The Most Effective Use of Music for Male Exercise in Gym Subculture

The Problem

A common feature of the gym subculture is the incorporation of music in the gym either through speakers or headphones. Many gym members used music because they believed that it helps them exercise in different ways. There are many factors that are involved in music’s effect on male gym exercise. In my previous essay, *Music’s Role on Male Exercise in Gym Subculture*, my informant, Naeem, discussed his experience in gym subculture and the manner by which music impacted his ability to exercise in the gym (2-6). From our discussion, I determined the factors of music’s effect on male gym exercise, which are genre, volume, tempo, and personal selection of music. Additionally, Naeem described, the way by which music affected him. Specifically, he stated that music helped “... him focus [only on the exercise], exercise longer, … [distract] him of his worries outside of the gym, and … [relieve] him of his worries outside of the gym” as he exercised (*Music’s Role on Male Exercise in Gym Subculture* 7). Thus, I would like to investigate the most effective usage of music to benefit male gym members as they exercised in the gym.

Background

As I stated, in my previous essay, *Women in Gym Subculture*, “the Elite Gym is located at 782 Coney Island Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11218 in [the] Kensington” neighborhood (1). It consisted of one floor, one basement, and one backyard. According to the NYCityMap website, the gym was estimated to cover 3,360 square feet (City of New York). The street parallel to its location, Coney Island Ave, was a four-lane road with two lanes going in both directions. As a result, there was a lot of traffic that passes by the gym, but due to an absence of parking lots near the gym, it was very difficult to find parking space near it. Furthermore, the nearest subway station was located 7 minutes away from the B and Q train station at the southeast corner of Marlborough Rd & Cortelyou Rd, Brooklyn, NY. At this point, it can be assumed that most gym members either come to this gym because it was within reasonable walking distance from their homes or the B/Q train. However, upon considering the Elite Gym’s proximity to it’s competition, I arrived at a different answer, which I will discuss in the following paragraph.

The Elite Gym is a mixed gendered traditional neighborhood gym that has a mix of weight bearing and cardio equipment. According to the google map search of “gyms in kensington,” revealed sixteen locations, but upon further examination, it was noted that only three other locations provided similar services to the Elite Gym (Google Maps). The other locations were either dojos to practice martial arts or yoga studios. Only three other locations provided similar services to the Elite Gym. They were Planet Fitness, Retro Fitness, and NYC Fitness Club. All of them were located twenty-five minutes away on foot away from the Elite Gym. The first two gyms were corporate gyms, located next to each other, and nine minutes away from the nearest subway. This subway ran on the B/Q tracks. Additionally, they had a greater customer base and provided more services than the Elite Gym. Since, these two gyms were also close to the same train line as the Elite Gym, then these gyms were more likely to attract customers that take the train to reach the gym since they provide more services at the same or lower cost. The last gym was located 22 minutes away from the nearest B/Q train station. Hence, the Elite Gym was not likely to attract customers that use the B/Q train, rather they are likely to attract customers that live within walking distance.

The moment I entered the Elite Gym, I noted features of the gym based on my senses (*Fieldnotes #2* 1). The most obvious feature was the loud music being played from the speakers. The gym’s music genres were limited to hip hop and rock. Other than the music, I noticed the absence of any distinct smell in the gym. As I looked around, I saw many people exercising with a variety of equipment. Most of the gym members consisted of males in both of my fieldwork observations (*Gym Subculture* 4; *Women in Gym Subculture* 3). Therefore, I focused this investigation to study how to maximize music’s benefit on male gym exercise. This investigation connects to the larger issues of gender and music in gym subculture. For this investigation, I suggest the examination of the changes in male exercise behavior in response to the manipulation of different aspects of music used in the gym. The collected data will be used to determine the manipulation of music’s aspects that provides the maximum benefit to male exercise in the gym.

As a former gym member of the Elite Gym, I used my past insider experience to develop questions to interview Naeem, a current gym member of the Elite Gym, to discuss music’s role in gym subculture in my previous essay, *Music’s Role on Male Exercise in Gym Subculture*. His responses were used as a basis to explore the problem in this research proposal by focusing on the effects of genre, volume, tempo, and use of personal music as participants exercise.

This paper will use four sources to discuss the effects of aforementioned factors of music on male exercise. First, I will use Anne Colley’s article, “Young People’s Musical Taste: Relationship With Gender and Gender-Related Traits,” to discuss genre. Second, I will use Jasmin C. Hutchinson’s and Todd Sherman’s article, “The Relationship Between Exercise Intensity and Preferred Music Intensity,” to discuss volume. Third, I will use Costa I. Karageorghis’ and Leighton Jones’ article, “On the Stability and Relevance of the Exercise Heart Rate–Music-Tempo Preference Relationship,” to discuss tempo. Fourth, I will use David M. Greenberg et al.’s article, “College Students' Usage of Personal Music Players (PMP) during Exercise,” to discuss the use of personal music compared to no music. The information from these articles will be used to determine the solution to this research proposal’s problem.

Literature Review / MLA Annotated Bibliography

**Males Preferred Music Genres**

In the article, “Young People's Musical Taste: Relationship With Gender and Gender‐Related Traits,” Anne Colley described and compared, the music genre preferences of males and females against each other. There were 208 participants that contributed to this study (2039). This group consisted of 110 females and 98 males (2043). Each participant completed a questionnaire from which Colley collected information to construct her research paper. Colley constructed five tables to present the dense results of her research. In table 1, she provided the average ratings of  males and females for liking each genre (2044-2045). In table 2, Colley showed zero-order correlations between professional music training, gender identity, and genre to identify potential relationships (2045-2046). In table 3, she identified significant predictors that contributed to rating a particular genre more or less favorably (2046-2047). It explained the differences between the ratings of males and females on music genres. In tables 4 and 5, Colley classified the genres as sophisticated, traditional, heavy, rebellious, or chart pop to identify relationships between genre and gender (2046, 2048, & 2049).

There were some weaknesses in Colley’s paper. First, she did not provide the specific list of songs that she used to determine each participants’ preferences. As a result, the reader cannot verify whether or not, Colley presented the correct music genres to her participants. Second, she did not mention the effects of tempo and volume across different songs as uncontrolled, which were uncontrolled variables that may skew her results. Colley’s omissions are troubling, because they may result in weaknesses in my research proposal that relies on her study’s results on genre preferences for males.

Males prefer listening to genres that they find enjoyable to help them exercise. Colley’s description of male preferences for music and likeness for each genre will be helpful towards to determining the most effective usage of music to benefit males as they exercise. Specifically, her research listed the males preference for genre on average, from most preferred genre to least preferred genre, as rock, blues, rap, chart pop, reggae, jazz, classical, heavy metal, folk, country, and opera (Colley 2045). Both Naeem and I preferred to listen to rap as we exercised, because we believed that music can benefit us in our ability to exercise (*Music’s Role on Male Exercise in Gym Subculture* 1, 5). Although, our favorite genre of hip hop does not conform with the majority of participants’ view in Colley’s data (i.e. rock). Our preference in genre did not conflict with Colley’s data. In fact, hip hop was listed as the third most preferred music genre for males on average. Naeem stated, he did not know if genre influenced him as he exercised; however, he said that hip hop would help him  “focus, exercise longer, … [distract] him from his sense of fatigue, and … [relieve] him of his worries outside of the gym for the duration of time he spends exercising” (*Music’s Role on Male Exercise in Gym Subculture* 5, 6). Since Naeem and I believed that preferred genre helps males exercise in the gym, I propose the incorporation of testing the preferred genre’s ability to influence male exercise. In doing so, I will be able to come closer to determine the most effective of music to benefit male gym exercise.

**Male Preferred Volume**

In the article, “The Relationship Between Exercise Intensity and Preferred Music Intensity,” Jasmin C. Hutchinson and Todd Sherman discussed the effects of self-selected volume and its perceived usefulness as individuals exercise. They expected to see individuals to exercise faster in response to increasing the music’s volume. Hutchinson and Sherman also wanted to compare the gender preferences in selecting volume as they exercised. In this study, there was forty-two participants that consisted of twenty-three males and nineteen females that listened to music as they exercised (Hutchinson & Sherman 194-195). Each participant received a headset to listen to the music. The music’s volume were set at sixty decibels (dB). The volume, rate of perceived exertion (RPE), and perceived usefulness of music were recorded every minute. Their heart rate was recorded every fifteen seconds in units of beats per minute (bpm). Hutchinson’s and Sherman’s test showed a correlation between the RPE of recreational exercisers and volume overtime (Hutchinson & Sherman 198). More importantly, their results showed participants exercised faster as the volume increased in eight out of nine recorded intervals in Table 1 (Hutchinson & Sherman 195). This result applied to both males and females (Hutchinson & Sherman 191). Thus, proving a positive relationship between preferred volume and exercise ability with a preference of louder music.

Two weaknesses were present that reduces the validity of Hutchinson’s and Sherman’s paper. First, the table recorded only nine of the eleven minutes of the participants exercising. The omission of the remaining two intervals could have provided valuable information to support or reject the authors’ argument. Second, the authors did not explain the reason behind the one recorded interval in which there was a slight decrease even though the music’s volume peaked. Fortunately, these omissions do not seem to pose a significant problem to the information I will rely on to develop an answer for my research proposal’s problem.

Hutchinson’s and Sherman’s results from their study clearly supported the existence of the positive relationship between the male preference for increased volume with faster exercise (191). Although, Naeem stated that he exercised faster as he listened to music, he implied his preferred volume did not have a significant impact on his ability to exercise (*Music’s Role on Male Exercise in Gym Subculture* 6). As a result of this conflict in information between the research study and my informant, I propose the manipulation of the music’s volume as the male participants listen to music for the duration of their exercise as part of my research proposal.

**Male Preferred Tempo**

In their article, “On the Stability and Relevance of the Exercise Heart Rate–Music-Tempo Preference Relationship,” Costas I. Karageorghis and Leighton Jones discussed tempo’s impact on exercise ability. They expected to see two results (Karageorghis & Jones 300). First, a cubic relationship between music’s tempo and exercise intensity (i.e. based on heart rate to reflect exercise speed). Second, an increase in tempo would lead to an increase in positive psychological effects such as increased focus on exercise movements. Karageorghis and Jones tested twenty-two participants, which consisted of eleven males and eleven females, in this study (299). They moved on a treadmill at six different speeds as they listened to music. The participants moved at a speed that correlates with that an increased heart rate of 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, and 90%. According to their results, the graph between tempo and exercise intensity showed a quadratic relationship rather than a cubic relationship. Secondly, the results showed that there was no significant difference between listening to low, mild, or fast tempo music as you exercise. However, there was a significant difference between listening to no music and slow, mild, and fast tempo music in terms of producing faster exercise. Furthermore, there was no significant difference of tempo’s impact between males and females (304). Therefore, this indicated music has a positive effect on exercise ability, but tempo does not influence it.

There were two weaknesses in this paper. First, the identification of slow, mild, and fast tempo music was very subjective. Although, Karageorghis and Jones provided the ranged measurements for their perceived interpretations of these three tempos. Many readers or participants may disagree with their identification of slow, mild, or fast tempo music. Since, these terms to state that there was no difference between them in terms of their effects on exercise ability was somewhat misleading. Specifically, this statement designated all subjective interpretations of the three tempi as having no noticeable effect on exercise ability. Since, there are different interpretations, the authors may be accused of misrepresenting their results. Secondly, the Karageorghis and Jones addressed that they did not take into account the effects of the lyrics in the music, which may have skewed the results to study tempo’s effects on the participants’ exercise ability (308). Therefore, an investigation on tempo’s effects on male exercise ability should be repeated while maintaining controlled conditions to prevent the lyrics from skewing the results.

I will propose a different test to study tempo’s effect on exercise ability. Specifically, I will test the effect only on male participants listening to the same song at the slow, mild, and fast tempi as they exercise. In doing so, I will prevent the influence of lyrics from skewing the results. Furthermore, in order to distinguish the effects of each different tempo, I will test each of them on separate days.

**Male Preferred Personal Music Selection**

In their article, “College Students’ Usage of Personal Music Players (PMP) During Exercise,” David Barney et al. discussed the effect of listening to personal music rather than gym provided music on their ability to exercise. Their study used 184 participants, which consisted of 98 males (53% of all participants) and 86 females (47% of all participants). Although Barney et al.’s study did not use the exact same amount of male and female participants, they used a chi square test to determine whether or not gender distribution of males and females was fair (24). The chi square test value was 0.78. Since the value was very small, Barney et al. argued the results from their experiment will be a fair representation for both genders. Furthermore, the researchers collected data from the surveys, which were completed by the participants. Barney et al. expected to see a correlation between listening to personal music and its positive effects on exercise behavior. According to their results, the participants expressed their belief that tempo benefited their ability to exercise (24-25). Specifically, 81.5 % (i.e. 150 out of 184 participants) said, it made them exert more effort in exercising,  77.8% (i.e. 143 out of 184 participants) said, it made exercise easier, 73.4% (i.e. 135 out of 184 participants) said, it helped them exercise longer, and 65.2% (i.e. 120 out of 184 participants) said, it made them enjoy the activity. Also, 60% of the participants that admitted they would only use personal music in one out of every two times that they exercised in the gym. According to this portion of participants, in response to questioning them whether or not they believed using personal music had a better impact on their ability to exercise; 53.3% replied, yes, 26% said, no, and 21% replied that they were uncertain (24). Since two times the number of people believed that music helped them exercise compared to the quantity of participants that did not think so, I argue Barney et al.’s study supports the idea that personal music has a positive impact on exercise behavior.

There was one weakness in Barney et al.’s paper. First, they did not mention if the gyms played music through their speakers. As a result, even if the control of no personal music was being used by the participants, the background music may affect their ability to exercise. As a result, the reader will be uncertain whether or not the effects on participants listening to personal music was compared against participants listening to background music or no music.

Barney et al.’s study has shown using personal music is more beneficial than listening to music as the participants exercised. Since, I need to know whether or not personal music (i.e. preferred music) is more beneficial on exercise ability than background music (i.e. random music). Then, I will implement a comparison of personal music’s and background music’s effects on male gym exercise in my investigation. In doing so, this answer will bring me closer to determining the most effective use of music to benefit male gym exercise. Specifically, I will be able to determine either favored music or random music was more beneficial to male gym exercise.

Objectives

**Genre-related objectives**

Music genre is one of the four aforementioned factors that will go under investigation to determine the most effective usage of music to benefit male gym exercise. In order to determine if genre benefits male gym exercise, we will need to test it against a control. Ultimately, the solution to this research proposal’s problem requires the determination of the most effective genre for male gym exercise. Therefore, multiple genres will be needed to be tested against each other. Since, there are too many genres to feasibly test them all. I propose to test the eleven music genres, which Anne Colley provided information on male music preferences. These genres will be sufficient to determine which of the eleven genres is most effective at benefiting male gym exercise. These genres are rock, blues, rap, chart pop, reggae, jazz, classical, heavy metal, folk, country, and opera. This experiment should be performed with multiple trials for both the control of male gym members that will exercise without music and the experimental groups of male gym members that will exercise while listening to a particular music genre. I anticipate that all participants will express listening to rock, rap, and heavy metal genres has benefited them for the duration of their exercise, because they make them feel excited. Furthermore, I expect every group to express this prediction in terms of enabling them to experience a greater focus on the exercise movements, an increased length of time they spent exercising, momentary relief of mental stress outside of the gym, and distraction from physical fatigue.

**Volume-related objectives**

The effect of male’s preferred volume of music must be investigated to determine the most effective use of music in male gym exercise. Similar to Hutchinson’s and Sherman’s test, the male participants will be allowed to adjust their volume of music according to their preference as they exercise. The changes in music along with their exercise performance will be recorded to determine if an increase in volume contributes to improving a male exerciser’s ability to workout. I anticipate that males will exercise faster and for a longer period of time in comparison to the second to twelfth days when they were not given this option to be able to control the music’s volume as they exercised.

**Tempo-related objectives**

Karageorghis’ and Jone’s results have shown tempo does not benefit male gym exercise. Even so, I want to determine the most effective usage of music to benefit male gym exercise. Since tempo is a feature of music, I will investigate whether or not it impacts male gym exercise. The effect of tempo will be tested by playing the same music at different tempos. I anticipate to see fast tempo has a positive effect on the participants’ ability to exercise.

**Preferred music-related objectives**

Barney et al.’s paper has shown personal music benefits male gym exercise. In order to determine whether or not a difference in the use of personal music or background music impacts male gym exercise, I will test this comparison. I anticipate to see personal music being more beneficial than background music in male gym exercise.

Methods

**Overview**

The test on genres’ effects on male gym exercise will be carried out in a lab or controlled setting that fits 550 treadmills. These treadmills will be equipped with software to record the speed and length of time exercisers move on the treadmill. The test will last eighty days. In this experiment, the slow tempo music will be ranged between 125-130 bpm, the mild tempo music will be ranged between 131-135 bpm, and the fast tempo music will be ranged between 136-140 bpm. The volume for all music will be set initially at 70 dB. The control will be tested on the first day. On the second to eightieth days, the participants will exercise twice a day under different conditions for different purposes.

**Testing the effect of genre, low tempo music, and background music**

On the first day, at 10 am, eleven groups of fifty male gym members each, from age eighteen and above, will be prepared to run on a treadmill at 5.0 mi/hr for as long as they can. They will rest twenty minutes before the exercise to make sure they will all be able to exert themselves to their maximum ability. Next, they will equip headsets with CD players that play no music. Each group will be assigned a letter from A to K to differentiate them. Each participant will occupy a treadmill. Additionally, each treadmill has a capped speed of 5.0 mi/hr, and it will record how long a gym member can sustain running at that speed. When a participant completes their run, the treadmill will display the maximum length of time they were able to run at 5.0 mi/hr. Next, each gym member will fill out a form to record their experience of running on the treadmill at 5.0 mi/hr without music. Within the same day, each group will repeat this exercise and fill out a form at 8 pm. These two exercises will be treated as a control. The repetition allows us to compare the two trials to check the reliability of the results. For each gym member, if the two recorded times for each run are close, then the results are reliable. Otherwise, the results cannot be trusted.

On the second day, at 10 am, the eleven groups will repeat the same test, but this time each group will receive headsets with a CD player that plays slow tempo music of a particular genre. They will listen to this music at the same volume as they exercise. Each group will be assigned a particular music genre. Just like the first day, they will rest for twenty minutes before occupying a treadmill. Then, the participants will exert themselves to run on the treadmill for as long as possible at 5.0 mi/hr. Afterwards, they will complete a form to note down their experience of running on the treadmill at 5.0 mi/hr while listening to a particular genre. At 8 pm, all eleven groups will repeat this trial for the second time.

On the third to twelfth days, the participants will repeat the same activity twice a day and fill out the same form as they listen to a different genre as they exercise for each day. Finally, a table will be constructed to compare the average length of time that each group spent running while listening to different genres or no music.

The purpose of collecting data on this portion of the experiment is to determine the most beneficial genre on male exercise. Another reason for collecting this data is to compare the effects of researcher provided music at slow tempo against the effects of researcher provided music at mild and fast tempos.

**Testing the effect of self-selected volume**

On the thirteenth to twenty-third days, the participants will repeat the same activity they performed on the second and twelfth days. The only differences will be the participants will be able to manipulate the volume of their music as they exercise and the CD player will have software installed to record the participants’ change in preferred volume as they exercise for every 1-minute interval.

The changes in preferred music volume will be coordinated with the respective exerciser’s movement speed and length of time exercising to determine volume’s impact on male exercise. Specifically, I will determine if an increase in preferred volume results in faster and longer exercise for males than music that is set at a standard volume that cannot be changed as observed on the second to twelfth days.

**Testing the effect of mild and fast tempo music**

On the twenty-fourth to thirty-fourth days, the participants will repeat the same activity as the second to twelfth days. The only difference is that the music will be artificially modified to play at mild tempo. In doing so, the same songs are being played through their headsets. As a result, this portion of the test will introduce only one new independent variable of mild tempo’s effect on male gym exercise. At the same time, it can be compared to the data collected on the second to twelfth days in which the same music was played at slow tempo.

On the thirty-fifth to forty-fifth days, the participants will repeat the same activity as the twenty-fourth to thirty-fourth days. The only difference is that the music will be artificially modified to play at fast tempo. As a result, the effects of the same songs of eleven different genres at the slow, mild, and fast tempi on male gym exercise will be tested.

The purpose of this portion of the experiment is to collect data to compare the effects of mild and fast tempo music on male exercise ability against the same music’s effects at slow tempo on male exercise ability. In doing so, I will determine the most beneficial tempo for the researcher’s provided (i.e. non-preferred) music.

**Testing the effect of personal music at slow, mild, and fast tempo**

On the forty-sixth day, the participants will bring in their seven songs for each genre from their personal selection of music. These songs will be checked by the researchers to verify they fit a particular genre. If there is any music that fails to meet the requirements of a particular genre, another song will be tested until they meet the requirements. If none of them meet the requirements, the participant will be called in the next day to show their personal selection of music. From which, the researchers will assist them to pick the appropriate music for each genre. The researchers will copy all the songs and modify them to play at slow, mild, and fast tempo.

On the forty-eighth to fifty-eighth days, the participants will repeat the same test as the one performed from the second to twelfth days. The only difference being the use of personal selection of music, modified to low tempo, in place of the researchers’ selection of music for each genre.

On the fifty-ninth days to sixty-ninth days, the participants will repeat the same test as the one performed on the forty-eighth to the fifty-eighth days. The only difference being the use of personal selection of music will be modified to mild tempo.

On the seventieth to eightieth days, the participants will repeat the same test as the one performed on the forty-eighth to the fifty-eighth days. The only difference being the use of personal selection of music will be modified to fast tempo.

The purpose of this portion of the experiment is to test collect data on the effects of the personal selection of music played at the slow, mild, and fast tempi on male exercise ability. This data will be used to compare with the data on non-preferred music of each genre at the slow, mild, and fast tempi on male exercise ability. It will also be used to determine which tempo produces the most beneficial effect on male gym exercise.

**Purpose of using focus groups**

In this study, I am using focus groups rather than in-depth interviews because I want to test the impact of preferred genre, volume, tempo, and personal music on male exercise. In doing so, I will collect data in the form of quantitative evidence to determine the most effective use of music to benefit male gym exercise. The problem with in-depth interviews they are heavily reliant on the words of the informants. These conversations do not provide objective evidence to support their claims. Therefore, I prefer to use focus groups to run tests to obtain objective evidence to determine the truth of the matter.

Conclusion

For the sake of determining the most effective usage of music, a number of tests were proposed to test the influence of genre, volume, tempo, preferred music, and non-preferred music on male exercise ability. In this research proposal, I expected rap, fast tempo, loud volume, personal music, and ability to manipulate the music’s volume would be most effective use of music to benefit male exercise in the gym. Since, the experiment only tested music’s effects on male exercise behavior, I only used research articles that provides reliable information regarding their impact. In doing so, I feel confident my research proposal will be able to answer it’s problem.

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