

# Ethnography paper essay



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(Insert Picture) Ethnography: A Study of the State University Recreation Center Introduction Health, as defined by the World Health Organization, is a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity”. When studying the concept of health and healthy lifestyles, from a sociological standpoint, this definition remains the basis for all perspectives. Health is not only a biological state, but a bounty of social occurrences, therefore ultimately being the result of a one’s social environment.

In our ethnography study of a common gym environment, this sociological concept of healthy lifestyles heavily prevails, being derived from the location, the atmosphere, and the behaviors of the population within, along with the underlying theories of peer group socialization, peer pressure, and gender roles. The scene for our ethnography study was Valdosta State University Recreational Center, located on the Valdosta State Campus, a college settled in the city of Valdosta.

Through examination of observations and one-on-one interviews, common sociological aspects of healthy lifestyles come into play, along with quite a few minor concepts as well. First off, it is apparent that each person working out within the gym is there for a purpose: to become healthier. One’s health is not only the wellness of one’s overall physical and mental state, but it is a reflection of the social environment. Groups of people and individuals alike had set ways of going about their exercises, which were ultimately based off their surroundings.

For instance, most individuals were observed exercising with the accompaniment of a personal music device, one that only they can listen to. Even though the gym provided forms of entertainment, these people chose to use their own forms, keeping them isolated from the locations given entertainment as well as any further social interactions with other people. Meanwhile, groups of people fed off each other's social encouragement to both work out harder and longer than the said individual.

This is a prime example of not only the proven sociological side of healthy lifestyles, but also the impact of peer group socialization in the given environment. Then there is the prevalence of gender roles. As our observations state, most males were found in the strength training area, whereas most females were found in the cardiovascular and mats areas. These occurrences go hand-in-hand with society's views on men and women.

The man, being the strong, brute force, strength trains to be a crucial asset among his peer groups, and the woman, being the lean, beautiful half of mankind, uses the benefits of a cardiovascular workout to tone and shed the unwanted pounds. Again, these stereotypical roles are birthed from the whole of our society, and relating back to peer pressure as well. Both genders feel the need to play out the part they are handed. Overall, this ethnography study shows that the basis of healthy lifestyles depends on several sociological theories.

Health doesn't only depend on whether one is physically or mentally "sick" or "well", it is more a product of one's social occurrences and surroundings. The influence of society on one's healthy actions can make or break any

chances at a potentially healthy lifestyle, as each and every one of us are subject to not only our own routines, but the pressures, the support, and the standards of our peers and our world. Literature Review Our ethnographic field study concentrated on Valdosta State University's Student Recreation Center.

We chose to focus on the gym aspect of the recreation center from a women's perspective. We wanted to find out if women are intimidated working out in areas with men. Do they chose to workout in areas where there are not men in the area, or does the presence of men not bother them at all? In order to answer these questions we had to do outside research at the topic in general before conducting our own ethnographic field study. All of our research centered on women working out in a gym or a women's perspective of working out in a gym. Our research proved opinions we had already formed before conducting the research.

The majority of our research revealed the same underlying cultural issues. Women perform better or feel more comfortable working out where there is not a male presence (Frost, 2011). While the male presence does not stop the majority of women from working out at a gym, women do feel more comfortable without them there. They are not as afraid to do a new workout or routine and they are not scared of getting a little sweaty. This article sums up the idea we most wanted to focus on with this study. Why do women become easily intimidated by men in a gym setting?

Is it something they do around other women or are they self-conscious about working out regardless if men or women are around? Our research has

provided us with the ideas to move forward with our study. We hope to find out why women suffer these insecurities and if the layout of the gym or how it is designed makes them more comfortable (Sassatelli, 1999). Method Since part of a healthy lifestyle would be working out, we decided to conduct observations at the schools' Rec Center. We conducted our research by ethnographic study using field notes and observations to document gym behavior.

We focused on Valdosta States College students who were working out at the gym. We interviewed female students who were busy in their workout routine, picking them at random. We paid close attention to those who went from machine to machine, as if following a specific workout plan. We took down their names, year in school, major and how often they worked out each week. Ethnography means trying to understand behavior and culture by going out and talking to people wherever they are, while they're doing whatever it is they do. It means entering someone's world for a while, be it a couple of hours or a couple of days.

We also conducted some of our research through articles that each group member collected and analyzed. We selected the articles based on similarity to our initial research. Some of the articles discussed the importance of how gyms are organized directly relates to whether or not the participants can stick to their fitness regimes. Another one examines whether or not "women only gyms" have feminized the historically masculine gym. The authors examine everything from the physical layouts of the gyms, the customer procedures and interactions, the use of the machines, and how employees interact with others.

The first article is very useful in our ethnography study of the Student Recreation Center. It points out to us that the layout is very important to consider in a fitness facility and we can study what areas of the center are the most popularly occupied. The second article proves that it was useful in our field study because it provided us with something to compare the coed Student Recreation Center and how women and men interact there to that of an only women gym. There are stereotypes around gyms that they are for men only or women who work out there are only there to socialize or meet men.

The article provided insight into those very questions. The observations we conducted were able to support the articles and prove of how valid and reliable such research methods can be. Findings Through are ethnographic field study we found many of our preconceived notions to be accurate. As a group of three women conducting a feminist approach to working out we were able to use our own experiences and feelings towards working out in a coed student recreation center. We assumed that are personal experiences and feelings towards working out would either be proved in conjunction with our opinions or quite the opposite.

By participative observations and two interviews we were able to develop an understanding of how the majority of women felt while working out. The two interviewees were both women college students. Kathryn was a user of the recreation center but going to work out was not a main focus of hers. She is described as being of an average weight and height but not at her physical best. She reported to Jessica that this does inhibit her while she is at the

gym. It is not so much a gender issue she has but more of her current physical ability that intimidates her workouts.

This introduces our first cultural theme. Physical Ability As a result of one of our interviews we found that it is not necessarily working out in front of other people or men that inhibit women but instead it is their current physical ability. Kathryn reported that because she is not in peak physical condition she is often intimidated at the gym and self-conscious of her performance. In addition to our interview we also observed this cultural theme. People who tended to be less physically fit, regardless of gender, worked out in areas that were less populated by more physically fit students.

In one observation, I observed a woman move machines because she was on a treadmill next to a girl who was running at a very vigorous pace. She moved to an elliptical machine that was isolated from the other machines and not near anyone who was working out. This observation and interview show that women are self-conscious when working out if they cannot keep up with the people around them. They have a fear of looking ‘stupid’ or ‘out of shape.’ This relates to our earlier notion that women are intimidated at the gym. Our second interview conducted was with

Courtney who is an employee at the student recreation center. Not only does she work in a gym but she is also very physically fit. She is not intimidated by her surroundings at the gym, she does not mind if people observe her while she is working out. This introduces our second cultural theme, increased confidence with being physically fit. Increased Confidence with Physical Fitness Not only through our interview with Courtney but also through our

observations we found that people who are in great physical condition have no problem being seen while they workout.

They like to be in areas with a lot of traffic and don't mind being surrounded by other students. In our observations we also found that these people tend to be much more social. They go up to people and start conversations or give pointers to other people in the gym. They walk with their head held high and almost with an attitude that they are better than others who are less physically fit. You can tell that exude confidence. They are not afraid to do workouts that are unusual or switch between many machines. They don't mind brining attention to themselves; in fact it boosts their workout.

They thrive on being observed. It gives them that extra kick they need to get through their workout. Throughout our ten observations we found when people tended to go to the gym and that the time of day played into how dedicated they were to their workout. This introduces our third cultural them, time of day and dedication to working out. Time of Day and Level of Dedication to Working Out It was important for us to go to the gym at various times throughout the day. We needed to be able to conduct an accurate portrayal of when people attend the gym and what motivates them to go at that specific time.

Early in the morning, when the gym first opens, it is sparsely populated. There is an average of about 15 people in the entire recreation center that early in the morning. There are a few dedicated students working out but the majority of the people are faculty or staff at the university who would prefer working out before they have to report to work at 8am. The people in this



group of time are not social. They are here to get their workout in before the day takes over. There are smiles in passing but nothing more. Another time of day that we observed was the 5pm to 7pm range.

This would be the busiest time of the recreation center. You usually have to wait to get a cardio machine and once you move to weights or the mats you have to wait your turn as well. This time is heavily populated with students. Many conversations take place and an hour workout usually ends up taking two because of the social aspect. Our last time that we observed was the closing hours of the gym, around 9pm until closing at 11: 30pm. This time frame largely relates to the earliest time frame. However, instead of it being mostly faculty and staff there are more students at this time.

There is a less sense of urgency in getting your workout done within the hour but the social aspect is far less than during the most popular time. Through these observations we found that working out at different times of the day bring about different types of people and motivation levels. While observing the recreation center for the past few weeks the setting of the gym began to play a role in our study. The layout of the gym played a part in where people chose to workout. This introduces our fourth and final cultural theme, layout of the recreation center and the people it attracts.

Layout of the Recreation Center and the People it Attracts They gym is made up of several areas. On the first floor are the basketball courts, racquetball courts, aerobics room, rock wall, and swimming pool. On the second floor there is a track that goes around the basketball courts, a large weight room with the cardio machines next to it, and then a free weights area with a few

machines off to the side. The first floor tends to be occupied by groups of people. The first floor provides activates for teams or groups, such as a pick-up game of basketball. The aerobics room attracts mostly women with very few men attending the classes.

The second floor tends to be more segregated and separated. The cardio machines are a free for all for both genders but the ellipticals are heavily occupied by women. The weights machines are where almost all of the men spend the majority of their time; very little you will find women working out amongst the men on the weight machines. The free weights off to the side are where women who want to use weights mostly go. It is secluded, if you might not know exactly what you are doing or are not in peak physical condition this area provides a more private setting with less traffic.

The layout of the gym provides almost everyone with an area they can go where they feel most comfortable. People in great physical attention tend to be in the areas that are more open while people who are just starting to work out or work on their physical fitness tend to migrate to the areas that are more secluded. Our findings were in accordance with our initial assumptions. We wanted to see if gender played a role in how people worked out but our findings showed us that it's not so much gender that affects someone's workout but their physical ability.

We were correct in assuming people who are at their peak physical condition are very confident in their workouts and little intimidates them. The time of day also played a role in the type of people the gym attracted. Early morning workouts tended to be reserved for the more serious and older crowd who

may have had a busier schedule. The late afternoons and early evening workouts were reserved for almost all students and their dedication levels ranged from beginner to experienced but it overall proved a time of social activity.

The late night workout time was reserved for students who just now are making it to the gym and adults. It showed to be a calmer type of work out with no rushing but also little social interaction. The layout of the recreation center also showed what type of people liked to work out in certain areas and why they chose those areas. The more physically elite liked the open areas with a lot of people while the less physically fit chose areas with very little people in attendance. Discussion Conclusion