

Music's Role on Male Exercise in Gym Subculture

Introduction

Gym members commonly use music as they exercise. In the Elite Gym, music was played through the speakers on the first floor (*Fieldnotes #1 1*; *Fieldnotes #2 1*). The gym's use of loud rap music created a sensational atmosphere as members were focused on working out. During my membership at the Elite Gym, from August 2017 to January 2018, the music influenced my emotions (*Gym Subculture 1*). At times, I felt angry or cheerful, which excited me to exercise faster and exercise for a longer period of time. In order to investigate the role of music in male gym culture, I interviewed my friend, Naeem, a male gym member of the Elite Gym. I assumed from this interview, I would be able to acquire evidence to support my claims of music's influence on a person to exercise faster and longer. In this paper, I will discuss music's potential effects on male exercise behavior.

During the interview with Naeem, I asked many questions to develop a better understanding of music's role in male gym subculture. First, I asked questions to learn about the potential benefits of music. Then, I asked questions to understand the connections between different preferences of music and exercise behavior. From his responses, I was able to identify a few potential connections between his preferences for music and his exercise behavior. Additionally, his responses surprised me a few times. Although I expected him to struggle with certain questions, it was still disheartening that he was unable to provide a sound explanation for some of his responses. On the bright side, I collected a wealth of information from this interview, but I will need to perform more research. It will be necessary to collect more information to substantiate or reject Naeem's claims for music's role in male gym exercise.

InterviewInterview Location

On the 29th of April 2018, I visited Naeem in his bedroom. Upon entering his room, I saw a stack of 12 boxes of sneakers against the middle of the left side of the room in front of the door of Naeem's closet. The bedroom was a small white rectangular room with a brown couch positioned against the middle of the rear wall. Dim sunlight came through the window on the right wall. Naeem's bedroom was void of any smell. On the couch's left was an empty space. On the couch's right, there was a single bed with a fixed bed sheet covering it, a pillow at the rear end, and a neatly folded blanket placed at the front end. In front of the brown couch, there was a small brown coffee table in the shape of the United States. In front of the coffee table, there was a black television leaning against the front wall. On the left of the coffee table and in front of the bed, there was a computer monitor on a black computer table. Under the table, there was a computer tower. Between the bed and the computer table, there was a black office chair. My informant, Naeem, was sitting on his couch for the interview.

Ten-Minute Transcript

M: How does music impact your exercise behavior in the gym? *(I decided to ask questions that would help me understand the informant's perception of music's role in the gym. So, I asked an open-ended question).*

N: It keeps me more focused on my workout. *(He scrunched his brows before answering. In response to his answer, I was somewhat disappointed with it being so brief. Since, he did not provide much information. I decided to use simpler questions to understand music's impact on him as he exercises).*

M: Does music make you exercise for a longer period of time?

good!!

N: Somewhat. Sometimes (pauses) you know (pauses) it helps me do more than I planned on doing. *(I felt worried regarding his uncertainty in his answer. However, I noted to myself that I will need to look for research that addresses music's impact on the amount of time a person spends exercising).*

These potential additions could be included in your reflection

M: Does music help you apply more strength in your exercise?

N: Hmmm somewhat. As I listen [to music], I'm more focused in my muscle movements. *(I thought his explanation could not be considered as sound support for being able to apply more strength as he exercised with music. So, I will rephrase the question for clarification).*

M: So, would you be able to lift more or run longer as you listened to music?

N: It depends on the distractions of what's going on in the gym. So, nope I don't think it [will have that] effect [on me]. *(The first half of his response does not make sense to me within the context of this question. However, my prodding seems to have resulted in a different answer to the previous question).*

M: What features of music impacts your exercise behavior in the gym? *(I already had preconceived notions on the music features that impacts male exercise behavior, but I asked this question anyway to check if I missed anything).*

N: *(pauses)* The noise-cancelling feature helps [me]. *(I expected this answer as I asked the previous question. After he responded, I wanted him to explain his response. So, I will ask him for an explanation in my next question).*

M: [What do you mean by] noise-cancelling feature?

N: I mean it blocks out noise and helps me focus.

M: How does music affect your state of mind as you exercise in the gym in terms of mental and physical stress? *(I asked about another consequence of music on his exercise behavior).*

N: Like I said I'm more focused that's it. *(I felt his response did not answer my question. So, I will press for clarification in my next question).*

M: Okay, but does it clear your mind as you exercise in the gym?! *(I spoke in a slightly louder and more hurried tone to express the importance of answering the question).*

N: Yeah, it does. It keeps my mind from thinking of other things.

M: You just stated, it (i.e. music) keeps you from thinking of other things, [but at the same time,] you also stated that it keeps you focused. So, would you say that music distracts you from your sense of fatigue (i.e. an example of physical stress)?

N: Yeah, I guess. *(After receiving this response, I decided to ask questions to investigate potential connections between preferences in music and exercise behavior).*

M: Do you prefer using your own music or the gym's music? *(Based on his previous answers of listening to music in the gym and my experience with him as his friend and former gym partner, I assume he prefers his own music. However, for the sake of the interview, I will ask him to provide an explicit answer).*

N: My own, because I like it. *(He stared at me as if I asked a "dumb" question. He pursed his lips after answering the question).*

M: Do you find your own music to have a greater impact over your exercise behavior [compared to the the gym's music]?

N: Yeah.

M: And why is that [the case]? *(I want him to explain his reasoning).*

N: Because I'm listening to what I like and not music that's bad as fuck! *(I felt his response did not provide a sound argument for preferred music to have a greater impact over one's exercise behavior. So, I moved on to the next question).*

M: So, do you prefer lyrical or instrumental music as you exercise in the gym? *(I asked him another question on his preferred classification of music).*

N: A bit of both, but I don't really pay attention to them as I exercise. *(His reply surprised me. I was expecting him to state that the lyrics influence him to exercise more vigorously based on his previous response that it makes him exercise faster, but he did not give this response).*

M: What are your preferred genres of music as you exercise in the gym? *(I decided to ask questions to check the connection between genre and exercise behavior).*

N: Mostly hip hop.

M: Could you explain why do you prefer hip hop over other genres of music as you exercise in the gym?

N: I don't know, I prefer it because I grew up with it. *(I was unsatisfied with his response. So, I decided to rephrase the question slightly and say it slower).*

M: Would such a genre influence you differently as you exercise in the gym?

N: Yo, I don't know! The only reason I listen to it is because I like it! *(He expressed annoyance and turned over his right palm upwards as he shook his head sideways. I decided he would be able to provide further clarification for this question. So, I will move on to the next question).*

M: Is volume important to you as you exercise? *(I decided to ask questions to check the connection between volume and exercise behavior).*

N: ... my earphones cancel out a lot of the noise. So, I don't have to make it too loud. (*His answer surprised me*).

M: And if it (i.e. your earphones) did not have a noise-cancelling feature, then you would make it really loud? (*I want him to clarify that if his music preference would change if his earphones did not have the noise-cancelling quality*).

N: Yeah.

M: What is your preferred tempo in music (slow, moderate, fast)? (*I want to check if there is a potential connection between tempo and exercise behavior*).

N: In the gym, I like medium to fast. (*Due to time constraints of a ten-minute transcript, I stopped asking questions*).

Reflection

From the interview with Naeem, I was able to learn a lot about ^{the} role of music on male gym exercise. According to Naeem, music influences his exercise behavior by helping him focus, exercise longer, distracting him from his sense of fatigue, and relieving him of his worries outside of the gym for the duration of time he spends exercising. In the article, "Gendered spaces: The gym culture and the construction of gender," Thomas Johanson supports Naeem's claim that music helps an individual focus in their movements as they exercise (Johansson 36; Women in Gym Subculture 5). ^{Singular} Naeem's statement that music helps him exercise longer also coincides with my own testimony as a former insider at the Elite Gym. Furthermore, Naeem stated, music does not help him exercise faster or apply more strength as he runs or lifts heavier weights. It should be noted that his statement, in which he does not find music to help him

exercise faster, refutes my claim. Thus, I will need to collect more information through interviews and research articles to substantiate or reject Naeem's claims.

Moreover, the interview revealed potential connections between a male gym member's preferences and his exercise behavior. Naeem described, he believed the most effective music on his exercise behavior was the music he preferred. He identified this music with the following characteristics: hip-hop, sufficiently loud that he cannot hear any background noise, and medium to fast tempo. Unfortunately, the articles, which I previously used to support my papers, did not provide any information to substantiate or reject these claims. Therefore, further research will be required to determine whether or not there is a connection between a male gym member's music preferences and his exercise behavior.

During the interview, some of Naeem's responses surprised me. First, Naeem stated that he did not have a preference between lyrical or instrumental music as he exercised. Second, he did not experience the influence of lyrics over his thoughts, emotions, and behavior as he exercised. Third, Naeem preferred sufficiently loud music to block out background noise. I expected him to prefer listening to really loud music, but that was not the case. These surprises helped me track my own biases. The presence of bias from this interview indicates the potential for improvement in the way I study cultures, in the manner I frame my questions, and the types of questions I use to explore this topic to develop a better understanding of it.

In conclusion, Naeem's interview provided claims about music's role in male gym subculture. Specifically, it described two things: First, the manner by which music impacts male exercise. Second, potential links between music preferences and male exercise. In the future, I would like to repeat this interview with a larger number of gym members of the Elite Gym. Of

course, I hope to revise my questions to be easier to understand to avoid the difficulties Naeem faced to provide a proper response. In doing so, I hope to develop a more accurate view of music's impact on exercise behavior through studying the effects of music on the exercise behavior of male and female gym members.

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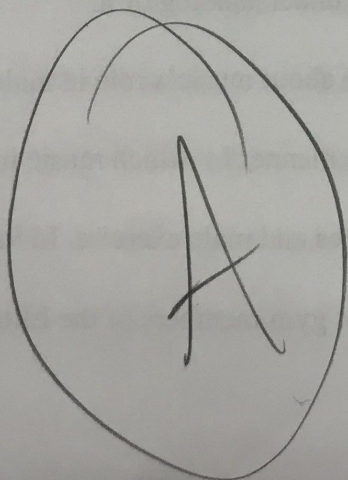
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