, have a significant impact on the habits of the individuals that are carried throughout their independent life.

The way that exercise is introduced has the potential to change a child’s perception of the activity. If parents were acting as positive role models, encouragement to join programs and begin healthy exercise habits early on was possible. For those who have very active parents, it seems easier to have exercise instilled as a positive activity to participate in. Allison, who is now an avid runner, explained:

> My parents are huge exercisers so they kept trying to motivate me to do exercise. In my family all of the kids, my brothers and I had to take swim lessons until we passed out of the highest level at the YMCA because my dad really wanted us to learn to swim. So he kept suggesting you should be on a swim team and you should swim for exercise.
At the very beginning, she was prompted to participate in swimming to learn it as a skill, but that was only one aspect of the creation of exercise as a regular experience. Allison explains further that exercise has been a main value for her entire family and has influenced a variety of activities that they have participated in both as a family and individually. From going to the gym together while on vacation to verbally encouraging her, Allison explains that her family’s attention to exercise has had a huge impact on her habits. She states:

They always encourage me. If my parents didn’t value exercise, I’m sure it wouldn’t matter as much to me. Because I always know that when we go to restaurants and stuff and if there’s a restaurant on the main street in town someone will suggest that we just walk there and not drive, it’s not exercise but it’s a value in our family. We would always walk to school. Before we were born, my parents did bike trips together. It is always something that has always been a part of our values and I’ve adapted them.

Through the support in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, Allison and her family are able to make use of healthy habits in their everyday lives.

A big part of making this transition from exercise as a chore to exercise as an important and positive aspect of life depends on the way it is framed. For Allison’s family exercise serves as a fun activity to do while on vacation or on the way to dinner. Meghan’s mother taught her and her two sisters that exercise can be fun from an early age with “Franny’s Nature Show” which consisted of her mother standing in front of the room doing movements while she and her sisters copied her. Meghan explains:

My mom, for as long as I can remember, has made exercise associated with having fun and laughing and listening to music. If I didn’t have a parent that instilled that in my life I
would maybe view it like my friends as a chore or something I don’t do, and if I do it’s sporadic. My mom always made exercising creative.

Through Meghan’s example, it can be seen that the creation of a fun environment can shape the way a person views exercise in the long term and how that influence started at a very young age.

Support for exercise within a family setting can be shown through the act of exercising as a group, setting a standard, and through vocal motivation. As Allison and Meghan’s families set up exercising as a group, Brittany’s family motivates each other to exercise by showing respect to those who are physically active. She explains:

So it was always like: you exercise. It was part of the thing. No one would push you to do it, there wasn’t any pressure, but if you wanted it there was a lot of support to get you going… I would never be looked down on if I didn’t exercise, but there’s a lot more respect given if I do exercise.

The foundation that she describes is displayed through many other people’s experiences with their families. By making the resources available for those interested, an easier environment to be able to exercise consistently was created.

The support can also be displayed through conversations about the subject. Andrew discussed that when talking with his mom about feeling badly that day she would mention going to the gym to feel better. Many subjects mentioned similar experiences with their families. Peter’s mother is always looking for deals for the gym to motivate him to go. The knowledge of health benefits accompanying exercise perpetuates the push from family members to encourage physical activity in any form.

The way that exercise is framed as a fun, important part of life is the basis for how the respondents view exercise throughout the rest of their lives. As a result of the need to make
exercise desirable, many parents turn to sport participation as an exciting way to get their children active alongside their peers. Previous research has shown that motivations to participate in recreational sports are skill development, competence, fun, and fitness (Sit & Lindner, 2006). In many cases, this involvement has a huge influence on the path to independent healthy habits to be continued throughout their adult lives.

Ten of the 16 people interviewed began exercising through team sports, mainly prompted by parents. John explains that because of his family loving baseball, they had him begin playing even though he later mentions that exercise is not a part of their core value system. Robert similarly states, “My dad was like play t-ball, so I played t-ball and soccer and basketball.” With the parents’ influences on which sports to play, subjects began early on. Mackenzie loved sports as a child and reportedly “played everything” but did not continue to play every sport as she matured. By participating in a large variety of sports, the child has the opportunity to see what he or she likes and continues to participate or rule it out to find something more desirable, whether that is sports or some other form of physical activity. In some cases sports serve as an introduction to exercise and are discontinued by the individuals, but in other cases, sports became a main source of physical activity through their young adult life and possibly continued in college.

Abigail, a varsity track runner, decided to join the cross-country team in middle school because of her parents’ involvement. She states, “My parents were runners and I don’t know, I just always thought I was going to do it.” By having parents as role models who participated in an activity and who shared their interest with her, Abigail expected to participate in the activity as well. Even though her parents’ previous actions served as a model for sport participation that
Meyer, H.

would continue to shape her life and be her main area of involvement, she later describes her family as being less active currently which can sometimes have a negative influence on her.

While family support is generally positive in the creation of exercise habits, it may serve the opposite purpose in some cases. For example, John’s family in general does not place much value on exercise because of cultural norms from the Dominican Republic:

The Dominican culture is big on heavy meat eating, rice and beans for lunch and dinner and sometimes for breakfast. It’s just a lot of meat eating and they also have beer bellies run in my family. The only exercise is dancing. So not really a big part of my family’s culture.

The exception is his brother who takes it upon himself to encourage John to exercise. Because of family dynamics, this effort is not effective. He reflected:

Well my brother, our relationship has been on and off and it’s been back and forth so that kind of affected how he saw everything that I did and I saw everything that he did. His working out made me feel like I didn’t want to because I wanted to show that I didn’t need to do what he did to do well for myself. I felt like he embraced working out because he knew that I didn’t do it at all so we really tried to embrace our differences. It’s because we are close together in age and we need to distinguish ourselves.

In this case, the efforts made by John’s brother were thwarted based on principles held by John regardless of the benefits that would come from engaging in such activities. Later on John explains that he let go of this need for independence in order to bond with his brother. He explains, “I did it as a way of talking to him because I had been at school for a long time so I wanted to see how he was and that’s why I went. It wasn’t for the workout.”
Not having exercise as an important value within a family, it is possible for the children to not be involved, but when parents are overweight and do not exercise, they may inadvertently motivate their children to exercise. Daniel describes both of his parents as overweight and explains how that turns into a source of motivation for him. In explaining how his family’s activity levels have impacted him he states, “part of it has to do with the fact that my dad in particular, and my mom in some degree, my dad is overweight and I don’t want to be overweight growing up and so that’s part of what motivates me.” While his family might not be the most active themselves, the fact that they serve as a basis for what not to be allows greater encouragement to make the change.

Many of the families of the subjects were described as very active with daily exercise routines. If parents, siblings and extended family all act as a source of the desire to exercise as well as a main source of support, do people choose to exercise with their families as well? The answer to this question can be found within the relationships held between the subject and each family member individually. While some subjects hate exercising with family members, others love it. Some participate just to appease the person asking and others do it to bond with family while doing a productive activity.

For some, working out with a family may be the most productive way to stay motivated and have a great workout. Studies have shown that siblings have a harder time exercising together as a result of age difference and contrasting interests (Thompson et al., 2010), but many of the respondents defied this idea. Michael comes from a very active family that includes a professional football player as a brother. In this case being able to exercise with him allows Michael to train his hardest with an individual who is one of the best. When reflecting on times that Michael has exercised with his brother he states:
Meyer, H.

My brother is very professional and I just try to keep up…I’d push myself to get to the level that I can do the exact same thing [he’s] doing as a professional. Yea there are something’s that I can do better than him and I can be like hey you’re the professional but I can do this!

By being able to train with a professional athlete who is also a family member, Michael has the ability to bond with his brother and have an extremely productive workout. This need for time to bond with a family member was a theme through many of the interviews.

Most respondents did not have siblings who were professional athletes. Yet, exercising with a family member who is of a similar age and ability can be beneficial. Mackenzie remembers a summer in which she and her brother woke up two hours before work each morning to go on long distance runs. She mentioned that they would “trade off mornings with like get out of bed, no you get out of bed.” When asked if she would have done that every morning if he had not been with her she very quickly responded, “oh god no, I would have been in bed.” Even though she really enjoyed running before work because of the results, she needed the extra push from her brother to be able to maintain the extremity in which they were performing and being in the same house only helped. Mackenzie and her brother preferred not to talk with each other as they ran, but in many cases exercising with family can serve as an opportunity to bond with each other.

Thompson et al. (2010), argues that majority of parents believe that physical activity is important and they use it as a way to sustain parent-child communication while spending time with each other. When a student is away at college, his or her life becomes very separated from those within his family and upon returning exercise is a great way to reconnect through a productive activity. Sean, a long distance runner who was inspired to start by his brother who
Meyer, H.

joined the track team, explained that running with his brother became a great medium for catching up with him after being away for so long. There was one time in particular that stuck out to him the most:

He had a really bad break up once so I like said lets go on a run and in that environment it was really good to help him along the line and he wasn’t looking me in the face so he didn’t have to think about what he was saying and we were going at a slow pace and we did stop at a park and sat down at one point. So it wasn’t about the workout, but the workout was a good vehicle for me to get him out of the funk that his psycho ex-girlfriend had put him in.

Generally, Sean would not slow down for his brother if he was to go on a workout for training purposes, but because of the situation, he was able to adapt. In this circumstance Sean was the one to instigate going on a run, but often times it is the family member inviting the subject to join in his or her routine.

When there is a set routine that the subject is being asked to join, the subject may agree to against his or her personal norms of working out alone or not at all. The reason for the change may be consistent with others in the desire to train harder or bond with family members, or it may be to appease those asking. Sarah mentions that her mother is one of the main reasons that she is an active person because they started walking together, but through her own personal journey in fitness, she has found her own passions and moved on from just walking to running at different times in the day, which she prefers. When asked if she likes exercising with her family, she responds by saying she “wants to like it,” but it might not be the most productive workout. By walking with her mom or biking with her dad, it is solely for bonding and because she was asked. She explains:
So like for my mom its more like if I want to go with her it’s cute bonding time with mom and I just get to talk to her while we’re walking. Same with my sister. If I ever want to go with my sister its more like cute bonding time. Or if I go on a bike ride its harder. I hate biking, but I’ve only tried to do it because my dad is like ‘do you want to come with me?’ and I’m like ‘okay I’ll bond with you on our bike ride’ even though we can’t talk because we’re like not on the same, like its more for the bonding part like again, I’ll come back and feel like I didn’t work out or it was too much for me.

Sarah would participate in activities that she hates in order to be with her family. She will sacrifice a good workout or push herself too hard to have bonding time with them. Through Sarah’s experiences it becomes clear that using exercise is not just a point of connection for parents to reach their children (Thompson et al., 2010), but also a point of connection for children to reach their parents. Sarah acknowledges that she would not be where she is today had her mother not “gotten her foot in the door.”

Similar to Sarah, many participants mentioned that their families are the reason they have reached their current point of success. From Mackenzie just seeing her family routinely exercising to the foundation created for Sean, each person had the ability to take what their families taught them and grow to find a routine that suits them individually. Even when the core values are not established and the subject finds motivation elsewhere, the value can be spread from the bottom up.

Daniel, whose parents are overweight, found a passion for sports and had the ability to extend the idea that exercise is a good thing to his parents to help them improve their quality of life. Matthew began exercising with his younger brother very intensely and the two of them inspired his sister and parents to become more active as well. While it seems most common for
the values to be established by the parents, it is clearly possible for the children to inspire the family to make changes for the better.

Over time, a person grows and expands her social network past those within the immediate family. Eventually she moves away for college and lifestyles change drastically. In family life, the core values remain, but when the person becomes independent, how will she maintain these principles? Will it be through the help of friends, just as it was through the help of family? Will seeing those around you with a daily exercise routine, or not, have an impact on you? Only one section of a person’s social network includes family members with friends and peers filling in the rest. What impact do these people have on exercise routines?

**Friends/Roommates**

Friends play a variety of roles within the area of motivation in exercise because they serve as a source of visualizing routine, getting motivated to go in general, sometimes creating improvement during exercise, and in some cases they can be detrimental. Friends have been known to have a significant influence on individuals, especially throughout adolescence, a time in which friends become the primary point of reference for behaviors, values, and attitudes (Maturo & Cunningham, 2013). Previous research has found that the physical activity of children is associated with the physical activity of their friends (Maturo & Cunningham, 2013) and that young people are more likely to be active when participating with friends rather than alone (Salvy et al., 2009). While this may be accurate for children and youth, it is clear that habits are influenced less by friends as individuals grow older.

There are two ways in which friends can influence motivation in exercise; changes during the actual act of exercising and changes to the motivation to get involved. Throughout the 16
interviews a variety of perspectives were shared on the presence of friends during exercise. In many interviews, participants expressed multiple perspectives on this topic based on different situations they are in with their friends. Even though every respondent cited times in which he or she exercised with friends, many also mentioned that they would prefer to exercise alone. When getting the participants to expand it became clear that the source of preference of whether to go with a friend or not depends on which friend you are going with.

For the most part, those who say they prefer to exercise alone rather than with friends do so because of the convenience of going alone as well as the need for personal time. Having another person to consider makes scheduling even more complicated. Matthew describes, “I do go on my own a lot because coordinating with people especially with such random college schedules; everyone has such random classes and random things so it’s much harder.” Even though he is open to the idea of going with people and has before, it just makes it more difficult. Daniel is so busy that he goes at “weird times” like really early in the morning and he would not be able to compromise and switch the times. Allison mentions that she likes to decide how long she goes for, so unless it is a fitness class the amount of time spent exercising is a personal decision, but it gets more complicated when the other person has ideas of what to do.

Even though it is harder to schedule, many people are open to the idea of going with a friend. Meghan explains, “I prefer going alone, but I ask my roommates ‘hey I’m going does anyone want to come,’ but they’re usually busy and that’s fine.” Similarly, Mackenzie mentions that she often goes on her own but she would never be opposed to someone coming with her if s/he asked. In these contexts, Meghan and Mackenzie are inviting friends into their own personal routine rather than changing based on the needs of others. Beyond scheduling and basic
accommodation for people, interactions within the setting can deter people and make them less inclined to exercise with friends.

At the very basis, having a friend with you is just one other thing that holds your attention. Andrew prefers going to the weight room alone every time because having a friend there became a distraction. He states, “I was focused and curious of what they were doing and usually I’m kind of in my own world. Having a friend there is almost detrimental, but it’s nice to have a friendly face that I know of course, but I’m kind of in my own world so I tend to do things on my own.” This idea of being in his “own world” is something that many people spoke about in reference to the enjoyment of exercise. When working out alone you have the ability to think about anything, do anything, and meet your own goals without the pressures put on by having someone else to consider.

Jessica, who tends to go to the gym more often to have her mood lifted, explained that for the most part she prefers to be alone because “it feels like a more personal goal meeting thing.” Because exercise is a very personal experience, as you are working to improve your own body and health, having a friend can infringe on this focus. She describes, “It feels like I am doing it for myself and it’s a personal thing that I want to do alone and I’ll be reading and I don’t want to be talking to anyone and I’ll do it and I’ll come back and I feel like part of the reward for me is that I did it by myself.” In order to conserve the individual goals that she has set, she cannot go with a friend. Jessica later talks about how being with friends can create a competitiveness that can be detrimental to her personal workout, which Brittany can also describe as a downfall of working out with friends.

When people become competitive with others who they know, it can bring out insecurities that cannot be seen otherwise. Salvy et al. (2009), argues that friends are generally
more secure in mutual affection for each other and therefore have less need to use strategies to gain approval, but this is seemingly not the case. If you are insecure about how fast you run and you are in the situation in which you have to run next to your best friend who is faster than you are, it will only hurt your self-esteem and possibly taint running for you in the long term. John describes himself as lankier than most men his age, which made him nervous about showing his body. He states, “When I know I can’t do as much as the other person I sort of prefer to go alone.” With each of the issues stated regarding exercising with friends, it has not completely stopped friends from going together for a multitude of reasons.

One of the main reasons why people think that going to exercise with a friend is a benefit is the fact that it can help a person actually go. Jessica mentions, “Sometimes I really need someone to go to the gym with me to literally get me in the door and then I’m fine. Other times, like that’s when I’m really struggling to get motivated to go and get out of bed and commit to doing it.” By making plans with a friend makes this person accountable for going. It is harder to back out of plans to go exercise when another person is counting on you to go. This is an example of the association between individual physical activity and physical activity with one’s friends (Salvy, et al., 2009). An added benefit to just going together is that the journey to the gym can act as a bonding experience, or a time to catch up with each other. We can see this reflected through the way that friends can encourage you to enter an area that might be out of your comfort zone. For example, the weight room intimidates many people, but going with a friend would ease that uncomfortable feeling.

Even though people say that they do not like going with their friends, dynamics change when speaking about sports teams, which also act as a very close group of friends. Every person who mentioned they were on a team also mentioned they enjoyed exercising in the company of
their teammates. Abigail, the varsity track runner, has to run incredibly long distances daily, which can take a significant amount of time. Over the summer when she had a strict training schedule on her own she would invite her friends to go on parts of her runs and use it as a time to catch up. When team practices started, everything changed:

When we’re going on distance runs, we talk the whole time. We talk throughout the whole warm up and throughout the entire run so it’s like hanging out for an hour and a half and you kind of forget you’re running. But like during a workout if you’re single file and around a track, you obviously can’t talk if you’re dying but during distance runs I talk with people, which is majority of my friends.

When you are on a team that practices daily and you live with people involved in the same team, it is an easy transition to exercising with your friends and they act as an external source of motivation. Based on the idea of being surrounded by family members who exercise as a source of motivation, it seems like active roommates would have the same affect. In reality, people tend to maintain the habits that they have formed individually regardless of their roommates habits, although they would sometimes serve as an extra reminder.

While Robert may enjoy playing basketball with his friends, he is seemingly he least active of any of his friends and roommates, but they do not seem to change his view on exercising. Robert, the self-proclaimed non-exerciser, is surrounded people who exercise frequently. He acknowledges that he exercises less than his peers exercise, and claims that they do not have an impact on him. When asked if they have an influence on his motivation he responded:
I wish, but I don’t think it does… I feel like I should be more willing to or more active because people around me are making it easier to do that and it is something that I like to do so its something you would think would be a positive impact. I just sit around instead.

In Robert’s situation, those around him do not influence his exercise ethic. Similarly, if there is a very active person who is surrounded by those who are not involved, it does not seem to have a negative influence. Allison’s friends do not exercise consistently and instead of having this be a detriment to her routine it actually makes her more motivated to continue, as she feels the pressure to “live up to [being a person that exercises].” Sean has also taken on the label of “athlete” with his roommates and feels an identical pressure to what Allison described.

Some people surround themselves with friends who are active as both friends and roommates. This does not seem to be the only source of motivation, but rather the little push when needed. When people have fitness in common, it becomes easier to help each other intentionally or not. Mackenzie’s roommates are all active and when one says they are going to work out, she thinks, “Ohhhh I should do that too.” They act as a subtle reminder that it might be a good thing to do. Matthew lives with members of the men and women ultimate Frisbee teams. As players they are all aware of the benefits of training and when Matthew needs an extra push he says, “I text my friends like I’m really tired today should I work out today and they’re like stop being tired go workout.” Because each person has the same values, it helps when needed. As John explains, “it’s the contagion of the drive.”

Regardless of the level of activity that an individual’s friends and roommates participate in, if the person has a set routine and goals to reach, it is likely that he will not deviate from the means of reaching those goals. Andrew exercises significantly more than his roommates and friends and he explains, “Sometimes when they’re not going it’s a good excuse not to go. If
they’re not going to go and they’re going to have brownies then I’m going to do that too, so of course that happens as well, but I try not to let that get to me.” By not letting his friends influence his workout patterns for the most part, he has the will to continue regardless of what they are doing. We see this through Matthew’s drive to be the best ultimate Frisbee player possible and Michael’s unwavering love for fitness. Each of these respondents is set in these ways and will not let anyone else’s habits distract from reaching their goals. In these cases, it is clear that the physical activity of friends and peers is not linked to the physical activity of the individual. While there might be a reminder that exercise is important, the poor exercise habits of others will not negatively affect those who set routines, and the good exercise habits of others will not completely change the habits either.

Working out with friends in a non-team setting presents many individual challenges. From not wanting to compete, to dealing with different skill levels, and understanding different desires of what is going to happen during the session. Each of the participants mentioned different strategies or techniques to lessen the issues that may arise from going to exercise with friends. Meghan described how on the way to the gym she and a friend would pick how long they would exercise on machines individually and then meet to do mat exercises afterward. The act of establishing what is going on also becomes important when levels of ability are different. Peter explains, “Knowing that ahead of time makes it easier because if you’re expecting someone to be a certain level and they’re not, it’s a little awkward for you, so I think that just setting expectations can alleviate a type of embarrassment or awkwardness.” This awkwardness described is a main contributor to lack of desire to work out with friends. It becomes uncomfortable when having to speed up or slow down for others. The differences in ability can
also be a source of stigma placement and judgment, which contributes to the uncomfortable feelings.

With all of the difficult situations that accompany exercising with friends it seems as if working out with significant others may be out of the realm of possibilities. How can a person navigate a romantic relationship when put in a situation that shows insecurities and abilities while also looking seemingly unattractive? Even if this is the case, what impact does having a significant other, or not, have on a person?

*Romantic Partners*

Romantic relationships have the potential to change how people participate in on a daily basis. Romantic partners have the potential to provide a significant amount positive health benefits leading to positive outcomes for an individual including social support, social integration, and increased sense of meaning and purpose (Markey, Markey, & Gray, 2007). Through the family systems theory that each partner acts in the shaping and being shaped by the other partners habits, we can understand that being in a relationship can lead to positive health habits by working to improve each other (Berge, et al., 2014). While most studies examining the influence of being in a relationship have on health outcomes focus on married couples, we are able to understand that benefits that come from being in a relationship regardless of the status. No research was found solely on the affects that not being in a romantic relationship has on physical activity. Through this study, it is possible to understand how young adults view the influence that romantic relationships, or lack thereof, have on exercise motivation.

Each of the people interviewed were at very different points in their lives regarding having a significant other. The group ranged from never having one at all to having one in high
school to having one in college to currently having one during the time of the interview. As a result, answers about significant others varied upon experience and covered the “what if,” reflections on the past and explanations of the current relationships. As a result, I separated the coded the interviews separately for those who have never been in a relationship, those who have previously been in one, and those who are currently in one. By doing so, I was able to see the influence the pursuit of a partner has on exercise as well as the differences in what happens when being in a romantic relationship. In general, people have found that being in the pursuit of a significant other and having one both have an effect on exercise routines on an individual level, but for the most part people do not exercise with their partners as a result of relationship dynamics.

Many of the people interviewed mentioned that it was very important to have an active significant other because it makes understanding each other easier. Sean, who has never been in a romantic relationship, stated:

I am kind of hesitant of starting a relationship with somebody who isn’t active because I feel like that at this point at least it’s such a big point in my life it would be hard to connect in some ways and there’s a lot of misunderstandings that can be avoided if you’re both on the same page.

Being very active has made Sean more aware that there needs to be a sense of understanding in order to have a successful relationship. What he is describing is consistent with the Matthew’s idea of the common “brain wave.” If two people understand each other, it allows for the continuation of something very important in life.

Beyond the need for having to be active in common, people find that the idea of being in a relationship has an impact on personal habits. Sarah, who has never been in a relationship,
finds that looking for a partner constitutes the need to look better and therefore the need to exercise more. She has recalled seeing her friends enter relationships, which have influenced their desire to exercise in the beginning. She explains:

A lot of girls want to look good to get the guy and that’s where I am I guess and then they get the guy, but they’re still rocky, they’re nervous, they’re not secure yet so I want to look the best and then it’s like, ahhh, we’re the best. Hopefully, it’s the best relationship ever and now I can like let loose.

In Sarah’s pursuit of a partner, she feels like she has to look good to be able to attract a man that she wants. This idea remains consistent with the idea that women believe that thinness will result in more dating and relationship opportunities because of becoming more attractive according to societal norms (Smith-Jackson & Reel, 2012).

While Sarah might think she needs to start exercising in order to look more attractive and achieve her goals of finding a partner, others believe that exercising more in the beginning of a relationship allows an individual to feel more confident and therefore will have a positive effect on the pursuit of a partner. Brittany knows that when she is dating some her habits change in general. “In the beginning of a relationship or when I first start to like someone I notice I am working out more, either because I have a lot of adrenaline or emotions or I think it gives me an extra confidence boost that’s nice to have when I’m beginning a relationship.” She finds this change to have a positive effect on her relationships because of being less self-conscious with the new partner. It is clear that the pursuit of a new romantic partner has the potential to change exercise habits, but dynamics change when in a consistent relationship.

Daniel has been in a very serious relationship for many years and has mentioned the same feeling of getting comfortable with someone. His girlfriend is not exceedingly active and it
Meyer, H.

makes him feel less pressure to maintain a high level of activity, but he explains that the fact that she exists in his life has created a “pressure of wanting to look good and feel good.” In this idea, activity level is not changing his habits, rather it is the idea you want to look good for someone that you are involved with, which carries through from the stages of pursuit of a romantic partner.

Consistent with the idea that having an active family and living with active roommates can influence your activity level, significant others may have the same effect. Allison mentioned the fact that her boyfriend in high school was on the hockey team and was consistently working out with his team. While she cannot recall if she actually changed her habits, his high level of activity made her more aware. Robert, who is not consistently active, has been in a relationship in which his partner was active, yet it had no impact on him even though he noticed it. He explains:

We did separate things and running can be a very individual thing and for her it was. It wasn’t like let’s go on a run together, more like this is how I get exercise and it relaxes me. And my way to do it is through basketball so it’s nice to have hat common thing because it’s just another connection and thing in common.

Both Allison and Robert did not change their exercise habits based on those of their significant others, but being active became a point in common. Being aware of what the other person is doing may have the same affect that roommates and friends have of adding a push of motivation when needed. Even though people do not actually change habits based on understanding that their partners are active, the question remains, what if they exercise together?

Not many people spoke about exercising with their significant others, as it seems to be a very difficult experience to navigate. Of the 16 participants, 13 mentioned being in a relationship
at some point. Of those 13 people, only five mentioned exercising together. Those who say they do not exercise with their significant others gave the reasons of not being in a secure enough relationship where that would be an option, not enjoying the same kind of exercise, and sometimes not even discussing it. Mackenzie argued that no one she is dating should see her in that state in regards to the way she looks. Some remained consistent with the idea that exercise is a personal pursuit that they would rather not engage in with other people. Those who have exercised with their partners have had a wide variety of experiences, both positive and negative.

Positive experiences included couples who are willing to learn from each other while one person may have to sacrifice productivity in order to help. For example, Michael is a personal trainer and varsity athlete, so exercise takes up a significant amount of his free time. He has had many successful experiences working out with his girlfriend and has seen a huge improvement in her since they started dating. He says that she has gotten more active in general and has switched from participating solely in cardio exercises to using weights, an area that many girls are too intimidated to venture to. He encouraged her to take advantage of the skills that her boyfriend has. Michael says that he really loves exercising with her and helping her, but it comes at a cost that does not affect him negatively. He mentions, “It’s a bit different because [he’s] protective and [he’s] looking out making sure she’s okay. It’s for her. Even if [he] does get [his] workout in, it’s not full out because [he’s] making sure she’s okay.” Even though Michael has to sacrifice the productivity of his workout to help his girlfriend, he finds joy in it and she is also perceptive to his help. This may not be the case for other couples.

Exercising together is not as smooth of a process for some couples. For example, Matthew and his girlfriend are both ultimate Frisbee players and place a lot of importance on physical activity. Even though Matthew may be very knowledgeable about different aspects of
exercise that he has done independent research on and could potentially be a helpful exercise partner, his girlfriend prefers not to exercise with him. When asked why they do not exercise together he mentioned that she thinks he is not very nice when working out. He believes that he pushes her when she needs it and backs off when she does not. They have encountered difficult situations regarding intensity of the workout when going on a run together, which involved one person sacrificing for the other in a way that was not desirable. The idea that one might be faster than the other might bring up competitive feelings that could be unproductive throughout the workout and within the relationship.

This competitive edge is one of the main reasons why Jessica has difficulty exercising with friends and this carries through her relationship. Jessica’s boyfriend is active, but he has learned how she navigates the issue with competition that she is trying to avoid. In this case, Jessica and her boyfriend talk about what they have done for exercise, but he will purposefully withhold information about how fast he was going in order preserve her piece of mind. Once she gets him to tell her how fast he is running, he negotiates with her by saying, “But you run for more time than I do” if he is running for speed this time. The idea is to preserve a neutral stance in order to make sure that neither one becomes insecure.

The one situation that was spoken about that becomes neutral grounds for exercise is playing sports. Matthew and his girlfriend have a hard time working out together, but they are happy to play ultimate Frisbee together. Robert mentioned that he would never exercise with a girl he was dating previously, but they were once on an intramural soccer team together and they had a lot of fun. Allowing for a natural sense of competition through playing a game rather than competing based on skill level creates a different and more enjoyable environment. John even inspired his previous girlfriend to take tennis as a physical education class.
Conclusion

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that all of the different people in an individual’s life could affect how he or she perceives exercise, how s/he is motivated to exercise in general, and how s/he will figure out if exercising with people within the network is a desirable action. Based on the answers of participants, we see that family values are a significant determinant of how people begin exercising and why they continue. Once that person leaves the house, whichever values were created within the family setting and solidified during adolescence are carried through regardless of those who are now surrounding the individual. It can be noted that the search for a significant other and having one in general has the ability to influence exercise patterns based on the desire to feel confident and look good for romantic partners.

Family, friends, and significant others are all a part of a person’s social network and therefore their social support. As seen through each of the interviews, people tend to mimic those around them through added awareness of actions, which turns into an increased desire to take part as well. From family values to seeing roommates going to the gym, the social support created stimulates the initial interest in behavior change, which therefore provides additional motivation (Gibbison, Godfrey, & Johnson, 2012). George’s research claims that the earliest socialization is based on familial interaction, which can be seen when understanding that most of the participants find that their personal health values are derived from those of their family members (2005). Research shows that friends and peers can have a significant impact on the habits of children, youth, and young adults and the college environment provides immediate access to friends (Gruber, 2008; Maturo, & Cunningham, 2013; Salvy et al., 2009). Perhaps because of age and personal autonomy, the friends and peers of participants in this study did not have much influence on motivation in exercise beyond making people more aware.
Within these data it is clear that the main source of exercise values predominantly comes from family members, whether it is a value that is held by each member or it is inspired by the lack of exercise. Raising a child with the knowledge that exercise is important can shape that child’s exercise patterns throughout the rest of his or her independent life, regardless of the habits of friends and roommates. Significant others, or the pursuit to find one, create a new dynamic within motivation to exercise because of wanting to feel good and confident for that person, or to look attractive for potential partners. By understanding that exercise habits are created throughout childhood, families can work to provide resources for exercising in fun ways to establish positive feelings correlated with working out to be carried throughout their independent lives.

The next chapter discusses how individuals take what was learned from social networks and apply it to personal exercise habits. What is learned in childhood leads to the creation of an exercise identity. People define their preferred exercise experience by identifying themselves as a specific type of exerciser and choosing the facilities they like best because of what was learned through experience and through social pressures. When going to the cardio room or weight room or fitness classes, the other people present have the ability to affect the productivity of the workout. We see how social networks transition from being a basis of support into an aid or a detriment to exercise depending on the preferences of the individual.
Chapter 5: General Fitness Patterns

Social networks play a key role in motivating individuals to exercise; yet participating in exercise is a personal choice made for a variety of reasons. In the pursuit of understanding the way that social networks and strangers influence motivation, we must understand not only the way that networks provide social support, but also an individual’s perspective of why they participate. This is their exercise identity. From wanting to be healthy, to playing sports, to socializing with others, the reasons are unlimited, yet each person has his or her own style. The style is created with the aid of the individual’s networks and furthered through personal motivation. When examining different environments in which people exercise, it becomes apparent that individuals have different preferences as to how and when to workout. The interviews conducted pushed the basic knowledge that people are participating in these activity to further the understanding of why. By understanding the reasons to exercise in specific settings with specific people, we can learn how to maximize the benefits of the space to encourage the continuation and enjoyment of exercise participation.

This chapter describes the general motivators as to why people workout and how each person forms different preferences of where to workout based on the people around them, the structure of the environment, and the knowledge of what is involved. Through the interview data, I show that each person has their own style in the choice of which environment to workout in, why they do so, and why they shy away from certain areas of the gym. Additionally, observing people in the gym revealed that certain environments are more comfortable when accompanied by a friend and that different areas of the gym foster the ability to interact with others and that these social relationships change the exercise experience. Based on analysis of these data, I argue
that an individual will place him or herself into a category that defines the workout style and each environment complicates this category, but societal norms will shape these experiences as well. This chapter begins with the understanding of the different categories that people place themselves in and then considers how each environment helps shape these categories and the differences that societal norms create.

*How and why we exercise*

In a retrospective view on the reasons why people exercise, the participant is forced to think about his or her internal dialogue used to get into the fresh air or into the gym. It involves a subjective process of making choices, as each person sees the decision as an individual one. What is it about this person that makes him or her want to get to the gym? Why is that a priority, or not, in one’s life? Through the sixteen interviews conducted, the first thing examined is what people prefer to do to exercise and why they do it. When looking at the sample as a whole, it is possible to detect trends and progressions in this subject occurred within this population of mostly upperclassmen and.

In analyzing these data, the first two questions I asked were, “how would you describe your workout ethic,” and, “what are the general factors for deciding to work out?” The goal with presenting these first was to understand how people view their own habits in an immediate reaction. It allowed the subject to reflect on the very basic ideas of how and why they might participate in the exercise that they do without any prompts of ideas like fitness classes, the addition of other people in their routine, and other situations that would be presented later in the interview questions. While it is possible for some people to neglect many of the activities that
they partake in, the initial answer provides insight into what the subject really believes about his or her preferences.

When answering the question, “how would you describe your exercise ethic,” many respondents used categories or identities that are not exactly reflective of the different activities in which they actually participate. Some of the categories used by respondents included being an athlete, a runner, a gym rat, a lover of classes, or a non-exerciser. These categories become important in understanding what people view as their main source of exercise even if they later describe enjoying other forms. Each one has a different driving force making them desirable. For instance, a runner may enjoy independent cardio exercise, a lover of classes may need the structure and company of other people, and the athlete might need competition to serve as motivation. Some people wavered between a few of these categories.

For example, Allison predominantly described herself as a runner. However, her comments point to a more complicated set of activities:

It’s complicated. So, I love to run and I only love to run outside. However, I cannot run when it’s below 55 degrees because it hurts my lungs. In the summer, spring, early fall I love running outside and it’s my main form of exercise. What I love about it is that it only takes the time that you’re running. You step outside, run, and step inside. I like to run outside, but during the winter I would prefer inside, but I don’t like to run inside, I do the elliptical. I really love to hike, to swim, but those are things I would do on a less regular basis.

Allison states that she loves to run for the most part, but outside factors lead to the participation in other activities like hiking or swimming. There was no mention of fitness classes or going to the gym in the summer with friends, which she continues to describe later in the interview. As a
result, Allison placed herself into the context of an independent exerciser, or a person who prefers to exercise on her own, before considering the fact that much of exercise, as she describes later, is in other contexts.

In contrast, people who identify as athletes tend to explain their exercising as revolving around the improvement of sporting ability. Matthew, an Ultimate Frisbee team captain, responds:

Well nowadays, I train with a very specific purpose so I do everything from long distance running to short distance running to jumping exercise to agility ladders to lifting to [plyometrics] and I vary it every day depending on what I want to work on that day… I train to be the best Ultimate Frisbee player on the field. I have certain goals for the upcoming years, like I want to make one of the best club teams next year in Boston. And I want to make the World’s team, which means the top 20 players in the country go.

Those are unlikely goals but require specific amount of training.

In this case, the athlete will do anything and everything to reach the peak physical ability to reach his goals. Matthew explains that this can range from agility ladders to long distance runs, to weight training, and so on. Throughout the rest of the interview, it is clear that his every need in exercise reflected his drive to reach his goals. By making exercise a part of his routine and a priority, he will continue making time for his daily workouts.

The disjunction between “identity” and activity also applies to people who describe themselves as non-exercisers. When describing what his workout ethic is, Robert said:

I don’t do mornings and I don’t exercise regularly. I guess I do prefer night but I prefer outdoors so I prefer afternoons and outdoors, but I don’t really care. As long as I’m
moving and playing some sport that I enjoy. In terms of actual exercise I just like running around and playing sports.

Robert spoke about his laziness and apathy to exercise. In his answer he really only mentioned playing sports for fun, but throughout the interview he mentioned working out with his father, doing individual exercises in his room and more. He took the idea of being a non-exerciser as his main identity in this context and disregarded most other activities that he might have done. The idea of “for fun” carries through his ethic as he mostly plays sports with friends and not for exercising.

People who identify as “lovers of fitness classes” have many options for working out. Whether it is at Brandeis University or at a private gym elsewhere, the classes offered range from yoga to Zumba and everything in between. The personality of the instructors, the type of workout acquired, the access to the class, and the timing all have an effect on the actual willingness to go. Rachel is a first year at the University and was quick to take advantage of the classes offered. She states:

I like classes, I used to go to Zumba classes and then ever since I got to Brandeis I started to really like yoga classes. I never did that at home partially because the yoga classes I would have gone to had people who have been doing yoga for 10 years and I’m a beginner so the classes here were really awesome and just a welcoming environment. So I like those classes, I don’t like, I’ve done a few abs classes and total body classes but those things I like to do on my own and stick with the basics. I’d say it’s half and half with group and alone.

The first thing that Rachel mentioned was enjoyment of classes and then she backtracked to narrow it down to types of classes. Lastly, she realized that she not only goes to classes, but
exercises on her own as well. Her willingness to participate in this type of exercise is a product of her environment and, as she mentioned, would not be the same in a different situation. This allows insight into the complicated view on classes and how different people have the ability to intimidate based on skill level.

Each of these subjects described above have started their narrative with the specific type in mind, yet they each broadened their field of performance greatly when asked about specific situations that may have been neglected previously. As seen in the case of Matthew and his preparation for Ultimate Frisbee, some have specific reasons for choosing which type that they participate in, others may have a purpose that is underlying and does not influence the decision of what they actually do for exercise. While Matthew does jumping exercises to be able to reach the highest point and steel the Frisbee, what is influencing Mackenzie to get on the elliptical for 20 minutes or Sean to go on a 10-mile run? Is there some other mechanism working to get these people exercising?

**Motivations**

Exercise can employ many different desirable effects on the body. Whether it is health-based competition based or mentally based, each person has their own reasons for participating in these activities. Of the sixteen interviews conducted, all but one person mentioned the health benefits of working out. When talking about how they decide to work out, respondents revealed their complex motivations.

From stress relief to weight loss to stop feeling “blah” as Daniel says, exercise has the ability to help a person improve his or her health. O’Connor, Rousseau & Maki (2004) state, “physical exercise can increase muscle strength, cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, and longevity,
while decreasing reaction times, joint stiffness, hypertension, body fat, and susceptibility to injury and disease” (178). Most participants in this study recognize these benefits and employ them frequently. College is one environment in particular that involves a lot of stress, but frequent physical activity can lower stress levels significantly and sport participation has been linked with better mental health (Nguyen-Michel, et. al, 2006). Health and fitness are the main reasons that people exercise, but social factors, competition, and relaxation are also prominent reasons (Huddelston, Mertesdorf, & Araki, 2002).

Sometimes, a good deal of thought is put into choosing when to work out and it has an impact on why exercise is being done in a specific fashion. When answering the question in an interview, Jessica took a stance on the subject from more of an organizational point of view. From her perspective, many factors in her life have to align in order for her to successfully fit exercise into her daily schedule. Jessica described:

I think the general factors are whenever I’ve gotten enough sleep, whether I will feel successful after doing it, it sounds stupid, but my shower routine. Like if I want to have my hair wet or not, if I’m going to sleep on my hair or how I’m going to do it. If I’ve eaten enough that day.

All of these factors that may seem minor in the scheme of things actually have a significant impact on the ability to perform. For Jessica, the motivation to go workout will not occur unless each part of her life is aligned. In many cases, this idea of having to feel capable before heading out is very important. Andrew similarly states, “I need to feel healthy in my body before I go to the gym, if I’m not feeling good physically I won’t go because I’ll feel bad after.” Andrew and Jessica both need to be prepared in order to go. Andrew continues on to describe how the post-workout feeling is one of the main factors as well. He explains, “I know how I feel after, and I
Meyer, H.

guess it’s like the high, the workout high, which I really enjoy. It makes me feel strong and better about myself.” The idea of this workout high in combination with being ready to take on the challenge allows the motivation to get going.

This workout “high” has been described in different ways throughout many of the interviews. It is a combination of all of the positive feelings derived from each workout. Griffiths (1997) describes three theories that studies have shown exercise has a positive influence on mental health and therefore leads to repetition of actions. These theories include thermogenic hypothesis, catecholamine hypothesis, and endorphin hypothesis (Griffiths, 1997). Each of these hypotheses include bodily functions that occur during exercise leading to a reduction in somatic anxiety, increased control of attention, mood, movement, stress responses, euphoria, and enhanced mood state (Griffiths, 1997). Many of the subjects explained that they participate in exercise in order to relieve stress and take a break while simultaneously getting the high.

The high mentioned is complimentary to the idea of euphoria in relation to exercise. Griffiths (1997) describes euphoria as “the subjective experience that people report as a consequence of engaging in the particular activity (i.e. they experience a “buzz” or a “high”)” (163). His article describes this phenomenon as a contributor to exercise addiction in which people display addictive symptoms when not able to exercise as part of a regular routine (Griffiths 1997). While the subjects of this study may not fall into the addictive category, the high described as a result of exercise remains in line with the positive outcomes of exercise that cause people to repeat the action.

The combination of the three theories described in Griffiths’ article introduces the idea that the reasons individuals give for wanting to exercise have actual physiological backing.

When Brittany says:
It’s how I feel. I can tell when I’m getting antsy or anxious because I haven’t moved. I don’t usually work out to lose weight, it’s more if my body doesn’t feel good I know why. It’s a clear relationship for me that it’s because I don’t feel like I’m strong or that I’m using it. And I like to, so I get my ass up and go.

There is a clear relationship at play between her feelings of anxiety and the need to move with feeling better. The self-improvement aspect plays into exercise for others as well. While Brittany may not be participating for the reason of losing weight, many people consider exercise the best way to regain control of one’s body weight and look desirable to themselves and others. The fact that Brittany does find that there are positive benefits to exercise may be in relation to the fact that her exercise is not motivated by these reasons. It has been found that exercise for weight management is associated with negative body image contrary to the fact that exercise for health is associated with positive self-esteem (Tiggermann & Williamson, 2000).

Studies have shown that women exercise for these purposes of weight management and in seeking the ideal body more than men do (Tiggermann & Williamson, 2000). While this may be true, multiple men interviewed in this studied mentioned body image in their reason for exercising. Both the men and women who associated weight and looking good with exercise still maintained the idea that they love exercise for all of the same reasons that someone like Brittany might. It is possible for the initial motivation to be a form of weight control, but that does not necessarily mean that it will stay that way. Sarah is a Zumba instructor at Brandeis University and her classes are well known and well liked throughout the campus. She recounts the beginning of her journey to become this loved teacher as the path to lose weight. She remembered, “I started exercising like really working out for losing weight probably around like
Meyer, H.

the 7th grade because that’s when I first went to a nutritionist in life because I was wanting to be healthier and eat healthier and lose some weight.”

Zumba, a newer form of exercise that combines exciting popular songs, fun dance moves, and cardio into an intense workout session, has become a preferred method of exercising for many. Sarah has found that these classes have transformed her chore of losing weight into something that she loves. When asked about her exercise ethic she responded:

I love teaching Zumba because Zumba is a very fun way of exercising and I don’t always feel like I’m exercising. I know I’m burning calories and I’m exercising and I know it’s good for me, but it’s not like ugh I have to go to the gym and exercise and ugh I’m not in the mood. It’s more like oh my god Zumba is so fun because it’s dancing and it’s something I love to do and I got to incorporate it into a way of exercising. I’ve gotten so used to that form of exercising that it’s been hard to do other forms of exercise. This love for what she does is a great way to be able to exercise and have fun at the same time. It becomes a highlight of her day and lifts her mood even when she starts off tired or not feeling well. This is one clear example of a female who transcended the boundary between exercising for weight loss purposes and exercising for enjoyment. These data suggest that the key to making the transition is to find something that you love and that makes you happy, rather than doing it as a chore, as many parents tried to instill in their children growing up.

While some people exercise for health purposes and general wellbeing, others participate in sports teams and have the added influences of competition, team dynamic, and routine practices. In order to be the best team player and competitor, it is likely that extra exercise may be necessary outside of scheduled practices. This can be in regards to any sport. Within the sixteen interviews conducted there was one female on the field hockey team, one female on the
track team, one male on the basketball team, one male on the ultimate Frisbee team, and one male on the hockey team.

Even though each of these teams competes at different levels of intensity, every athlete spoken to involves themselves in exercise outside of scheduled practices. Perhaps it is because they want to be the best athlete possible, or perhaps it is because it has become a part of everyday life and it uncomfortable to stop. As we have seen, Matthew, the captain of the ultimate Frisbee team, refers to his desire to be a top competitive player and reach his goals by exercising on his own most days of the week, regardless of practices scheduled. Daniel, the goalie on the hockey team, describes the how he decided to start exercising:

Growing up it used to be because I played hockey and I wanted to get better so I went to the gym to get better. Now it’s sort of a mix of wanting to stay healthy. I swim in the mornings largely because I think it’s a really great way to start the day and I feel a lot less blah if I start the day that way.

Daniel started with the ultimate goal of getting better at his sport that he loves, but later on, he found that it became a necessary health component in his life. This is a very common phenomenon found within each of the athletes interviewed. Abigail, a first year on the varsity track team explains:

Well I feel like weird if I don’t work out because my body is so used to working out every day since 7th grade. I’m used to running almost every day except for weeks off that I’ve had and what motivates me to workout is that I’m on a schedule and I have to, and when I’m not, and I’m never really not on a schedule.

Many athletes explain that it is just “what [they] do.” By having mandatory practice for each respective sport on a daily or weekly basis, exercise becomes a part of their routines. While it is
helping improve in competition, it also influences their lives to the point that they feel off balance when stopping or taking a break from training. Exercise in the athletic setting transcends the dynamics of competition and exercise for health in general.

With each of these situations, we see reasoning for why people participate in exercise. Even though there is a slight understanding of why people participate in certain activities, like running for the track team, or participating in Zumba for happiness, there are many different facilities available for use, so why do people choose to spend more time in the weight room? Or more time on the elliptical instead of the stationary bike? Who decides to go to fitness classes and who avoids them as much as possible? Through the process of learning what each individual participates in, it can be seen that there were clear trends within each gender of which facilities are preferred and which are avoided completely. Each participant maintained strong opinions on what they liked, but why?

Classes, Cardio, and Getting Cuts

There is one main fitness center at Brandeis University Called Gosman Athletic Center. It comes equipped with a cardio room, weight room, basketball courts, indoor track, indoor tennis courts, outdoor tennis courts, squash courts, a swimming pool, dance studios, a baseball field, a softball field, a soccer field, an outdoor track, and an extra practice field. If that is not enough, there is a small cardio room in lower campus open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For those who are interested in exercising indoors or on the courts with the use of equipment, the University provides many opportunities to get active and take advantage of its resources. For those who prefer to exercise outside and independently, there are many trails and paths to run in the area.
The respondents in this study held strong opinions about their preferred method and place of exercise. However, as with their answers about their exercise “ethic,” their answers seemed linked to identities, while their experiences were more complex. Each person has had a variety of experiences with different facilities that were neglected at first. Additionally, people frequently reported opinions about classes and facilities they had never used. However developed, such opinions influence the usage or avoidance of each location based on enjoyment, knowledge of facilities, and general population. Choices of which area to exercise in are based on the needs within self-determination theory, which maintains that people possess psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and social relatedness (Kilpatrick, Herbert & Bartholomew; Chu-Hsin et al., 2007). Each participant explained why he or she chose where to exercise and it reflected the idea that he or she needs to feel independent, capable, and comfortable in the space. People’s identities and their need for autonomy shape their choice of where and how to work out.

Classes

Fitness classes have been present in western society since the late 1900’s and have been made popular through television broadcast and increasing presence in fitness facilities (Gimlin, 2001). At Brandeis University, classes include free aerobic and anaerobic classes at a wide variety of times throughout the day. Majority of classes are taught by Brandeis students and attended by Brandeis students, with some exceptions of Brandies faculty and staff. As a result, the majority of the population attending the classes is within the ages of 17 and 22. Classes are run almost exclusively in the Gosman dance studio on the bottom floor of the facility and are held on a weekly schedule. By finding one that targets the workout that is desired and at a time that is convenient, a member of the Brandeis community has the ability to attend it as often as preferred.
In the interview I asked, “Have you ever been to a fitness class?” By not specifying the location of the class, this question allowed respondents to describe not only classes at Brandeis University, but also those used at other facilities in which subjects may have access. A wide variety of answers was offered ranging from a love of fitness classes to having no experience with them at all. My analysis suggests that fitness class preferences are shaped by multiple factors including the type of workout, the people involved, the comfort level, and the style of the instructor. Once the person arrives, there are also different styles of participation aiming to have the most beneficial experience.

One of the main obstacles that students found in going to a fitness class was finding one that fits into his or her schedule that is also focused on the type of exercise being sought. Mackenzie, who has frequented a total body toning anaerobic class, explained, “the running and elliptical stuff I do on my own.” When there is a type of exercise class being offered, but it is something that the individual has no problem doing on her own time, it is likely that she will not go to it. Allison, the self-proclaimed runner, explains:

I love fitness classes. I enjoy working out in that setting. I think it’s really fun to do it with a group of people, but I really like to exercise on my own time. That’s what’s challenging for me to find the exact class that I want. There are some classes that are not enough cardio for me so it doesn’t feel like a work out and a waste of time.”

This may be a reason that she runs more often than she participates in fitness classes. Finding the right combination of the basic factors can be difficult and discouraging of joining a class.

The only class that earned all around rave reviews from the participants was Zumba. Of the seven individuals who mentioned that they had gone to Zumba, only one person had a negative thing to say. John described the instructor leading the class as “more focused on the
dance moves, which was less effective she didn’t speak much.” Each instructor has a different personality that can really change the tone of the class. From a Zumba instructor’s point of view, Sarah explains, you just cannot get tired or disengaged because the group will lose its energy. Her method is to approach each class with as much energy as possible. She went into depth:

When I’m leading I’m completely engaged with everyone. I go into the crowds, I’m going up to them and if certain people, I can sense already that certain people who keep coming to my class and love that I can see they get really excited about the song so I’ll go up to them and do the move with them and engage with them. Sometimes it’s not as much energy as I want I’ll go into the crowd and do the move right in front of them and try to get them to do it more.

Another subject that was interviewed has gone to some of Sarah’s classes and had a very positive response to the amount of energy that Sarah puts into every move for the entire class. Brittany, who does not have patience for instructors who do not know what they’re doing, described Sarah in a positive fashion, as “she loves it so much, I love it.” Sarah’s extreme enjoyment for what she is doing rubs off on the participants in the class.

The personalities of instructors, like that of Sarah, can cause many people to be attracted to a certain class or it can form a less desirable environment for others. Brittany continued to explain that she has had conversations with her sister about their different preferences. She described the difference:

She loves it when someone like yells it and is really like “you can do it, you keep going” and I’m literally like I’m out, fuck you, don’t tell me what to do. I really don’t respond well to that. I prefer people who are like “you do what you need to do, you know your own body” and then I’ll push myself. I don’t need them to push me.
Many other subjects felt that there was some distinction between a good instructor and a bad one and the way the difference molds the opinion of the class. With the instructor as the focal point of the fitness class, having a compatible motivating demeanor becomes extremely important.

In combination with the need for a compatible instructor and a convenient time, the type of class becomes really important and something that the participants find to be the key part of why they participate. The benefits of the class lie within the type of exercise being done, the instruction, and sometimes other participants in the room. Jessica described the Chisel classes she has taken previously as, “very good for me and they made me do things that I wouldn’t do otherwise to strengthen my muscles, so I chose that one.” Andrew, who went to Total Body Toning and Ab Blast once, found that the class was “a new way to learn techniques that [he] hadn’t been exposed to and it was also a way to force [himself] because sometimes [he] gives up so easily and we all do and it’s nice to have that push.” Not only did Andrew get to experience things he would never do on his own, he mentioned that there is an added push of motivation when in the group class setting.

When in a situation with both direction and other people potentially succeeding or struggling, many people find that people around them have a distinct effect on their own exercise productivity. Andrew found that the setting warranted an extra push to do what he may have given up on otherwise. When asked how they felt about fitness classes in general, majority of responses were positive. This is in regards to the structure of going to a class and being conscious of the people present. People have mentioned that having the class set up the basics and proper forms for exercises that might not have been known otherwise is a very beneficial part of the classes. For yoga specifically Rachel states:
They’re awesome at least at the beginning when you’re trying to figure out where you stand or a baseline because I can see myself doing yoga by myself in my room, but classes are good to get an education of what the moves are and how to execute it. Rachel attends these classes to learn what to be able to do later on. Some come into the classes intending to learn for the sake of independent exercise. Others come for the purpose of exercising with others as a source of motivation.

Leeds and Liberti (2007) argue that the fitness classes provide a location in which all members are performing the same movements and therefore are going through the same pain that allows for a sense of empathy between members of the class. Many people touched upon this idea of solidarity and community when discussing the positive aspects of fitness classes. During a yoga class, Sean describes a typical interaction he had with other members of the class who he does not know outside of class:

Knowing glances. Sometimes when there’s a really, really difficult pose and you see the instructor doing it and you know you’re not going to be able to do it. It’s mostly nonverbal communication until after class… There was a guy behind my mat who had been having trouble the entire time and it’s the first time he had been there and I looked back and I said “that is not going to happen” and he said “yea man I know I’m dying over here.”

These interactions can help create a bond between those participating in the class regardless of the relationship once you leave. It is a common occurrence to form a kind of community because as Allison explains, “it’s like saying hi I just met you and I’m going to embarrass myself in front of you. When you open yourself up in that way there is sort of this automatic friendship kind of
thing.” Jennifer agreed with this and noticed that a group of people who were constantly going to the same Zumba class took a picture together at the end of the year.

While some may truly enjoy interacting with the other participants in the class, others avoid it at all costs. As fitness classes are frequently attended with a friend, some like to solely interact with the people they have planned to go with. First, going with a friend makes the person accountable for his or her own actions. If plans are made to go, it is less likely that a person will back down because the friend is counting on them. Meghan speaks about how she will go with a friend or her sister, but she is “super awkward” so she prefers to remain anonymous. People like Meghan tend to go to classes with friends and interact with them, but when it comes to the actual class, they focus on what they are doing for the most part. This may be a product of how people prefer to workout in solidarity, yet they are going for the workout that is provided.

Michael, a member of the Varsity basketball team and personal trainer, goes to yoga classes regularly with the basketball team, as mandated by their coach. He recognizes the positive aspect of being able to gather support from the group and do the same thing as everyone else, but at your own level. Yoga proved to be very challenging for him at first, yet he describes it as “one size fits all” because each person is able to perform each exercise at whatever level works of them while continuing to get a good workout. Having the team there with him helped Michael become more comfortable in the environment. Many people go to fitness classes with friends because of this idea of intimidation of the large group, which can be determined a negative aspect of exercising in this environment.

Fitness classes are interesting settings to workout in because you are performing with an entire group of people who may or may not be struggling. Andrew, who has only been to one fitness class, described the environment as “hyper” and “overwhelming,” which he found to be
extremely intimidating. For the males who took part in some kind of exercise class, which was half of the males interviewed, the environment was predominantly seen as scary which caused a nerve-wracking feeling beforehand. This may have been a result of the general population attending the class and the lack of knowledge of what will be done throughout, as people continuously strive for competence in any situation (Kilpatrick, Herbert & Bartholomew; Chu-Hsin et al., 2007). The individual who decides to go to a fitness class is entering an environment that is not in his or her own control. It is different from doing whatever you feel like when you go to the cardio room or the weight room. A certain pressure is applied to keeping up with the rest of the group and maintaining a strong position. It does not seem like the norm to enter a class and then leave, unless there is somewhere the person needs to be. For the most part, the people who come to the class remain there until it is over.

Some find the idea of working out with other people to be a negative experience because as John describes, it is a “personal adventure.” If someone is prone to becoming discouraged as a result of seeing others who are more capable than he or she is, it is likely that this environment will not prove to be beneficial. Andrew, while he did enjoy the class he attended, found that he was “hyperaware of others,” but he was willing to overlook this for the sake of the workout. Sean found it hard to begin doing yoga without the initial push from a friend. He explains, “I do understand that it’s hard to push yourself into a new situation especially when there is…the critique and the potential for other people to be more skilled at whatever action it is and critique you.” It seems as if the idea of exercising when other people are more aware of you becomes a turn off to those uninterested in that environment.

During my fieldwork, I attended Total Body Toning and Ab Blast as well as couple of Zumba classes. I was able to observe what kind of interactions took place as well as how I felt in
these environments. When I went to the class with a friend I found that I really only interacted with her. I wrote “Steph and I walked in, Steph and I found a spot, Steph and I basically did everything together” When I am alone I tend to keep to myself, but I did notice that there were people who came back to the class multiple times and it became a kind of understanding that we were there together and it sucks every time but it’s good anyway. I found myself gravitating towards the same location where she was and it was a kind of comforting factor that even though we weren’t friends, we were in it together every single week without having to verbally acknowledge it.

Cardio & Getting Cut

Those who enjoy exercising in the gym but prefer not to go to fitness classes all the time mainly go to the cardio room or weight room. Each area has a very different atmosphere that allows different interactions to occur. In the cardio room in Gosman, there are treadmills, ellipticals, and stationary bikes all lined up in two rows with a mat in the right corner of the room for stretches and floor exercises. The village gym has four of each of the machines in a three different lines and a mat in the back of the room. The weight room in Gosman is comprised of two different rooms, one with mats and free weights and the other with weight machines. In each of the facilities people have the opportunity to be near other people yet remain independent of each other. Some prefer to be in these contexts with the company of a friend, yet others prefer to go alone. While this may influence the way that people consciously focus their attention, other people who remain anonymous but are present in the space may also influence an individual’s workout.

When going to the gym each person has a preference of which machines or facilities to use based on experiences they have had in each situation. Sometimes the preferences are so
Meyer, H.

strong that the person will not even consider going to the machine. One of the downfalls about the gym facilities at Brandeis University is the seemingly limited number of machines available for use. Sometimes there is a huge influx of people using the machines and it becomes difficult to find one to use, or it becomes uncomfortable to be there in general. Sean, who participates in yoga and long distance running, will go to the weight room to ensure a well-rounded workout. He explained that when there are too many people in that environment he does not like it as much because he has to wait for machines and sometimes explain to people how to use it. This is not desirable, as it takes a much longer time to accomplish anything.

In the cardio room sometimes there will be no machines available and it turns people away. In my fieldwork, I observed a day in which all treadmills and all ellipticals were in use and those coming in who did not want to use the bike had either to wait or leave. The people who could not get a spot were clearly off put by the fact there was nothing available, yet they did not go to the open stationary bike. In the same way, if Jessica was to walk into the cardio room and there were no treadmills and bikes open, she would not consider using the elliptical. She states:

I don’t like the elliptical. I know other people do but I don’t like it because I lose my balance on it. It’s just weird, I know it’s a full body workout but it feels weird to me. Like unnatural, I don’t know. I really like the recumbent bike. I feel like I can do other things while I’m on it. I really like the treadmill when I can do it, although I think that requires more energy for me.

Jessica has reasons for why she would use one machine over another, but through experience, she found that the elliptical is in no way her preferred method of exercise. Many people have similar dislike to machines as Brittany displayed, “I would never do spinning, it makes me want to die it just sounds awful to me. I don’t like riding a bike. I don’t want to do it.” If the stationary
bikes were the only ones available when Brittany arrived, it is clear that she would not compromise and use it by default.

There are many different motivators working to get people to the gym specifically. For some it is a last resort, for others it is a preferred method of exercise. Mackenzie prefers to go running outside or play sports, but will go to the cardio room often when it is too cold, raining, or she is simply not in the mood to run. For some people using the gym could be a result of medical issues inhibiting the ability to partake in other kinds of exercise. For example, Brittany cannot run because of tendinitis in her legs and Daniel has many allergies that complicate exercising outdoors. Brittany has the ability to exercise on the elliptical without hurting herself further and Daniel could do anything he wants indoors and it will be easier on his breathing.

Andrew, on the other hand, prefers to go to the gym above all else. He found that it was a good place “to do what [he] needs to do.” The facilities available allow him to get the most beneficial workout possible. He uses the weight room as well as the cardio room. By going to these facilities, he describes becoming more confident and secure in himself. Michael, a personal trainer, decided to start going to the gym because he fell in love with the results and enjoyed investing in his body. He sets goals and enjoys reaching them.

Beyond the initial reasoning to partake in certain activities within these facilities, there is a sense of freeness associated with the gym, as it is something that can be done at the spur of the moment. Rachel mentioned that the gym is more “spontaneous” because she could just decide to go whenever she is free, rather than classes that are scheduled at specific times. By being able to head to the gym whenever there is a free moment within a college students’ busy schedule, the open facilities are more convenient. For Jessica who frequently goes because of the need for mood regulation, the cardio room becomes a place for her to lift her mood as 30-35 minutes of
exercise three times a week was recommended to her by the doctor. This idea of an easy way to self-improve combined with stress relief can have many positive affects for people. Meghan recounts how just 20 minutes on the bike listening to good music can lower her stress levels significantly. While fitness classes can help to achieve this goal, they are also not as easily scheduled into the daily routines.

Both John and Robert do not go to the gym often, but when they do, it is predominantly for sports. In these two cases, the motivation to perform is not for self-improvement or to lift one’s mood, it is for enjoyment and fun. John mentions that he was always “going to win a game or to compete with a team,” while Robert explains that going to play sports is something he has always done. He states, “I don’t consider it exercise, I think it’s just something fun to do.” In these two situations, the facilities are not used for the purpose of exercise on a regular basis, but rather a location to have fun with friends and compete.

Regardless of the path a person takes to get there, the subjects interviewed for this study have all gone to the gym at least once and some go very frequently. At most times the gym is open, many other people are there as well doing whatever they wish to be doing. By having other people around, an individual’s workout can be greatly influenced by their presence and it may change the productivity for better or for worse. The outcome of whether the time spent at the gym will improve or not depending on other people is based on the presence of competition and comparison. When going to the gym with a friend it is possible to engage in competition or comparison because you a familiar with the other person, but it is also possible with strangers. This topic will be explored in depth within Chapter 6 as a complication of the motivational state within exercise.
Avoidance: Lack of Knowledge and Stereotyped Fitness Resources

As seen through many of the interviews, respondents frequently place stereotypes on the fitness classes and weight rooms, skewing the positive additions to exercise that they can provide. Respondents stated their beliefs on these locations even though many of them have not had any experience with them. It was found that four of the eight men have been to a fitness class, two of which went to yoga, while all eight female participants have attended at least one fitness class in the past. Only two of the eight women have ever used the weight room and only one of these two uses it frequently, while six of the eight men use the weight room on a regular basis. There are clear imbalances within these locations and it is seemingly a result of the misconceptions of what they have to offer.

In his study, Dworkin found that there were few women in weight rooms, more women than men in cardio rooms, and almost exclusively women in aerobics classes (Leeds & Liberti, 2007). The trends found at Brandeis University are consistent with his findings. Leeds & Liberti (2007) argue that aerobics classes put an emphasis on body size reduction and reshaping to limit muscularity. If this were an accurate goal of these classes, it would be a direct contradiction to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, which places emphasis on strength, challenge, and competition. The fitness class environment allows for a group workout enabling a sense of empathy for one another, an idea that is also the opposite of what men are seemingly interested in within an exercise setting (Leeds & Liberti, 2007).

Traditionally, women have been striving to maintain the ideal feminine body, which has been determined as ultra-slim and completely different from the average female body (Davis & Cowles, 1991). Recently this ideal has been changing to allow females to have a more muscular and toned body, but they cannot have too much muscle or it would be seen as a
violation to the ideal femininity similar to excessive body fat (George, 2005). Because of these changes, it would seem possible for women to start taking advantage of the weight room, but this is not the case. The fitness classes at Brandeis University cover a range of exercises from cardio to weight training, which may allow more men to be involved under the need to remain masculine, but the classes remain majority feminine. According to my data, women tend to avoid weight rooms while men tend to avoid fitness classes as expected, but it suggests that it is a result of misconception and lack of knowledge rather than maintaining masculine and feminine ideals.

As previously discussed, fitness classes provide many benefits to working out, from learning new skills, to having a guided workout, to using the group as a source of motivation. Half of the male respondents have attended at least one fitness class in the past, two of which were yoga. According to Adams & Puig (2008), yoga has been becoming more popular in the United States as a form of exercise and stress relief and it is gaining a lot of popularity on college campuses. With its growing popularity through the country and in colleges, having men take part in yoga classes is no surprise. The other two male participants who have attended classes have participated in Zumba and Total Body Toning/Ab Blast.

When discussing fitness classes, male respondents gave a variety of explanations as to why they have not participated or how they felt when going for the first time. Some of the ideas portray overlap with the general view of the population including the female perspective. For the male respondents who had never gone to a fitness class before, it is explained as a general lack of desire as well as how the classes are perceived by the greater population. Peter explains, “Honestly I think there is a gender association with fitness classes. Not that I was not attending
for that reason, but I think it’s something that, it’s something for women.” Daniel furthers this idea by stating:

It was never something I thought I needed to pay more money for. I also found that in my experience, and this is largely anecdotal, but the demographic that fitness classes attracted was not what I fit into, it was largely middle aged women who from what I saw doing that sort of thing, so it never really appealed to me.

Both Daniel and Peter mention that fitness classes are predominantly a female “thing” and Daniel alludes to the idea of middle-aged women being the main population to attend. This stereotype of fitness classes only targeting this population is a widely spread view for most of the participants in this study. Both males and females who were interviewed mentioned that older women are frequently involved in this type of exercise.

When entering a situation as an outsider, it is easy to be forced to deal with insecurities that may not be apparent elsewhere. Multiple male participants did take part in fitness classes and described the environment is “intimidating.” Sean felt overwhelmed by the idea of being the only male while Andrew felt overwhelmed by the idea of working out with other people doing the same things. Sean entered a yoga class for the first time being the only male participant and he describes, “I was afraid of being critiqued…Right now in my life I’m used to self-motivation and it was definitely uncomfortable to be motivated by fear.” He describes being motivated by fear of making a fool of himself in front of the other people in the class. Andrew participated in one fitness class that focused on weight training; he discussed being nervous beforehand and thought the class was a little intimidating. Even though he was apprehensive at first, it turned out to be a positive experience:
I liked it. It is a lot though. It was an overall good experience and I’m going to go back every Monday and Wednesday… I didn’t think I would like it and I don’t love the environment, but I feel like what you get out of the instruction is nice, so I’m willing to deal with it, but I think that’s what’s stopping me, like it’s a lot.

Andrew found it to be an overall positive experience, enough to overlook the parts he dislikes. He mentions that the class was so hard he was not able to challenge himself against other people the way he would through independent exercise because he was so focused on the moves. Of the men who did attend fitness classes, they have had positive experiences, but those who have not gone were turned off by their stereotyped views of the classes in general.

Throughout my fieldwork, I found that it was rare for men to attend classes. It was more common in weight training/abs classes and yoga, but not Zumba. Within the weight/abs and yoga classes, it did not appear that people involved took any notice to the presence of the gender imbalance and just went on with their personal workout. There was only one instance when a male was in a Zumba class. It seemed as if he was embarrassed to be there, perhaps because of the types of moves that the group was doing and what songs were being used. He was constantly making fun of each move. At one point, his friends saw him participating through the doorway and they started laughing at him and making fun of him. He immediately became very embarrassed and ran out of the room to talk with them. This example shows that stereotypes not only deter men from participating, they also create judgment from other men for those who do choose to participate.

Similarly, females constantly avoid the weight room just as males avoid fitness classes, but the weight room can have huge benefits for anyone who understands what to do. Salvatore and Marecek (2010) state that lifting weights has biophysical benefits and can provide a partial
buffer against psychological conditions. Not only is it proven to be beneficial, the Department of Health and Human Services recommends taking part in muscle strengthening activity at two times per week (Salvatore & Maracek, 2010). Regardless of what is proven, many women remain preoccupied with the need to reach the ideal thinness and believe that weight lifting and participating in other strength exercises will not have any importance in this pursuit.

Multiple female respondents said that they do not use the weight rooms because they do not believe there is any benefit to that kind of workout for what they are trying to achieve. Jessica states, “I think what I want is like cardio more than anaerobic exercise, more than muscle building in general.” Brittany feels similarly, as she explains, “I’m also not so concerned with building my pecks.” Both women believe that there is no need to use the weight room because they do not believe it would benefit them, as they are more focused on an aerobic workout. In furthering their answer, it becomes clear that there are more underlying reasons as to why they do not consider using the weight room. These answers were based on the lack of knowledge of what to do and the intimidation from both the people and the machines.

When asked if she would consider using the weight room Sarah responded, “I think I should, but I don’t. I’m scared of the weight room.” Most of the female respondents used the words “scared” and “intimidated” in reference to using the weight room in general. Allison describes it as “a little intimidating when these big tall men walked in and I’m this little scrawny girl.” By being surrounded by men who seemingly know what they are doing, it can be a scary situation which turns people away from participating. Mackenzie expands on this idea:

I think that it’s the fact that a lot of people are very serious about working out combined with the fact that they look like they’re so in their own workout that if you get in their
way they don’t have time to deal with people who don’t know what they’re doing and I
don’t know what I’m doing…I would definitely hurt myself.

The lack of knowledge on the machines is another factor that deters females from participating in
weight training. With their lack of competency comes the ability to hurt themselves and this is
not a desirable outcome. Jessica stated, “I’m not really sure what I would do there.” Brittany
stated, “I really don’t know how the machines work and I don’t want to hurt myself of break a
machine.” Sarah stated, “I just think it’s like I don’t know how to, I’m just not familiar with how
to use the machines. The only way I can see myself doing that is if I got a personal trainer and
they taught me and I knew what I was doing.” None of these women feels capable of partaking
in this kind of exercise because they do not know how.

This environment with a lack of instruction and feeling like an outsider can provide an
opportunity for a very uncomfortable experience. The first time I went to the weight room for
observation is the first time I had ever gone in my time at Brandeis and I felt very uncomfortable
when I arrived. I did not know what to do or where to go. There were men everywhere doing
their own workouts and circuits, some in partners, some spotting each other. It was not a tense
environment; I just had no idea what to do, so I stretched on the mat. Even for those who know
what to do, it can be a “super socially awkward experience” as Meghan explains:

Yea so when you go in there they’re playing really cool rap music and its bros on bros on
bros and then there’s me. I walk in and go to this room where there’s a smaller room with
a blue mat and free weights or whatever. I will look for the smallest ones and just do my
thing and that I learned from exercise TV when exercise TV used to be on Comcast. I
listen to music or listen to what’s playing and when I was done I would just get out of
there. I didn’t belong there being a girl and not using any of the equipment, just the weights.

Meghan makes sure that she has an extremely short stay in the weight room when she does choose to go. To avoid the situation all together, she brought her own weights to use in her room. The weight room can be an extremely uncomfortable situation for women, especially for those who do not know what they are doing and have no way of learning.

Both the weight room and fitness classes are environments that foster stereotypes, which turn people of the opposite gender away from their use. The lack of knowledge of what can be done in each setting is enough to stop people from trying. Finding a way to help men understand that fitness classes can act as a useful resource to help achieve fitness goals, as each class has a different purpose, and a way to help women understand that weight training will not make a female body extremely muscular, can help people take advantage of the resources available to them. What is creating these stereotypes is lack of understanding.

Conclusion

This chapter helps us understand the way that individual preferences, environmental differences, and societal pressures work together to create fitness patterns. Participants took completely different paths taken to reach the places where they are now. From starting exercise based on family influence, to the need to lose weight, to a love of sports, the scenarios are endless, but they shape how each person views exercise throughout their lives. People do what they feel comfortable with, which places an importance on knowledge of what they are doing. Both males and females have misconceptions of areas of the gym that discourage them from taking advantage of the resources available.
It is clear that there are many health benefits to exercising on a regular basis and health is a driving force when considering how frequently people participate in exercise. Each fitness setting including the weight room, cardio room, fitness classes, and independent exercise all have positive attributes to help a person have a productive workout. Through the interviews, we see that the different qualities involved in each setting have a positive value in reaching the overarching goal of making strides in health and level of ability. These data show that by figuring out an individual’s ideal exercise setting, it is possible to reach the optimal level of fitness, but by expanding basic knowledge on the different areas may allow for new opinions may be formed.

Because of the habits formed through familial interactions combined with friends and romantic partners, we see how each person finds an exercise identity in which they predominantly belong. The categories that people put themselves into influence the use of specific facilities and the people within those areas work to shape the entire exercise experience. The anonymous individuals who are involved in exercise play a very important role within motivation during the actual act of physical activity and in the next chapter, we will see how people may or may not use the individuals around them through comparison and competition to reach their goals.
Chapter 6: Comparison and Competition

When exercising with other people, regardless of their relation, it is highly likely that you will notice them and depending on how you deal with this situation, it could be for better or for worse. Upon seeing other people in a sensitive environment in which people are dealing with negotiating body image, comparison and competition can arise. Social comparison, or the use of others as standards, can become apparent in reference to both body shape as well as what another person is doing at the gym (Möller & Marsh, 2013). Competition, meaning the striving to outperform others, can alter a person’s exercise habits in the moment or over the longer period to reach his or her goals (Dewar & Kavussanu, 2012).

Through many different situations, participants mentioned the presence of comparison or competition within their workouts and if these phenomena affect them positively or negatively, in some cases both. Going to the gym, going to fitness classes, running outside, and being a part of a sports team are all environments that people have cited finding comparison and competition. The addition of partners, doing the same exact thing as those around you, and negotiating positions on a team can lead to difficult situations regarding the two phenomena. Not only do they create complicated dynamics within this situation, they can also take a toll on one’s concept self because of the internalized evaluations of others created within the situations (Gecas & Scwalbe, 1983; Tice, 1992). Competition and comparison oftentimes have a blurry line between them. When does a simple comparison lead to competition and how does the addition of working out with friends complicate this idea? Throughout the 16 interviews, many opinions were shared on which situations can help to create a more productive exercise experience and which can be detrimental to exercise as a whole.
This chapter describes the ways that people use or do not use comparison and competition as means for motivation and the ways that the interactions or internal creation of these phenomena affects individuals. Drawing on interview data, I show that in each situation these occurrences can either help or hurt a person in the pursuit of a productive and meaningful exercise experience by both creating or destroying motivation to exercise and the positive experience one might have. Additionally, observing people within the fitness setting showed that the likelihood of glancing over at a person exercising in the vicinity is high, and through the understanding of the internal dialogue found within the interview data and the synchronization of subjects, may have an impact on the actual performance of the person. Based on the analysis of these data, I argue that people use comparison and competition in different ways in order to extract the most productive means of exercise, yet this changes based on the situation. This chapter begins with the analysis of the use of comparison in both positive and negative ways and then considers the use of competition in the exercise setting with a complication in the context of team sports.

Comparison

There are two different types of comparison, social and temporal. Social comparisons use other people as standards while temporal comparisons use prior self-related information as standards (Möller & Marsh, 2013). When a person compares herself to another, she is looking at the similarities and differences between the two. Based on the data in this study, comparison can operationally defined as one looking at another and using the other person as a basis of one’s body image, exercise technique, understanding of performance level, and means for motivation. Within the social comparison theory, we understand that people prefer to compare themselves to
those who are similar in order to gain an accurate sense of ability (Datta & Kulik, 2012) and therefore see signs of improvement or continuing acceptability (Bailis & Segall, 2004).

Because of comparison being used within a sensitive topic of self-improvement, it can have a positive or negative affect on an individual depending on the way it is perceived. For some this might be comparison of technique to better understand goals and therefore being more motivated to get there. For others this might be personal comparison to derive a sense of judgment from others through the mutual comparison between them. As described in the previous chapter, the respondents participate in exercise for health reasons, improved mood, weight management, and improvement in sporting abilities. Depending on the goals of each respondent, comparison can be used in specific ways. For example, someone concerned about weight management will look to others for physique while someone concerned with sport performance will look to others for performance comparison. Regardless, comparison can be used as a mechanism to reach those goals.

Each participant explained the way that the presence of other people affects their workouts at different points during the interview. For Allison, the point in the interview at which this topic emerged was in a discussion of whether she prefers working out alone or with friends. While she states that she preferred going alone because of personal autonomy in selection of what time to go and how long to go for, she believes that it is more beneficial to have other people around even if they are not her friends. When asked how other people affect her workout she responded:

I think that I compare myself a lot at the gym and in other places, but at the gym. So if other people, I seen a girl running for a really long time I feel myself consciously being more motivated to do the elliptical for a little bit longer. If I see someone sitting at the
bike nonchalantly pedaling and reading a book, I think I’m better than them and I’m working hard and I feel good about myself. In that way, it affects how I feel about my exercise.

In this answer, Allison reveals her inner thought processes and provides insight on events that would not be observable otherwise. The people that Allison is describing help to motivate her regardless of the level at which they are exercising because she interprets the things that they are doing according to her goals. If someone is working out very intensely she is motivated to do the same, but if someone is slacking off, she is proud of herself for keeping a good pace. Allison interprets or gives meaning to what she observes in ways that help her meet her goals.

Allison includes herself in temporal comparison accompanied by those who she knows about even if they are not there with her. To judge her progress, Allison has an application on her phone that tracks her exercise and she has the ability to see how she is performing in comparison to her previous workouts. By comparing her previous times, she finds motivation to push herself harder and beat her previous accomplishments. Allison also mentions finding inspiration to continue pushing herself through the comparison of her friend who runs marathons. She says, “I have a friend who runs marathons and she is an amazing runner so if I go running and I only run a mile, I’m like alright Julie ran probably ten miles today, keep going.” By comparing herself to her friend who is a very active runner, she finds a greater ability to continue pushing herself because of the reminder that her friend is doing even more. Just as Michael pushes himself because he knows there is someone else training harder elsewhere, Allison will use the knowledge that other people can do what she is trying to accomplish as a way to push herself to the point where she is able to reach her goals.
Rachel explains a similar phenomenon to Allison when finding motivation through the social comparison. She finds that looking at other people can help her if they are doing a really great job and make her proud of herself if they are not. Consistent with the responses of Allison, Rachel would continue at a good level if she saw someone who was not working as hard and if someone were working harder, she would push herself even more. When describing how she motivates herself, if she cannot find internal motivation, she looks to other people and thinks, “look at all these cool clean looking people. They are exercising and have a flat stomach. That motivates me for sure. It’s attainable. I can get there and I have in the past.” By seeing a look that she wants to embody, Rachel uses other people to find motivation to push herself. Instead of focusing solely on what is happening in regards to how hard people are working, she looks at the physique of people to form her goals.

Rachel is not the only person who mentioned comparison of aesthetics. By seeing people with the desired bodies, it enables a person to have a visual of his or her goal. Sarah defines this as “comparison for show.” She explains:

If you see someone in your fitness class who looks great, it’s like I want to look like that and be able to be like that. It’s more like let me get myself to that point where I can be like that person. It’s not like I need to be better than them, it’s just like I want to be on some level. I think there’s a lot of comparing. When you were saying, ‘oh does anything motivate you when you’re in the gym on the treadmill,’ when I see someone who looks really great it’s like oh I want to look like that. Let me put it up higher so I look like that. It doesn’t really make sense, but it’s going on in my head. This is not fast enough I got to go more. A lot of comparison.
Sarah interprets the desire to look good based on another person she sees in the gym as a driving force for her to work harder. When explaining why she started exercising, Sarah talked a lot about wanting to be healthier and lose weight. The comparison that she describes may be a reflection of that same desire in dealing with the negotiation of body image.

Beyond comparison as a means of motivation to reach the body goal, Sarah describes comparison as a tool that can be used in fitness classes. Studies have shown that having mirrors in the exercise environment can diminish the positive aspects of associated with exercise because, according to the objective self-awareness theory, it is a stimulus that increases self-awareness and the magnification of the discrepancy between the individual and societal standards causes negative self-awareness (Ginis, Burke, & Gauvin, 2007), but this may not be the case. Sarah is a Zumba instructor and she believes that fitness classes are a positive atmosphere for people because participants are doing it as a group. Comparison within a group fitness setting is easily accomplished as you all are in one room with mirrors at the front of the room. People have the opportunity to be hyperaware of each other. Sarah describes:

As much as I go sometimes to certain classes and I’m here for myself, it’s nice to compare yourself to what other people are doing. If you find it hard and you see someone else finds it hard it’s like okay there’s nothing wrong with me. I feel like you compare yourself with people in the class.

This phenomenon of comparison in order to make sure you are not the only one struggling, or that you are doing the move right seems to be a pattern found in what people see as the benefits of working out with others. Being able to check to see that you are not alone in what you are doing can serve as a significant aid to continuing a workout when it starts to get difficult.
Comparison can serve as a useful tool in times of need. Whether it is seeing someone who looks so good it creates the need to look like that as well so you push yourself harder or it is using others to help you continue when the going gets tough. In each situation, having other people around may make a huge difference in the productivity of an exercise session. For some it may have the opposite effect. Multiple participants discussed comparison as a detrimental part of working out around others based on the judgment it fosters as well as need for a more personal workout. The change in opinion of this mechanism stems from the different contexts in which the respondents were participating.

Brittany has participated in exercise through a variety of settings from fitness classes to dance classes to going to the gym. She describes exercising as a means of relieving stress and making herself feel better. In this manner, she views herself as more low-key about exercising in general as compared to her friends. As a result, she loves exercising alone because her values are different from others involved. When reflecting on Zumba classes she has taken, she says, “if I see someone who also looks like a dancer I’m like I can do this and then I do it more full out and take notice of that and then I hit myself mentally for doing it. I’m like Brittany this is your own damn workout, leave them alone and I sort of have to fight myself on that.” Brittany’s example displays her comparison between herself and the other dancers who are in the room, who seemingly have more dance skills than the rest of the class. In this instance, she is taking the focus away from herself and putting it on the other dancers, which is not something she strives to do within her workouts. By having to fight herself on this change in mentality, it becomes clear that she finds comparison within the setting to be burdensome to her workout goals.

Even for those who find having other people around beneficial in most situations can find making comparisons a distraction and therefore a detriment to the workout. For example,
Meghan finds looking at others when in the cardio room a very motivating thing. She loves being able to compete with those around her, but not when in the yoga setting. Meghan describes yoga as a very personal experience because “you are your own worst critic in terms of certain poses.” As a result, she finds it to be unproductive to compare herself to others in the room and appreciates when the instructor says, “be on your own mat, you don’t have to look at others.” By acknowledging the difference in settings, Meghan is self-aware in the understanding that different techniques work for motivation based on the type of workout. There is a big distinction for her between a yoga setting and a cardio setting based on the underlying goals of the different kinds of exercise.

Meghan describes how she is her own worst critic within a yoga class. While she may be experienced enough to feel capable of making those judgments, many students who are trying workouts for the first time are not at that point. Sean came to college and tried yoga for the first time. Instead of feeling like he was his worst critic, he felt like the other people in the room were. Exercising can be a very sensitive experience for people when it is working to improve one’s body, a very personal practice. Yoga classes have been known to be predominantly filled with females. By entering a setting in which he is the minority, Sean felt self-conscious of his body when trying to do things that he has not done before. He says:

I guess because, so my body shape is different from theirs and guys are not generally as flexible as girls are and the whole set up seemed like an opportunity to make a fool of myself because I’m anatomically different from the other participants in the program. I was afraid of being critiqued.

Sean was initially afraid of being the center of other participants’ gaze. They had the opportunity to see him embarrass himself and that was intimidating. He felt like he was giving the other
people the ability to judge him by being inferior and inexperienced. Sean mentioned critique as a negative form of comparison many times throughout his interview which seems to be a result of being vulnerable and showing his weaker abilities. Sean is not performing to the ability in which he would like which creates discrepancy between his own ideals of performance and his actual behavior. Therefore, the internalized attitudes of others will have a negative effect on his internal dialogue and discourage him from attending yoga and trying to push himself. The fact that classes are a public setting allows internalization to take a greater toll, as behavior and self-concept change is more common in a public space rather than a private one to the opinions of others (Tice, 1992).

In situations like these, individuals have the ability to internalize other people’s opinions. For someone who already has a low sense of self in this new context, being outperformed and the center of attention threatens the individuals sense of self further as comparison pertains to those who are already better than the beginner (Normand & Croizet, 2013). When an upward comparison is made, it is possible for a lower self-regard to be attained which leads to a decrease in body satisfaction (Datta & Kulik, 2012). It is possible for some of these mechanisms to be taking place in regards to Sean’s experience of being self-conscious.

The uncomfortable situation that Sean describes takes place because of the lack of knowledge and capability to do what everyone in the class is able to achieve. He has to expose his weaknesses. Salvy et al. (2009), argues that friends have mutual affection for each other and therefore have less of a need to use strategies to hide these weaknesses and gain approval. The interview data did not coincide with these results. Many respondents described how working with friends and exposing their vulnerabilities to critiques created an uncomfortable situation. They explained that working out with friends could get “awkward” or “tense” based on
differences in abilities and how they are dealt with. Being in the setting of independent exercise creates an easier opportunity to expose these issues because the individual is able to choose what is done and is therefore forced to acknowledge the differences rather than doing what an instructor says and following directions.

The idea of being better or worse than a friend in any situation makes it very easy to bring up difficult feelings. No one wants to be inferior to someone whose opinions matter, but being superior might make the other person uncomfortable and may therefore make the experience uncomfortable as a whole. Participants touched upon experiences where this may have been an issue and why they would rather not be subjected to the concerns it might bring up. Mackenzie feels like these situations can get very uncomfortable for both parties. She states, “with friends I feel like there are weird stigmas with you are quicker than me, you are slower than me, should I speed up, slow down, do I leave you, do I stay with you, do I have to talk to you now that we’re running together.” The comparison of ability forces people to deal with altering their workout routines in order to accommodate the person they are with, but it can be a tense situation.

Andrew expands on a similar experience, which he refers to as a kind of intimidation. The situation can get uncomfortable regardless of the setting in which you are exercising. He explains:

There was an intimidation factor, I guess if they were better or worse. It felt sensitive, you didn’t want to overshadow them but you also didn’t want to be inferior to them as well. So there’s that too, especially because you know the person. With people that you don’t know you don’t care. There’s tension I guess.
Andrew acknowledges that this need to navigate the sensitive situation occurs only when he knows the person he exercising with. Peter reflected on a time in which he was in the exact situation where he was working much harder than the person he was exercising with and it made him feel badly about going at his normal pace and having a productive workout. He describes:

So I one time went to the village gym with a friend. I was on the treadmill and I was running and she was on a different treadmill… I was running and she was strolling. There I felt like kind of an [asshole] so I felt a little odd putting in all of that effort. Maybe I could slow it down a little bit. It was odd sweating and she was like strolling. It was odd.

It was a weird experience, not bad, but it was not exactly conducive to improving fitness. Peter clearly did not like the feeling of working harder than the girl that he went with. Perhaps this was magnified because of the partner being of the opposite gender, but by actually having a productive workout while she just strolled, it made him feel as if he was working too hard and therefore embarrassed about it. He was comparing his workout to hers and it made him question the level at which he was exercising.

When conducting fieldwork within the cardio room, I noticed that people would begin exercising at their own rates, but oftentimes look at those around them. It was rare to find someone who did not glance at the person next to them. While there is no way of knowing what the person was actually calculating in terms of comparison, such glances may have had an impact. For example, sometimes the individual began to run at the exact same pace as the person around him or her. One subject that I observed was clearly a faculty or staff member using the facilities and he remained facing straight ahead without any deviation. While there are many explanations for this observation, it is possible that he had a lack of desire to compare with those who are younger than he is because of the social comparison theory and the preference to
compare with people who are more similar (Datta, & Kulik, 2012). It is difficult to understand what is actually going on in this setting, but it is clear that individuals look at others while exercising.

Comparison infiltrates exercise settings when you know the people you are comparing with or not. Depending on the way the participant views the situation, it can be seen as a beneficial factor in improving motivation as well as increasing exercise rigor or it can be detrimental to the productivity of the workout. There is a fine line between comparison and competition, but when does that gaze turn from a harmless viewing to a source of rivalry? Throughout the interviews, the participants switched between the two words, but competition had a significantly different effect.

**Competition**

According to achievement goal theory, people participate in achievement settings in order to demonstrate or develop confidence in an area through effortful accomplishment or capacity (Dewar & Kavussanu, 2012). Effortful capacity is the ability to outperform others, which is determined through competition (Dewar & Kavussanu, 2012). Competition adds another dimension to a workout. You are no longer just working out for yourself; you are working out for a goal to beat someone in the room, a team, someone you know, or simply yourself through internal drives. This additional pressure can push a person to work to his or her greatest ability; however, for some it is not desirable. According to the processing efficiency theory, pressure-induced changes in performance are a result of increased anxiety (Cooke et al., 2011) and a competitive environment creates these changes.
Competition in a fitness setting can vary greatly depending on the context. A person can experience this in an individual workout, a workout with friends, teammates, or in an actual competition with a sports team. Throughout all of the interviews, we are able to see that respondents’ views of whether or not competition is productive change significantly based on whichever context the person experiences it in.

Many people find competition adds a positive edge to a workout. For example, some respondents reported that competition appears as a contagious feeling that allows for a better sense of achievement and helps them push themselves farther than they would without it. John, who enjoys a variety exercises from classes to playing sports, is one example of an individual who feels that competition can be a very positive aspect of working out with others. He explains how competition is motivating:

"It helps you achieve more if you, I guess I don’t know the genetic basis of muscle development, but I feel like how strong someone gets or how well they can use their body to go through cardio workouts is a result of their training. And their training is a result of their discipline. And discipline is a result of their choice. Choice is a result of your inner drive. Something that makes you happy. Something that makes you feel good. So if you look at it from that kind of perspective and you go with it all the way to their conditioning their body well, because they’re really driven, then that drive is contagious."

John finds competition to be motivating within his own workouts because he understands the effort that other people put into getting to the point of success and that need to get there becomes a part of his workout in a more competitive fashion. Through his analysis of why he finds this phenomenon motivating, he realized that it comes down to his feeling of being inspired by the drive that each individual has."
John may be able to derive this motivation from people that he is familiar with or people that are strangers. Both Andrew and Meghan stressed the use of other people in the gym setting who they use to help push themselves using of competition. Andrew describes these experiences as an aid in the creation of his “best workout.” He says, “I try to beat them. So I’ll do more weight or harder. I don’t know, it’s a competition even though it’s an informal just me competition that they don’t know about. It’s completely internal. I do that a lot.” The fact that the competition is “internal” and one-sided indicates that this is solely coming from Andrew himself as a means to work as hard as he possibly can. Competition has the ability to elicit the desire to beat someone and therefore be physically more capable than him or her. It allows for the people involved to work as hard as possible to get to that point.

Meghan described similar experiences to Andrew in the fact that she uses others around her to create a competition between the two when the other does not know about it. Meghan mentions this in the context of both strangers and friends and she finds it equally beneficial. She reflects:

So when I used to run on the treadmill and there was a person next to me I would look to see what time they had, not time but miles they had. 6 point something or 5 point something. When I felt like I was in my groove and I wanted to race in my head I would put it up one notch higher. I wouldn’t look at them and put it one notch higher. It’s all me… But for me it would always feel good especially if it was a guy that looked really fit and was taking a slow day, well then I’m gonna race you.

In this example, we see Meghan creating a competitive environment with a stranger in order to push herself harder and she finds it truly beneficial. Exercising with friends changes this a bit because competition can arise from the jealousy that is created. When working out next to a
stranger it is less likely to be jealous because the person does not matter beyond that moment. Meghan turns the jealousy with friends into a competition that she finds to be helpful instead of harmful. She states, “I think it’s positive because everyone needs [external motivation] once in a while. To be pushed by a friend even if the friend doesn’t realize that they’re pushing you.” It may allow her to do extra crunches when she is with the friend who is seemingly more capable even though she feels that it is good to go on her own once in a while.

Being around other people in general creates an opportunity for critique and judgment. While some see this as a negative form of comparison, others find it to be a positive source of competition. Through the interview responses, it becomes clear that individuals thrive as a response to these critiques while others clearly hate it. One positive example is Daniel who is constantly surrounded by others when working out, as his preferred activities are hockey practices and swimming. He enjoys being with friends because it allows the judgment that they might have to turn into competition and push him harder than he would if he was alone. He says:

Part of the exercise that I could be doing alone I push myself a little harder when there are other people around because I don’t know if this is just in my head, but I feel like there’s a competition judgment type of thing going on and I think that’s good. I think it’s good to kind of amp up your workout by a couple of notches.

In Daniel’s case, the competition is only present because the people around are friends and their opinions do matter. Along similar lines of having to negotiate being better or worse than a friend you are working with, the judgment factor helps to push Daniel to work harder than he would if he were alone. According to Cooley’s concept of the looking glass, our self-concepts form as a reflection of the responses and evaluations of others in our environment (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983), and this is magnified when considering people who matter. Instead of just viewing it as an
awkward situation that you have to deal with, the judgment turns into a source of motivation to work as hard as possible to make sure he is doing as well as he possibly could to make sure he maintains a high self-concept.

Daniel mentioned being a part of a hockey team as one of his main sources of exercise. Being on a team creates mandatory practices and an inherent feeling of competition that accompanies the desire to succeed within a sport. Four other participants mentioned being a part of a sports team, two of whom are captains. All of these respondents report that competition within the team setting impact their workouts. Abigail did not mention competition many times throughout her interview, but when asked about competition within her team, she did bring up the fact that her and her teammates have to compete for their spot on the team. She explains

I think [competition] does with people you’re a similar level with because there are only a certain number of spots on the team that are varsity and you can travel with. I’m not on the cut off level but I think competition for the top 7 spots if you’re the 7th or 8th spot only happens in meets because that’s where the will draw the line if you’re going to go to the championship level.

Even though Abigail is not a part of this competition firsthand, she acknowledges that it is a big part of competition within the team itself rather than solely competing against other teams. Track is a very individualized sport that makes it more likely to have competition within the team itself. Sports that need every member of the team to work as a unit seems to have less opportunity for competition, which may be a result of the focus of training on practice and developing skills while actual competition is higher during the trials (van de Pol & Kavussanu, 2011). Michael never mentioned a sense of competition between his teammates on the basketball team.
Two of the participants are the captains of their club teams. Mackenzie is the captain of field hockey and Matthew is the captain of ultimate Frisbee. Both of these sports require a team to work together without competition between members. This remains true between regular members, but competition becomes evident between a captain and its team because this is a kind of ranking that the captain needs to uphold. By being the leader of a team, a captain needs to make sure he or she is setting an example for every other member by working as hard as possible. When asked if competition has an impact on her workouts, Mackenzie responded:

I’d say that comes up most during field hockey stuff. It’s more of a push when you’re working out if you feel someone behind you on your team. It’s more friendly because at the end of the day you’re on the same side, but it’s like a better, if you’re like that person’s one lap ahead of me, that person’s 10 sit-ups ahead of me, and it does push you a little bit to keep going.

Mackenzie acknowledges the pressure that a team environment creates to keep going when there is someone doing better and she sees it in the context of a competition to get up to par with the others. I then asked why this competition pushes her. She further explains:

More specifically with field hockey, as a captain you are supposed to be a leader so you don’t have to be the best but pushing yourself the hardest and being the example for everyone else. If someone is way ahead of me, I’m not doing my best to show everyone that they can do it too. So that’s something that motivates me to go more and harder and stuff like that.

It is clear that Mackenzie internalizes the position of captain in order to push herself more than the other members of her team do. Being a captain complicates her view of the team, but the
teammates might not feel this competition as strongly as Mackenzie might. We can see this through the example of Michael.

As mentioned, Michael does not find the basketball team to be a source of competition for him. Instead, his main source of competition is himself. Many people find that internal competition is the best motivator within an exercise setting, and the same holds for individuals involved in team sports with inherent competition. Michael’s sense of competition is constant within his workouts as it fuels what he does. When asked if competition ever influences his workouts he responded:

Competition brings motivation all over me. I’m always trying to push. Even if they’re like ‘oh you’re so big and bigger than us.’ I’m always thinking that there’s someone else who’s bigger than me and I have goals to get there. That’s motivation and inspiration. There’s always more that you can do. Every time I do something I think how can I make this harder. I want to do things I couldn’t do before. It’s life really. You want to overcome obstacles.

Michael brings the competition of the hypothetical people who he knows are working hard into the context of competition to be able to push himself as hard as possible when he is on his own. As a personal trainer and varsity athlete, Michael loves working out to be able to push his body to new limits every day and we can see how competition helps him to get to where he wants to be.

When Michael is on his own, he brings competition into his workouts by choice. John, Meghan, Abigail, Mackenzie, Daniel, and Michael all find competition to be beneficial within an exercise setting because it allows for an extra push in a workout to do your best and work your hardest. However, others found the general aspects of competition to be detrimental to their
workouts. Those who do not find it beneficial usually describe themselves as a non-competitive person and therefore dislike competition within their exercises, although this can be for a variety of reasons.

Rachel is one example of a person who tends to avoid competitive situations. When asked if she likes competition within her exercise, Rachel responded:

No I really don’t. I was thinking about that this morning because I was photographing a volleyball game and it looked so fun and they were winning and the competition was so fierce and some people enjoy that, but I’ve never been like that. I don’t like competition. I would hate running the mile in school and everyone comparing their times. In my head I’m probably insecure about what if I’m not as good as someone else. But I have to take into account that everyone has a different body and has a different way. But I’ve never been competitive.

In Rachel’s example, the dislike of competition stems from insecurities regarding her abilities in comparison to those around her. When she was forced to run a mile, she hated it because of the competition it imparted on her and her peers, not because of the run itself. This idea followed her into her exercising endeavors later on, as she described not wanting to compare with her friends and avoiding competitions. She does not like playing sports and she does not seem to think she ever will.

Rachel describes herself as a non-competitive person because of insecurities in abilities. However, others describe themselves as non-competitive within an exercise setting because of the desire for a more personal workout that is very focused on self-improvement rather than using other people to push themselves to reach their goals. Within these examples, competition
was brought up as an issue in response to questions about exercising with friends, not competition in general. Peter responded:

The competition of it, if that begins to evolve, it might be a little disconcerting because I am not a huge fan of exercise being competitive. I think it would be okay if we went to the gym together and we were on the machines together, but weren’t tracking what the other was doing so much. I would do it… I think competition is a little weird.

Peter has found that to have a productive workout he should not be engaging in competition with other people. At the beginning of the interview he mentioned, “I’m not a competitive person when it comes to exercise so I prefer to run on my own to get a better sense of how I’m doing and sort of just compete against myself.” Because of this self-reflection, it becomes clear that he finds competition beneficial solely within the context of exercising alone. When friends or other people are brought into the situation, he gets uncomfortable because he does not want to be an “asshole” doing better, but doing worse can be demoralizing.

In the pursuit of understanding how competition can turn into a detrimental attribute of exercising with others, it is helpful to look at Brittany and Jessica’s interviews. They both find that having a personal workout is more rewarding than one involving those around them. Peter does not like to have competition within exercise and eventually may have it with friends over time, but both Brittany and Jessica seem to have the tendencies to allow competition into their workouts much easier than him and they find this to be uncomfortable. It is not an aspect of their ideal exercise experience. When asked if she would rather go to the gym alone or with a friend, Brittany responded:

I like going to the gym with another person because it gets me to the gym, but I don’t want to be on the same machine as them because it feels competitive. Like going with
you when you’re on the bike and I’m on the elliptical, I’m really okay with that, but if we’re on the elliptical side by side and I can see how fast you’re going, it takes my brain away from what I’m doing and it includes, I just start including other people in the room in my own workout. I’m not a competitive person and that makes me uncomfortable, so I try to avoid that and if that means going by myself I’m okay with that.

The discomfort that Brittany describes is enough to deter her from going to the gym with a friend. The workout that she was craving is no longer the one she desires and it a reason for her to deem competition within exercise an unwanted aspect of going with friends. Jessica maintains a very similar point of view in reference to this phenomenon.

Jessica spoke about competition within exercise many times throughout her interview, each time in a negative way. She describes it as a mentality that becomes damaging to her productivity, as it starts to break down her strong sense of self in reaching her goals. When describing competition within her workouts she explains:

Yea, I think it actually, I think it makes me feel worse. I think when I workout I have to think solely about myself and what my level is and if I really want to stop that’s okay and I have to give myself that leeway because that’s what makes me feel like I’m able to go more, which is weird because it’s a structured thing, but if I say that I can stop if I want to and then keep going it’s all an added bonus. But if I tell myself that I really can’t because I have to compete with someone next to me, that’s something that will make me crack under the pressure.

Jessica puts a great deal of emphasis on the need for autonomy in her choices in how to exercise. This includes how fast she is going and for how long. By allowing competition to sneak into her mindset, she feels a loss in the ability to make these important decisions for herself and this
Meyer, H.

creates an unwanted pressure. Instead of continuing as a personal choice, she feels like it is no longer in her control.

Jessica, Brittany, Peter and Rachel all describe themselves as non-competitive people and become increasingly uncomfortable when it is introduced to them in this setting. They try as much as they can to avoid it. It seems natural for all competitive people to enjoy competition within exercise, but this is not the case. Matthew describes himself as “a competitive person and has a competitive nature.” Given his self-description, I felt inclined to assume that he would compete with others in the room to help push himself. This, in fact, is not the case. Matthew did mention that he naturally compares himself to others in the room when he is working out, but he tries to avoid competition with them. When asked if he does compete with people around him, he explains:

I really try to stay focused on my thing and stray away from those types of thoughts because those types of thoughts, they don’t really motivate you as much as they can just frustrate you or annoy you or they can do the opposite, you can put yourself up on a pedestal, get on your high horse, and then you’ve ruined your workout for you because the whole point is finding your motivation in figuring out what you need to improve.

Matthew places a lot of importance in self-motivation. Throughout his experiences with trying to be the best player on his ultimate Frisbee team and striving to make other professional teams, he works extremely hard to get to the point where is capable enough to keep up. By allowing others to influence the drive that he has found, he feels like it could throw him off balance and ruin everything he is working to improve. While some find doing better than others to be an added push to the workout, Matthew feels like it actually destroys the workout for the day.
It is clear that context and individuals’ tendencies have a significant impact on the way that people view competition within exercise. From sports to individual exercise, each setting has the opportunity for the creation of competition that may be embraced or avoided depending on the perspective of the subject in how it would affect productivity. Each person has the ultimate goal of reaping the benefits that exercise provides, whether it is health benefits or winning a game, and competition changes the dynamic of these goals for better or for worse.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the different tendencies that people have in referencing other people within their own experience of exercise. The participants in this study had varied opinions about whether comparison and competition can be found to be harmful or beneficial. Some reported that it depended on contexts that included the kind of exercise, the exercise setting, and their own motivations to workout.

These data have shown that both people involved in a social network and strangers in an exercise setting have the potential to create dynamics of comparison and competition. The navigation of these complications leads people to form opinions as to whether they are helpful or hurtful in the pursuit of a positive workout. Previous literature has found that social comparisons in exercise are generally done with those who are better than the individual, but tend to have a negative effect as a result of the possibility of being outperformed by a peer which takes a toll on the sense of self (Normand & Croizet, 2013). This study has supported this phenomenon in the exposure of weakness, but it also introduces the idea that comparison can be used to push harder, set goals, and fix form, although context is important because self-focused exercise can be beneficial as well. Research has shown that competition increases anxiety and can greatly affect
how people perform (Cooke et al., 2011). While this may be true, the self-induced competition, as studied in these data, does not change performance based on anxiety. Rather, people use it to push themselves harder or avoid it to enable a personal workout.

Comparison can be used as a tool for those who need reinforcement of what they are doing. This idea can be displayed through the need to see that others are struggling, to check on using proper form, to understand ability level based on others and push for improvement, and to see an example of what a person aspires to be. Comparison infiltrates the mind when another is in a line of vision, but this may not be seen as beneficial. Some find that comparison can obstruct the pursuit of a personal workout or create an opportunity for negative judgment and critique.

For those who exercise with friends, comparison can create an awkward situation when navigating the different levels of ability and when negotiating how to exercise from there, so people prefer exercising with those who are at a similar ability level.

Competition is essentially comparison with the added pressure of striving to do better than another person. Within an exercise setting it can be used as an added source of motivation to reach a specific goal. It can be seen as beneficial because the pressure to do well is higher and many people work well in these settings. This idea becomes increasingly complicated when brought into the context of sports and sports teams. Team sports introduce the possibility of losing a game, a spot on a team, or credit as a captain. Similar to comparison, those who prefer a personal workout find competition to be a harmful addition to exercise as mindsets and goals can be skewed.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study has focused predominantly on the intricate relationships that people have and their influence on motivation in exercise. As seen through the different scenarios, motivation can be influenced during the creation of habits as well as during the actual act of exercise. Based on the foundation formed within the family setting, individuals develop an identity and self-efficacy and are therefore capable of choosing the space in which they prefer to exercise in. While this remains a personal choice, the people who are predominantly in the space and societal pressures shape the choices. When surrounded by individuals in a space of self-improvement, it is possible to involve others in the process through comparison and competition. Interviews and fieldwork provided data that demonstrates the difference between the ways other people can influence motivation in exercise combined with personal opinions on if they have a positive or negative effect.

Social Networks and Motivation in Exercise

Research has shown that social networks play an important role in the creation of health behaviors and whether they are positive or negative outcomes (Christakis & Fowler, 2011). Parents as the main model for healthy habits are the most significant part of the social network within childhood, but this is thought to change in adolescence with a shift to friends having the most influence on habits (Maturo & Cunningham, 2013; Theodorakis et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 2010). My research suggests otherwise.

Respondents have described family as playing a predominant role in the creation of healthy habits that they have maintained throughout college. Beginning with the framing of exercise as an important, fun part of life allowed participants to view exercise as a welcomed
break rather than a chore to do each day. The encouragement of parents to join teams, programs, and find enjoyment in each activity was the first influence that individuals had for exercising on a regular basis. Even when parents were not the immediate source of exercise values, siblings could act as a substitute. In one case, no one in the family was active, but the lack physical activity led the son to be more motivated as a will to not end up in the same routine.

As people become increasingly independent from families and are able to choose what to participate in, exercise with families becomes a basis for social interactions rather than a force influencing them to continue. From the parent’s perspective, physical activity can be an important mechanisms for sustaining communication within the family and spending more time together (Thompson et al., 2010). The data displayed that this mechanism was important from the child’s perspective as well. Exercising together served as a time to be with each other in a productive manner, rather than just focusing on having a good workout. Even for the “laziest and most apathetic” respondent, going to the gym with his father at home was one of the most important parts of his school vacations.

With the transition into college and more immediate access to social groups, friends are thought to become the most influential people in a student’s life regarding exercise motivation (Gruber, 2008; Maturo & Cunningham, 2013). Many participants described friends playing the role of reminding them that exercise is something to do and inviting them to go workout together. While this action may boost the motivation of the individuals, it did not create it. Respondents who have set exercise routines and positive healthy habits are able to maintain these regardless of the action of friends. This could be seen through the individuals who are not surrounded by active people but remain active regardless.
Unlike exercising with family as a mechanism for spending time together, respondents have found that exercising with friends can be a more difficult situation. While some might think that friendships are already secure relationships and would not employ the need to use strategies to gain approval (Salvy et al., 2009), this is not the case. Many respondents cited times in which they were uncomfortable exercising with a friend due to stigmas placed on being better or worse or different ideas about what is to be accomplished when there. The main benefit to going with friends is that it makes an individual accountable and therefore more likely to exercise even if the day gets very busy. Because of the issues that people have when working out with friends, people come up with strategies of dealing with them. For example, discussing what each person will do when s/he gets there, for how long, and if s/he will be doing anything together.

Because of the difficulties accompanying exercising with friends, it seems unlikely for people to want to exercise with romantic partners as a result from the unattractive look and difficult navigation of the same issues of being with friends with the added pressure of being in a relationship. This turned out to be accurate. Many respondents described a similar experience with significant others as with friends. People were more likely to avoid exercise with their partners, but having a significant other or being in the pursuit of one changed the motivation to exercise independently.

Through the creation of habits resulting from parental influence, the extra push of motivation from friends and partners, and the difficulties accompanying exercising with people within the social network, we see individuals choosing what kind of exercise is right for them. General fitness patterns are then created and we can see the influence that these social networks have on their formation with the added societal pressures.
General Fitness Patterns

Resulting from the formations of habits due to familial influence, people have the tendency to put themselves into categories depending on the type of exercise they are doing. Some might believe they are predominantly athletes while others might believe they are runners, or a lover of classes, or a gym rat and so on. Each area has its own personality. For example, a runner may believe in independent exercise outside and a lover of fitness classes may need instruction and other people around them to keep them motivated. Regardless of where people place themselves, throughout the interviews participants revealed a more complex set of exercises they have participated in, but their category has dominated their exercise routines and is important to their exercise identities.

Within these categories, general motivations get a person to actually be involved. Stemming from the values created within the family life, most people exercise for health reasons, but other factors might include mental health, social factors, competition, and relaxation (Huddelston, Mertesdorf, & Araki, 2002). Respondents in this study had a common motivation of reaching goals. Whether it was to reach a certain weight, be the best player on a team, or relieve stress, exercise was not completed without an ultimate goal. To reach these goals and maintain consistency within the self-determined category, people would choose different facilities to use.

Fitness classes, weight rooms, and cardio rooms were the main focus in understanding the use of facilities. Individuals had an opinion on each area leading to the decision of whether or not they were used. Fitness classes have many boundaries to overcome when trying to participate including finding a convenient time, a type of class to suit the individual’s needs, and a good instructor. Once a class is found to fill each of these needs, it can be a very beneficial form of
exercise because of the group motivation and instruction of proper form and new exercises. Being surrounded by other people doing the exact same thing can be very valuable for some individuals because of the ability to compare and find empathy in each other. For those involved, the group setting can be seen as intimidating and overwhelming. As a result, people may choose to exercise independently in the weight room or cardio room.

One of the major reasons why people choose to use the weight room or cardio room is their availability at any time and freedom to do whatever you like. People have very strong opinions of which machines to use in order to reach the pre-determined goals. The other people in each setting have the potential to influence the individual in their own personal workout. This influence is completely internal and either embraced or ignored. Some find that looking at other people can boost self-esteem by being able to work harder or push a person to new limits because they are inspired by other capable individuals. Others try to ignore the presence of other people and focus on their own exercise in the pursuit of a personal workout.

Societal pressures create stereotypes about each of these locations, which discourage individuals from getting involved, predominantly in the fitness classes and the weight room. Majority of participants in fitness classes are women because of the lack of knowledge of what goes on within the class and the benefits they might have. Multiple male participants believed that they were only for women and not a place where they would fit in, so it is deemed intimidating and therefore avoided. Men who did choose to participate found them to be beneficial and continue going. There is a similar situation regarding women within the weight room.

Many women find the weight room to be a scary place where they would feel lost in what to do. While there are many benefits for women to participate in weight training, the vast
majority of respondents were either not aware, were not concerned with lifting weights, or just did not know how. Lack of competence of what to do combined with the intimidating population of men discouraged women from visiting the weight room. For the one person who did go, she found it uncomfortable and left as fast as possible.

Through these examples of the people involved in locations serving as a reason not to participate in a type of exercise, we see that other people play a significant role in the motivation of individuals to use certain facilities. This combined with the actual presence of people in the space, like someone on the next treadmill or everyone in a fitness class working towards the same goals, has the ability to shape a person’s exercise experience and this can lead to the creation of comparison and competition.

Comparison and Competition

Both social comparison and competition use the presence of other people to influence performance in an exercise setting by creating standards or finding the drive to outperform others (Dewar & Kavussanu, 2012; Möller & Marsh, 2013). Each mechanism has the potential to influence motivation in exercise. Previous research has shown that social comparison has predominantly negative effects on individuals due to the inability to reach standards created by others (Möller & Marsh, 2013), but data has shown that there are many opportunities to use comparison for beneficial reasons.

Möller & Marsh (2013) explain that there are two types of comparison: social comparison using other people as standards and temporal comparison using previous self-related information as standards. Both can assist an individual in reaching his or her goals, but social comparison predominantly has the potential to hurt motivation in exercise. Interview data has shown that respondents frequently use themselves for comparison to measure improvement and
Meyer, H.

push themselves harder next time. Respondents can use social comparison to be able to judge ability in relation to others and the discrepancy between personal ability and the ability of others has the potential to threaten the sense of self and destroy motivation to exercise because of low self-esteem (Normand & Croizet, 2013). We see this occur through multiple instances, but many people described positive aspects of social comparison.

Social comparison, rather than just hurting people’s self-esteem, can be used as an instructional and motivational tool in exercise. From being able to compare form and therefore fix form to being able to empathize with others, comparison can help people maintain a high level of motivation to continue exercising. Fitness classes are one of the main locations where comparison can be used to find empathy and know that you are not alone in the struggling to complete the tasks. Sometimes this can turn into critique and judgment, which people can find as a daunting aspect of comparison and discourage individuals for exercising in close proximity to others. Another negative aspect that people cited within exercise is that comparison can take the focus away from the self and disrupt the process of having a very personal exercise experience. Sometimes comparison can even transform into competition.

Competition, or the striving to outperform another, has the potential to alter performance due to increased anxiety and pressure (Cooke et al., 2011; Dewar & Kavussanu, 2012). Through the interviews, respondents described how competition could have both positive and negative effects on performance based on the context and the way it is viewed. It can be seen as positive edge working to push people a bit more than they would alone. The competitive drive can be seen as contagious and inspire people to work as hard as possible. Competition within the fitness setting is completely internal, but the opinions of other people can act as the drive of competition through judgment.
Sports teams may be assumed as a source of competition, but based on the type of sport it may stay in within the actual trials of the team. For team sports, like basketball, field hockey, and ultimate Frisbee, there is hardly any competition present within team dynamics with the exception of the captain working to push the hardest as a role model. Individual sports, like track, have the added pressure of competition between teammates in the need to secure rankings on the team. People on sport teams in general might embrace competition in order push themselves to be the best player possible.

Others might avoid competition completely. For those who value a personal workout without involving others, competition can be detrimental to the productivity in reaching this goal. Many respondents try to avoid looking at other people or exercising with friends because it takes the focus away from the self, just as comparison does, but it makes people very uncomfortable. In some ways, it can ruin the workout by putting yourself in the context of others rather focusing on self-improvement.

Comparison and competition can have both positive and negative effects on a person in the exercise setting based on the personal goals of working out combined with the context. One individual may be capable of using competition in cardio exercise to push harder, but then avoid comparison in yoga classes to focus on the self. Each situation provides a new dynamic that individuals have to navigate, but comparison and competition can aid or work against motivation in exercise depending on how people view it.

Recommendations

Throughout my study, I have found many aspects of the resources available that can be greatly improved to allow for a more productive fitness environment. Beginning with location, there is currently an imbalance at Brandeis with location of fitness facilities and this can easily...
be changed. Adding a small fitness facility to each area of campus can create easier access by students living there and encourage people to exercise in a smaller window of time. Currently the Village gym is used by those who live on lower campus; those who live in east have easy access to Gosman and the new cardio facility in the quad itself. However, the addition of small fitness facilities in Charles River, Massell and Rosenthal quads, and North quad can help those who live farther from the gyms have easy access to some much needed equipment. I propose having one or two of each cardio machine, the treadmill, stationary bike, and elliptical as well as free weights placed in each housing area with a television to provide a nice and convenient space for exercise.

One of the biggest issues that I have found in my study is the rift between men and women in the setting of fitness classes and the weight room. While it would be difficult to break down widespread stereotypes, steps can be taken to improve the gender balance within the areas and make for a more comfortable fitness environment. Women teach the vast majority of fitness classes at Brandeis. As a result, it may discourage men from wanting to attend them. I propose that Brandeis hires more male fitness instructors for group fitness classes to make classes more appealing to anyone interested. The types of classes being taught can also be catered to a male population, for example having a hip hop class as an alternative to Zumba. By frontloading classes with men in the beginning of the semester, it may be possible to encourage other men to join. In addition, by educating people on what the general benefits are of each class regardless of gender, people might find a class that suits their individual needs to reach personalized goals.

The weight room is currently seen as a scary and intimidating environment for women. This is a result of lack of education as well as discomfort in being the minority. I believe that with better education of how anaerobic exercise can be very beneficial and what to do, women would feel more inclined to take advantage of these resources. I propose that during orientation
there be small, free workshops for women on how to use the machines properly and what the benefits are. Many people mentioned that doing weights is much easier in a gym that has cardio and weights in the same room. To make the transition between the two types of exercise easier for people, I propose that free weights be added to the cardio rooms throughout the campus with directions on how to use them and examples of exercises. Instead of having to go to a different room on a different level of a building, having a small amount of free weights available can provide a smooth transition and added motivation to use weights by anyone who does not normally go to the weight room.

Scholarly Contribution

Throughout my research, I have found many different studies on the way that social networks influence health habits, how societal pressures create gender norms in exercise facilities, and the influence that competition and comparison have the opportunity to influence motivation in the moment. This study combines all of these widespread ideologies into one data set and reveals the complicated lives of individuals and how other people in general, both social networks and strangers, prove to influence motivation in exercise. The interview data contradicts some of the findings of previous studies and places all of the different mechanisms in collaboration because all of the processes work together to create motivation in exercise. An individual’s social network influences health habits, which therefore create personal identity and preference in how to exercise and the different people present within each setting complicates the internal drives to continue through comparison and competition. Each individual’s processes are complicated and can be looked at as a whole rather than being separated.
Suggestions for Further Research

This study cannot be generalized throughout the entire population of college students in America. Each person has complicated processes to find motivation to exercise and each college campus has a different internal setup of resources for their students. By only interviewing 16 students, majority being upperclassmen, the data is limited. In future studies it would be beneficial gather a greater number of subjects with more diversity in age. Quantitative research can be considered as an additional data set to understand the overarching trends within the current population of college students. This research has found that there are two main types of motivation in exercise: the creation of habits and the motivation during the actual act. Further research can expand upon the two and work to make the findings more able to be generalized through college campuses in America.
Appendix A: IRB Protocol

Informed Consent Form

Brandeis University
Permission to Participate in Research
Motivation in Exercise: The Influence of Networks and Partners

Consent Form

This interview will be included in the research project for Helaine Meyer’s senior thesis. The research will be used to examine the way that other people influence one individual’s motivation before and during exercise. By participating in this interview, you will be assisting in the expansion of this knowledge. The interview will be approximately 1 hour long and you will be asked questions only regarding this subject. The minimal risk of this study will be sharing personal information that might bring up certain emotions. The benefits of this study will be getting to share your personal stories and helping to further the findings of this thesis.

By signing this form you agree to allow the researchers from Brandeis University to conduct a formal qualitative interview with you about the influence of groups and partners on motivation in exercise. By signing this form you also agree to allow the researchers voice record this interview and for any information collected in this interview to be used in a thesis project at Brandeis University during the 2013-2014 school year. If you prefer not to be audio recorded, notes will be taken. The personal information on this form is for the sole purpose of consenting to participate, and will not be used to track you in this project. There is minimum risk to you to participate in this interview, and you can withdraw from the project at any time.

The data used in this study will be completely confidential with the files stored on a password-protected computer only accessible to the student researcher and the files will be encrypted. After the study is complete, all electronic documents will be deleted and all paper documents will be shredded.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject please contact the Brandeis Institutional Review Board at irb@brandeis.edu or 781 736 8133

Should you have any questions about this study, please contact Helaine Meyer at 914-391-3560 or lainem@brandeis.edu.

I consent to having this interview audio recorded: (Initial)________
I consent to allow the interviewer to take notes: (Initial)________

Your Name: ____________________________________________________________

Your Signature: _________________________________________________________
Meyer, H.

Date: _____________________

Brandeis University Contact Information

Professor:
Sara Shostak
(781) 736-2213
shostak@brandeis.edu

Student Researcher:
Helaine Meyer
914-391-1560
lainem@brandeis.edu

Thank you for your help!
Dear ________,

My name is Laine Meyer and I am a senior at Brandeis University. I am writing a senior thesis on the influence of networks and partners on motivation in exercise. Through this study, I hope to find out what the factors are by means of observing/participating in fitness classes.

I’m writing to ask you if you would be willing to allow me to observe and participate in your class ___________. The opportunity to research in this environment would be highly beneficial to my study. Would you please let me know if I would be able to pursue this research?

Please feel free to contact me with any questions of concerns. Thank you for your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

All best,

Laine Meyer

Brandeis University ‘14
Phone: (914) 391-3560
Recruitment Email 2

Dear ________,

My name is Laine Meyer and I am a senior at Brandeis University. I am writing a senior thesis on the influence of networks and partners on motivation in exercise. Through this study, I hope to find out what the factors are by means of observing/participating in fitness classes.

I am writing to ask you if you would be willing to allow me to make an appearance in the beginning of your class/classes to announce the opportunity to participate in my study through an interview that will be approximately one hour long. I would provide my email address to the class as well for contact information.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. Thank you for your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

All best,

Laine Meyer

Brandeis University ‘14
Phone: (914) 391-3560
Recruitment Email 3

Dear __________,

My name is Laine Meyer and I am a senior at Brandeis University. I am writing a senior thesis on the influence of networks and partners on motivation in exercise. Through this study, I hope to find out what the factors are by means of observing/participating in fitness classes.

I am writing to ask you if you would be willing to pass along information about my study to your club members, as I am looking to conduct individual interviews on my research topic. For more information on the study and contact information, I have attached a flier.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions of concerns. Thank you for your consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

All best,

Laine Meyer

Brandeis University ‘14
Phone: (914) 391-3560
Recruitment Flyer

Sociology Department

Motivation in Exercise: The Influence of Networks and Partners

Participants Needed for a Senior Thesis!

I am looking for undergraduate volunteers to take part in a study of how networks and partners influence how individuals motivate themselves to exercise and continue once they get started.

As a participant of this study, you would be asked to take part in one interview approximately one hour long.

Participation is greatly appreciated!!

For more information please contact:

Laine Meyer
at:
Lainem@brandeis.edu
Appendix B: Interview Guide

Grand tour question:
How did you begin exercising?

Factors to working out
- How would you describe your exercise “ethic”
  - Indoors vs. outdoors?
  - Time of day?
  - Number of people present?
  - Gender effect?
- What would you say are the general factors for deciding to work out?
  - How do these things affect your choices

Fitness classes
- Have you ever gone to a fitness class
  - If yes
    - What kinds of classes have you taken?
    - Can you tell me about the experiences you have had there?
    - How did you decide that you wanted to take classes?
    - How did you perceive the way the instructor got the class involved?
    - Can you describe the way the participants of the class interacted with each other?
      - Did you speak to one another?
    - How do you feel about fitness classes in general?
    - Do you prefer a certain type over another?
  - If no
    - How did you come to the decision that you would rather not?
    - Would you ever consider it?

Gym
- Do you go to the gym?
  - If yes
    - How did you decide that you wanted to exercise in the gym?
    - What kinds of facilities do you use?
    - Would you consider using the facilities that you haven’t yet gotten the chance to use?
      - Would having a friend with you impact this decision?
    - Would you prefer going alone or with friends? Can you expand on that?
    - If there are other people around you, how does it affect your work out?
    - How does going with a friend impact your work out?
  - If no
    - How did you decide that you didn’t want to work out at the gym?
    - How would going with a friend change your opinion?

Different for school and home
- When you are home, do you participate in exercise with other people?
- Do you have access to fitness facilities at home?
Meyer, H.

- How has having a free gym influenced your exercise patterns?
- At home, who would you exercise with if you were not alone?
- How is that different than at school?

**Friends**
- Do your roommates and friends exercise?
  - How often do you work out compared to your friends and peers?
  - How do you view your fitness level in comparison to them?
    - Does this impact your habits?
- How do you feel about exercising with friends?
- What impact does competition have on your exercise?
- Can you describe some of these experiences you have had exercising with friends?
- How does going to a fitness class with a friend influence your experience?
- How do you interact with your partner while exercising?
- How would having the same or different fitness level affect your opinion?

**Alone**
- How do you feel about exercising by yourself?
- If there is any, can you describe the difference in motivation when you are by yourself?
- If there are any, can you explain the times that you would prefer to work out alone?

**Significant Others**
- Do you have a significant other?
  - If yes
    - Is your significant other active?
    - Has your significant other had any influence on your exercise routine?
    - Have you ever exercised with your significant other?
    - If so, how has it affected your work out?

**Benefits/disadvantages**
- What would you say are the benefits of working out with others, in general?
- What would you say are the disadvantages of working out with others?
- Would you prefer classes or independent exercise?

**Personal information**
- How old are you?
- Where are you from?
- What year in school are you in?
Meyer, H.

Works Cited


Meyer, H.


Ginis, K. A. M., Burke, S. M., & Gauvin, L. (2007). Exercising with others exacerbates the negative effects of mirrored environments on sedentary women’s feeling states. *Psychology & Health, 22*(8), 945–962. doi:10.1080/14768320601070571


Meyer, H.


*Adolescence, 43*(171), 557–575.


Meyer, H.


Meyer, H.


Theodorakis, Y., Papaioannou, A., & Karastogianidou, K. (2004). Relations between family structure and students’ health-related attitudes and behaviors. *Psychological Reports, 95*(3), 851–858. doi:10.2466/pr0.95.3.851-858


Meyer, H.


