

Gym Subculture

Every time I see a weight scale I feel ashamed of myself. The object serves as a constant reminder to myself that I am still overweight and I need to address it. In August 2017, my friend, Naeem, and I decided to join a gym. We limited our options to gyms that were located 20 minutes away from our homes. As a result, there were only two gyms that fit the bill. After a few days, we decided to join the Elite Gym. Unfortunately, this gym only had one location, which was positioned at 782 Coney Island Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11218. In a period of six months, I have familiarized myself with more than half of the equipment in the gym. At the same time, I have concluded that although the gym's facilities were sufficient to meet my needs, there were many aspects of the gym that make me uncomfortable. *such as... lost them*

We believed that if you exercise with someone else, then the two individuals would be able to motivate each other by competing to see who was better. At first, I was unenthusiastic about working out in the gym, whereas my partner *Naeem* was highly motivated to do so. Even so, I made this decision because I recognized that I needed to lose weight, become healthier, and start moving away from my sedentary lifestyle. On the first day at the gym, we performed varied sets of exercises. After my first workout at the gym, I limped my way home in pain from my legs. For the next two days, I was moaning in pain on the bed. On the first day, every movement I made, sent a shock of pain to my nerves. Naeem attempted to goad me to return to exercising at the gym. *good word choice*

His tactics succeeded on the fourth day. On that day, I was finally able to move around with light jolts of pain. In the beginning, the pain, tiring activity, and miniscule improvement to my physique discouraged me from attending regularly. Five months later, my attitude towards exercising at the gym completely flipped. In this time period between my first day at the gym

and now, I developed a greater appreciation for exercising at the gym, and I was able to see the changes this activity was having on my body. In doing so, I have become more motivated to exercise at the gym. At the same time, I have been exercising more often and for longer durations in the gym on a weekly basis. The gym intrigues me as it was a place where I get away from my sedentary lifestyle, develop a better physique, challenge myself every time to increase the number of repetitions and sets for each workout, and become healthier. Most importantly, the gym was a place in which I can meet with friends ^{who} that I rarely see. In January 2018, I stopped renewing my subscription at the gym because I would have less time available to work out.

One month later, I have finally come back. The Elite Gym consists of one floor, a basement, and a backyard. I observed the site from 7:00 PM to 8:00 PM. In the front of the gym, from the left, there was a 10-feet by 10-feet glass screen. By standing in front of it, I can see a number of people exercising in the gym and three ellipticals facing the glass screen. Behind the ellipticals, to the left, there was a mirror lining the wall from the floor to the ceiling and stretching across the other end of the building. In front of this mirror, there were four treadmills lined up side by side. From above the positions of the treadmills and ellipticals would form an "L" ^{frag.} On the right side of the glass screen, there was a black door with a glass screen in the center and a flat bar in the middle of the door to push the door open or pull the door shut.

Upon entering the gym, we notice a wide rectangular room that makes up the entirety of the first floor. This floor was characterized by a dark yellow wooden floor, the treadmills were located on the left side, and there were 10 black lockers and 12 grey lockers lined up against the wall to the right. On the left side of the lockers, there was a large black refrigerator with a glass screen to examine an assortment of drinks. The lockers and refrigerator were across from the treadmills. On the left side of the refrigerator, there was the receptionist desk with a 4 1/2 feet

how much
did they
cost?
No water
bought

steel plated border in front of it. A scanner and flyers were placed on top of the border, where members scan their cards. One of the flyers lists membership prices for \$ 45.00 per month, \$ 40.00 per month for 3 months, and \$ 40.00 for 6 months. The receptionist desk had a black computer's monitor placed on it with an assortment of papers. Behind the desk was the black-haired receptionist. Inside the gym, there was no odor, but there was the repeating cycle of loud rap music playing from the speakers that hang from the walls. The lack of odor indicates that the gym was kept well ventilated. The exercise equipment occupied so much space, there was only a narrow walkway for two people to walk abreast. As I walked passed the receptionist's desk, I saw a wide-open space that was occupied by people performing squats and lifting a long black bar or a long steel bar with black metal plates on each end. Each person had a black rack to catch or hold the bar. The gym-attendees were either working out or taking a break. At the end of the first floor, passed the open spaces to use the long bar, there benches available to push up or pull up a long steel bar while lying down or sitting up on the bench. In order to prevent attendees from dropping the bar on themselves, there was a rack to catch and hold the bar.

In the back of the gym, there was a door leading to the backyard. Upon entering it, I enjoyed the fresh air as the wind blew against me. There was a blue tarp positioned about 10 feet above the backyard. The tarp blocked out rain on rainy days and much of the wind, but there were wide gaps at the sides for wind to pass through. There were various pieces of equipment for attendees to use. On the left of the doorway, there was another black rack to catch or hold a long steel bar as attendees perform squats or deadlifts. Behind the rack, there was a bench to perform sit-ups. Shortly ahead of the doorway, there was a piece of equipment in which attendees lift their bodies pressing their forearms against the arms of the equipment. Noticeably, no one was exercising in the backyard.

What was weather on
day of observation?

Upon going back through the door, I returned to the gym's 1st floor. I walked passed the wide-open spaces to reach a stairwell located to the wall on the left. After reaching the bottom of the stairs, I have entered the basement. I am standing in a wide hallway. In front of me, there were different types of exercise equipment lined up against the left wall. On the right wall, from right to left, there was a door to the maintenance room, a door to the restroom, and a door to the employee's reserved restroom. At the end of the hallway, there was a room with two benches and other equipment. Unlike, the first floor, the basement feels warmer and there was no music being played. Like the 1st floor and backyard, there was no odor. The most notable thing in this room, there were the four racks filled with barbells of different weights that placed against the left wall and another four racks placed in front of the rear wall. On the left and right walls of the room, there were mirrors that stretch from knee-height to the ceiling.

Any
one
using
room?

In my observations of the Elite Gym, I noticed four rituals of the gym subculture. One, all 16 attendees (consisting of 13 men and 3 women) wears sneakers, sweatpants, and a sleeveless shirt or T-shirt. The only exception was one woman who wore bloomers. Two, upon entering the gym, the gym members place their belongings into the lockers. As usual, not all members will choose to place a lock on the lockers to secure their belongings. Three, during breaks between workouts, attendees spent their time not exercising in order to relax their muscles. During their break, I saw people stretching, walking around, using their phone, talking with others, and sometimes even listening to music through their headsets. Four, after members have finished using gym equipment, they return the equipment to their original location.

Did
the
clean
the
machines

Aside from the rituals, I realized the error in one of my assumptions. I believed that it was common practice for everyone to keep water bottles with them in the gym. However, only three out of the sixteen members in the gym were openly carrying ^{plural} it with them or placing it near ^{singular}

them as they exercised. I acknowledge that it was possible that the other gym members may have placed their water bottles behind some exercise equipment in such a way that I would not notice it or they may have stored them in their lockers.

transition needed

In my time, as a member of the Elite Gym, there was seven things that bothered me. One, the gym's staff often moved around the equipment. It was irksome to come in every week to waste time looking for the equipment. Two, there was no water fountain in the Elite Gym. It was often said by others that gyms usually have a water fountain for gym members. I found it annoying that I had to bring my own water bottle every time to the gym. Upon hearing these statements from others, I blamed the gym for being too cheap to set up a water fountain. Also, if my water bottle runs out of water before I complete my workout, then I will end my exercise session early in order to avoid fainting due to dehydration. My friends, other gym members, and even the staff *state* this was the gym's most notable disadvantage in comparison to other gyms.

Three, the equipment took up too much room in the gym. As a result, two people walking in opposite directions parallel to each other will either brush against each other to get to their destination or one person will have to stand aside for the other person. Four, the quantity of equipment was not always sufficient to meet the demands of all gym members. Resulting in attendees taking turns to use the equipment. Sometimes, a line was formed in order to use a particular piece of equipment. Five, gym membership was more expensive than other gyms.

Even though they do not offer the same perks as other gyms that cost less, such as providing a water fountain and shower room. Six, the gym's owner could expand the gym by adding the backyard, but refuses to do so. If he/she did *it* could solve the problem of their narrow walking space and overcrowded placement of gym equipment. Overcrowding due to lack of space was such a problem that people exercising must consider the safety of other gym members passing

*Why?
to clean?
or to
buy their
overpriced
drinks?*

frag

nearby them. Seven, they refuse to offer part-time membership during the spring and fall semesters, despite knowing that a significant portion of their members, including myself, only show up in the summer and winter breaks.

At a Dunkin Donuts restaurant, I met with my friend and former gym partner, Naeem, to discuss about the gym subculture. After we took our seats, I asked Naeem questions regarding his routines before going to the gym and to elaborate the reason behind these routines. I asked, "do you have any routines before going to the Elite gym? If so, what were they?" He replied, "Yeah, before going to the gym, I always take a shower, dry myself, put on some clean gym clothes, and stretch the muscles that I will be working on in the gym. Altogether, these routines take 20 minutes". I was confused upon hearing that he takes a shower before going to the gym. So, I asked him "why would you perform each of these routines?" "Generally, I stay at home to work at my desk. I take a shower before leaving my house, because I don't want to stink when I am around others. After showering, I am wet and I don't want to wet my new clothes. So, I use a towel to dry myself. Then, I put on clean clothes because wearing dirty clothes would defeat the purpose of cleaning myself. Lastly, I stretch my muscles to prepare them for my workout session, avoid ripping my muscles, and avoid feeling terrible after my performing exercise."

Admittedly, I would also feel terrible if I exercised incorrectly". Aside from his answer regarding taking a shower. The rest of his answer fell in my expectations. Next, I asked, "how would you recognize that you were performing an exercise incorrectly?" He replied, "I've looked up how each of the exercises [that I perform] would affect the different muscle groups. If I am feeling an exertion on an unexpected part of my body, I am experiencing excessive pain, or my limbs are not moving symmetrically as I push or pull a bar with two hands. Then, these instances would help indicate that I am doing something wrong. So, I would put down the exercise

equipment, fix my posture, and lower the weights on the equipment to lower the difficulty of the exercise. You already know this". I replied to him matter-of-factly, "yes, but I am asking you for the sake of the interview". He sighed and said "ugh...".

Afterwards, I asked questions to compare and contrast Naeem's routines to the ones that I observed in the gym. I decided to ask him about I asked, "what were your everyday routines from the time you entered the gym to the time you exited the gym?" After 15 second pause, he replied, "Upon entering the gym, I place my clothes in the gym locker. Then, I place a lock on my locker to secure all of my belongings except my water bottle. I carry my water bottle to be placed on the floor near myself as I exercise. Next, I will walk up to the receptionist desk and I will scan my membership card with the scanner. I will perform a warm up for 8 minutes by either using the treadmill, elliptical, or the bike exercise stand. When performing an exercise, I would push myself to do as many repetitions as I can with a goal to surpass the number of repetitions in my previous workout session. Between each exercise, I would take 30 seconds to 1 minute long break. Whenever I feel thirsty, I would sip some water in small amounts to conserve the amount of water to last me for my entire workout session. If I leave any sweat on the equipment, I will use the gym's disinfectant spray and towels to clean the equipment. If I feel that I can do more after completing my workout routine, then I will repeat it from the beginning until I tire out. Lastly, I will unlock my locker and collect my belongings before leaving". Wow, I replied, "did you know that you have been performing 10 to 11 routines in the gym for every workout session. Naeem replied in a surprised tone" "yeah, I knew that I repeated some things, but not that many". Then, I asked, "do you prefer exercising with a gym partner or by yourself? How would your routines change when exercising with a gym partner?". He squinted his eyes at me. Then, he replied, "of course, I prefer working out with a gym partner". Using my poker face, I

asked, "how would you change your routines when exercising with a gym partner?" He replied, "there were a number of changes for one, I would take longer breaks between exercises in order to wait for my partner to complete his sets. Second, if you have a gym partner I can push yourself to do more repetitions without worrying about hurting myself using the equipment. The spotter can also check if I have the correct posture before exercising. Third, we motivate each other to exercise more by competing against each other. Fourth, it's more fun when you're with someone else".

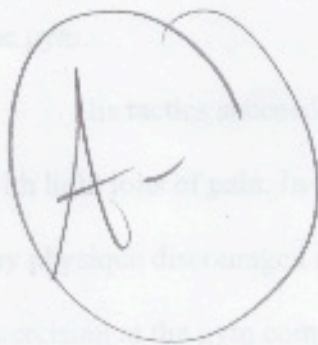
Later on, I asked questions to compare and contrast his assumptions, intrigues, and disturbances to my own. I asked, "were you surprised about anything in the gym or about the gym attendees?" He replied, "before joining the gym, I thought there would be more bodybuilders. Two, there was no water fountain and shower room. Third, the gym staff keep moving around equipment that I expect to be in the same place". Then, I asked, "can you list things that you like about the gym?" He replied, "the gym was located nearby, it meets my needs, and the staff will assist you by providing advice, spotting you, or answering exercise-related questions". Lastly, I asked, "what do you dislike about the gym?" He replied, "[One,] the walkway was too narrow. [Two,] they have a backyard that could be used to resolve the issue by expanding the building around it. [Three,] the gym does not have a water fountain. [Four,] the membership price was too high for the services they were providing. I would prefer the price from two years ago, where they charged \$ 30.00 per month rather than \$ 45.00 per month that they are charging now".

Based on my observations and conversation with my informant, Naeem, I have developed three interpretations. One, I realized that I only saw one person stretch immediately before exercising. So, the other attendees, ^{who} ~~that~~ entered the gym after myself, either stretched before

Why did Naeem join?

entering the gym or did not stretch at all. Potentially many attendees would be harming their muscles rather than developing them in a positive direction. Two, my observations missed eight rituals that Naeem noted to perform regularly in the gym. This indicated that I must be much more attentive in noting down the rituals of my subject of interest. Furthermore, I should return to make another observation of the fieldsite to pay attention to the rituals that I did not previously notice. Three, my informant and I shared the same intrigues and disturbances with the gym, but our assumptions were completely different. By comparing and contrasting my view of the outsider and his view as an insider, I can learn more about gym subculture and develop better questions for a later study on people with disabilities in gym subculture.

Before I began this fieldwork study, I could only consider my personal discomfort with the gym. During the study, I have come to realize many aspects of the gym subculture ^{have} gone unnoticed. I have also realized that I held an erroneous assumption about gym attendees. This study has made me realize the significance of speaking with informants to receive their perception of the subculture. At the end of the study, I understand that The Elite Gym provides equipment that are sufficient for beginners to work on all of the major muscle groups. It has many disadvantages and there is room for improvement in the services. Even so, people will continue to go there because it is the closest gym available for many attendees.



More transitions
needed

monopoly
on
gym
biz