

**Meeting Up With The Worlds Of Exercise And Rave At The Start Of  
The Twenty-first Century: A Story About Young People, Body  
Culture, Health And Identity In Changing Times**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John Moores  
University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**June 2005**



## Acknowledgements

Where to begin...

There are so many truly wonderful people who have helped sustain me through, what turned out to be a rather long and somewhat traumatic process.

A big thanks to those who felt sufficiently motivated to fill in questionnaires and to those people who allowed me to enter into their lives' for more sustained periods...all in the name of research!

Thank you Lindsey for your on-going support. You are an inspiration.

Henning. Thanks for providing some support when the boat looked like sinking. And also I'd like to thank Dave and Andy for the timely and precious feedback.

Thanks also to all my family and friends. You know who you are. Respect!

And also a big shout-out to Jan. You are such a precious soul mate. I can't thank you enough for all that you have done over the last...how many years? You are the best!

“...Keep on keeping on.”



## *Abstract*

The relationship between young people, body culture, health and identity has received much attention in recent years. With a few notable exceptions, research has tended to focus on traditional practices such as sport and exercise. Nevertheless, the post-modern climate has given birth to a multitude of alternative body practices, many of which the young have played an active role in creating and developing. This project attempts to explore some of this post-modern landscape, focusing on exercise and comparing it with an alternative youth constructed phenomenon called ‘raving’ or ‘clubbing,’ which emerged at the end of the 1980s, in what is regarded as a particularly influential juncture of post-industrial life and young adult alienation.

The thesis is divided into two distinct research phases. The first was informed by positivistic epistemology and utilised a questionnaire format to ‘map’ some of the cognitive and mental health indices of the respective body cultures. Some notable differences were highlighted. Enjoyment derived from exercise was found to be significantly predicted by general life (or dispositional) variables (contributing 23 of the 45% of explained variance). In dance, dispositional factors were not significant suggesting that this activity is relatively free from the rules and demands of general life. What is more, the social support derived from dance environments was found to exert a significant positive influence in predicting enjoyment ( $p < .05$ ).

The second phase developed out of a critique of the first study. It was felt that positivistic epistemology wasn’t adequate enough to comprehend exercising and clubbing as meaningful, embodied, living phenomena. As a rejoinder, the second phase adopted an ethnographic methodology and employed narrative forms of representation to investigate the worlds of exercise and rave. In more detail, the researcher’s personal experiences and those of co-participants were explored and portrayed using a variety of narrative genres (e.g. auto-ethnography and ethnographic fiction), so as to create more embodied and dialogical research ‘stories.’

Set against the backdrop of post-modern times, the implications of these cultural practices, in constructing contradictory bodies and identities within the young adult population are discussed.

**Keywords:** Exercise, Dance, Youth, Identity, Health, Narrative knowing



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# Chapter One



## **1. Body culture in changing times**

### **1.1 Young people, body culture, habitus and identity**

If the bodily experience and practice of time and space in everyday life—including work, sport, dance, games and festivities—is the base of societal processes and contradictions, then sport is not only an ideology present on the surface of symbolic culture nor an organized system and institution only featuring as part of society's super-structure. Instead, as a ritual of 'the social body', it is deep rooted in the material fundamentals of society, figuring patterns of work and even prefiguring revolutionary changes (Eichberg, 1998, p.162).

As the basis of social practice, human bodies are engaged in life forming routines or 'habitus' (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; 1990; Eichberg, 1993a; 1998; Elias, 1978; 1982; Foucault, 1973; 1977; Gleyse, 1998; Mauss, 1973; 1979; Vigarello, 1995; Whitehead, 1933). These habits give a certain, rhythm, shape, colour and meaning to the life and times of the people.

In modern times, sport and exercise have been influential practices through which the *values* and *ideas* of society have become actualised in the concrete lives of the people (Eichberg, 1998; Gleyse, 1998). This becomes evident at an early age. In school, sport and physical education is not only used to explore ways of physical emancipation and identification, but also to en-culture a degree of control and discipline over bodily behaviours and attitudes (Foucault, 1977). Through physical education, the rules and ways of the social system are learnt (Hendry, 1992). As the child progresses through the education system, the bodily practices become more rule-bound and regulated, lose spontaneity, and for some, seem almost work-like, mimicking the ways of the system.

In the gymnasium and on the sports field, these games and bodily performances become a gateway through which children are judged, differentiated and measured along continuums, "I am first you are last." "Look at you, you throw the ball like a girl!" Here, the modern performance pyramid becomes actualised in the life of the child, preparing the young for life in the adult show. At the 'grass roots' level, school sports and physical education not only develop 'champions' and children 'fit' for society, but also frighten many young people away from exploring the potentials of their body in motion (Hendry,



1992), placing an over emphasis on masculine sensibilities and reinforcing cultural stereotypes (Hargreaves, 2000).

The stark reality is that from an early age, the traditional bodily practices engendered at school alienate as many young people from pursuing a life in motion as they do allow others to identify and develop a sense of esteem and belonging. If we were to briefly introspect upon our own childhood experiences, we will remember just how central the body is in the formation of identity. The body can be both, a source of happiness and joy, as well as shame and guilt. In the playground, the gymnasium and on the playing field, this is most evident.

Sport and exercise are highly influential cultural phenomena, whether we actively participate in them or not, we can't help but be influenced by them. We pick up the paper, we watch the news and we see the importance of sporting fixtures in the life and times of the people. Likewise, we can't escape exercise culture as our lives are influenced by healthy living and the drive to become fit, even if we are not sold on the idea ourselves. We do not have to look far to see how prevalent images of healthy living influence our appreciation of who we are.

As *the* dominant social bodily rituals of the industrial age, sport and exercise have acted as 'living metaphors' (Eichberg, 1998), through which the rules, regulations, values and beliefs—and more generally the ways—of western society have been made *bodily*, "We do it like this!" (Eichberg, 1998; Gaultung, 1982; Gleyse, 1998). Through these practices, the body has learnt to become disciplined, streamlined, productive, competitive and result bearing (Eichberg, 1998), as well as generating metaphoric knowledge about life (Eichberg, 1998; Johnson, 1987, Sparkes & Silvennoinen, 1999). We can speak of life being a 'race', of forging a 'career' and of being 'fit' for the race, moving the 'goalposts' and the like. In this respect, the significance of body culture<sup>1</sup> in understanding western cosmology runs deep. Indeed, it is through the enactment of social body

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<sup>1</sup> This term is not commonly used in Anglo-Saxon social science, yet it has a history in continental philosophy (see Brownell, 1995; Eichberg, 1995; 1998). It is used here, as a means of transgressing the taken for granted concept of physical activity, which would seem to have a very prescribed meaning and history in Britain (i.e. privileging sportive and fitness configurations and body concepts, as well as emphasising the *physicality* of the body over the emotional, intelligent, sensual etc.). Thus, 'body-culture' is used as a more encompassing term, which acknowledges the cultural relativity of the body, and the variety of corporeal leisure (and work) configurations, within society.



practices, that the abstract logic of modernity has been made tangible and real (Galtung, 1982).

In the last thirty years or so, there would seem to have been some dramatic changes in the bodily habits of society—an epochal shift? The story would seem to be changing, and this has been reflected in the plethora of alternative practices that have emerged in the post-modern climate. This is perhaps most evident in the recreational habits of younger people.

The ‘keep-fit’ boom in the 1970’s and 1980’s illustrate one way in which society, has attempted to come to grips with the post-modern world. In aspiring to follow such a straight-line path through life, by championing progress, achievement and linear growth, the modern tale has also revealed a rather dark shadow side. There cannot be continual achievement and growth without consequences. Where there is growth there also has to be limits of growth, there also has to be breakdown and illness. In renewing the fascination with ‘healthy living’, contemporary fitness culture has given people an avenue to deal with the stress, anxiety and strains of life. In its own way ‘keeping-fit’ has revealed some of the tensions and contradictions that have manifested within the body, in this period of societal upheaval. This is apparent when we consider the twin pillars of scientific culture and the market, which have enabled fitness culture to become so pervasive in the post-modern identity project.

On the one hand exercise has been justified by scientific discourse, as *the* adjunct to healthy living (Cooper, 1968; Goldstein, 1992; Ingham, 1985; Porter, 1999; White *et al.*, 1995), yet in everyday practice, the healthy and fit body has also become synonymous with the ‘body beautiful’ (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 1995). The focus on exercise as *the* path to healthy living, when understood in the hurl and burl of everyday life, has also highlighted some ‘dark’ tendencies, transpiring in tales being told of the relationships between exercise, eating disorders and addiction (e.g. Fahlberg, 1990; Fahlberg, 1993; Fahlberg *et al.*, 1992; Morgan & O’Connor, 1988; Wankel & Berger, 1990).

These contrasting pictures of fitness culture bring into question the taken for granted assumption, that exercise is synonymous with healthy living. In the life and times of young people, bombarded with images of the fit and the firm, the body has become an



important material in the crafting of identity, taking cues and inspiration from the diets and lifestyles of the rich and celebrated. Keeping-fit has been but one important cultural practice which has emerged in these post-modern times. But this is not the whole story. Other practices have emerged which have more radically brought into question young peoples' experiences of time and space.

In the post-industrial landscape we meet up with people roller-skating (and blading), and others skateboarding up half pipes in the park. People are hitting the high streets on their scooters, whilst their friends are at the beach flying their kites and playing frisbee. On the beach, these kite flyers meet up with surfers, body boarders and wind surfers and Frisbee players, as well as paintball players in the near-by forest, and a host of other alternative post-modern body cultures (e.g. Wheaton, 2004a; Rinehart & Sydnor, 1999). These all have different stories to tell, different from the traditional body cultural narratives. What of the elastic craze of Bungy jumping? Up in the sky, the anxious jumper waits to let-go. A little higher up in the clouds, a skydiver exits the plane—what a rush! Increasingly, people are willing to put themselves on the line in all manner of 'extreme' sports, in order to take responsibility for their lives (Moller, 2000).

These are just a few examples of alternative bodily experiences that have become mass phenomena in the post-industrial landscape. There are many more besides. The 1950 and 1960's beatnik and hippy counter-cultural movements marked the re-awakening of carnival and festival culture, as well as the migration of eastern contemplative practices such as yoga and meditation, bringing with them an oasis of 'stillness' for those perturbed by the stress society, in this age of anxiety. Other body cultures full of eastern promise have also migrated to the west. Practices such as tai-chi, karate, judo and a multitude of other martial and contemplative arts have taken root here, over the last few decades.

Through the emergence of these alternative body experiences, the modern illusion that sport can only be one of two things, for 'achievement' or 'fitness', has been brought into relief (Eichberg, 1998). These alternative bodily practices not only differ from the traditional ones in a behavioural sense, but they also bring with them, in the body, other ideas to do with morality, values and ways of being in (and with) the world. In creating an oasis of peace and contemplation, meditative practices have allowed people to



question the utility of traditional health and medicine, and to integrate into their lives alternative belief systems borrowing from Buddhism, Taoism, Shamanism and other exotic-indigenous philosophies (Eichberg, 1984).

Speaking of changes in the base of social life, other body cultures have found themselves in conflict with the established order, bringing into question in a more direct manner, the moral and ethical boundaries of societal life. If the traditional bodily rituals of society (such as sport and exercise) are 'changing age', no longer being the sole domain for the expulsion of *youthful* energies (Eichberg, 1998), then dance cultures may well shed light on some alternative, yet more *subversive* bodily energies that have endeared the youth in society, to move their bodies (Rust, 1969).

During the twentieth century, dance has provided young people with alternative avenues for bodily exploration. This interest in dance has manifested most visibly in the youth cultural crazes of late modernity. Whether it be teddy-boys, rockers, mods, beatniks, hippies, punks, skin-heads, disco boys and girls, hip-hoppers or ravers, these youth movements, have in some way or another, brought the young together, through the hedonistic mix of dance, music and drugs (e.g. Kohn, 1997). In doing so, the youth cultures of the late twentieth century have time and time again, brought the young into direct confrontation with the codes, values and ideas of the 'good life' as envisioned by the traditional and established order, bringing about numerous 'moral panics' of one sort or another (Osgerby, 1998; Kohn, 1997; Springhall, 1998).

Despite these moral panics and talk of the disintegration of the ethical fibre of society, youth culture experiments can also be understood as novel sojourns into the imagination—as subversive and innovative underground body projects (e.g. Eichberg, 1993b). Playing with 'difference' and 'novelty' suggests that youthful experimentation, is not *just* rebellion. This period of the life course reveals itself as a period of intense creative identity experimentation. Said another way, it is the young who, from one generation to another, remind society that 'it' can be done differently.

It has been noted that it is the creative energies of the younger generation within a given society, which helps to stem and reverse societal stagnation (Erikson, 1963; McKay, 1998; Whitehead, 1933). As a conservative tendency in society, people rely upon tradition, meaning they tend to look to the past for understanding and reassurance, yet it



is the young who often look somewhere else for inspiration. This is nowhere more apparent, when we look at the influence and potentials of the internet and digital cultures that are becoming more, integral and integrated within young people's life patterns and styles.

Contemporary dance culture exploded into the public's consciousness in the late 1980's, a highly influential period in the story of youth alienation (Osgerby, 1998). It was marked by an increase in state censorship and regulation of the mass media and sexual practices (Cloonan, 1996; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995), cast more generally under the the politics of bodily pleasure (Rietveld, 1998b). Like the ethical crises of previous youth phenomena, the rave revolution was accompanied by an outbreak of moral panics, perpetuated by scare mongering tactics of the tabloid press and the reactionary Conservative political agenda (Collin, 1997; Reynolds, 1998).

Regardless of the details which have permeated the debate surrounding dance culture, for a not too insignificant proportion of teenagers in today's society, clubbing is part of the initiation into young adult life in the post-industrial global matrix (Garratt, 1998; Gilbert and Pearson, 1999; Reynolds, 1998; Wright, 1994. For international perspectives; Canada see Fritz, 1999; Germany see Richard & Kruger, 1998; United States see Silcott, 1999. For a cross-cultural ethnographic analysis see, Reitveld, 1998a). As a cultural phenomenon, clubbing has *fundamentally* transformed the leisure habits of young people (e.g. Garratt, 1998; Gilbert & Pearson, 1999; Collin, 1997; Malbon, 1999). In the space of approximately 15 years, dance culture has turned from being perceived rather hysterically by the mainstream, as the latest in the long line of attacks on the morality of society, to being a fully fledged dinner guest of mainstream popular culture. Over such a short period of time, the influence of rave culture in the experience of young people has been profound, to say the least.

Young people are now just as likely to go out clubbing, as they are to play sport or to endeavour to become fit. If we are to speak of the fastest growing 'sport' over the last decade or so, I for one would have to resist the urge to say women's football, and say instead, dance culture. And this is interesting, as it marks a rather radical social breakthrough. The dance crazes of the second half of the twentieth century have shed some light on the significance of dance as a subversive bodily practice, specifically in



relation to the story of modernity. Folk dancing, in all its guises, is an integral part of the underground history of the body (Eichberg, 1993b), a history that runs beneath the surface of the modern Civilising project (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1986, Klein, 1995). This is a hidden hi-story of the body, which yearns to break free and to express repressed feelings, desires, dreams and emotions. This is a history that contemporary dance cultures have helped to bring to the surface and into the consciousness of the public, once more. It would appear that the drum, which had been banned since medieval times from social life, has once more returned as a healer of the people (Eichberg, 1998; Reitveld, 1998b).

Since the 1960's, the traditional leisure patterns of western society have been brought into living critique through the emergence of new body practices, as well as witnessing the return of much older 'pre-modern' rituals, energies and relationships, re-configured into post-modern patterns of body experience (Eichberg, 1993a, 1998). These transformations in the bodily base of society would seem to point towards a revolutionary shake up, in the way, young people experience time and space.

## **1.2 Introductory overview of the thesis**

The post-modern landscape is awash with traditional and more contemporary sports, conventional and alternative body cultures. Whilst the emphasis on the more traditional configurations of exercise and sport still remains within the academic field of recreation, leisure and sport science, recent initiatives have begun to redress this imbalance, recognising a variety of 'new' social bodily practices and youth oriented body cultures (e.g. paintball, hip-hop, skateboarding, windsurfing) that have emerged in this post-modern transition period (e.g. Rinehart & Sydnor, 1999; Rail, 1999; Wheaton, 2004). In doing so, these studies have shed some light on the re-configuring of sporting biographies (of young adulthood) at the start of the twenty-first century.

This thesis emerged out of this post-modern landscape, as an attempt to explore and compare two forms of post-modern body culture, one 'conventional'—gym and fitness culture—and one 'alternative'—rave and club culture—in relation to issues of health and identity in a young British (predominantly student) population. The thesis is split into distinct research phases, grounded in somewhat contradictory ontological and



epistemological assumptions, including a cognitive science approach in the first study as well as a much more radical embodied approach adopted in the second phase of research, which included the integration of my own experiences into the analysis, and presented findings using post-modern narrative genres (auto-ethnography and ethnographic fiction).

The first phase adopted a positivistic epistemology, grounded in a cognitive and behavioural theoretical framework. In more detail, this initial study utilised a transactional model of stress, coping and mental health (e.g. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This socio-cognitive model understands mental health as the, outcome of complex interactions involving the environment and the person, developing out of primary appraisal processes, which establish the risk for the individual, and gives rise to the utilisation of various coping initiatives, aimed at alleviating stress and facilitating wellbeing (Gill, 1994). From this perspective, exercise and dance can be conceived as two specific coping initiatives, and in this phase were explored and compared (alongside sport) in relation to mental health outcomes.

In implementing this theoretical model, a questionnaire methodology was adopted, which considered individuals' *dispositional* cognitive characteristics using various scales measuring, personality (Eysenck *et al.*, 1985), coping strategies (Edwards, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), social support (Russell & Cutrona, 1987) and general feelings of competence (Warr, 1990). These personality characteristics were considered alongside *context-specific* measures of social support and competence, to ascertain the relative influence of dispositional and contextual aspects of the appraisal process, in predicting feelings of enjoyment (Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991), as well as ascertaining whether these forms of body culture act as specific types of coping strategies. The questionnaire also included questions relating to dose-response characteristics (e.g. Godin & Shephard, 1985), borrowed from much earlier exercise psychology research (e.g. Dua & Hargreaves, 1992; Mertinsen *et al.*, 1989), to determine the relative influence of these factors when compared alongside psychosocial determinants.

The results from this questionnaire phase, helped to discern some of the differences in the psychosocial dimensions of dance and exercise culture in relation to the appraisal, coping and mental health process. However, towards the end of this phase of the research I began to question the quantitative approach and the cognitive framework adopted. I had



particular concerns as to what this approach *couldn't* explore or say when applied to complex cultural phenomena, and these concerns emerged primarily from my personal involvement with exercise and dance cultures, as well as through the reading and rehearsing of contemporary critiques of positivistic enquiry (e.g. Bain, 1995; Falhberg & Fahlberg, 1994; Markula *et al.*, 2001; Sparkes, 1992). Many of these lines of critique are re-inscribed in chapter three, where I began to reflect upon a variety of paths upon which social enquiry can be conducted, situated within the broader philosophical and social scientific hinterlands.

From this period of reflection and introspection, I felt that what positivistic epistemology left out, or rather, was unable to deal with (given its mentalistic bias), were the *embodied* and *intentional* dimensions of gym and club culture. In the concrete milieu of the *real* world, exercising and dancing are primarily, bodily, that is to say *sensuous* and *tacit* practices (e.g. de Garis, 1999; Nagbol, 1993; 1994; Sands, 2002), situated within contrasting cultural and historical frames of reference, replete with their own ideological narratives, involving bodies that move with different motivations and goals, as well as giving rise to bodily stories, which tell contradictory stories about young people and their quest to explore the meaning of (their) lives.

As a rejoinder to the ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent within the first study—whereby cognition is severed from the body and perceived as a biological substrate, and where research is conducted objectively, distancing the researcher from the researched world—I wanted to situate the second phase of the research within an embodied framework.

Drawing on the plethora of contemporary social body literature, and specifically the insights of Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1965; 1968), Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990) and Eichberg (e.g. 1993a; 1995; 1998), who have all advocated bringing the body “back in” to social analyses (Frank, 1991), the second phase began to take shape. These and other body theorists have contended that the *non-body* dominance has had the effect of, severing the links between human action and meaning, from the concrete, lived world.

As one of the forefathers of contemporary phenomenological thought, Merleau-Ponty argued that the basis of human subjectivity is grounded in the body's consciousness of itself, and that all meaning is primarily *bodily* in nature. Merleau-Ponty



argued that perception, can only occur from one place or another, or rather, one body or another. In moving towards a corporeal and practical philosophy, Merleau-Ponty observed that human beings have a dual role, which positions us as both the perceiver and the perceived, and it is this duality which enables us to make sense of others (i.e. in order *to* touch someone we must know what it means *to be* touched). Furthermore, how we go about comprehending others includes the integration of tacit non-verbal cues enacted through our body (e.g. Crossley, 1995). This leads towards an understanding of the corporeal world as inherently, inter-subjective, whereby the body-self is understood as sentient and meaningful, thoroughly intertwined and intermeshed with the world.

Where Merleau-Ponty brought attention to the body as the basis of cultural praxis and meaning, Pierre Bourdieu extended these phenomenological insights by developing an awareness of bodies as the *carriers* of social and historical knowledge. Using his concept of *habitus* (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; 1990), he argued that all bodies carry in them the ways of society, which enter the body through practice and repetition, and become for example, displayed in the way people, eat, dress, walk and think, as a learnt and *felt* way of being in the world.

Within the research on physical activity and body culture, I found the ideas of Henning Eichberg particularly insightful, in so far as they seemed to concur with the embodied perspectives outlined by the likes of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, bringing into my awareness the potential significance of body cultures, as paradigms of socio-cultural knowledge, and the carriers of rich and insightful social metaphors (Eichberg, 1998). Eichberg contends that by placing the body in a central analytical position, the cultural worlds of exercise and dance (for example) afford rich insights into the contents and contradictions of social life, giving rise to inter-cultural knowledge. Far from being trivial and *only* recreational in their scope, Eichberg has, throughout his many studies argued that the realms of sport, dance and play afford themselves as important analytical windows, through which to explore taxing questions of philosophical anthropology: What is man and what can we know? If identity is grounded in the bodily practices of society, I began to ask what exercise and dance cultures could say about young people within contemporary society and the changing faces of sociality?



These ideas forwarded by Eichberg's anthropological studies and his 'configuration concept' (incorporating geographical, cultural studies, sociological, historical and psychological perspectives), along with the insights of scholars such as Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu (as well as Arthur Frank, 1991; 1995), made a big impact on my thinking and were influential in re-orienting the project. Understandably, these insights weren't without implications to questions of methodology and representation. How to make research bodily? What Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu and Eichberg (amongst others) have argued, is that the re-orientation of social analyses to incorporate the body, has to also consider what embodiment means to the *practice* of research. They have suggested that as a rejoinder, research be grounded in the body's consciousness of itself, or rather, research needs to move beyond the Cartesian ocular-centric gaze, and contemplate what cultural body practices *feel* like, leading towards a more tacit, sensuous and experiential research programme. Here, bodily *know-how* and experiential learning move into the foreground, and the corporeal becomes insightful, as the lived intersection of biography, history, culture, emotions and social structures.

At this juncture I found an affinity with the burgeoning experiential ethnography literature, where researchers have traversed the boundaries between auto-biography and self-other ethnography, integrating their own body experiences into their analyses and accounts (e.g. Nagbol, 1993; 1994; Parrott, 2003; Sands, 1995; Sparkes, 1996). Given my own involvement as both an exerciser and dancer, I was drawn to these contemporary initiatives (which blurred the lines between auto and biography, self and ethnography), and was keen to use my personal body experiences and stories as a resource rather than deny this domain of self-knowledge, as had been the case in the first phase of research.

In more detail, an ethnographic methodology was adopted in the second phase, which incorporated fieldwork conducted in gyms and dance clubs and other significant cultural spaces (combining participation and participation-observation strategies), in-depth interviews as well as focus group discussions with participants. Keeping within the realms of embodied methodology and inquiry, the resultant data from the fieldwork and interviews, left me with the dilemma of how to place the researched bodies (mine and others) into ethnographic accounts, or rather: How to fit living bodies into the words?



How to embody communication? How to explore and portray experiential worlds of movement culture?

This dilemma lead me back into contemporary qualitative literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and post-structural debates concerning the twin crises of representation and legitimation (e.g. Sparkes, 2002; Denison & Markula, 2003), where scholars have contended that what we know is contingent upon how we know and how we write. Growing out of this narrative turn, a number of recent initiatives and research projects within the domain of movement culture and social theory have begun experimenting *doing* ethnography through various genres of writing and representational strategies (such as auto-ethnography, ethnographic fiction, poetics, fiction and reader's theatre amongst others), more able to capture the nuances, temporality and situatedness, of living, dialogical, *moving* bodies (e.g. Dennison & Markula, 2003). Thus, I decided to write up my ethnographic data as a series of body tales, which attempted to portray what life can be like in the gym and dance club (through the vestiges of my body), as well as explore some of the life stories of participants, using the narrative genres of auto-ethnography and ethnographic fiction, structured using a bricolage sensibility, where stories and experiences were woven together in a rather messy way.

By way of a 'conclusion' the last chapter, attempts to consider the findings from the second phase and discusses how exercise and dance as social identity practices (and the gym and nightclub as specific cultural spaces of enactment), conceive of the body in contradictory ways, giving rise to very different tales about young people, identity and society at the start of the twenty-first century.



# Chapter Two



## **2. Study One: Cognitive behaviourism, body culture and mental health**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Within the exercise and health sciences, much research has been devoted to generating an understanding of the relationship between physical activity and mental health. The dominant paradigm that has underpinned this type of research is known as cognitive behaviourism, which has focused primarily, on issues to do with behaviour change, the emotional outcomes triggered by acute bouts of physical activity as well as the influence of more prolonged regimens. Much of this type of research would seem to supplement findings that have purported to understand the physical effects (that is to say grounded in physiological and biological systems) of physical activity, which have been widely disseminated, both within the academic community and western society in general (see Shephard, 1994 for a review of this literature).

In general, research initiatives which have looked at the effects of body cultures on mental health have inferred that physical activity is an important coping strategy in which to reduce stress, anxiety, increase self-esteem as well as influence aspects of personality (Biddle, 1995; 2000). These observations have been grounded by empirical findings, discernible in different age groups and sexes, as well as in normal and clinical populations (I.S.S.P position statement, 1992; Biddle, 1995). In this respect, physical activity is seen as an important health behaviour and coping mechanism, which people use to alleviate stress in their lives (e.g. Berger, 1994; Gill, 1994; Long, 1993; Rostad and Long, 1996).

As in all domains of research, there would seem to be some important contemporary developments that have typified this field of research. Rejeski and Thompson (1993) have noted how interest in the psychology of physical activity was relatively slow up until the late 1970's. They attribute this to the mixed response placed on the importance of exercise in general life, something that did not change until increases in health care costs spawned considerable interest in life-style management.

During the 1970's Gill (1994; 1997) has noted that exercise psychology research programmes began to assimilate the ideas of Hans Seyle, making *stress* the central focus for exercise related psychological enquiry. Alongside stress (a concept that gained huge



appeal in health psychology at the time), the field also relied heavily on the sport and exercise sciences more general emphasis on physiological and biomedical organising and understanding principles. In particular, research has relied on measures such as fitness, intensity, duration and frequency, more commonly referred to in the literature as ‘dose-response’ protocols. These studies have found ambiguous support for a dose-response relationship (e.g. Brown and Siegel, 1988; Dua and Hargreaves, 1992; McCann and Holmes, 1984; Plummer and Young, 1987), and are now considered as providing only limited explanatory power in understanding the physical activity and psychological well-being relationship (e.g. Byrne and Byrne, 1993; Martinsen *et al.*, 1989). More recent approaches have suggested that psychological outcomes of physical activity need not be contingent on changes in physiological parameters (Doyne *et al.*, 1987; Long, 1983; Martinsen *et al.*, 1989; Moses *et al.*, 1989; Rejeski & Thompson, 1993).

Despite continued efforts to establish a ‘dose-response’ relationship between physical activity and mental health outcomes, more sophisticated approaches have acknowledged the necessity to place more attention on social cognitive paradigms of understanding. In these types of investigations, the focus has been on individual differences and personality correlates of exercise (e.g. Courneya & Hellesten, 1998; Yeung & Hemsley, 1997a; 1997b), as well as contextual and situational determinants such as social support (e.g. Duncan and McAuley, 1993; Duncan & Stoolmiller, 1993; Oman, 1992; Turner *et al.*, 1997). On reflection, the social cognitive paradigm suggests that cognitive and emotional outcomes are best understood as being mediated by complex interactions that involve the individual’s personality makeup, coping resources, and the social contexts in which bodily movement occurs.

If the last decade or so has been dedicated to shaking off the dogma of the ‘dose-response’ logic adopted from the physical sciences (although a look at any of the recent exercise and health psychology journals will show that this logic is still prevalent), then it is perhaps also true to note that such dogmatic assumptions have also plagued the study of physical activity and mental health more generally. Gauvin & Spence (1995) noted that there has been a major tendency for researchers to study the mental health correlates and outcomes of structured aerobic exercise to the detriment of other *types* of physical activity (for exceptions, see Abele & Brehm, 1993; Berger & Owen, 1983; 1988; Gurley



*et al.*, 1984). These comparative studies all noted that there is a real need to look at structured exercise alongside other forms of physical activity (where the goals and motivation to participate differ), in order to discern more comprehensively the influence of body cultures on psychological functioning.

In a review of 209 physical activity and psychological functioning related articles (Gauvin and Spence, 1995) approximately 55% used structured aerobic exercise, with the majority of others focusing on unstructured exercise and only a fraction on other forms of body culture. There is obviously a clear bias in research initiatives, but why?

This fascination with structured forms of exercise is perhaps due to the field's close association with physical fitness research, which sees aerobic exercise as the *archetypal* scientific physical activity (i.e. is easily manipulated and controlled). However, this reasoning certainly doesn't justify the exclusive approach that has been adopted, especially as physiological functioning is by no means a strong correlate of mental health (as has been previously discussed). And perhaps more to the point, in these post-modern times young people participate in a whole range of body cultures that also need to be researched.

Contemporary youth dance culture is one such bodily phenomenon. As a comparatively new form of body culture which has become extremely popular in a relatively short space of time all over the western world, little if no attention has been given to rave culture's potential in providing an alternative to mainstream body culture (i.e. exercise and sport). On an anecdotal level, rave has been highlighted as allowing people to dance in highly supportive social environments, wherein little emphasis is placed on the presentation of the body, as the lighting and music help to drown out physical or social differences (Rietveld, 1998a). In this light, rave can be seen to afford young people with an alternative to exercise and fitness culture, and perhaps merits some attention from a research field, which has typically ignored different forms of body culture, in order to consolidate and strengthen the validity of aerobic exercise, as *the* important health intervention.

There is a very real need to consider aerobic exercise alongside other forms of body culture. There is a huge gap in the literature. Clearly, the reasons and motivations for participating differ from body culture to body culture, which is to say that the likes of



exercise and dance afford people different coping strategies and ways in which to deal with the stresses of life. By looking at the relationships between different body cultures and psychological functioning—focusing on the social contextual determinants as well as personality differences—it is hoped that the processes that underpin these relationships may be tentatively mapped out.

## 2.2 Transactional models of stress and well-being

Recent approaches that have developed an understanding of psychological health processes have generally adopted one of the socio-cognitive and behavioural paradigms. These paradigms are more or less analogues of cybernetic theories of human behaviour. According to Edwards, cybernetics concerns

...the functioning of self-regulating systems. At its core is the negative feedback loop, the operation of the negative feedback loop is perhaps best understood by sequentially considering its basic components...the input function senses the environment and transmits this signal to the comparator, which evaluates the sensed environment against a relevant reference criterion. If this comparison indicates a discrepancy between the sensed environment and the reference criterion, the output function attempts to alter the environment to reduce or eliminate this discrepancy  
(Edwards, 1992, p.239).

In general, cybernetic approaches see mental health outcomes as the result of complex interactions involving the person and their environment. The ability of the individual to exert *control* over a situation is seen as pivotal in alleviating stress and increasing well-being. One of the most common models of stress and coping, which incorporates the negative feedback loop, inherent in all cybernetic frameworks, is that of the transactional model of stress (Folkman *et al.*, 1986; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Cognitive appraisal is of central importance to the transactional model (Long, 1993), which stresses the influence of both primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal establishes the risk for the individual and may be influenced by a range of



“...values, commitments, goals and beliefs about oneself and the world” (Folkman *et al.*, 1986, p.571). Secondary appraisal concerns the evaluation of what if anything can be done, and thus includes the assessment of coping options. Viewed in this light, any stressor perceived by the individual, not only damages health, but also stimulates coping, which is defined as the “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.141).

With regards to body culture, primary appraisal might hypothetically correspond to someone perceiving themselves as feeling too sluggish when they walk up the street to catch a bus. Or, it may relate to an individual having a heart attack and surviving it, or it could just relate to someone feeling bored, or in need of something different in their lives. Regardless of the specifics, in these instances the individual might well reflect and appraise their life, and see themselves as needing to change their ways. Secondary appraisal refers to initiatives used to deal with the stress that accompanies these life situations, which could include adopting a healthy lifestyle, incorporating a little exercise into the weekly routine, or it might well mean getting involved with a sport, or going out dancing in order to alleviate boredom. Thus, body cultures can be seen as coping behaviours that can be adopted as a means in which to mediate and cope with the effects of stress (Gill, 1994).

Within the research literature, it has generally been found that physical activity (predominantly structured aerobic exercise), acts as a significant coping behaviour, in alleviating stress. In a review of the contemporary literature, Rostad & Long (1996) cited 41 empirical studies (23 quasi-experimental, 18 experimental) that focused on exercise as a coping strategy, inferring support for the efficacy of exercise in coping with stress. However, it should be noted that most of these studies lacked appropriate measures to consider the stress appraisal process in any real depth.

In more detail, the transactional model attempts to explicate an understanding of stress, coping and well-being processes in terms of the complex transactions that occur between the person and their environment (Folkman *et al.*, 1984), and it constitutes the theoretical framework in which this first study is situated. By looking at different body cultural contexts (lone physical activity, dance, exercise, and sport) in relation to the



appraisal process, this study will attempt to shed some light on how the mental health outcomes of participation are mediated by the social environments in which the activity takes place, as well as taking into consideration the influence of individual differences in mediating the relationship between physical activity and mental health.

### **2.3 Psychological health outcomes: Emotion, Mood, Affect and Enjoyment**

Psychological well-being has been conceptualised within the cognitive behavioural literature as being multifaceted (Ryff, 1995), incorporating both cognitive and emotional processes that mediate thoughts, actions and feelings. In the historical development of mental health and exercise related research, one can see that early attempts to measure the effectiveness of physical activity on mental health indices relied too heavily upon clinical measures of well-being, such as the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck *et al.*, 1961), the Centre of Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-DS; Radloff, 1977) or the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ; Goldberg, 1972). Studies that have used these measures in the assessment of the efficacy of physical activity on mental health have provided information to suggest that exercise has a moderate effect in reducing episodes of depressive orders (e.g. Biddle, 1995; 2000; Dua & Hargreaves, 1992; Labbe *et al.*, 1988; McCann & Holmes, 1984).

In considering the appropriateness of these measures Byrne & Byrne (1993) have noted that the clinical nature of these instruments may be sensitive of the effects of physical activity in reducing depressive symptoms in clinical populations, yet when applied to 'normal' populations they give no real indication as to whether exercise facilitates *positive* feelings of well-being. That is to say, these types of clinical measures are insensitive to measuring well-being in normal populations, as in reality they can only ever give an idea as to whether exercise is beneficial on a biomedical level, which views health and well-being in terms of the absence of disease.

As a counter to this type of research, efforts have also been made to consider more fully the emotional responses to exercise. Many of these approaches have been typified by their reliance upon multidimensional scaling techniques, which involve differentiating emotions into distinct subscales and dimensions of moods and emotions (Gauvin &



Brawley, 1993). One of the prevalent measures that delineates mood into distinct subscales, the Profile of Mood States (POMS; McNair *et al.*, 1971) has been used in numerous studies. Unfortunately this psychometric tool has been highlighted as being insensitive to mood fluctuations due to possible ceiling effects, as well as displaying a heavy reliance upon negative mood states (five of the subscales relate to negative moods). In critiquing this instrument, Mutrie & Biddle (1995) suggest that due to these inadequacies, it is unlikely to be an instrument sensitive to the many possible fluctuations in mood, experienced in bouts of physical activity.

Another approach, which has been incorporated into research protocols, is based upon the Circumplex model of affect (Russell, 1978; 1980; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). This model suggests that all emotional experience can be represented in two-dimensional space (e.g. Abele & Brehme, 1993; Gauvin & Brawley, 1993), representing hedonic tone and activation. Hedonic tone can be seen as fluctuating between pleasure and displeasure, and activation indicates the level of arousal. According to this model, we may describe any form of emotional well-being in terms of its location in relation to these separate dimensions and its distance from the mid-point (Warr, 1990). Measures that incorporate the circumplex model can be seen as an improvement on measures such as POMS (McNair *et al.*, 1971) as they contend that emotional experience can be differentiated into two theoretically distinct and fundamental dimensions, giving an indication of the level of positive as well as negative emotional responses to physical activity.

Given the advantages of measuring emotional experience along both hedonic and arousal dimensions, recent approaches within the exercise sciences have developed measures related specifically to the exercise context. One such psychometric measure, the Feeling Scale (FS; Hardy & Rejeski, 1989), provides a measure of the hedonic tone dimension of affect and was designed to assess how bad-good a person feels whilst exercising. Another specific scale which measures the emotional content of exercise experiences, the Exercise Induced Feeling Inventory (EFI; Gauvin & Rejeski, 1993). This was designed to measure four feeling states that are supposedly sensitive to the stimulus properties of exercise, namely; positive engagement, revitalisation, physical exhaustion and tranquillity. The EFI, has been shown to be sensitive to exercise manipulations across



several studies (e.g. Spence *et al.*, 1995; Vlachopoulos *et al.*, 1996), and the items from the subscales do take into consideration the entire circumplex space.

Yet another exercise specific measure, the Subjective Exercise Experience Scale (SEES; McAuley & Courneya, 1994), which divides emotional experience into three subscales (positive well-being, psychological distress, and fatigue), has been developed as a multidimensional measure of emotion. Like the FS and EFI, the development of the SEES scale was based upon exploring an understanding specifically of the emotional content of the exercise experience, and thus based upon certain assumptions. These measures can be seen as an improvement on the more clinically inclined well-being scales used in earlier studies, in so far as they take into consideration positive aspects of emotional health, and not just the absence of stress and psychological disorders. However, on reflection, the specificity of these tools (developed primarily for structured exercise experiences) means that their validity in capturing the emotional experience of other body cultures is still unexplored.

Alongside these initiatives, there has been a more specific interest in optimal functioning and engagement with physical activity. Here research has been concerned with feelings of enjoyment and ‘flow like’ experiences. The work of Leonard Wankel is of specific interest (e.g. 1985; 1988; 1993; 1996; 1997). In a series of empirical and theoretical articles Wankel notes that, rather than focus on the health outcomes associated with physical activity, attention could be more appropriately directed toward the enjoyment attained from participation. Enjoyment is viewed as a positive emotion, a positive affective state, which is clearly related to successfully applying one’s skill to meet environmental challenges facilitated by intrinsically motivated behaviour (Wankel, 1993).

According to Wankel, enjoyment is highly related to ‘flow like states’ as understood by the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who, has been instrumental in establishing the field of positive psychology. In the book, *Optimal Experience: Psychological Studies of Flow in Consciousness* (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), the authors suggest that flow like states, can be seen along with the equilibrium of challenges and skills, clear goals, immediate feedback, as the



...merging of activity and awareness so typical of enjoyable activities. One simply does not have enough attention left to think about anything else. A consequence of this state of affairs is that the usual preoccupations of everyday life no longer intrude to cause psychic entropy in consciousness. Because of the deep concentration on the activity at hand, the person in flow not only forgets his or her problems, but loses temporarily the awareness of self that in normal life often intrudes in consciousness

(Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p.32-33).

In this respect, it would seem fair to suggest that enjoyable flow-like states experienced in body cultural activities, may help to determine whether someone will continue to participate, as by and large people choose freely to participate in activities that they enjoy (e.g. Kimiecek & Harris, 1996; Wankel, 1993).

In relation to the different types of body culture, some experiences are clearly more geared towards extrinsic goals than others. Given the current social climate in which fitness culture is situated, there is reason to suggest that the motives associated with exercise participation are not so intrinsically oriented. In fitness contexts there is a strong emphasis on shaping, sculpting and toning the body to conform to socially ascribed norms. The same could be said of sport, wherein there is a very definite external objective (i.e. to win), which, like exercise is usually related to achievement, performance and meeting of definite goals. In comparison, in dance culture, people usually express themselves to some extent, intrinsically, by letting go of the constraints placed upon them in normal life (Reitveld, 1998a). People move their bodies to music that they find pleasurable, and as such, dance would seem to be comparatively devoid of extrinsic goals.

Here we might tentatively suggest, that in practice, the social, cultural and environmental values and norms of youth dance culture (socialising and music are central to the experience) may make for more intrinsically motivated human experiences than in more structured activity domains. Although this hypothesis has not been tested empirically in the literature, there is evidence to suggest that the music that accompanies dance can play an important role in determining how enjoyable people perceive bodily movement (for a review of this literature, see Karageorghis & Terry, 1997).



In order to measure enjoyment in generic physical activity settings, the Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale (PACES; Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991) has been developed. In the validation of this measure two experiments were set up. The research team hypothesised that aerobic exercise could cause physical discomfort and boredom (e.g. Smith, 1981), suggesting that a way people overcome this is by interacting with others (i.e. talking whilst exercising), or by listening to music. They suggested that music could make the experience more enjoyable, distracting the individual from boredom and physical discomfort by adding a pleasurable aspect to the movement experience. Their findings suggested that when individual differences (proneness to boredom) were taken into consideration, the music condition facilitated a significant increase in feelings of enjoyment derived from physical activity. In so doing, this evidence along with the assumption that some physical activity contexts are by their very *nature* more related to intrinsically motivated actions and processes than others, helps strengthen the contention that research needs to pay particular interest to the type of body culture and the social context in which it is situated, when considering the relationship between well-being and physical activity.

In another study that used the PACES, Briggs (1994) explored the potential factors underlying participant enjoyment in a university volleyball class. Citing perceived competence and mastery as antecedents of enjoyable and fun youth sport experiences (e.g. Brustad, 1988; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Wankel & Kriesel, 1985; Wankel & Sefton, 1989), Briggs suggested that enjoyable physical activity experiences are likely to be ones whereby the individual feels competent enough to successfully complete the action. In this sense we see a strong overlap with the facilitation of flow-like experiences, namely the matching of skills and challenges in any given situation (Wankel, 1993). In more detail, Briggs (1994) asked participants to fill in measures of mood states, perceived competence, challenge, and teacher behaviour as well as the 18 item PACES across a five week period. In this sporting context, perceived competence was shown to be the most significant correlate of enjoyment ( $r = .60$ ), consistent with previous research findings (e.g. Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Wankel & Sefton, 1989).

In consideration of the importance of enjoyment to physical activity, Wankel (1993) makes a strong case to suggest that the link between enjoyment and intrinsic



motivation is fundamental to wider issues of freedom and adherence. Because individuals have different objectives and outlooks on life, an important consideration should be to give people as many alternatives as possible in becoming physically active. In this way, individuals will be more inclined to find a body culture that matches their expectations, and to derive intrinsic pleasure from such experiences. In this respect, enjoyable movement experiences can be seen as fundamental to continued involvement with physical activity (Briggs, 1994; Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991; Wankel, 1985; 1993), as well as an indicator of the intrinsic worth derived from bodily experiences.

## **2.4 The importance of feeling competent**

The link between competence, mental health and adherence to physical activity has been given much attention in the exercise and health science literature. Across several related studies research has highlighted the importance of self-efficacy and competence in exercise settings (e.g. McAuley & Jacobson, 1991; McAuley & Courneya, 1993). Using social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986), research initiatives have provided empirical evidence to suggest that feeling competent in physical activity settings, gives an indication as to whether a person is likely to continue participating.

In more detail, research has found that self-efficacy (or feelings of competence) acts as a consistently strong predictor of adherence to structured exercise programmes (e.g. Dzewaltowski *et al.*, 1990; Ewart *et al.*, 1986; McAuley, 1992), as well as being a major mediating variable in the relationship between exercise and feelings of well-being (McAuley & Courneya, 1992; McAuley *et al.*, 1995; Mihalko *et al.*, 1996). There is now considerable evidence regarding the importance of feelings of perceived competence as an extremely influential determinant of exercise behaviour and related well-being outcomes. Self-efficacy theory represents one of the most popular research thrusts in the exercise and well-being literature. In relation to the transactional model of stress and well-being, perceived competence can be seen as essential to the appraisal process and subsequent efforts at coping with stress.



## 2.5 Considering the social context in the appraisal process

Consistent with the transactional approach to stress is the assumption that setting and context does influence the appraisal process and subsequent efforts to cope with stress. The various types of body culture that people participate in are not *only* bound by differing patterns of bodily movement but also vary, in terms of the types of interaction that occur with others. For example, sport, like dance, usually takes place in highly social environments, but they are distinguishable in terms of the objectives that underpin these bodily practices. Sport is generally geared towards establishing a winner and a loser through a contest, yet the central objective of youth dance culture, is to allow people to express themselves and interact with one another in a non-aggressive manner. The point that is of importance here is that, how one appraises and uses physical activity to cope with stress, is very much influenced by the cultural context and environment in which it occurs.

In some recent research investigations, the influence of the physical and social environments has received some attention. McAuley *et al.* (1999) and Turner *et al.* (1997) have provided some empirical evidence to suggest, that the environment is an important variable in altering feelings of self-efficacy. In the Turner study, researchers contrasted the responses of participants randomly assigned to either a socially enriched or bland leadership style, the former condition being typified by a strong sense of social support, positive skill-related feedback and a friendly communicative and interpersonal style. In the McAuley study, self-efficacy was manipulated in an exercise context, with female students being assigned to a high or low efficacy condition (which involved bogus manipulation of efficacy expectations via feedback and graphs depicting contrived normative data). Results indicated that the manipulation of environmental feedback in this setting was related to changes in emotional responses. Alongside these findings, an investigation by Katula *et al.* (1998) highlighted how the *physical* environment in which exercise occurs can itself alter feelings of competence. In this study the research team got exercisers to run on a treadmill, and then in front of a mirror. The research found that the mirror condition lowered feelings of competence in female participants, inferring that in such self-evaluative contexts, it is unlikely that many women will continue to participate.



Another related area of research that has attempted to look at the effects of the environment has focused on the importance of social support. Social support has been defined as relating to feelings of being adequately supported or cared for by others (Rook, 1987), and includes structural (seen as the existence, reciprocity and density of social relationships), as well as functional (i.e. quality of relationships) components (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Within the literature, attention has been directed towards highlighting its moderating effects on efficacy cognitions and exercise behaviours (e.g. Duncan & McAuley, 1993; Oman, 1992). Using a theoretical model developed by Weiss (1974), which views social support as a multidimensional process (incorporating guidance, social integration, reliable alliance, reassurance of worth, nurturance and feelings of attachment), and measured by the Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Russell & Cutrona, 1987), research has shown that social support is a potential mediator of self-efficacy cognitions (e.g. Duncan & Stoolmiller, 1993; Duncan *et al.*, 1993; Duncan & McAuley, 1993; Oman, 1992). Although none of these studies looked directly at the potential stress buffering effects of social support on emotional well-being, a relationship which has been well documented in the more general health psychology literature (e.g. Bailey *et al.*, 1994; Sarason & Sarason, 1985; Vaux, 1988; 1990), evidence suggests that feelings of support are likely to mediate the relationship between activity and well-being in general leisure contexts (e.g. Calabiano, 1995; Coleman, 1993; Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Iso-Ahola & Park, 1996).

This type of research adds support to the idea that the social environment in which physical activity occurs may indeed be an important factor in the stress-coping process. Indeed social support has been shown to act as an additional form of coping support, as well as exhibiting a direct impact on well-being (e.g. Bailey *et al.*, 1994).



## 2.6 Individual differences and the appraisal process: Coping and personality

Despite recent attention being placed on the situational determinants of exercise in relation to cognitive and emotional well-being, a more comprehensive understanding of the stress and well-being relationship, as viewed by the transactional model, would suggest the need to look more closely at underlying personality and individual differences, which contribute to the appraisal and coping. Investigations have considered in greater detail, underlying personality dispositions in relation to exercise (e.g. Courneya & Hellesten, 1998; Courneya *et al.*, in press; Davis *et al.*, 1995; Potgieter & Venter, 1995; Szabo, 1992; Yeung & Hemsley, 1997a; 1997b), as well as considering exercise and health behaviours alongside more general coping dispositions (e.g. Guppy & Weatherstone, 1997; Ingledew *et al.*, 1996; Ingledew & McDonagh, 1998; Rick & Guppy, 1994; Weidner *et al.*, 1996). The general conclusions drawn from these research initiatives would seem to justify the inclusion of dispositional elements of the primary (i.e. personality) and secondary (i.e. coping) appraisal process in physical activity and mental health research.

In more detail, Ingledew *et al.* (1996) reported research that placed health and coping behaviours (alcohol, smoking, eating, exercise) alongside more traditional coping strategies. They reported clear clusters of exercise behaviours alongside problem focused, emotion-focused and avoidance coping. Their results conferred with those of Rick & Guppy (1994), indicating that when exercise was used as a coping strategy, it was significantly related to problem-focused strategies. In another investigation reported by Ingledew (Ingledew & McDonagh, 1998), it was argued that in adopting health related behaviours (such as exercise and diet), different coping functions may be served. This investigation showed significant associations between exercise, self-care and problem-focused coping. In addition they found an avoidance and prevention function served by health behaviours, in which avoidance was further delineated into a 'Time-out' function, which they suggested could illustrate the efficacy of exercise as a short-term avoidance strategy.

In a further study, Guppy & Weatherstone (1997) found that both exercise and relaxation / meditation coping behaviours described by Rick & Guppy (1994), emerged



as a single factor (labelled 'symptom oriented coping'), which showed significant correlations with problem-focused, social support seeking coping strategies and psychological well-being. An interesting finding from this study highlighted an interaction between exercise and relaxation coping, which made a significant contribution to the equation predicting well-being. This suggests that exercise, health and relaxation coping behaviours were only associated with higher levels of well-being when perfectionist attitudes were low. It was argued by Guppy & Weatherstone that such dysfunctional attitudes could represent dispositional aspects of primary appraisal schema, and thus have a direct influence on the stress-appraisal and coping process, influencing the choice of coping strategies as well as their efficacy. This very much supported the premise that the association between certain coping behaviours and outcomes of psychological well-being, may depend on elements of primary and secondary appraisal, outlined in the transactional model (Folkman *et al.*, 1986; Dewe, 1991; 1993).

Another dispositional aspect of the appraisal process that has received much interest in health psychology research is that of, personality. In exercise related investigations the main focus, has been on highlighting the relationship between personality dispositions and exercise adherence (Courneya & Hellesten, 1998; Courneya *et al.*, in press; Davis *et al.*, 1995; Howard *et al.*, 1986; Potgieter & Venter, 1995; Yeung & Hemsley, 1997a). The general inference drawn from this research was that extraversion is positively related to exercise participation. In affording an additional insight into this important determinant, researchers have also noted that this observed relationship might be due, not to the activity itself, but rather to the contextual characteristics of the environment in which the physical activity takes place (Courneya & Hellesten, 1998; Courneya *et al.*, in press; Yeung & Hemsley, 1997a; 1997b).

This would seem to be a particularly valid observation, given that physical activity encompasses a wide variety of movements and associated meanings, framed and bound by numerous physical, social and cultural parameters, which help to construct environments in which, more or less attention is placed upon the individual to perform in the public domain. In linking this point to empirical findings, an investigation by Yeung & Hemsley (1997b) found exercise class attendance to be inversely related to extraversion. Using personality theory Eysenck & Eysenck (1991) inferred that exercise



classes might be too structured for highly extraverted individuals, as the sensation seeking environment resources are likely to be minimal. Yeung & Hemsley, as well as the Courneya research team both suggested that in the future, attempts to map the personality correlates of physical activity participation, should pay more attention to the environment in which the activity takes place, as well as considering contextual characteristics in greater detail.

## **2.7 Overview of study**

### **2.71 Intentions**

The aim of this first study was to assess young peoples' physical activity habits, paying particular attention to the different forms of body culture that people engage in. In more detail, the central aim was to compare responses to both exercise and dance (although these will be compared with physical activity undertaken alone, as well as in sporting contexts), in relation to the stress, appraisal and coping processes.

This investigation aimed to highlight how general and more specific aspects of primary and secondary appraisal mediated the complex cognitive and emotional relationships that underpin participation in exercise and dance. From the reviewed literature, there is empirical evidence to suggest that in understanding the relationship between physical activity and feelings, one needs to consider the influence of both individual differences in greater depth, as well as to pay more attention to contextual and environmental characteristics that help to distinguish and differentiate the various body cultural experiences.

### **2.72 Research aims**

1. To investigate how dispositional as well as contextual aspects of the appraisal process (alongside 'dose-response' characteristics) correlate with and help to predict enjoyment within the various body cultural contexts.
2. To investigate if participants distinguish and differentiate one form of body culture from another, in terms of their cognitive and emotional responses (enjoyment, competence, social support) to these bodily experiences.



3. To investigate whether participants and non-participants differ in relation to dispositional aspects of primary and secondary appraisal (i.e. how people normally appraise and cope with stress in general). Do the various forms of body culture act as specific types of coping response?

## **2.8 Methodology**

### **2.81 Sample**

The sample contained both male and female participants. 400 questionnaires were administered to undergraduate students in sport science, physical education, psychology, media studies, health and drama departments spread across the various faculty campuses at Liverpool John Moores University (during or after the designated lectures). Of the 400 questionnaires, 351 were completed (or mostly), representing a response rate of 87.6%. When the types of physical activity were considered, approximately 55% of the sample participated in physical activity undertaken alone (LPA; e.g. walking, jogging, yoga, cycling, roller-blading), 51% in dance on a regular basis (D; e.g. rave, disco), 50% in exercise that took place in social contexts (Ex; e.g. gym, weights, step classes), and 32% in social sport (Spt; e.g. football, hockey, rugby, basketball).

### **2.82 Development of questionnaire**

Before being administered, the survey was piloted on a sample of 50 undergraduates for structure, readability and flow. The survey was divided into six sections (see **appendix A** for a copy of the questionnaire). The first section related to general physical activity habits, and briefly assessed the total level of leisure time physical activity people engage in over a typical week. In the subsequent sections (2-5), participants were asked specifically if they participated in specific forms of body culture; LPA (section 2), D (section 3), Ex (section 4) and Spt (section 3). If they responded NO to any of these, they were asked to move on to the next section. Upon replying YES to participating in any of the modes of body culture, respondents were asked to fill in more detailed information relating to participation, i.e. the name of the activity, how often they do it (less than once a month - everyday), duration (less than 30 minutes - more than three



hours), intensity (minimal effort - strenuous activity <heart beats rapidly>), as well as length of participation (less than three months - more than two years). After responding to these specific questions, participants were then asked to fill in various psychometric scales relating to emotional (enjoyment) and cognitive (competence) aspects of the activity experience, as well as perceived social support (in the social contexts). Upon completing sections 1-5, respondents were asked to fill in a more general section (section 6), which included more general life cognitive and emotional psychometric measures (competence, support, personality, coping), as well as a demographic section (academic course, gender, age, domestic status, qualifications, parents occupations, ethnicity, religion). The specific psychometric scales incorporated in the survey are outlined below.

## **2.83 Psychometric measures**

### **2.83.1 Total physical activity levels**

This was assessed using the Leisure Score Index (LSI) of the Godin Leisure Time Exercise Questionnaire (GLTEQ; Godin & Shephard, 1985; Godin *et al.*, 1986). The LSI contains three open questions assessing the frequency of strenuous (heart beats rapidly), moderate (not exhausting), and mild (minimal effort) physical activity done during free time, and that lasts more than 15 minutes in duration over a typical week. A total LSI can be calculated by weighting each frequency by its estimated intensity in METS (a unit that represents the metabolic equivalent of an activity in multiples of the resting rate of oxygen consumption) and summing for a total score as follows: (3=mild) + (5=moderate) + (9=strenuous). An independent evaluation of the LSI (Jacobs *et al.*, 1993), found the measure to be reliable and possess concurrent validity based on various criteria including objective activity monitors and fitness indices.

### **2.83.2 Enjoyment**

Enjoyment was assessed using the Physical Activity Enjoyment Scale (PACES; Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991). The scale was developed to assess the level of enjoyment experienced in various physical activity contexts. The scale consists of 18 items related to feelings of enjoyment and flow, in which respondents are asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale, *how they usually feel* (e.g. 1= It's not at all exhilarating - 7= It's very



exhilarating). The scale has been reported as having a generally adequate internal reliability. In two reliability studies (Kendzierski & DeCarlo, 1991), both studies yielding a Cronbach alpha of 0.93. In the present study the internal reliability of the scale compared well with the validation studies, ranging from 0.89 (D) to 0.91 (S) and 0.93 (both LPA and Ex).

### **2.83.3 Competence**

Competence was assessed using the competence / self-efficacy sub scale of Warr's 3 component well-being measure (1990). In the development of this sub-scale, Warr (1990) noted that a competent person is someone who has adequate psychological resources to deal with experienced difficulties, drawing parallels with self-efficacy and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986). The original 6 item scale asks individuals to rate on a 5-point Likert scale the extent to which they agree (1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree) with the following statements (e.g. I enjoy new challenges when I participate in this physical activity). The scale has been specifically developed for use in general and specific contexts, yet prior to this study it had never been used in physical activity contexts. In the Warr (1990) validation studies, the internal reliability was recorded as being acceptable (0.68 - 0.71). In the present study the scale was reduced to a 4 item measure, yielding acceptable reliability coefficients in the various body cultural contexts (0.60 - 0.72), as well as in general life (0.76).

### **2.83.4 Social Support**

Social support was measured using the short version of the Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Russell & Cutrona, 1987; Cutrona, personal communication). The scale was developed in conjunction with Weiss's (1974) model of social provisions, which consists of six related dimensions (*reassurance of worth* or esteem support, *reliable alliance* or tangible aid, *guidance* or informational support, *social integration* or network support, *attachment* or emotional support, and *opportunity for nurturance* where assisting others bolsters one's own self-worth). The scale asks people to rate on a 4-point Likert scale the degree to which they agree (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree) with the following (e.g. There are people I can depend on to help me, if I really need it; I have relationships



where my competence and skill are recognised). The scale has been validated in various exercise contexts (e.g. Duncan *et al.*, 1993; Duncan & McAuley, 1993), and has been shown to possess good internal reliabilities for the various dimensions of experienced support (e.g. in Duncan & McAuley, 1993, reliabilities ranged from 0.68 for reassurance of worth to 0.89 for guidance). In the current study, the 24-item scale was reduced to 12 items (Cutrona, 1998; two items per provision), and used to generate a uni-dimensional score of perceived support (for the various activity contexts as well as in general life). The Cronbach alphas in the present study were as follows; D = 0.77; Ex = 0.81; S = 0.81. The level of social support in general life was also recorded in this study, with the internal reliability found to be good (0.84). As well as in the various physical activity contexts, levels of competence and social support were assessed for people in their general life. Along with these two scales, measures relating to personality traits and coping dispositions were also used.

#### **2.83.5 Personality**

Personality was assessed using the 12 item improved version of the Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI; Eysenck *et al.*, 1985). Six items reflecting extraversion (E), and six reflecting neuroticism (N) were used, with respondents asked to “...decided which response best represents your usual way of acting or feeling”, in response to statements E (e.g. Are you rather lively?), and N (e.g. Do you feel ‘just miserable’ for no good reason?). Each item was graded on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from ‘almost never’ to ‘almost always’. This scale was reported as having generally high alpha coefficients in the Eysenck *et al.* (1985) study, of 0.80 for E, and 0.84 for N. In the present study, the internal consistencies were reported as 0.75 for E, and 0.64 for N.

#### **2.83.6 Coping**

Coping strategies were assessed using the Cybernetic Coping Scale (CCS; Edwards, 1991), based upon cybernetic coping theory (Edwards, 1988; 1991; 1992; Edwards & Cooper, 1988). In this model, stress is conceptualised as damaging health and stimulating coping. The original scale comprised of 20 items and differentiated into five theoretically and psychometrically distinct dimensions (1. change the situation - CS; 2.



accommodation - ACC; 3. devaluation - DEV; 4. avoidance - AV; 5. symptom reduction - SR). An assessment of its construct validity (Edwards & Baglioni, 1993) has highlighted each dimension as possessing generally high internal reliabilities (0.79 or higher).

In addition to this, another coping dimension (seeking social support - SSS) was taken from the Ways of Coping Checklist (WCCL; Aldwin *et al.*, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the Edwards & Baglioni (1993) validity study (which compared the CCS and the WCCL), the SSS dimension was shown to exhibit an acceptable alpha (0.65). For the sake of brevity, the highest loading item from each of the six coping dimensions (0.73 - 0.94) was incorporated into the coping inventory for the present study. In completing this section of the survey respondents were also asked, how they generally coped with problems in their life. Assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, participants were asked to rate how often (from never to always) they used the specific coping strategies (e.g. I try to fix what is going wrong with the situation (CS); I try to adjust my expectations to meet the situation (ACC)).

## **2.84 Procedures**

Data was collected over the course of a university semester, with students asked to fill out the questionnaires (undergone on a voluntary basis), usually at the beginning or at the end of a scheduled lecture. Subsequent data analysis was undertaken using the statistical package SPSS (version 10). The analysis involved the calculation of Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients to ascertain bivariate relationships between variables, paired sample t-tests to ascertain any differences in cognitive and emotional responses to movement, made by participants from one context to another, as well as hierarchical regression analyses, which were conducted in order to highlight some important multivariate relationships in the prediction of dependent variables. These statistical techniques were used to help explore the specific research questions outlined previously in this study (see 2.72).



## 2.9 Results

The descriptive statistics for the various psychometric scales are presented in Table 1. Of the 184 who participated in LPA on a regular basis, 38.3% said that they did it between 3 and 4 times per week (25% said everyday, 15.3% said between 5 and 7 times a week, 18% between 1 and 2 times per week, 2.2% less than 4 times per month and 0.5% said 1 time per month or less). As regards to dance (D), of the 174 who said they did it regularly, over 50% (54.3) went out and danced on one or two occasions every week (23.4% between 3 and 4 times per week, 9.7% less than 4 times per month, 4.6% between 5 and 7 times per week, 4% everyday, and 4% less than once per month). 172 respondents said that they participated in exercise (Ex) on a frequent basis, 45.4% of whom worked-out between 1 and 2 times per week (35.6% between 3 and 4 times per week, 6.3% between 5 and 7 times per week, 5.7% less than 4 times per month, 4.6% everyday, and 2.3% less than once a month). Finally, of the 108 who took part in sport (Spt) frequently, 37% did so once or twice a week (35.2% between 3 and 4 times per week, 13.9% between 5 and 7 times per week, 5.6% less than once a month, 4.6% everyday, and 3.7% less than 4 times per month).

### 2.91 Research question one

Bivariate correlations were calculated for each activity context in relation to perceived enjoyment (including frequency, duration of session etc.) as well as situational and dispositional cognitive variables (see tables 2-5). In LPA (table 2), feelings of enjoyment correlated positively with duration of session (0.23;  $p < .01$ ), intensity (0.29;  $p < .01$ ), E (0.18;  $p < .05$ ), CS (0.20;  $p < .01$ ), SR (0.21;  $p < .01$ ), LPA competence (0.22;  $p < .01$ ), and general competence (0.20;  $p < .05$ ), as well as negatively with N (-0.18;  $p < .05$ ). On the bivariate level, feelings of enjoyment derived from D (table 3), were shown to correlate positively with age (0.22;  $p < .05$ ), gender (0.19;  $p < .05$ ), duration of session (0.15;  $p < .05$ ), intensity (0.22;  $p < .01$ ), CS (0.28;  $p < .01$ ), ACC (0.18;  $p < .05$ ), SSS (0.24;  $p < .01$ ), D related competence (0.42;  $p < .01$ ), D related social support (0.29;  $p < .01$ ), general competence (0.19;  $p < .05$ ), general social support (0.34;  $p < .01$ ), as well as negatively, with N (-0.17;  $p < .05$ ) and AV (-0.19;  $p < .05$ ) coping.



Ex induced enjoyment (table 4), correlated positively with how often individuals participated (0.18;  $p<.05$ ), duration of session (0.26;  $p<.01$ ), intensity (0.22;  $p<.01$ ), length of participation (0.15;  $p<.05$ ), E (0.22;  $p<.01$ ), ACC (0.17;  $p<.05$ ), DEV (0.16;  $p<.05$ ), SR (0.25;  $p<.01$ ), exercise competence (0.41;  $p<.01$ ), exercise social support (0.37;  $p<.01$ ), general competence (0.27;  $p<.01$ ) and general life support (0.38;  $p<.01$ ), as well as correlating negatively with N (-0.26;  $p<.01$ ). In the Spt condition, bivariate correlations highlighted derived feelings of enjoyment (table 5) to be correlated positively with duration of session (0.21;  $p<.05$ ), E (0.32;  $p<.01$ ), CS (0.33;  $p<.01$ ), DEV (0.26;  $p<.01$ ), SR (0.20;  $p<.05$ ), Spt competence. (0.48;  $p<.01$ ), Spt social support (0.28;  $p<.01$ ), general competence (0.23;  $p<.05$ ), and general life social support (0.27;  $p<.01$ ).

**Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and internal reliabilities for major variables in study**

Variable	Mean	SD	Internal reliability	n
LSI	53.69	39.66		339
LPA				
Enjoyment	93.20	17.10	.93	165
Competence	13.73	2.78	.71	175
Dance				
Enjoyment	106.36	12.99	.89	172
Competence	13.13	2.33	.60	171
Social support	37.74	4.48	.77	168
Exercise				
Enjoyment	102.80	17.10	.93	164
Competence	14.05	2.50	.70	168
Social support	37.01	4.71	.81	164
Sport				
Enjoyment	107.58	13.93	.92	105
Competence	14.17	2.87	.72	104
Social support	37.55	4.63	.81	104
General Life				
Extraversion	18.35	2.95	.75	338
Neuroticism	13.81	3.09	.64	338
Competence	14.01	2.52	.76	336
Social support	39.12	4.83	.84	329
Coping in general*				
Change situation	3.91	.82		335
Accommodation	3.40	.82		335
Devaluation	3.32	.90		335
Avoidance	2.72	1.00		335
Symptom reduction	3.72	.85		335
Seek social support	3.65	1.12		335

LSI = Leisure Score Index; LPA = Lone Physical Activity; \*single item scores



Table 2. Bivariate correlation matrix for Lone Physical Activity (LPA); enjoyment, dose-response, dispositional, and situational variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Enjoyment																		
2. Age	.05																	
3. Gender	-.06	.02																
4. LSI	.13	-.18**	-.30**															
5. How often	-.09	.04	.15*	.11														
6. Duration	.23**	.07	-.13	.17*	-.06													
7. Intensity	.29**	.04	-.32**	.23**	-.28**	.33**												
8. Length	.06	.05	-.10	-.06	.14	.06	-.05											
9. Extraversion	.18*	-.24**	.07	.08	-.05	.07	-.04	-.01										
10. Neuroticism	-.18*	-.20**	.03	-.01	-.02	.01	-.06	.05	-.01									
11. Change situation	.20**	.05	.11*	.04	.20*	-.02	-.12	-.03	.27**	-.08								
12. Accommodation	.11	-.03	-.02	.01	.09	-.03	-.06	-.08	.10	.08	.40**							
13. Devaluation	.04	-.10	-.03	.03	.07	.03	.02	-.12	.14*	-.05	.12*	.36**						
14. Avoidance	-.11	-.20**	.03	.02	-.14	-.11	-.09	.01	-.03	.24**	-.30**	.02	.15*					
15. Sym. reduction	.21**	-.02	.04	.08	-.01	-.02	.09	.04	.32**	-.05	.28**	.20**	.24**	.06				
16. Seek support	.04	.04	.22**	-.07	.08	-.04	-.10	.01	.29**	.15*	.21*	.11*	.11*	-.11*	.31**			
17. Gen. competence	.20*	.01	-.06	.08	-.02	-.08	-.03	-.02	.33**	-.34**	.36**	.04	.16**	-.17**	.31**	.15**		
18. Gen. S. support	.16	.05	.18**	.04	.08	-.02	-.14	.03	.32**	-.13*	.40**	.14*	.13*	-.23**	.26**	.33**	.39**	
19. LPA competence	.22**	.05	-.19*	.20**	.03	.17*	.17*	.37**	.06	-.10	.09	.02	.09	.01	.15	-.04	.26**	.13

Note \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; LSI = Leisure Score Index; Sym. = Symptom; Gen. = General life; S. = Social



Table 3. Bivariate correlation matrix for Dance (D); enjoyment, dose-response, dispositional, and situational variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. Enjoyment																						
2. Age	.22*																					
3. Gender	.19	.02																				
4. LSI	.00	-.19**	-.30**																			
5. How often	-.04	-.23**	-.03	.11																		
6. Duration	.15*	-.32**	.14	.05	-.10																	
7. Intensity	.22**	.01	.20*	-.01	-.13	.21**																
8. Length	.05	.18*	-.01	.07	.06	.10	.10															
9. Alcohol	-.12	-.14	-.02	-.11	.07	.10	-.14	.13														
10. Drugs	.08	.04	-.07	-.01	-.18*	.18*	.13	.10	-.10													
11. Extraversion	.07	.24**	.07	.08	.09	.24**	-.04	.12	-.01	-.06												
12. Neuroticism	-.17*	-.20**	.03	-.01	-.03	.03	.04	.11	-.01	.17*	-.01											
13. Change situation	.28**	.05	.11*	.04	-.09	.15*	.14*	.02	.03	-.10	.28**	-.08										
14. Accommodation	.18*	-.03	-.02	.01	-.07	.02	.03	-.12	-.04	-.03	.10	.08	.40**									
15. Devaluation	.14	-.01	-.03	.03	-.01	-.09	-.07	-.03	.05	.04	.14*	-.05	.12*	.36**								
16. Avoidance	-.19*	-.19**	.03	.02	-.03	-.07	-.20**	.03	.10	.11	-.03	.24**	-.29**	.02	.15**							
17. Sym. reduction	.07	-.03	.04	.08	.01	.06	-.03	.17*	.02	.04	.32**	-.05	.28**	.20**	.24**	.06						
18. Seek support	.24**	.04	.22**	-.07	.02	-.03	.10	.07	-.11	-.05	.29**	.15**	.21**	.11*	.11*	-.11*	.33**					
19. Gen. competence	.19*	.01	-.06	.08	.04	.08	-.12	.10	.04	-.11	.33**	-.34**	.36**	.04	.16**	-.17**	.30**	.15*				
20. Gen. S. support	.34**	.05	.18**	.04	.07	.07	.10	-.08	-.04	-.08	.32**	-.13*	.40**	.14*	.13*	-.23**	.26**	.33**	.39**			
21. D competence	.42**	.14	.07	.09	.05	.14	.15	.21**	-.16*	.05	.26**	-.07	.22**	.09	.08	-.13	.16*	.25**	.36**	.25**		
22. D S.support	.29**	-.05	.07	.19*	-.01	.14	.21**	.16*	-.15	.05	-.26**	-.13	.34**	-.04	-.02	-.28**	.16*	.35**	.42**	.62**	.30**	

Note \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; LSI = Leisure Score Index; Sym = Symptom; Gen. = General life; S. = Social



Table 4. Bivariate correlation matrix for Exercise (Ex); enjoyment, dose-response, dispositional, and situational variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Enjoyment																				
2. Age	-.02																			
3. Gender	.11	.02																		
4. LSI	.09	-.19**	-.30**																	
5. How often	.18*	-.06	.02	.18*																
6. Duration	.26**	.09	-.26**	.24**	.25**															
7. Intensity	.22**	.08	-.02	.13	.20**	.32**														
8. Length	.15*	.09	-.20**	.12	.14	.23**	.01													
9. Extraversion	.22**	-.24**	.07	.08	.16*	-.06	-.04	-.01												
10. Neuroticism	-.26**	-.20**	.03	-.01	.02	-.12	-.01	-.01	-.01											
11. Change situation	.14	.05	.11*	.04	-.06	.00	.05	-.15	.27**	-.08										
12. Accommodation	.17*	-.03	-.02	.01	-.11	.00	.06	-.11	.10	.08	.40**									
13. Devaluation	.16*	-.01	-.03	.03	-.05	-.05	.03	-.06	.14*	-.05	.12*	.36**								
14. Avoidance	-.02	-.19**	.03	.02	-.05	-.13	-.10	-.02	-.03	.24**	-.29**	.02	.15**							
15. Sym. reduction	.25**	-.03	.04	.08	.16	-.03	-.05	.00	.32**	-.05	.28**	.20**	.24**	.06						
16. Seek support	.06	.04	.22**	-.07	-.01	-.19*	-.06	.00	.29**	.15**	.21**	.11*	.11*	-.11*	.33**					
17. Gen. competence	.27**	.01	-.07	.08	.08	.10	.13	.03	.33**	-.34**	.36**	.04	.16**	-.17**	.30**	.15**				
18. Gen. S. support	.38**	.05	.18**	.04	.01	.02	.07	-.06	.32**	-.13*	.40**	.14*	.13*	-.23**	.26**	.33**	.39**			
19. Ex competence	.41**	.16	-.15	.07	.19*	.16*	.19*	.29**	.28**	-.22**	.18*	.02	.09	-.06	.18*	.02	.48**	.27**		
20. Ex S. support	.37**	-.19*	.03	.18*	.25**	.17*	.02	.04	.34**	-.23**	.24**	.10	.04	-.21**	.26**	.13	.44**	.61**	.29**	

Note \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; LSI = Leisure Score Index; Sym. = Symptom; Gen. = General life; S. = Social



Table 5. Bivariate correlation matrix for Sport (Spt); enjoyment, dose-response, dispositional, and situational variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Enjoyment																				
2. Age	-.04																			
3. Gender	.02	.02																		
4. LSI	.10	-.19**	-.30**																	
5. How often	.133	.01	-.14	.10																
6. Duration	.21*	-.12	.08	.08	.28**															
7. Intensity	.14	.05	-.07	.17	.18	.17														
8. Length	.08	-.11	-.24*	.11	.18	.03	.05													
9. Extraversion	.32**	-.24**	.07	.08	.07	.02	.18	.00												
10. Neuroticism	-.05	-.20**	.03	-.01	.14	-.05	-.08	.19*	-.01											
11. Change situation	.33**	.05	.11*	.04	.06	.09	.08	-.12	.27**	-.08										
12. Accommodation	.14	-.03	-.02	.01	.09	-.03	.05	-.10	.10	.08	.40**									
13. Devaluation	.26**	-.01	-.03	.03	.14	.10	.06	-.02	.14*	-.05	.12*	.36**								
14. Avoidance	-.02	-.19**	.03	.02	-.12	-.30**	-.13	-.06	-.03	.24**	-.30**	.02	.14**							
15. Sym. reduction	.20*	-.03	.04	.08	.24*	.03	-.10	-.10	.32**	-.05	.28**	.20**	.24**	.06						
16. Seek support	.14	.04	.22**	-.07	-.07	.04	.09	-.20*	.29**	.15**	.21**	-.11*	.11*	-.11*	.33**					
17. Gen. competence	.23*	.01	-.06	.08	.08	.15	.17	-.18	.33**	-.34**	.36**	.04	.16**	-.17**	.30**	.15**				
18. Gen. S. support	.27**	.05	.18**	.04	.04	.18	.18	-.26**	.32**	-.13*	.40**	.14*	.13*	-.23**	.26**	.33**	.39**			
19. Spt competence	.48**	.04	-.25**	.09	.09	.17	.09	.31**	.30**	.07	.19	.09	.10	-.18	.15	.21*	.31**	.13		
20. Spt S. support	.28**	-.24*	-.01	.17	.17	.21*	.21*	.03	.45**	-.04	.18	-.07	-.07	-.18	.13	.26**	.36**	.57**	.36**	

Note \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; LSI = Leisure Score Index; Sym. = Symptom; Gen. = General life; S. = Social



In order to ascertain whether feelings of enjoyment could be predicted from the extant variables, four hierarchical regression equations were calculated. Each prediction equation was calculated by stepping in five blocks of variables; block 1 (age; gender), block 2 (Do you participate in the other physical activities? frequency, duration, intensity and length of participation in the respective physical activity), block 3 (personality and coping), block 4 (general life competence and social support), and block 5 which contained the body cultural (D, Ex, S) cognitive variables, of competence and social support.

In the first equation, entered variables helped to predict 32.5% of the variance in LPA enjoyment (significant at the  $p < .01$  level). In more detail, block 2 and 3 made significant contributions to the overall equation, with block 2 contributing 17% of the variance ( $F_{\text{change}} = 2.58$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and block 3 contributing 12% to the total explained variance ( $F_{\text{change}} = 2.04$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The only variable to contribute significantly to the final equation was intensity of LPA ( $\beta = 0.24$ ;  $p < .05$ ). For a summary of these findings see table 6.

In predicting D related enjoyment (table 7), it was found that block 1 and block 5 made significant contributions to the overall equation. Block 1 contributed 9% to the explained variance ( $F_{\text{change}} = 5.69$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and block 5 contributed 11% to the total explained variance once the preceding four blocks were stepped into the equation ( $F_{\text{change}} = 9.65$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The entered variables helped to contribute 45% of the variance, which was significant at the  $p < .001$  level. In the overall equation five significant individual predictors emerged. Neuroticism ( $\beta = -0.22$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and general competence ( $\beta = -0.28$ ;  $p < .01$ ) made significant negative contributions. Positive contributions were made by ACC ( $\beta = 0.18$ ;  $p < .05$ ), D competence ( $\beta = 0.40$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and D specific social support ( $\beta = 0.18$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

As regards to Ex related enjoyment, the variables (blocks 1-5) accounted for a total of 47.5% of the variance. Of the stepped in blocks, 2-5 all made significant independent contributions to the overall regression equation. In more detail, block #2 contributed 16% of the variance ( $F_{\text{change}} = 2.63$ ;  $p < .01$ ), block 3 added an additional 15 % ( $F_{\text{change}} = 2.83$ ;  $p < .01$ ), block 4 contributed 8% ( $F_{\text{change}} = 6.70$ ;  $p < .01$ ). In addition to this, block 5 helped to contribute another 7% of variance to Ex related enjoyment ( $F_{\text{change}} = 6.40$ ;



p<.01). From the overall equation, “do you participate in dance?” made a significant positive contribution in predicting exercise-enjoyment ( $\beta = 0.20$ ; p<.05), as did ACC ( $\beta = 0.24$ ; p<.01), general social support ( $\beta = 0.28$ ; p<.01), and Ex competence ( $\beta = 0.29$ ; p<.01). For a summary of this regression analysis see table 8.

In the Spt condition (table 9), the stepped in blocks contributed over 55.6% of the total explained variance (which was significant at the p<.001 level). Block 3 added 29% to the explained variance (Fchange = 3.59; p<.01), block 4 contributed an additional 6% (Fchange = 3.12; p<.05) and block 5 an additional 13% (Fchange = 8.37; p<.001). In the overall equation, four individual significant predictors emerged. The first was DEV ( $\beta = 0.42$ ; p<.001), the second was SSS which made a negative contribution ( $\beta = -0.23$ ; p<.05), the third was general life social support ( $\beta = 0.25$ ; p<.05) and the fourth was sport competence ( $\beta = 0.47$ ; p<.001).

**Table 6. Prediction of enjoyment in lone physical activity using hierarchical regression analysis (N=184)**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. Age				-.05
Gender	.00	.00	.09	.19
2. LSI				.11
Participate in Dance?				-.12
Participate in Exercise?				-.16
Participate in Sport?				.12
How often do you do LPA?				-.16
Length of session - LPA?				.09
Intensity of LPA?				.24*
How long involved in LPA?	.17	.17	2.6**	.14
3. Extraversion				.01
Neuroticism				-.14
Change situation coping				.06
Accommodation coping				.12
Devaluation coping				-.09
Avoidance coping				-.14
Symptom reduction coping				.06
Seeking social support coping	.29	.12	2.0*	.13
4. Competence in general life				.08
Social support in general life	.30	.01	.94	.05
5. Competence in LPA	.32	.02	2.8	.19

Multiple R =.570; R<sup>2</sup> = .325; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .17; F ratio = 2.1; d.f. (21,113); p <.01  
 Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is 37.5 (SE=25.0). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001



**Table 7. Prediction of enjoyment in dance using hierarchical regression analysis (N=174)**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. Age				.16
Gender	.09	.09	5.69**	.02
2. LSI				-.10
Participate in LPA?				-.01
Participate in Exercise?				.10
Participate in Sport?				.11
How often do you do Dance?				-.02
Length of session - Dance?				.08
Intensity of Dance?				.01
How long involved in Dance?				.08
Do you consume alcohol?				.07
Do you consume drugs?	.20	.11	1.66	.11
3. Extraversion				-.11
Neuroticism				-.22*
Change situation coping				.02
Accommodation coping				.18*
Devaluation coping				.04
Avoidance coping				-.03
Symptom reduction coping				.01
Seeking social support coping	.31	.11	1.88	.15
4. Competence in general life				-.28**
Social support in general life	.34	.03	2.27	.08
5. Competence in Dance				.40***
Social support in Dance	.45	.11	9.65***	.18*

Multiple R = .670; R<sup>2</sup> = .45; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .32; F ratio = 3.4; d.f. (24,118); p <.001  
Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is 54.6 (SE=19.5). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 8. Prediction of enjoyment in exercise using hierarchical regression analysis (N=172)**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. Agw				.02
Gender	.02	.02	.87	.06
2. LSI				-.07
Participate in LPA?				.13
Participate in Dance?				.20*
Participate in Sport?				-.02
How often do you do Exercise?				.12
Length of session - Exercise?				.23
Intensity of Exercise?				.02
How long involved in Exercise?	.18	.16	2.63**	.07
3. Extraversion				-.02
Neuroticism				-.12
Change situation coping				.13
Accommodation coping				.24**
Devaluation coping				.04
Avoidance coping				.22
Symptom reduction coping				.07
Seeking social support coping	.33	.15	2.83**	-.07
4. Competence in general life				-.20
Social support in general life	.41	.08	6.70**	.28**
5. Competence in Exercise				.29**
Social support in Exercise	.48	.07	6.40**	.18

Multiple R = .689; R<sup>2</sup> = .475; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .356; F ratio = 3.99; d.f. (22,119); p <.001 Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is -34.9 (SE=22.3). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001



**Table 9. Prediction of enjoyment in sport activity using hierarchical regression analysis (N=108)**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. Age				-.17
Gender	.01	.01	.19	.10
2. LSI				.05
Participate in LPA?				.13
Participate in Dance?				.09
Participate in Exercise?				-.01
How often do you do Sport?				-.07
Length of session - Sport?				-.03
Intensity of Sport?				-.01
How long involved in Sport?	.08	.07	.67	.03
3. Extraversion				.15
Neuroticism				-.07
Change situation coping				.09
Accommodation coping				-.05
Devaluation coping				.42***
Avoidance coping				-.11
Symptom reduction coping				-.06
Seeking social support coping	.37	.29	3.59**	-.23*
4. Competence in general life				.18
Social support in general life	.43	.06	3.1*	.25*
5. Competence in Sport				.47***
Social support in Sport	.56	.13	8.37***	-.09

Multiple R = .746; R<sup>2</sup> = .556; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .388; F ratio = 3.30; d.f. (22,80); p <.001 Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is 24.8 (SE=22.3). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**2.92 Research question two**

In order for scores on the various emotional (enjoyment) and cognitive variables to be compared (competence and social support), paired sample t-tests were conducted. The idea was to compare participants’ scores on measures in the different activity contexts. The detailed results of these comparisons can be seen in table10 (enjoyment), 11 (competence), and 12 (social support). As regards to feelings of enjoyment, from the paired t-tests it can be highlighted that participants who regularly took part in lone forms of physical activity (LPA) as well as social forms of body culture, do indeed differentiate these experiences. Perceiving social forms of movement as being more enjoyable. Paired comparisons between LPA and D highlighted that people perceive D to be more enjoyable than the physical activity they do alone (t = -6.90; d.f. = 82; p<.001). This was also shown to be true between LPA and Ex experiences (t = -6.08; d.f.= 82; p<.001), as well as between LPA and Spt (t = -6.46; d.f. = 49; p<.001). According to the other paired comparisons, participants didn’t perceive the socially oriented experiences as being any



less or more enjoyable than the others at the statistical significance level ( $p<.05$ ). For a brief summary of these paired comparisons see table 10.

When feelings of competence were considered, paired comparisons (table 11) highlighted some significant differences between the various activity contexts. People who participated in LPA as well as D perceived themselves as feeling more competent in LPA than in D ( $t = 2.31$ ; d.f. = 84;  $p<.05$ ). The only other significant difference highlighted in the paired comparisons, was between D and Spt, wherein people who participated in both scored slightly higher on feelings of competence in S related activity than in D ( $t = -2.01$ ; d.f. = 52;  $p<.05$ ).

When perceptions of social support were considered (table 12), one notable difference emerged. This difference was highlighted in the comparison between D and Ex. People who participated in both D and Ex, perceived the D environment as being significantly more enriched with socially supportive resources than the Ex environment ( $t = 2.87$ ; d.f. = 83;  $p<.01$ ).

Table 10. Paired sample t-test analysis of enjoyment scores; comparing physical activity contexts.

Variable a	Variable b	N	Mean	S.D.	Correlation	t	df	sig (2-tail)
LPA	Dance	83	a. 92.34 b. 107.94	17.6 13.06	0.12	-6.90	82	***
LPA	Exercise	83	a. 93.69 b. 105.16	17.27 16.48	0.48***	-6.08	82	***
LPA	Sport	50	a. 94.30 b. 108.08	15.05 13.33	0.44**	-6.46	49	***
Dance	Exercise	91	a. 108.01 b. 106.07	12.36 16.27	0.38***	1.14	90	n.sig
Dance	Sport	52	a. 104.50 b.107.85	11.49 14.29	0.14	-1.42	51	n.sig
Exercise	Sport	74	a. 105.45 b. 107.51	15.03 14.14	0.42**	-1.14	73	n.sig

\* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$ ; \*\*\* $p<.001$ ; n.sig = not significant at  $<.05$



**Table 11. Paired sample t-test analysis of competence scores; comparing physical activity contexts.**

Variable a	Variable b	N	Mean	S.D.	Correlation	t	df	sig (2-tail)
LPA	Dance	85	a. 13.92 b. 13.16	2.71 2.25	0.28**	2.31	84	*
LPA	Exercise	86	a. 14.32 b. 14.03	2.77 2.73	0.62***	1.13	85	n.sig
LPA	Sport	52	a. 14.27 b. 13.83	2.37 3.04	0.45**	1.10	51	n.sig
Dance	Exercise	90	a. 13.50 b. 13.94	2.27 2.21	0.38**	-1.64	89	n.sig
Dance	Sport	53	a. 12.87 b. 13.68	2.33 2.64	0.09	-2.01	52	*
Exercise	Sport	74	a. 14.61 b. 14.27	2.41 3.07	.40***	0.94	73	n.sig

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; n.sig = not significant at <.05

**Table 12. Paired sample t-test analysis of social support scores; comparing physical activity contexts.**

Variable a	Variable b	N	Mean	S.D.	Correlation	t	df	sig (2-tail)
Dance	Exercise	84	a. 38.63 b. 37.44	4.20 4.86	0.66***	2.87	83	**
Dance	Sport	51	a. 38.04 b. 37.35	4.27 4.58	0.59***	1.23	50	n.sig
Exercise	Sport	72	a. 37.90 b. 37.78	4.46 4.64	0.73***	0.32	71	n.sig

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; n.sig = not significant at <.05

**2.93 Research question three**

In order to see how participation in the various activity contexts related to more general aspects of the stress and appraisal process, participation and non-participation were considered alongside one another. The objective in this part of the analysis was to see if participants in the various forms of physical activity appraise stress and deal with it differently than non-participants. In other words, are there elements of the stress-appraisal and coping schema that relate to participation in some movement contexts, but not others?



In order to explore this question, responses from the questionnaire, asking whether people participated in the respective physical activity (yes or no) were correlated with both of the personality variables (E and N), as well as alongside coping strategies and general life competence and social support. In addition to this, responses to the question ‘how often do you participate in this physical activity?’ were considered. Those that said they didn’t ever participate were dummy coded as 0 and placed alongside responses that differentiated the length of participation. In other words, all participants were also considered for each activity, wherein people were assigned a value from 0 (I never participate in this physical activity) through to 5 (I have participated in this physical activity for over two years). This was done to allow some consideration of the appraisal variables (and fitness levels) that differentiate participants from non-participants, as well as focusing specifically on whether the length of involvement played a role in altering the appraisal process.

In order to predict participation and length of participation, eight hierarchical regression equations were calculated. Variables were forced into the equation in three blocks, block 1 related to total physical activity levels (LSI), block 2 related to both personality and coping variables, and block 3 included general feelings of competence and social support.

Table 13. Predicting participation in physical activity undergone alone using hierarchical regression analysis

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. LSI	.00	.00	3.04	.07
2. Extraversion				-.18**
Neuroticism				.02
Changing situation coping				.07
Accommodation coping				.09
Devaluation coping				-.03
Avoidance coping				-.03
Symptom Reduction coping				.22**
Seeking social support coping	.08	.08	3.02**	-.06
3. Competence in general life				.04
Social support in general life	.09	.01	.18	-.01

Multiple R = .297; R<sup>2</sup> = .091; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .053; F ratio = 2.51; d.f. (11,296); p <.01  
 Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is 1.25 (SE=.35). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001



As regards to LPA participation (table 13 on previous page), entered variables accounted for 9% of explained variance, which was significant at the  $p<.01$  level. The only variable that contributed significantly to the overall equation was E, which made a negative contribution ( $\beta = -0.18$ ;  $p<.01$ ), and SR ( $\beta = 0.22$ ;  $p<.01$ ). When length of participation was considered (never - over two years), entered variables contributed to approximately 7% of the explained variance ( $p<.05$ ; see table 14). The same two significant predictors, E ( $\beta = -0.13$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and SR ( $\beta = 0.24$ ;  $p<.01$ ) emerged in this analysis.

**Table 14. Predicting length of involvement in physical activity undergone alone using hierarchical regression analysis**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. LSI	.01	.01	2.27	.06
2. Extraversion				-.13*
Neuroticism				.06
Changing situation coping				.01
Accommodation coping				.07
Devaluation coping				-.05
Avoidance coping				-.06
Symptom Reduction coping				.24**
Seeking social support coping	.07	.06	2.24*	-.06
3. Competence in general life				.05
Social support in general life	.07	.00	.33	.01

Multiple R = .267; R<sup>2</sup> = .071; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .036; F ratio = 2.01; d.f. (11,300);  $p<.05$   
 Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is -.11 (SE=1.65). \* $p<.05$ ; \*\* $p<.01$ ; \*\*\* $p<.001$

In considering D participation, entered variables explained approximately 9% of the variance ( $p<.01$ ), wherein E made an individual positive contribution ( $\beta = 0.19$ ;  $p<.01$ ) as did SSS ( $\beta = 0.16$ ;  $p<.05$ ). When length of participation was entered as the dependent variable the independent variables accounted for 9% of the explained variance ( $p<.01$ ). Again E made a significant contribution ( $\beta = 0.19$ ;  $p<.01$ ), as did SSS ( $\beta = 15$ ;  $p<.05$ ), and was joined by AV ( $\beta = 0.13$ ;  $p<.05$ ). For a summary of these regression equations, see tables 15 and 16.



**Table 15. Predicting participation in dance using hierarchical regression analysis**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. LSI	.01	.01	2.41	.09
2. Extraversion				.19**
Neuroticism				-.09
Changing situation coping				-.01
Accommodation coping				.04
Devaluation coping				.03
Avoidance coping				.12
Symptom Reduction coping				.01
Seeking social support coping	.08	.07	2.9**	.16*
3. Competence in general life				-.06
Social support in general life	.09	.01	1.31	-.08

Multiple R = .303; R<sup>2</sup> = .092; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .057; F ratio = 2.62; d.f. (11,296); p < .01

Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is 1.0 (SE=.35). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 16. Predicting length of involvement in dance using hierarchical regression analysis**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. LSI	.01	.01	2.31	.09
2. Extraversion				.19**
Neuroticism				-.07
Changing situation coping				.01
Accommodation coping				.03
Devaluation coping				.02
Avoidance coping				.13*
Symptom Reduction coping				.01
Seeking social support coping	.08	.07	2.9**	.15*
3. Competence in general life				-.04
Social support in general life	.09	.01	1.62	-.09

Multiple R = .30; R<sup>2</sup> = .09; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .056; F ratio = 2.6; d.f. (11,301); p < .01

Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is -.11 (SE=1.65). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

Ex participation (table 17) was significantly predicted by the three blocks of variables (nearly 9%; p<.01). The only variable that afforded a significant individual contribution to the equation was LSI (β = 0.24; p<.001). When length of participation was entered as the dependent variable, independent variables accounted for



approximately 11% of the explained variance (table 18). LSI emerged as the only significant predictor ( $\beta = 0.28$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 17. Predicting participation in exercise using hierarchical regression analysis**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	$\beta$
1. LSI	.07	.07	21.43**	.24***
2. Extraversion				.07
Neuroticism				-.06
Changing situation coping				.07
Accommodation coping				.01
Devaluation coping				-.05
Avoidance coping				-.01
Symptom Reduction coping				-.01
Seeking social support coping	.08	.01	.72	.02
3. Competence in general life				.05
Social support in general life	.09	.01	.31	-.04

Multiple R = .295; R<sup>2</sup> = .087; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .052; F ratio = 2.48; d.f. (11,296);  $p < .01$

Note: standardised ( $\beta$ s) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is 1.62 (SE=.35). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 18. Predicting length of involvement in exercise using hierarchical regression analysis**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	$\beta$
1. LSI	.09	.09	28.3***	.28***
2. Extraversion				-.08
Neuroticism				-.05
Changing situation coping				-.01
Accommodation coping				.02
Devaluation coping				-.07
Avoidance coping				-.03
Symptom Reduction coping				-.01
Seeking social support coping	.10	.01	.62	.02
3. Competence in general life				.09
Social support in general life	.11	.01	1.2	-.06

Multiple R = .327; R<sup>2</sup> = .107; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .073; F ratio = 3.16; d.f. (11,301);  $p < .001$

Note: standardised ( $\beta$ s) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is .70 (SE=1.45). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$



**Table 19. Predicting participation in sport using hierarchical regression analysis**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. LSI	.07	.07	21.2***	.24**
2. Extraversion				.07
Neuroticism				-.06
Changing situation coping				.07
Accommodation coping				.01
Devaluation coping				-.05
Avoidance coping				-.01
Symptom Reduction coping				-.01
Seeking social support coping	.08	.01	.72	.02
3. Competence in general life				.05
Social support in general life	.09	.01	.34	-.04

Multiple R = .30; R<sup>2</sup> = .09; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .05; F ratio = 2.48; d.f. (11,298); p < .01

Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is 1.62 (SE=3.57). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 20. Predicting length of involvement in sport using hierarchical regression analysis**

Step / Predictors	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change	β
1. LSI	.09	.09	31.62***	.30***
2. Extraversion				.16*
Neuroticism				.01
Changing situation coping				-.06
Accommodation coping				.02
Devaluation coping				.06
Avoidance coping				.02
Symptom Reduction coping				-.04
Seeking social support coping	.15	.06	2.51**	-.19**
3. Competence in general life				-.02
Social support in general life	.15	.00	.01	-.01

Multiple R = .391; R<sup>2</sup> = .153; Adj R<sup>2</sup> = .121; F ratio = 4.77; d.f. (11,301); p < .001

Note: standardised (βs) regression coefficients are based on the final regression equation. The regression constant for the final equation is .37 (SE=1.47). \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001

When Spt participation was entered into a regression equation (table 19), the entered variables accounted for 9% of the variance (p<.01). LSI was the only variable



that afforded a significant contribution to the prediction ( $\beta = 0.24$ ;  $p < .01$ ). When length of participation was entered as the dependent variable, the variance accounted for by the independent variables amounted to nearly 15.5% of the explained variance. LSI contributed significantly ( $\beta = 0.30$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and was joined by SSS, which made a significant negative contribution ( $\beta = -.019$ ;  $p < .01$ ). For a more in depth look at the results of this particular regression analysis see table 20.

## 2.10 Discussion

The transactional model stresses that the relationship between stress and well-being is mediated by both primary and secondary appraisal processes, which include how we appraise the stressor, as well as the coping efforts made to alleviate the accompanying stress. Results from this study suggest that when different forms of body culture are considered alongside one another, dose-response, dispositional, as well as situational factors may be more or less influential in determining emotional outcomes.

Results indicated that people do distinguish physical body cultures along cognitive and emotional lines. More specifically people who participated in LPA perceived their experiences to be significantly less enjoyable than their social oriented bodily experiences. As well as this, some evidence was found for aligning specific forms of body culture to different aspects of the appraisal process. These findings taken together suggest that current approaches, which attempt to explore the relationship between physical activity and emotional well-being are likely to be too simplistic, as they don't consider individual differences and situational dimensions of physical activity experiences, in enough detail.

In all three socially oriented body cultures (D, Ex, Spt), domain level cognitive factors (competence and support) made significant contributions to the overall enjoyment equations (between  $p < .01$  and  $p < .001$ ). These findings are entirely consistent with previous research initiatives which have shown context specific competence as playing a major moderating role in the relationship between physical activity and emotional well-being (e.g. McAuley *et al.*, 1999). However, unlike previous research projects, which have tended to focus exclusively on situation specific cognitive processes, the current



findings suggest that the relationship between body cultures and emotional well-being may be understood in greater detail, when dispositional aspects of the appraisal process are also included in the analysis. Consideration of these more general processes allowed the researcher to comprehend whether emotional responses to physical activity, were to some degree, influenced by how participants normally appraise and deal with stress in their general lives.

Interestingly, results from the present study highlighted dispositional aspects of the appraisal process to be more influential in accounting for enjoyment, in structured forms of body culture (namely Ex and Spt). In the enjoyment regression analyses, blocks 3 (personality and coping strategies) and 4 (general life competence and social support), were shown to make an important and significant contribution in predicting enjoyment scores in Ex and Spt, but not in D. In Ex, these two blocks contributed approximately 23 of the 45% of the explained variance and 45 of the 56% of the total variance in the Spt domain. In D, neither block 3 or 4 made significant contributions in predicting enjoyment. These results suggest that in both Ex and Spt, feelings of enjoyment are perhaps more dependent upon how people generally perceive and cope with stress in their lives, whereas feelings of enjoyment derived from D may be *less* dependent upon how people appraise and deal with stress in general life.

The failure of dispositional aspects of the appraisal process to significantly contribute to D enjoyment could suggest, that when compared to Ex and Spt, D can be seen as a body culture that exists relatively free from the demands and constraints of everyday life, as it takes place in an environment that transcends general codes of rationality. Feelings of enjoyment experienced within the more structured body cultures, such as Ex and Spt, may be more influenced by general aspects of an individual's appraisal and coping repertoires. As in general life, achievement, competition and performance are valued by society, similar to the values prevalent in structured physical activity domains where there is also an emphasis on measuring oneself against external standards, comparing performance against others (Gurley *et al.*, 1984) and being conscious of the aesthetics of the body (e.g. Maguire & Mansfield, 1998). This being the case, the sources of stimuli and stress experienced in Ex and Spt, can be understood as similar to those found in general life.



Although this explanation should be interpreted with caution, when individual predictors from the enjoyment equations were considered, it became more apparent that enjoyment derived from D could well be less dependent upon how people normally appraise and deal with stress in their lives. In more detail, the findings highlighted that people who felt less competent in general life, were more likely to find D enjoyable. This could suggest that D contexts allow people, who normally feel more uncomfortable or unable to meet the challenges of their everyday lives, to enjoy this type of movement experience. This evidence adds a little weight to the argument being developed here, that the dance experience in comparison to Ex and Spt, is relatively free from social norms and values that proliferate in life more generally.

It would also appear from the results that the social support derived from the D environment plays an important role in facilitating enjoyment. D was the only context in which feelings of social support, imparted a significant main-effect on enjoyment. Some leisure oriented research has shown that social support can play an important role in facilitating positive emotional outcomes from recreational experiences, acting both in a stress-buffering capacity (Iso-Ahola & Park, 1996), as well as acting directly to alleviate stress and enhance well-being (Bailey *et al.*, 1994; Caltabiano, 1995). Within D contexts, the social support derived from such experiences can be seen as affording individuals with an important additional coping resource, which contributes directly to feelings of well-being, *independent* of how competent the individual feels.

This observation can be partially explained, if we briefly consider the nature of the actual movement experiences. People who go and Ex in a public place (such as a gym or leisure centre) may well be participating in the presence of other people, yet the level of real interaction that occurs, and indeed, is needed for a successful experience, isn't generally high. People tend to get on with their own thing. In Spt, people are often pitted against one another, sometimes as individuals and sometimes as part of a team. In either circumstance, the competitive nature of the experience might well detract from people perceiving these contexts as highly supportive, what tends to be re-enforced is an "Us versus them" logic. Whereas in D, one of the main intrinsic aims of the experience is to generate a friendly supportive atmosphere in which people can relax, mingle and let go. Results from the paired t-tests help to clarify this point, at least in relation to Ex



experiences. People who participated in both Ex and D, perceived D to provide them with a significantly higher level of social support than their Ex experiences.

Feelings of social support were also influential in predicting enjoyment in Ex and Spt. However, in these contexts it was *general life* support that helped predict enjoyment, suggesting that participants' general networks of supportive relationships, may partially buffer the effects of difficulties experienced in these movement activities.

Some individual coping strategies also emerged as making significant contributions to enjoyment scores in the various body culture contexts. In D and Ex, ACC coping made a positive contribution, and in Spt DEV coping made a strong individual contribution. One of the key requisites for enjoyable experiences, as postulated by flow theory, is the matching of perceived skills and challenges. If applied to the current findings this theory would suggest that in order to enjoy movement experiences, it is necessary for people to attempt to adjust their expectations to meet the challenge of these situations. It is feasible that an enjoyable experience of Spt, to a degree depends on how well someone has performed (am I winning or losing?). The findings suggest that in order to cope with these type of experienced difficulties, one might have to constantly re-evaluate and devalue the situation, in order to enjoy it.

Dose-response characteristics also made a significant contribution in predicting enjoyment, in both LPA and Ex. When entered into the regression analyses (block 2), these factors accounted for 17 of the 32.5% of total explained variance in LPA, and 16 of the 47.5% in Ex contexts. 'Intensity' of activity made a significant contribution to LPA and 'length of session' to Ex. These factors may well be more important in structured Ex contexts, whereby people often set themselves goals based on dose-response criteria (e.g. *how* intense the work-out should be, and *how* long the person can endure the work-out) which are seen as important in eliciting successful experiences. However, the current findings would also suggest that the dose-response parameters that have defined much of the research on physical activity and well-being, when investigated alongside dispositional and situational aspects of cognitive appraisal, might best be seen as influential (yet more peripheral) in explaining emotional responses to physical activity.

Interestingly, participation in D made a significant contribution to enjoyment derived from Ex (table 7). Although this could be just a statistically significant result,



there are plausible explanations. Perhaps one of the main reasons young people work-out is to change the physical appearance of their body. Yet, in D contexts (e.g. Rave and Disco), little attention is placed upon having a 'beautiful-body' (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998) as people are welcomed and valued regardless of their bodily looks. This de-emphasis on the body could influence the way the exerciser, who also goes out clubbing, actually views their body. This explanation requires further empirical investigation, and should be viewed with scepticism. It might be more plausible to suggest that a lot of D music is now played in the gym, meaning that people who also go out clubbing, could derive enjoyment in the gym from working-out to the same sort of music (e.g. Karageorghis & Terry, 1997). Further investigation is needed here, as these are only tentative explanations.

Recent research investigations have looked at how participation, in physical activity relates to aspects of both primary (i.e. personality) and secondary appraisal (i.e. coping). Some researchers have suggested the need to clearly delineate the personality and coping correlates of participation with specific types of body culture. This need to more clearly differentiate physical activity was first highlighted by Yeung & Hemsley (1997b) who found that E people were more likely to leave structured exercise classes.

The current findings would seem to concur with the observations drawn by Yeung & Hemsley. In more detail, they put forward the hypothesis that E people were more likely to seek physical activity experiences that were not so structured, controlled, and predictable, and that allowed enough opportunities for people to socialise. Findings from this project add support to their hypothesis, whilst at the same time contesting the conclusions drawn by the majority of related research initiatives which have inferred, that exercise per se, is correlated with E (e.g. Courneya & Hellesten, 1998; Davis *et al.*, 1995; Howard *et al.*, 1986; Potgieter & Venter, 1995). In more detail, people who participated in LPA were likely to be less extraverted. People who participated in D and Spt were more likely to be extraverted, which according to Yeung & Hemsley's reasoning, can be accounted for by the observation that D and Spt offers people potentially less predictable and more 'thrill-seeking' movement experiences.

If these observations hold true in real life, then we should consider more carefully just *how* effective health promotion strategies, can really be. If they only target certain



forms of body culture (normally Ex), it is unlikely that all people will find this type of movement experience to their liking. Yeung & Hemsley (1997b) have noted in consideration of this point, that people should be given enough opportunities to become physically active, and that this involves giving people as many different types of physical activity to choose from. Clearly this type of research has implications for activity interventions (Courneya & Hellesten, 1998; Courneya *et al.*, in press), which should be structured according to the values and beliefs held by the individual. Some contexts may be too stressful for certain individuals, whilst others, may not be able to hold the attention of the individual. What is needed is an appreciation of the differences that each physical activity experience holds for any given individual. This means understanding that all physical activity is *not* the same.

The current findings also offer additional evidence to suggest that body cultures may act as specific forms of coping (e.g. Ingledew & McDonagh, 1998). Like the personality research, little if no attention has been given to delineating the coping functions of specific types of body culture. The current findings help to redress this balance. In more detail, SR coping was found to predict involvement in LPA (as well as distinguish length of participation), SSS was found to predict D participation (as well as distinguish length of participation along with AV), and SSS was highlighted as being a significant negative predictor in distinguishing length of participation in S.

In view of these results it is perhaps important to note, that LPA takes place in the absence of others, and therefore there is likely to be little direct pressure to perform or compete in such contexts. LPA may simply act as a way in which to directly alleviate the symptoms of stress, this is plausible as it is common for people to recreate on their own in order to escape the pressures and stresses of life. Guppy & Weatherstone (1997) also found evidence for this relationship, finding exercise and meditation health behaviours to correlate with symptom-oriented coping.

In relation to D participation being predicted by SSS coping, many observations have already been noted concerning the socially supportive nature of this type of movement experience. The experience itself offers many people an opportunity to share freely with others. It is not uncommon for people to draw upon the advice and support of others in these environments, indeed one of the main aspects of clubbing, involves



meeting up with friends before going out and then spending time ‘chilling-out’ with people afterwards. AV coping was also shown to predict length of participation in D. This coping function has been observed before (Ingledeu & McDonagh, 1998). The authors noted that in relation to physical activity, AV coping could serve as a form of ‘time-out’ coping strategy.

Finally, the only significant coping strategy that was highlighted as predicting length of participation in S, was SSS coping, which made a negative contribution. This finding suggests, that people who have competed in S for any length of time, are less likely to seek out others when they need help. SSS also made a significant contribution to enjoyment derived from S. Taken together these findings suggest that seeking support from others might not be so necessary, or indeed desirable, in order to succeed in sport.

One of the main limitations of the study was that the sample was heavily skewed towards female participation. Future studies might want to perform separate analyses on male and female populations, as there are likely to be important differences in understanding the extant relationships. The present study is likely to mask some of these potential differences. Another limitation of the study concerns the coping inventory used. Given that each function of coping was measured by a single item there is rightly much ambiguity concerning the results drawn from the present study. Future initiatives may well want to focus on eliciting the coping functions served by different forms of physical activity, by incorporating more statistically robust coping measures.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

The main aim of this study was to explore how different types of body culture are implicated in the stress, appraisal and coping process, and to understand more fully, the influence of dispositional and situational cognitive factors in this process. By looking at body cultures in a comparative sense, an effort has been made to understand how the type of physical activity and the context in which it occurs influences the appraisal and coping process. Results have suggested that consideration of the environment in which movement occurs, does alter the stress-appraisal and well-being process.



Specifically D contexts were shown to afford opportunities for people to enjoy movement relatively independent of how they normally appraise and cope with stress in general (indeed, those that felt less competent in general life were likely to enjoy the dance experience more than others). In comparison, enjoyment derived from more structured movement experiences were highlighted as being more dependent on general appraisal and coping processes. It was suggested that similar types of social stimuli proliferate in Ex and Spt environments as in general life namely, achievement, performance, and competition. In comparison, D may afford people opportunities to enjoy movement which aren't based on prevalent social values and norms that operate with the wider milieu, as the requisite for enjoyable experiences would seem to be to have an affinity with the music being played, and to enjoy moving the body for the sake of it, as opposed to the meeting of specific extrinsic goals.

Recently, researchers have suggested the clear need to create movement contexts enriched with social support (Turner *et al.*, 1997), ones that don't necessarily promote competition and achievement (Wankel, 1996). D, in the shape of youth dance culture focused upon in the present study, may well provide one such suitable environment, in which people can experience their body's moving in non-threatening environments. Indeed, it was the only context in which social support derived from the experience imparted a significant effect on enjoyment, irrespective of how competent people felt within such contexts.

Much effort has been invested in understanding the relationship between structured exercise and emotional well-being in recent decades. The present study, in broadening the focus and looking at body cultures in a comparative sense, has illustrated the need, to more clearly elucidate the influence of different types of body culture on emotional well-being. Young people participate in many forms of physical activity. Increasingly these experiences include non-traditional forms of movement. The findings from this study would suggest that Rave dancing affords young people with one important alternative type of bodily experience, offering a contrast to the traditional body cultural landscape, which alienates so many young people.

Future research would do well to consider the whole spectrum of movement experiences, available to young people. The predominant focus on structured exercise at



the expense of other forms of body culture, displays a clear bias in the research literature at present, which the present study has tried at least, to partially redress.



# Chapter Three



### 3. Changing paradigms: Towards a qualitative approach

#### 3.1 Paradigmatic breakdown

The first study marked the beginning of my research journey, helping to discern some pertinent differences in the psychosocial dimensions of exercise and dance (alongside sport) within a young student population. However, when I began to question the research, towards the end of the analysis phase, some concerns emerged as to what *could* and *couldn't* be said about young people and their psychosocial health in relation to exercise and dance, when researching from within the positivistic paradigm.

These concerns emerged in conjunction with some new research questions, which arose when reflecting upon my personal experiences of 'keeping-fit' and going out 'clubbing.' This period of reflection, left me feeling that in order to dig deeper into the worlds of exercise and rave as *distinct* cultural practices with their own particular nuances, 'ideologies,' internal sense making dimensions and implications on questions of health and identity, I had to situate the research within another paradigm of thought and action, more suited to exploring these types of questions.

In hindsight, I realise that the adoption of a positivistic approach came about through a somewhat naïve and uncritical acceptance of quantitative science as the only means of accruing *valid* insights. Whilst here is not the place to elaborate upon the background context of my research journey, it is suffice to say that not unlike other sport researchers, my undergraduate research methods training was undertaken within a physical science oriented sports science department, where I was relatively unaware of alternative approaches as well as being nurtured to doubt the legitimacy of the alternative 'soft' sciences.

This chapter will serve as an 'adjunct' between the first study and the *beginning* of the remainder of the project, moving away from the positivistic pastures and into the worlds of qualitative inquiry.

In more detail, I will highlight some of the assumptions underpinning the research enterprise as perceived from within the positivistic paradigm, and discuss these assumptions, in relation to two alternative—interpretive and critical—paradigms, which have tapped into the qualitative imagination as a means of exploring and analysing the



social world. By making visible the contours and parameters that shape these different belief systems and knowledge making practices, the hope is to show how these paradigms conceive of the world and deal with it in contrasting ways.

On the basis of this *awareness raising* exercise, it will be suggested that a more informed decision can be made concerning which paradigm is more or less appropriate to investigate cultural phenomena, given the nature, purpose and interests of a given research project. Some of the relative strengths of qualitative approaches—as a means of exploring the social world—will then be outlined and discussed in relation to developments within the social sciences, using examples of qualitative work from within the field of sport and exercise science, as a means of illustrating and expounding these strengths.

### **3.2 Contrasting paradigms of thought and action: Positivistic, interpretive and critical perspectives.**

A paradigm is a set of beliefs, values and techniques which is shared by members of a scientific community, and which acts as a guide or map, dictating the kinds of problems scientists should address and the types of explanations that are acceptable to them

(Kuhn, 1970, p.175).

Paradigms deal with first principles, or ultimates. They are human constructions...A paradigm encompasses four concepts: ethics (axiology), epistemology, ontology, and methodology. *Ethics* asks, How will I be as a moral person in the world? Epistemology asks, How do I know the world? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?...Ontology raises basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world. Methodology focuses on the best means of gaining knowledge

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.157).



Long since the insights and commentary of Thomas Kuhn, the term ‘paradigm’ has been one of the most talked about and contentious issues within the social sciences (Schwandt, 2001). The ‘paradigm debate’ continues to influence both, philosophical and applied social research discussions, none more so than in the differentiation of quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of individuals and societies, a discussion which has also permeated critical dialogue within the field of sport and exercise science (e.g. Bain, 1995; Biddle *et al.*, 2001; Markula *et al.*, 2001).

It is important to make visible the assumptions that shape paradigms of inquiry, so that the tacit ‘ins and outs’ of the knowledge production process, can be brought into conscious awareness, as it is important to remember that, “The individual research act does not take place in a vacuum but in the social context of “invisible colleges”, that is, a community of scholars who share similar conceptions of proper questions, methods, techniques, and forms of explanation” (Sparkes, 1992, p.11). Involvement in this debate, informed the process of ‘deconstruction’ that took place in my research project, helping me to come to a more informed understanding of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of social inquiry as viewed from within different traditions and research communities. This provided a platform upon which to orientate and navigate myself through the rest of the project, in a more reflective manner.

Whilst an in-depth comparison of social science paradigms is outside the scope of the current discussion—see Crotty (1998); Guba & Lincoln (1998); Wilber (1995) for detailed analyses, as well as Bain (1995); Fahlberg & Fahlberg (1994); Markula *et al.* (2001) and; Sparkes (1992) for more sport-focused commentaries. The intention is simply to contrast some of the key assumptions that underpin positivistic, interpretive and critical paradigms, so as to make evident how ‘first principles’ or fundamental ‘stepping stones’ link philosophy with applied practice (ontology, epistemology and methodology). In doing so, an attempt will be made to show how these different paradigms channel inquiry down different paths, positing different relationships between the inquirer and the researched, using different strategies for producing knowledge, as well as being, more or less oriented towards contrasting interests and purposes. In order to facilitate this discussion, some of the basic assumptions that differentiate these paradigms of thought



and action are briefly dealt with in the table below (table 21), and ‘fleshed-out’ in the commentary that follows.

**Table 21:** Some assumptions informing prevalent social science paradigms

Assumptions	Positivistic*	Interpretive	Critical
Ontology	<b>External-realist</b> (reality “out there”)	<b>Internal-relativist</b> (reality “in the mind” / context specific)	<b>Historical-realist</b>  (reality as historical appearance) <b>Internal-idealist</b> (reality “ought to be...”)
Epistemology	<b>Dualist-objective</b> (findings as “truth”)	<b>Transactional-subjective</b> (findings as value-laden / constructed)	<b>Transactional-subjective</b> (findings as historically situated / value-based)
Role of researcher	<b>Independent from participants</b> (passive / apply techniques)	<b>Engagement with participants</b> (active / researcher = instrument)	<b>Engagement with participants</b> (active/ researcher = critical instrument)
Research stance	<b>Neutral</b> (“all things equal” control for biases)	<b>Reflexive-relative</b> (acknowledge prejudices & biases)	<b>Reflexive-relative</b> (acknowledge biases & risks)
Methodology	<b>(quasi)-experimental</b> / manipulative (nomothetic)	<b>Hermeneutical-dialectic</b> (ideographic)	<b>Dialectical / transformative</b> (ideographic)
Validity claims	<b>Rigor sanctioned by methods</b> (internal-external validity / reliability)	<b>Legitimacy sanctioned by authenticity / values</b>	<b>Legitimacy sanctioned by values / agreement &amp; erosion of ignorance</b>
Goals / interests	<b>Explanation, prediction &amp; control</b>  (Strategic / technical / intervention)	<b>Meaning, interpretation &amp; reconstruction</b> (Communicative / practical)	<b>Interpretation, critique and emancipation</b>  (Communicative / ethical / transformative)

\* It is acknowledged that contemporary qualitative inquiry can also be situated within a neo or post-positivistic paradigm, which can be conceived as a watered down (or modified) version of positivism. The ontological and epistemological position moves towards a critical-realist and a modified, dualist-objective stance (acknowledges an external reality out there, which can only be probabilistically apprehended, and where the probable ‘truth’ of findings is established by the research community). Asides from this, *validity* is still established via the application of correct methods and techniques and the *goals* of inquiry, concerned with explanation, prediction and control.



As regards to ontology, positivism (external-realism) perceives reality as an *external* construct “out there” (Spicer & Chamberlain, 1996; Sarantakos, 1998), governed by universal laws as in the natural world (Flick, 2002). Human beings are understood to be thoroughly rational, functional and mechanical entities (Hoberman, 1992; Reason & Rowan, 1981), whose behaviour is learned through observation and governed by external causes (deterministic), and thus devoid of, freewill (Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

In contrast, the interpretive paradigm (internal-relativism) understands reality to be something, which is *internally* experienced in the minds of people (Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1994), socially constructed through interactions and personal interpretations. In other words reality is individual, context specific and therefore, *relative* (e.g. Crotty, 1998; Sparkes, 1992).

A more critically informed ontology (historical-realism / internal-idealism), argues that far from being the sole preserve of an individual’s freewill (experienced and interpreted internally) reality is configured and influenced by encounters with powerful social, political and historical forces, which distort peoples’ perceptions, in order to serve their own needs (Wilber, 1983; 1995; Sarantakos, 1998). In this paradigm, reality is only real in a historical sense (Crotty, 1998; Herda, 1999), yet behind the historical illusion are innate hidden potentials for a more ethical and equitable reality (Habermas, 1996). Therefore, the ontological assumptions stress on the one hand, the *external historical* and political structures that determine ‘reality’, as well as envisaging more *idealistic* notions of reality through transformation of the status-quo (Crotty, 1998; Herda, 1999).

Turning attention to the nature of the knowledge quest and the relationship between knower and known, positivistic epistemology (dualist-objectivism) views the human world as consisting of discrete, functional-structural parts, independent of the human mind, which can be observed, measured, manipulated, controlled and added up to reveal characteristics of the whole (Fahlberg, 1993; Harman, 1991; Robinson, 2000). The researcher and researched are perceived to be independent of one another—with the researched being the ‘object’ of study—and inquiry assumed to take place through a ‘one way mirror’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Sparkes, 1992), so as not to jeopardise and bias findings, which are thought to be untainted by ‘values’ and communicated as ‘truthful’



and ‘objective’ reality (Spicer & Chamberlain, 1996).

In contrast, interpretive and critically informed epistemological standpoints (transactional-subjectivist) contend that knowledge is socially constructed, embedded and shaped within local frames of reference and inter-dependent relationships (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Both paradigms contend that the knower and known can’t be detached from one another, as in the subject-object position espoused by positivism. Thus, findings will necessarily be informed by the ‘values’, ‘interests’ and ‘histories’ that the researcher brings to the inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). In this sense, learning about the social world occurs as an ongoing and unfolding conversation between the researcher and the researched, which is envisaged as the meeting or, fusion of ‘horizons’ (Gadamer, 1992; Herda, 1999).

Whilst the underlying ontological and epistemological views of these contrasting paradigms are concerned with the philosophy of being and knowing in an abstract sense, the methodological assumptions that arise from these world-views outline in a more concrete fashion, how the researcher actually goes about producing knowledge.

Positivistic methodology (experimental-manipulative/nomothetic) is primarily concerned with formulating a-priori questions and hypotheses, which distinguish between assigned ‘dependent’ and ‘independent’ variables so as to explore possible correlations and predicting various outcomes, with the intention of assigning cause and effect relationships (Spicer & Chamberlain, 1996). Hypotheses are empirically tested, controlled for prejudices and biases and rigorously checked by complex statistical calculations for reliability, internal and external validity, so as to ensure stability and generalisability (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

In contrast to positivism’s concern with the nomothetic realm of generalisations, interpretive methodology (hermeneutical-dialectic), seeks to understand the ideographic domain of concrete situations, studying social actors within their life-worlds (Sarantakos, 1998). Here, the focus is not on developing external theories, but a concern with ‘emic’ or ‘insider’ perspectives (Flick, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1998), indigenous philosophies and local knowledge (Geertz, 1983). Through a dialectical interplay between the researcher and the researched, interpretive methodology seeks to describe and interpret the structures of lived experience and the organizing principles that shape and give



meaning to social actors understanding of the life-world (Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1983; Reason & Rowan, 1981).

Within the interpretive paradigm, the criteria used to judge the adequacy of an investigation aren't reliant upon the application of correct statistic techniques and methods, which insure validity and reliability in positivistic investigation. Interpretive methodology seeks to provide interpretations and reconstructions of the social world that lead to improved understandings of the lives of others, grounded in a shared recognition and understanding (between researcher and researched) of the life-world (Fahlberg, 1993; Sparkes, 1992). Here, validity is shaped by claims to the *trustworthiness* of findings (broadly congruous with positivistic validity and reliability criteria), which includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as well as more fluid criteria concerns, which respond to issues of *authenticity* (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Understandably, given the subjective and relativist ontological stance of interpretive research, where meanings are multiple and socially constructed, validity is sought via a much more dynamic interplay between the researcher, the researched and the interests of inquiry (i.e. non-foundational stance). The human faculty of common sense ascertains that some interpretations are likely to be better or, more persuasive than others (Crotty, 1998). Similarly, multiple interpretations, congruous with the relativist position, can co-exist and enrich the landscape of understanding (Sparkes, 1992).

Given the similarities between interpretive and critical epistemologies, the assumptions and attitudes upon which critical methodological enterprises take place, are also broadly speaking, congruous with one another (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). However, there are some significant differences in the intentions of critical methodology, in so far as it attempts to go beyond reconstructing 'what it means...' from an insider perspective, towards questioning the underlying intentions and tacit assumptions that are inscribed in personal accounts and group narratives (Herda, 1999). Critical methodology has an overt interest in uncovering the deep-seated, historical power relationships that infuse social life and personal narratives (Crotty, 1999; Habermas, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

Critical methodology is concerned with uncovering the more 'external' structures of social oppression, suffering and struggle that operate within the lifeworld (Herda,



1999; Guba & Lincoln, 1998), as well as, exploring the ‘internal’ aspects of psychological suppression, which manifest from within (Fahlberg, 1993; Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1994; Wilber, 2000) in order to “...transform ignorance and misapprehensions into more informed consciousness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p.206).

Attempts to scrutinise critical research to claims of validity and goodness, are necessarily understood to take into consideration the situated-ness of the researcher (Crotty, 1998), in terms of noting the socio-cultural, political, economic, gender, ethnic dimensions of social life that infuse and influence the power relationships within the researched life-world. Given the ideological premises of critical research, it has been argued that there should also be evidence of how encounters with the data, changed and transformed the researcher’s pre-conceived ideas and theoretical postulations, in other words there is “...a need for systematized reflexivity in order to indicate how *a priori* theory has been changed by the logic of the data” (Sparkes, 1992, p.44). Validity claims might also consider whether the narratives of social actors are in some shape, coherent with the wider community of interpreters (i.e. subjective referenced claims, congruous with inter-subjectivity claims, see Herda, 1999; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Besides from this, it has been suggested that wider scrutiny of critical research, should question whether inquiry helps to give voice to and empower the marginalised (Bain, 1995; Herda, 1999; Sparkes, 1992) and provide a stimulus to action that focuses on transforming the status-quo (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Not surprisingly, all three paradigms align themselves to different interests and research goals. Positivistic research attempts to control and predict social phenomena, which lends itself to explanations of human behaviour and action through an explicit reliance upon techniques and methodological procedures. This type of knowledge is assimilated into the literature, in order to develop and build a more general theory of a given phenomenon, information from which can be applied generically at the level of strategic interventions (Spicer & Chamberlain, 1996). The interests of interpretive research are oriented towards making sense of peoples’ lived experience. Concerned with the social relations and processes that influence personal and inter-personal interpretations, as well as elaborating upon the intentions behind behaviours and social habits, through acts of reconstruction (Crotty, 1998). Research within this paradigm



attempts to produce ‘experiential knowledge’ in contrast to the ‘technical knowledge’ emphasis that results from positivistic inquiry (Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1994).

Alongside these interests, critical research endeavours tend more towards the realms of ethical and moral contemplation and action. The explicit goal is to question and critique existing power-relations within the social world, by uncovering the mythologies that sustain the powerful and constrain individuals and marginalised communities (Herda, 1999). Critical research seeks justice, emancipation and social transformation, which is to say that it has a more overtly ‘edgy’ and ‘political’ research agenda than the positivistic and interpretive paradigms.

Whilst the critical paradigm might be more openly political, this is not to deny that all paradigms are human constructions, which stress certain values and interests over others and rely upon specific rhetoric strategies and argumentation to persuade others (Sparkes, 1992). How else could research communities thrive?

Whilst some have argued that these paradigms act as ‘either-or’ frameworks from which to situate and conduct research, this approach isn’t without complications and has been noted as foreclosing debate and dialogue between various research communities (Flick, 2002; Sparkes, 1992). Another way to ‘work with’ the paradigms, is to perceive them as part of a social science ‘tool-box,’ in which the approach used would reflect the interests and purposes of the ‘job.’ Those in favour of a trans-disciplinary and multi-paradigmatic position have, “...suggested that purism about the epistemological origins of a particular approach may undermine our ability to choose and implement the most appropriate research design for answering the research questions posed” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p.17).

When set within the context of the paradigm debate, I had to concede that with regards to this project I needed to use another ‘tool,’ as the purposes of the project had moved away from prediction and explanation towards a more overt interest in meaning and interpretation. The first study was a useful starting point, but the research had developed and couldn’t be accommodated by the continuing along the positivistic path. As a consequence, this *turn away* from quantitative inquiry necessitated a move *towards* qualitative methodology, to accommodate the emergent interests of the project.



### 3.3 Outlining some strengths of qualitative inquiry

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter disciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social sciences and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions.

Qualitative research embraces two tensions at the same time. On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is drawn to more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis

(Nelson *et al.*, 1992, p.4 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p6).

Qualitative approaches to exploring the social world are multiple and numerous, straddling post-positivistic, interpretive and critical paradigms. One cannot simply speak of a unified or homogenous approach in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For example, within the field of sport and exercise psychology, qualitative research has adopted post-positivistic, interpretive and more post-modern assumptions and strategies (Biddle *et al.*, 2001; Culver *et al.*, 2003; Sparkes, 1998). The qualitative enterprise extends over the social science landscape like a rich tapestry of coloured threads, fabrics and textures, engaging with and depicting various complexities of life, from multiple angles and standpoints. This heterogeneous enterprise has taken social research down numerous qualitative paths, adopting many methods and tools (e.g. interviews, focus groups, photographs, case studies, reflective diaries, film, various print media, participant observations, participant reflections), as well as various methodologies (e.g. hermeneutics, phenomenology, action-research, ethnomethodology, psychoanalysis, ethnography, symbolic interactionism) informed by diverse theoretical perspectives adopted from the social science ‘search engine.’

Within the fields of sport and physical activity, qualitative inquiry has borrowed



from many theoretical schools, for example; existentialist exploration into exercise (Fahlberg *et al.*, 1992); grounded theory used to inform studies looking at exercise programmes for overweight women (Bain *et al.*, 1989), the construction of a youth sports club (Kirk & MacPhil, 2003); various strands of post-modern, post-structural thought applied to the textual analysis of fitness magazines (Eskes *et al.*, 1998), an analysis of a fitness club as a nexus of health, beauty and leisure concerns (Ginsberg, 2000) and the construction and meaning of a body-builder's identity (Monaghan, 1999). Post-modern feminist thought has also informed qualitative inquiry into young women's perceptions of leisure and physical education (Flintoff & Scratton, 2001), ethnographic studies focusing on aerobics (Collins, 2002; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 1995) and in-depth interviews, examining the meaning of exercise in Swedish women's wider life-patterns (Thomsson, 1999), as well as an ethnography of the experiences of an elite women's soccer team (Cox & Thomson, 2000). Besides from these studies, recent qualitative studies have explored the world's first gay only rugby union club borrowing from queer theory (Price & Parker, 2003). Studies combining post-colonialism and race perspectives have also explored the experiences of semi-professional black soccer players (e.g. Jones, 2002).

Together, these diverse examples of qualitative research have provided insights in to the worlds of recreational body cultures, communicating descriptive 'snapshots' of lived experience, examining, articulating and interpreting the 'view from within' specific, culturally and historically shaped life-worlds. They have also attempted to make visible the implicit power-relationships that permeate sport and physical activity, elaborating upon the contradictions that arise from these social processes, and giving space to the marginalised, oppressed and poorly understood to articulate their *truths* and *constraints*.

Despite the differences in approaches, perspectives and methodologies, qualitative research (in all its guises), has attempted to provide situated, contextualised and often, overlapping and ambiguous insights into the life-worlds of 'others' (Crotty, 1998), via a bricolage of strategies (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and modes of representation (e.g. Sparkes, 2002). Thus, whilst it is impossible to speak of a single and unified qualitative approach, that doesn't necessarily, preclude such a thing as a set of qualitative *attitudes* and *sensibilities* towards social research.



An underlying ontological issue has concerned whether the social and natural worlds exist in similar ways or whether the social world is very different because it is open to subjective interpretation...Most contemporary qualitative researchers maintain that the social world is regulated by normative expectations and shared understandings and hence the laws that govern it are not immutable (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p.13).

In the proceeding section, some thought was given over to differentiating and discussing standpoints, views and assumptions that inform prevalent social science paradigms of enquiry. This discussion delineated positivistic inquiry as essentially different in comparison to interpretive and critical research from ontology upwards, in so far as positivism understands the basic substance of reality to consist of 'matter,' whereas with interpretive and critical paradigms, the primary substance of reality is 'meaning.'

This reasoning has provided a basis for some philosophers and theorists to argue that in adopting the physical science model, quantitative approaches are "...no match for addressing human complexity" (Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1994; see also the work of Wilber, 2000). However, it is perhaps naïve to discuss the strengths of qualitative research solely on the basis of abstract, philosophical reasoning (e.g. Silverman, 1993). It needs to be remembered that the qualitative enterprise developed out of, and in response to changing historical circumstances and conditions (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Divorcing the philosophy of knowledge from this historical dimension doesn't do justice to *how* and *why* qualitative approaches provide particularly valuable alternatives to more quantitative oriented research, at this particular juncture in the history of the social sciences. Here, the remarks of Uwe Flick in a recent textbook, '*An Introduction to Qualitative Research*' (2002) are incisive and insightful, and worth quoting at length.

Qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social relations, owing to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds. Key expressions for this pluralization are the 'new obscurity' (Habermas, 1996), the growing 'individualization of ways of living and biographical patterns' (Beck, 1992) and the dissolution of 'old' social inequalities and the new diversity of milieus, subcultures, lifestyles and ways of



living (Hradil, 1992). This pluralization requires a new sensitivity to the empirical study of issues. Advocates of postmodernism have argued that the era of big narratives and theories is over: locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives are now required. With regard to the pluralization of lifestyles and patterns of interpretation in modern and postmodern society, Herbert Blumer's statement becomes relevant once again and has new implications: 'The initial position of the social scientist and the psychologist is practically always one of lack of familiarity with what is actually taking place in the sphere of life chosen for study' (1969, p.33).

Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives. These are so new from them that their traditional deductive methodologies – deriving research questions and hypotheses from theoretical models and testing them against empirical evidence – are failing in the differentiation of objects. Thus, research is increasingly forced to make use of inductive strategies: instead of starting from theories and testing them, 'sensitizing concepts' are required for approaching social contexts to be studied. However, contrary to widespread misunderstanding, these concepts are themselves influenced by previous theoretical knowledge. But here, theories are developed from empirical studies. Knowledge and practice are studied as *local* knowledge and practice (Geertz, 1983)

(Flick, 2002, p.2).

Flick's comments remind us that the changes and developments that have taken place in the wider social milieu, have fundamentally altered individuals' relationships with themselves and the social world, impacting upon peoples' habits, lifestyles and biographies, as we pass from modern into post-modern times. These changes have confronted social researchers with new problems, risks and challenges, which have required the development of new *sensibilities* and strategies in terms of the way people position themselves in the social world, as well as an increased *sensitivity* and *reflexivity* to how they explore and reflect on their relationships with the researched, not to mention questioning how they might *represent* the 'others' they seek to understand.

In this light, we might argue that a particular strength of qualitative research has to do with its ability to respond to these new challenges and predicaments, in ways that



traditional approaches struggle with (and often oppose). For example, quantitative inquiry adopts a generally deductive attitude towards investigation—whereby hypotheses are formulated from the body of knowledge then tested in order to verify or falsify *a priori* ideas—which often (by design) omits ‘novelty’ as a part of the inquiry process. Qualitative sensibilities re-introduce the concept of novelty as a central part of the knowledge quest (Flick, 2002).

By affording practitioners various ‘sensitising strategies,’ qualitative inquiry allows researchers to combine inductive impulses and deductive hunches, so that the research journey isn’t presupposed on verifying or falsifying hypotheses, rather, it develops as a kind of reconnaissance mission, where various open questions can be asked—What is going on? What are the challenges and issues that face individual *X* and community *Y*? How do these processes impact on how they make sense of life? As such, these sensitising strategies and attitudes enable qualitative inquiry to respond to on-going changes in the post-modern landscape, by asking and re-asking: What are the new problems and tensions that are manifesting? What are the real issues that concern participants here?

Qualitative sport related research has likewise reflected these commitments and concerns, as witnessed in two recent studies (amongst others), which focused on the experiences of a team of elite women soccer players (Cox & Thompson, 2000) and an amateur gay rugby club (Price & Parker, 2003). In exploring two emergent sporting configurations, which have arisen in the post-modern pluralisation process, these studies produced insights into the social worlds of sport as, contested ideological terrain.

Both of these studies used ethnographic methodologies, combining participant observations and in-depth interviews with squad players and officials, with media text analyses to produce rich, longitudinal diaries of life within these post-modern sub-cultures. In the Cox & Thompson (2000) study, the authors provided stories about the women’s soccer experiences, in which their bodies were seen as sites of contestation and conflict between numerous identities and discourses (i.e. public and their private lives, as well as their experiences of the feminine body and heterosexual corporeality).

In more detail, all participants had encountered taunts and jibes from peers for their involvement in a ‘man’s’ game when they were growing up, and felt that their sexuality



was constantly brought into question, more so than their counterparts in the more 'female' dominated sports such as netball. By the way of anecdotes, participants alluded to how the mythology of female soccer, as a domain of lesbian athletes, had influenced the way in which significant others (e.g. family, friends and male coaches) perceived them and their sport. As a consequence the 'physical presence' gained through their affiliation with soccer, was accompanied by a strong desire to be perceived as 'feminine.' By way of illustration, participants drew reference to ways in which they 'played' at being feminine. The text is saturated with 'thick descriptions' highlighting some of the 'distancing' strategies that the women used to demonstrate their heterosexuality. These included wearing their hair long and in a pony-tail (in contrast to short cuts which were commonly perceived within the sub-culture as part of lesbian symbology), as well as partaking in various 'induction games' in the changing rooms, which required team-mates to give hints at their heterosexuality, so that their touching of others (on the pitch and off it) would not be put into question.

Evidently, this was not without implications for the lesbian players, who were overly conscious about how their body language was interpreted by team-mates and visiting teams, so much so that they would rather refer to themselves as 'bi-sexual' in order to avoid full-blown stigmatisation as well as present themselves in accordance with the team's implicit heterosexual defined image of femininity. However, by the end of the season, the researchers noticed that the 'them and us' attitude had dissipated somewhat, and that the visibility of lesbians within the team had led to some of 'straight' players to reflect and question their own behaviours and attitudes.

In the Price and Parker (2003) study, the fieldwork was conducted over the course of a year. Here, the primary field worker researched the world's first openly gay and bi-sexual rugby union team. The beginning of the report is dedicated to detailing members' prior rugby experiences (again through the use of 'thick descriptions'), often expressed as narratives of alienation, in which 'macho' school sport culture confronted their emergent sexual identities, leading many to conclude that their 'effeminate' nature's were inappropriate for playing sport. Not surprisingly, their successful entrance into the playing world was based upon the attainment of traditional masculine ideals and behaviours, which involved participants 'distancing' themselves from stereotypical camp



imagery. For some this created tensions and animosity with 'straight' players, others spoke about the jibes and jokes they'd been subjected to as a sign of their acceptance, whilst some felt threatened within this sort of environment and concealed their sexuality.

The report then moves onto highlighting the reasons why participants decided to leave their old clubs and join a gay only team. Interestingly, some members expressed the feeling that they wanted to distance themselves with traditional effeminate 'camp style,' and that their affiliation with rugby allowed them to identify more with masculine representations of homosexuality. Others said they were allured by the eroticism of 'macho-culture,' whilst some members noted, that they didn't feel alienated at 'straight' clubs. All players believed the idea of a gay team was more enjoyable, and served as a safe-heaven for many members.

Through the course of the report, the reader becomes familiar with the public face of the club, which presents itself as not wanting to be caught up with sexual politics (a position which received most criticism from within the wider politically active gay community). Internally, the club is shown to want to challenge the stereotypical view of gay men in society. Asides from this, the ethnography also drew attention to conflicts between the club's committee and the players. It was noted that the committee was keen to raise the standard of play in order to challenge the idea that gay men can't compete at the highest level, yet this wasn't endorsed by the players, who felt that this 'push' could detract from the social reasons which attracted them to the club, as well as diluting the original ethos and purposes of the club when it was founded.

In concluding, the authors suggest that the existence of an openly defined 'gay club' within the 'heterosexual matrix' enabled many participants to feel that they were challenging sporting stereotypes, on and off the pitch. However, ongoing tensions between the committee and the players, presented different opinions and views as to how acceptance within the mainstream rugby fraternity could best be facilitated. Here, the authors suggested (in a similar vein to Cox & Thompson), that whilst the club's visibility did much to challenge the commonly received notions of rugby as a domain of hyper-masculine heterosexuality, by 'distancing' itself from radical political activism, the club "...does not appear to challenge heteronormative discourses in this setting to any significant degree. Thus, in an attempt to gain some level of acceptance for players, the



club is co-opted into mainstream rugby and continues to endure discriminative (heterosexist) practices in order to remain unchallenged. It may be that (the club|) actually serves to reinforce definitions of sport through its “political” (in)actions both on and off the field” (Price & Parker, 2003, p.122).

These two studies are particularly pertinent examples through which to highlight and discuss the strengths of qualitative inquiry as a means to investigate social phenomenon. The studies explored two sub-cultures that juxtapose traditionally ‘marginalised’ and ‘silenced’ social groups (e.g. women in a men’s world; homosexuals in a homophobic sport-scape) as participants in dominant ‘male’ and ‘heterosexual’ sporting practices. They are extremely sensitive and ambiguous worlds, which posit the *physically active* body as a site of political, sexual, gender, and identity tensions, framed within the context of wider socio-cultural-historical forces and discourses.

Although particularly radical examples of sport-focused qualitative research (at least in terms of the subject matter), the point that can be made from these investigations, is that qualitative inquiry is well suited (perhaps uniquely so), to explore the highly complicated and often ambiguous, personal, social relations and historical processes that shape peoples’ experiences, by enabling individual viewpoints and opinions to be articulated and expressed, and juxtaposed with contrasting narratives and positions. Which is to say, qualitative approaches are well suited to explore and uncover the social world, as a site of tensions, constraints and differences (Flick, 2002).

Furthermore, as the case studies illustrate, personal sporting experiences do not develop in a vacuum and can’t be understood divorced from the times and spaces (histories and cultures) in which they are enacted. The ethnographic imagination enables the complex social structures, relations and historical narratives that infuse and shape cultural practices to be examined and communicated. Qualitative inquiry turns away from grand narratives and seeks instead to produce local, ideographic and contextualised knowledge grounded in the concrete experiences of the researched (e.g. Geertz, 1983).

By being situated in the life-world of the researched, contrary to quantitative investigation, the qualitative researcher aims to gain a sense of what is going on from within, to get close to the researched. Often, this develops out of prolonged engagement in the ‘field,’ so as to enable the researcher to become familiar with the multiple layers of



meaning that shape the life-world, and to become privy to the implicit nuances and ambiguities that only an 'insider' might be able to recognise, as well as to facilitate a degree of trust with the researched. For example, in the Cox & Thompson soccer study (2000) one of the authors (herself an elite player) confessed that during the course of the participant observations, the players were quite conscious of her presence.

However, on the fourth week of observations, I was named in the starting line-up of the team to play that day. After I had played, I felt that the team as a whole...accepted me more as another team member rather than an outsider who was researching them. This acceptance helped a great deal when it came to the subsequent interviews, where the players were very open and honest with their thoughts, particularly on sensitive and personal issues (Cox & Thompson, 2000, p.9).

Evidently, qualitative inquiry asks different things of the researcher. Intimacy and an affinity with the researched world is an attribute that can facilitate access into sporting cultures, as well as nurture trust between the, researcher and researched (Sands, 2002). In contrast to quantitative research, proficiency in the world of qualitative research doesn't develop by way of familiarity and expertise in statistical and technical procedures. As the 'research instrument' the qualitative researcher is required to nurture certain sensibilities, which enable them to develop an awareness of the 'personal realms' they inhabit with the researched, as well as being able to nurture a *reflective* and *reflexive* attitude, so as to remain aware of their positioning within the social world and the 'baggage' that accompanies them during the research journey (Alvesson & Kaj Sköldberg, 2000; Davis, 1999).

It is now commonplace for sport researchers to highlight something of their own relationships with the 'others' they investigate, by way of introductory caveats and extended extracts from research diaries, reflective journals, (e.g. Collins, 2002; Markula, 1995). Whilst serving to inform the reader about how (and why) the author is implicated in the research (so as provide a broad horizon from which the reader can assess and judge findings), the reflexive sensibility that qualitative approaches nurture can, in and of itself, be regarded as a particular strength of qualitative enterprise, heightening one's personal



and social awareness.

Over the last decade or so, qualitative inquiry has begun to respond to the post-modern issue of reflexivity and positioning, in a more concrete and creative fashion. Many researchers have begun to produce in-depth accounts of their own involvement in sport and physical activity, in the form of 'auto-ethnographies' (e.g. Gilbourne, 2002; Silvennoinen, 1993; Sparkes, 1996; Tsang, 2000). Using these strategies have allowed social researchers to explore and reflect upon their own experiences as the researched 'other,' in so developing other ways of knowing about the field they're engaged in. It has been argued that this sort of self-inquiry provides researchers another vista, through which to undertake a process of self-discovery in which their own voices and experiences are re-visited and acknowledged, where "knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges" (Richardson, 2000, p.929). In elaborating upon the strengths of this type of personal narrative work, Eichberg (1994, p.109) contends "They have, however, also a very practical side: How should we encourage our students to sharpen their sociological awareness?" Clearly, "getting to know oneself" is part of the challenge of getting to know about the world. Reflectivity and reflexivity form a central part of the qualitative knowledge quest.

This is just one example of how the qualitative 'imagination' has begun to extend the horizons of social research, as well as sharpen an awareness of its subject matter, so as to provide other opportunities for knowing and gaining insights into the social world. Whilst a more detailed discussion of recent developments in the field of qualitative inquiry is outside the remit of the current discussion (but will be returned to in later chapters), it is hoped that this chapter has been able to highlight some of the strengths that qualitative inquiry affords social research. The accompanying commentary and analysis has provided a suitable platform to enable the project develop into a more critical and interpretive research endeavour, furthered by qualitative methodologies and accompanying sensibilities.



# Chapter Four



## **4. The development of an embodied approach**

### **4.1 Bringing the body back: Preliminary comments and remarks**

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the body, embodiment, corporeality and carnal life within the social sciences (e.g. Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Featherstone *et al.*, 1991; Frank, 1990; 1991; 1995; 1998; Shilling, 1993; 1997; Turner, 1984). It has been argued (e.g. Davis, 1997; Frank, 1991), that the return of the body in social theory was born out of earlier interest, expressed by Feminist scholars (e.g. Bordo, 1987; Davis, 1981; Mitchell, 1971), phenomenology (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 1965; 1968) Foucauldian body micro-politics (Foucault, 1977; 1979; 1987; 1988), experiential realism (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sheets-Johnstone, 1990; 1992), the process-sociological approach espoused by Norbert Elias (Elias, 1978; 1982) as well as Bourdieu's work on *habitus* (e.g. 1977; 1990), amongst other perspectives.

To varying degrees, these theorists have all argued that the non-body dominance within the social sciences has had the effect of differentiating the mind from the body, in so removing the study of the (disembodied) mind from concrete experience, assigning the body to the natural and biological sciences, so emptying it of feelings and emotions, as well as exempting it from the influence of historical, cultural and political forces. The disembodied bias was, until recently, also replicated within the realm of Sports Studies. However, since the early 1990's this imbalance has also begun to be redressed (e.g. Eichberg, 1993a; 1993b; 1995; 1998; 2001; Harvey & Sparks, 1991; Loy *et al.*, 1993; Maguire, 1993; Rail & Harvey, 1995; Theberge, 1991; Vigarello, 1995; Young, 1990). This re-appropriation of the body, it has been argued, has allowed sport (as a mode of social analysis) to begin to reclaim its proper epistemological focus.

Hyphenated sociology (as in sport-sociology) means that sport is treated as if there was nothing specific in its field, or, in other words, as if it were without the body...The central point of the activity, the body, is thereby systematically excluded from sociological analysis, and in sociology assigned to the natural sciences, anatomy and physiology, just as the involved mind is assigned to psychology and the dimensions of change to history. The inter-relating connections of the activity—sport as fascination, sport as



culture—disappear...The body as an epistemological starting point shows that this type of sports sociology is a hyphenated science that leads away from the topic itself

(Eichberg, 1998, p.117-118).

This observation by Henning Eichberg is not without consequences to the social investigation of movement culture. Can sports studies afford to exclude the body from its analysis, and if so, at what cost? I myself became aware of this dilemma having concluded the first study. Looking back, I now realise that the disappointment and frustration that I felt when exploring my findings—a feeling that many of the qualitative and intentional differences had been overlooked—was in part due, to reproducing the ‘error’ outlined by Eichberg. In my enthusiasm to do ‘proper’ science, I placed the phenomena in a mentalist straightjacket, which was ill equipped to distinguish exercise and dance as distinct cultural *embodied* practices. As a consequence I was unable to investigate them on their own terms (as corporeal phenomena), so to speak.

As a rejoinder, this chapter explores what can happen when the body is brought ‘back in’ (Frank, 1991). In the following sections, an outline of an embodied framework will be sketched, drawing reference to the ideas of some prominent theorists, who have all in distinct yet overlapping ways, used the body as a ‘kick-off’ point (Eichberg, 1998). Drawing primarily on the general work of Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1965; 1968), Bourdieu (1977; 1990) and the more focused movement culture ideas of Eichberg (1993a; 1993b; 1995; 1998; 2001a; 2001b; 2002; In Press), it will be suggested that the body is neither, simple or natural, and that as domains of embodied knowledge, body cultures reveal important insights into the contents of social life and its contradictions.

Following this, it will be argued that an embodied theory of body culture isn’t without implications on how we do research. In advancing an embodied approach, it follows that the ways in which research is carried out also have to be grounded within the corporeal world (including the involvement of the researcher), and that the language used to express and communicate exercise and dance as corporeal phenomena, needs also to consider the links between discourse and embodiment (e.g. Eichberg, 1995; Sampson, 1998; Sparkes, 1999; 2005).



Citing some of the recent developments in cultural anthropology, reference will be made to contemporary ethnographic research endeavours, which have attempted to explore the embodied and living worlds of body culture, by way of more experiential and dialogical methodologies (e.g. Sands, 1999; 2002). In highlighting some of the recent sport focused examples of experiential ethnography, attention will be given over to discussing how these body researchers have drawn inspiration from the recent ‘narrative turn’ (e.g. Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Richardson, 1997), as a means of expressing their experiences in more personal, storied and—that is to say—embodied ways.

#### **4.2 The bodily basis of meaning: Merleau-Ponty’s sentient body**

[Merleau-Ponty] does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity.’ This word ‘facticity’ means that the factual-being-of-*Daesin*, being-there-in-factual-existence (as opposed to *Sosein*, essence) (Holbrook, 1988, p.113).

Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1965; 1968) attempted to overcome the legacy of Cartesian thought by re-fusing meaning into the flesh and the mind back into the body. As the basis of his re-embodiment project, he challenged Cartesian ontology and the traditional distinction made between the body (understood as a biological substance adhering to laws of physics) and the mind (perceived as a pure thinking substance standing outside of the physical world). Recently, Crossley (1995) noted that Merleau-Ponty “...argues for an understanding of the body as an effective agent and, thereby as the very basis of human subjectivity” (1995, p.44-45). In arguing for this re-conceptualisation of the body and mind, Merleau-Ponty drew reference to three fundamental points (Crossley, 1995), which help to illustrate that human meaning and subjectivity are actively constituted through the carnal roots of being-in-the-world, a world inherently *inter-subjective* in nature (Holbrook, 1988; Williams & Bendelow, 1998).

His first point was that perception is not an inner representation of the (outer) world. Rather, it occurs in the world. For example, there are not two pages here—one in the outer



world and one in your mind—just one typed page that is seen by you. In this sense, you the perceiver and the perceived (the page) stretch out and envelope one another, you and the page are thoroughly intermeshed and intertwined, meaning that perception is a relational and inter-subjective affair (Williams & Bendelow, 1998).

This leads to the second point, that the perceiving mind cannot be a separate substance from the body, we can only perceive from one place or another. Here perception consists of the meaningful integration of the senses, which are to be found in the body. As both the perceiver and the perceived (at one time or another), our body's can be the seer and the seen, the toucher and the touched, the speaker and a listener, a sentient being and a sensible being. These are dual aspects of our embodied nature, which are reversible, yet can never be wholly detached from one another. This re-configuration overcomes Cartesian thinking, in so far as the dualistic categories of subjective mind/objective-body and individual-world are "redefined as relational, intertwined and reversible aspects of a single fabric" (Crossley, 1995, p.47), a fabric which Merleau-Ponty came to recognise as the intertwining of the *flesh of the body* and *the flesh of the world*. The body is seen not only nor primarily as an objective body, but as sentient and meaningful body or body-subject (Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

A third point that arises has to do with the idea that perception is based in our body's *culturally* acquired behaviours through its *pro-activity*. In reading these words, you do not passively receive them. You are actively involved in comprehending what is going on by utilising the culturally acquired skill of reading and our shared sense of cultural symbology. Likewise, when in the presence of another person, we are involved in meaningfully comprehending what is going on, not only through spoken language but also through non-verbal behaviour, in the language that we speak through our body's actions and gestures. This gives us a felt sense of what is being understood, which we can only comprehend through recourse to our store of shared culturally acquired skills and techniques (e.g. Crossley, 1995; 1996; Howson & Inglis, 2001).

The implications of this final point are that in practice, culture and society intermesh with the body. Societies can't be understood detached from the actions of the body, or said another way "The perceiving body...is shown to be an agent of cultural praxes and, conversely, cultural praxes are argued to be the work of an active body" (Crossley, 1995,



p. 48). By re-appropriating the body as a *sentient* and *inter-subjective* being, thoroughly infused (and involved) with the world, the ideas of Merleau-Ponty go some way to overcome Cartesian philosophy, and in doing so, help to re-wire the mind back into the body and the body back into society (Williams & Bendelow, 1998).

In bringing the body back on the horizon, Merleau-Ponty drew reference to practical aspects of corporeal learning (akin to the work of Michael Polanyi, 1958; 1967), whereby we don't acquire existential understanding, primarily by intellectual work, but through practice and repetition. By focusing on the ways in which *real* bodies act, move and comprehend the world, Merleau-Ponty sought to bring back into conscious awareness the *tacit* and *sensuous* dimensions of bodily *know-how*, in so undermining the "I think therefore I am" mantra as the grounding for a practical philosophy of life.

This challenge is consolidated by Merleau-Ponty, through his affirmation of the primacy of practical over theoretical or abstract ways of being-in-the-world. Our principle relation to our world is not a matter of 'I think', he maintains, but rather 'I can' (Crossley, 1995, p.53).

#### **4.3 Putting culture and history back into the body: Bourdieu and habitus**

As Bourdieu suggests, the actual body is molded to carry within its very tissues and muscles the story of ideology (Sampson, 1998, p.49).

The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty reminds us that the grounding of social knowledge (in practical and commonsensical terms) has to be understood primarily as that which is acted and shaped through the body's consciousness of itself. In other words, there can be no theory or insights *without* the body, which leads us to understand all knowledge as fundamentally, *bodily* in nature (Johnson, 1987; Sheets-Johnstone, 1991). Nevertheless, as several critiques of phenomenology have noted (e.g. Crotty, 1998), this approach lacks sufficient awareness of cultural and historical forces that become the



body's sense making partners in the journey we call life. The 'phenomenological reduction' tends to erase the dialogical links between the body, history and culture. Grounded in an awareness of the living body, Merleau-Ponty's 'sociological heir,' Pierre Bourdieu (1978; 1984; 1990) has provided, through his concept of *habitus*, an approach, which does remain sensitive to the wider sociocultural and historical forces, in so providing

...a way out of the non-sociological arena in which Merleau-Pontian thought languishes, as it connects an account of social structural power relations with a phenomenological account of corporeal being and doing (Howson & Inglis, 2001, p.310).

Bourdieu's major contribution towards the development of an embodied social theory, centred upon his notion that in practice, all—socialised—bodies know and have to learn what to do in all situations (Bourdieu, 1984). Through practice and repetition this *know-how* lives in the body and its actions as “political mythology realised and embodied, turned into permanent dispositions, a durable manner of standing, speaking, and thereby of feeling and thinking” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.94). In other words, the ways of society (specifically the beliefs of our kinship communities and groups) are in—and en-acted through—the body, passed from one body to another, below conscious awareness.

An agent's *habitus* is an active residue or sediment of his past that functions within his present, shaping his perception, thought, and action and thereby molding social practice in a regular way. It consists in dispositions, schemas, forms of know-how and competence, all of which function below the threshold of consciousness (Crossley, 2001, p.83).

Whilst this position could be interpreted as effectively nullifying individual agency, Bourdieu was careful not to paint an overtly deterministic picture, privileging structural forces at the expense of the body's creative energies, and it has been noted that he was acutely aware of how conflict is built into societies, pre-empting struggle and change on



both individual and collective levels (e.g. Crossley, 2002). Individual habituses are very much different from one another, but we can't deny that these differences are acting within historical and culturally crafted boundaries of experiences and rules of engagement. In this sense, our personal biographies are also strands in a collective history, which we cannot escape from. As body-selves we are part of this historical body, as creatures of our times and circumstances, we are privy to particular resources in the construction of our identities (e.g. Crossley, 2001; Eichberg, 1998; Frank, 1991; 1995).

Bourdieu argued that habituses are very much like *games*, enacted and practiced in *fields* of play, replete with specific rules, roles, responsibilities and repercussions for the players, where there is freedom and choice. However, this is very much tempered and shaped by the particular boundaries and rules of the game, which infuse play with meaning and significance. Players play with purpose and by using strategies and making choices, yet in any given context the rules (implicit and explicit) are an ever-present force, which we learn to respect if we want to get on.

What particularly fascinated Bourdieu was the fact that people buy into and get caught up in certain games, whilst simultaneously dismissing others (*illusio* in Bourdieu's words). In other words, the meaning and *realness* of the game is lost on non-players (which is why it is easy for those without a stake in a particular social practice to understand that it is, more or less, *just* a game).

Bourdieu argued that social groups, classes and communities are very much bound up in the playing of these games, wherein getting the feel for them (Do I know what the implicit rules of this game are and how to act?) as well as considering their stakes (What are the implications of my body's involvement with this game? Is it worth playing?), are part and parcel of our embodied day-to-day routines. Following from this we can say that some games are accorded higher status and rewarded by society, more than others. Likewise, the rewards—symbolic (status), social (networks) and cultural (styles, tastes, qualities) *capital*—acquired in playing a given game, may have meaning in one field yet have no exchange value between fields (Crossley, 2001). Within this process of social practice and exchange, anything can count as capital that is afforded an exchange value. In this respect, bodies (and their extensions) can serve as resources and thus, forms of capital with accompanying exchange values.



In a recent review of Bourdieu's work and with reference to the *field* of health, Arthur Frank (2001) summarises most eloquently how our habituses imbue meaning and significance beyond the realm of cognition alone, operating within our bodies' *tacit* and *sensuous* relationships with the world. He notes that *habitus* does not explain, for example, *why* some people partake in risky behaviours (such as smoking and unprotected sex) whilst others diet and exercise, yet what Bourdieu does do is ground research on these issues in

...the recognition that people's actions reflect what stakes they feel compelled to take seriously, and what stakes they are unable to take seriously even if they 'know' they should. Habitus trumps cognition; what people know counts less than what they feel comfortable eating, wearing, sleeping in and with, breathing and inhaling, spending time and money on...Last in the unendable list but perhaps first in significance: habitus indicates what people are able to appreciate as valuable. Such appreciation is, again, embodied; felt, not known  
(Frank, 2001, p.390-391).

#### **4.4 Body-Cultures as paradigmatic: Eichberg and body configurations**

Another opening into embodiment, corporeality and identity—that focuses more explicitly on recreational body cultures—is to be found, in the work and ideas of German-Danish cultural anthropologist, Henning Eichberg (1984; 1988; 1989; 1990; 1993a; 1993b; 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 1998; 2001a; 2001b; 2002; In Press). His interest has been in studying the various *habitus*es within given societies and between historical epochs (e.g. 1982; 1988; 1989; 1998), as well focusing on the milieu of body practices in contemporary post-modern times, highlighting these social patterns of practice as speaking distinct and often contradictory body languages (1984; 1994; 1998; 2001a; 2002).

Eichberg argues (in a similar vein as Bourdieu) that the logics of society are internalised and enacted within the body's experiences and movements, so that sociality is not only somewhere above, but also inside bodily practice (e.g. Eichberg, 1998; 2001b). In drawing attention to varied nature of body culture (e.g. sport, fitness, dance,



martial arts), Eichberg alludes to body cultures as being fields of cultural and tacit *know-how*—replete with their own logics, rules and roles (e.g. Eichberg, 1998).

As the basis of social practice and identity building, the myriad of body cultures within any given society, therefore, reveal themselves as embodied paradigms, which tell different tales about society; its contents, struggles, tensions and contradictions. By focusing on the experiences of the body within these distinct *fields of play*; by placing the body (and bodies) in a central epistemological position

...this paradigm concentrates on the body in conjunction with historical change and cultural variability, seeking to understand the threads that run in every direction possible between situated bodies (the bodies of given peoples in given times and places going about their business, travels, dances, games and sports) and the broader formations (social systems, cultural practices, political organisations) that encompass what people do, think and even feel in these historically and geographically specific situations. And what this paradigm also produces is a style of research that refuses to focus myopically on sport per se but is always striving to see sport in context and as itself an impelling force within the wider social world (Bale & Philo, 1998, p.11-12).

Eichberg understands body cultural practices as the concrete, spatial-temporal dynamics of identity development (e.g. Eichberg, 1998). Central to Eichberg's oeuvre and way of *thinking with* bodies is his configuration concept, which focuses on how the spatial-temporal dynamics of body culture contours the development of identity (specifically see chapters 7-9 of Eichberg, 1998; 2001b). In treading a tight-rope between analysing body cultures as living, breathing, cultural and sensuous movement practices and dissecting them as reified phenomena, Eichberg's configuration concept attempts to mesh a 'Gestalt' awareness with an investigative sensibility, so as to develop an analytical approach which both, moves and feels with the body and remains sensitive to the ecology of movement, and "gives the reader a new way to see—to see movement in space, and especially the movement of human bodies in space" (Brownell, 1998, p.39).

In articulating his approach, Eichberg alludes to five dimensions, which shape and configure the body's experience; time, space, energy, objectification and space. Eichberg



has used these dimensions to analyse bodies in different historical (e.g. 1988; 1990; 1998 chapters 8-9) as well as contemporary cultural spaces and environments (e.g. 2001a; 2002; 2004). However, within the context of the current discussion, a brief overview of these related dimensions will suffice, so as to illustrate the heuristic qualities of his configurational approach in bringing attention to the tacit (and contradictory) dimensions of the bodily experience within different movement contexts (e.g. Eichberg, 2001b).

*Time* can be experienced in different ways by the body, following certain patterns and rhythms. For example, bodies can experience lack of time (e.g. against the clock) on one hand and richness, on the other, whilst it can also be experienced, for example, through the following; work vs. play, competition vs. festivity, linear vs. cyclical, measured vs. situational.

*Space* dimension can allude to the actual place of movement, with an example being indoor vs. outdoor (e.g. natural and built environment), whilst it also describes the actual course of movement the body navigates its way through. Here the body can move in a straight line geometry; confront decisions of movement under stress, say within a maze like course (should I go left or right?), as well as move in anticipation of surprise, via the non-panoptical labyrinth, where visual survey is impaired (e.g. running in a newly found woods). In yet another way, the space of the body can be both universally arranged (as in the markings of a football pitch) as well as experienced more variably by the locality of the concrete geographical 'place,' which shows no such uniformity (e.g. the makeshift pitch in the alley-way, the park or beach).

Similarly, the aspect of the body's *energy* can be experienced in multiple and contradictory ways depending upon the field of play. Given the non-ocular nature of energy (as an invisible force), it is difficult to visualise, yet we can say that there "is something like "energy" in the game" (Eichberg, 2001b). A most basic distinction can be made between high and low, as well as through 'tension' and 'relaxation.' In another way, the dimension of energy can also describe the 'vibe' or 'atmosphere,' between seriousness and laughter the body encounters the energies of competition and the carnival. Likewise, energy can also point to aspects of body experience, such as fear, pain, pleasure and euphoria.



As regards to the *interpersonal relations* of movement, Eichberg notes that body culture is at its heart interpersonal (1995; 1998; 2001b); bodies learn *with* others and handed down from others. The relation between bodies can take the form of a challenge (I or we challenge you, the others), in self-challenge or loneliness (as a monadic relation), as well as through togetherness (festivity). In another way, the body can experience intercorporeality, by way of exclusion (male and female games; winners and losers; those with and those without). Another contradiction revolves around the 'eye' and the 'hand,' between distance and separation (as experienced by the eye) and nearness (experienced by the touching of bodies). And another contradiction can be understood in terms of the distinction between male and female, and its social construction, pointing towards other 'third' gender spaces and orientations. In yet another way, interpersonal relations can be embodied by the differences between the monadic relation of the self, which encounters itself, and in meeting in reciprocal dialogue with others, leading to contradictions in the base of identity (Who am I when I move? Who are we?). For a similar understanding, see Frank's discussion about the body's monadic (self-relatedness) and dyadic (other-relatedness) dimensions of identity nostrification (Frank, 1991; 1995).

*Objectification* describes the goals of movement and its products and rewards. A basic tension that the body can experience is between work (product driven) and play (as process driven). Besides from this, the body can strive to win and be the best in the here and now, as well as produce a result (the record) which can be compared across time and space. Similarly, the body cannot only be result bearing but can also bare the results of their movement experiences, for example through the definition of the worked out muscles and sculpted legs and arms. More in festivity and situations of non-seriousness, the body can fail and be applauded and celebrated (a sort of non-goal) as well as not be interested in producing anything in particular by way of its movements (e.g. adhoc play). In another way, this dimension of the configuration can be seen as similar to Bourdieu's notion of *capital*. In bodily practices and rituals we are making strategic decisions such as what is the value or goal in participating?

Besides from these dimensions of the body's configuration, Eichberg alludes to another dimension, that of the logic of ideologies, which he acknowledges operates on the level of superstructure, which feeds into the bodily base of movement practices. In



recent papers (2001a; 2001b), Eichberg notes that the superstructure of ideas and institutions relates to how people organise, think and evaluate movement. Here, narratives derived from the related spheres of the market, state and civic society, provide resources, which people draw upon in order to evaluate and make sense of social life. Where the state objectifies and systemises the body (I produce therefore I am), the market relates subjectivity primarily to consumption (I consume therefore I am). Besides from this dialectic of social life, the logic of civic society concerns itself with people in the sensuous plural sense (I am *with* you), as a rejoinder to life as an individual (prescribed and re-produced by the production and consumption logics of the state and the market), a sense of solidarity, of brotherhood and sisterhood.

Overall, these related and overlapping aspects of the configuration, afford a kind of search engine (or kaleidoscope) of co-ordinates (Eichberg, 2001b), through which to bring into awareness that which is particular to the way in which bodies experience time and space, in any given movement situation or encounter. It is a way of seeing and feeling the body and thinking with it; an epistemology grounded in uncovering the messy contradictions of lived experience. Eichberg's awareness of the real life *fields* in which the body moves and experiences time and space, expands the insights of Bourdieu, by fleshing out how the forces of culture and history converse with the body; how, for example, the demarcation of space of the athletic track (which divides the runners into lanes) questions the body's sense of identity (Who are you, separate from all the others?) and how, say, the duress of sportive time (against the clock) feeds into how the body experiences life.

On the one hand, the body is the part of human existence which the individual is not free just to choose – but on the other hand, the body is not determined from the very beginning, either. Between the given body and body management, body culture develops as a historical and collective process – and the study of body culture casts light on this contradictory development. People “make” their own body, but they do not make it of their own individual will (Eichberg, 2001c, p.1).



By focusing on the multitude of body cultures within society and across historical periods (e.g. Eichberg, 1998 chapters 7-9), Eichberg breaks out of an essentialist understanding of “sport” and brings into awareness how different body cultures (when studied side by side), give contradictory insights into how people identify with themselves and others, and how this changes from one cultural field (and historical epoch) to another. Eichberg has suggested that the spectrum of available body practices (such as exercise, sport and dance), craft specific types of bodies, which in *ideal* terms can be understood as including the; disciplined body; the achievement body, the mirroring body as well as; the communicative body. This typology of ideal body types, is very much similar to that described by Arthur Frank (1991; 1995). Yet as with Frank, who suggests that “Ideal types are puppets: theoretical constructions designed to describe some empirical *tendency*. Actual body-selves represent distinct mixtures of ideal types” (1995, p.29), Eichberg argues that “Every real, concrete phenomenon is blended and hybrid” (1998, p.123). Elsewhere he has substantiated this observation by arguing

There is nothing elementary or simple in bodily movement, neither in running, jumping and throwing nor in pull or tug. The body is not at all simple, but a field of tensions. Body knowledge is marked by the tension between its objective dimensions (the It-body), its subjective dimensions (the I-body) and its dialogical dimensions (the You-body)  
(Eichberg, 2001b, p. 13).

As Eichberg notes, body cultures are indeed fields of corporeal knowledge marked by tension, conflict and contradiction. The use of the configuration concept, I believe, helps to make this evident. It asks us to direct attention to how different movement cultures and their ideologies and mythologies become embedded in a most tangible sense in their spaces of enactment and practice. As the stages (or fields), the spaces in which exercise and dance are practiced, converse with bodies and model them in particular ways, leading towards, what has been described as a deep ecology of identity practice (Eichberg, 1998). In this way, the stages and actors are given equal consideration.

Rather than adhering to an either-or approach to puzzling questions of structure-agency, Eichberg appreciates that the processes of body identification develop in



intermediary spaces (between bodies and between bodies and cultural worlds), where the multiple *relationships* formed between bodies and worlds are key (Eichberg, 1995). The configuration concept focuses on these inter-relationships between the bodies and cultural worlds (i.e. time, space, objectives, inter-relationships, energy and ideologies), so as to enable analysis (as a practical, rather than a theoretical endeavour) to focus on, how the structure-agency dialogue develops, within any concrete movement experience (or experiences). In this sense, his ideas would seem to concur and extend Bourdieu's work on *habitus* and *fields*, as well as remain sensitive to the tacit dimensions of bodily knowledge, in the advancement of a more practical methodology, grounded in real life bodies' experience of time and space, as advocated by the likes of Merleau-Ponty.

#### **4.5 Towards an embodied epistemology: Re-thinking the research process?**

If we are to speak of the body, we cannot be satisfied with using the mind. It is important to discuss the methodological dilemma about theory and practice, if sports research is not to remain purely mental  
(Nagbol, 1994, p.87).

Sport is as much an activity of the body as it is of the mind. Much of the physical experience of sport lies rooted in what de Garis (1999) labels the *sensuous*...As any athlete knows, much of participation and competition cannot be translated through sight or verbally communicated to others, especially non-athletes. Despite being unable to communicate this realm of experience through the more traditional means of interviews, observations, and field notes, de Garis suggests that sport ethnography, or what I call experiential ethnography, brings to the field of investigation an opportunity to develop a methodology that makes lived experience real to others' perception of sport experience  
(Sands, 2002, p.131).

As the above comments suggest, bringing the living body back into sociological analysis has consequences on the ways in which we research body culture. As the central epistemological focus in the study of sport and physical activity, the living-moving body,



is primarily a field of tacit and sensuous knowledge (e.g. Eichberg, 1994a; 1994b; Sands, 1999; 2002; Sparkes, 2005). Accordingly, this awareness calls for—perhaps more so than in other fields of study—embodied methodological approaches, which enable us to actually explore the living, experiential worlds of movement culture. This call to embody social theory and research practice has found voice, not only within the realms of sport, but moreover, in the general vestiges and fields of the social sciences, where traditionally, an occular-centric academic project—which sees but does not *feel* the world—has predominated (e.g. Sampson, 1998). In referring to the much cited analytical review of the body by Arthur Frank, (1991), Williams & Bendelow (1998) have commented upon the links between the body, academic research and discourse

*Discourses*, in other words, are embodied, and social institutions cannot be understood apart from the real, lived experience and actions of bodies. The grounding of social theory must, therefore, be the body's consciousness of itself. In short, what is required is not so much a sociology of the body, as an *embodied* sociology, one which includes its practitioners as well as its subjects. Only on the basis can theory put selves back into bodies, bodies back into society and society back into the body  
(Williams & Bendelow, 1998, p.65).

As Williams & Bendelow (after Frank) contend, “the grounding of social theory must be the body's consciousness” a grounding which “includes its practitioners as well as its subjects.” Such comments put into perspective the very real need for researchers to also participate in the particularities of embodiment—as a sensuous, felt and living awareness—so as to move beyond the cognitive bias, and reflect upon their own corporeality, as other living, breathing, embodied beings. This attitude and sensibility has perhaps been most prevalent in the field of anthropology. The comments of Martin Buber (e.g. 1965; 1966; 1870), an early advocate of an embodied-dialogical philosophy, pre-empted many of the ideas, which have become synonymous with post-structural cultural anthropology



...it is not enough for him to take his self as an object of knowledge. He can know the wholeness of the person and through it the wholeness of man only when he does not leave his subjectivity out and doesn't remain an untouched observer...Here you do not attain to knowledge by remaining on the shore and watching the foaming waves, you must make the venture and cast yourself in, you must swim, alert and with all your face, even if a moment comes when you think you are losing consciousness: in this way, and in no other, do you reach anthropological insight  
(Buber, 1965, p.155).

Not surprisingly, recent developments in contemporary cultural anthropology have provided many impulses and pointers in the development of more culturally sensitive and embodied research methodologies (e.g. Coffey, 1999), which situate the researcher within the specific life-world under investigation as a cultural participant. In paying reference to the much cited critiques of modern anthropology by the likes of Marcus and Fisher (1996), Robert Sands (2002) has suggested that the traditional ethnographic tendency, to privilege observation over participation, has precluded many important insights into body culture as lived practice.

In advocating an alternative approach, which is both *participatory* and *experiential* in its scope, Sands feels that this methodological approach “relates the personal to the cultural and opens up a cast of areas and behavioural niches left untouched or beyond the reach of conventional ethnography” and furthermore, by researching as a cultural participant “Living through the body, the ethnographer can access feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and other aspects not uncovered through participant observation” (Sands, 2002, p.123).

The shift in positioning, from outsider to relative insider, advocated by Sands and others (see the excellent edited collections of experiential ethnographies by, Denison & Markula, 2003; Sparkes & Silvennoinen, 1999), provides an important avenue through which research can claim to become embodied in its nature and scope, enabling the researcher to become more personally aware and appreciative of the participatory dimensions of movement culture, as lived practice. There are now many examples of experiential approaches in the academic study of body culture (e.g. Klein, 1993; Sands,



1995; 1999; 2002; n.d.; Wheaton, 1997; 2000; 2002; 2004a; 2004b; Ylonen, 2003), in which “the ethnographer becomes just another informant providing information and experiences to the understanding of the culture” (Sands, 2002, p.124). Two overlapping, yet, distinct approaches, which have adopted an embodied and experiential leaning are the ethnographies undertaken by Sands within the worlds of elite sprinting and collegiate American football (1995; 1999; n.d.) and Wheaton, in the sub-cultural realm of windsurfing (1997; 2000; 2002; 2004b).

Belinda Wheaton has reported on an experiential ethnography, which examined the adoption of sub-cultural identity in windsurfing, in particular the “meanings, experiences and pleasures of this practice for those that participate in it” (Wheaton, 2000, p.256). Based upon her proficiency and commitment to the sport (she was previously the British wave sailing champion), and involvement with “a community in which I had been wind surfing at the beach for several years, and lived in the vicinity” (Wheaton, 2002, p.241), she was “able to participate in most sporting and social activities. I had almost full access to the men’s activities and conversations, including the time that their female partners weren’t ‘welcome’ in the group. I even had entry to the changing room—traditionally one of the most hallowed of male sanctuaries” (Wheaton, 2004b, p.134).

Reflecting on her fieldwork (Wheaton, 2002; 2004b), she noted, that given her status as a token “one of the lads” based upon her competence as a windsurfer, it wasn’t until two years into the experience that she came to realise that her research was fundamentally an exploration of masculinity (Wheaton, 2002). Using this as a starting point, she discussed how her experiences and understanding of the social world she was a part of was ‘tied up’ with multiple and shifting roles and identities “that I, as an embodied researcher, brought to and experienced during this ethnographic enterprise” (Wheaton, 2002, p.241), going on to note that “My positioning in the subculture was more complex than consideration of gender or any epistemological standpoint alone...the methodological distinction between insider and outsider seems a misleading binary that does not fit with my experiences as a fieldworker” (2002, p.261).

Through such reflexive questioning, Wheaton believes that through the course of the fieldwork, the changing dimensions of her own sub-cultural identity, gave some important insights into the complexity of the identities performed, and power relations



played out in windsurfing (Wheaton, 2002). In recalling her experiences, Wheaton contends that the hardest task in her participatory exploration came in understanding and portraying the experiences and exclusion of 'core' women surfers (in a male oriented sub-culture), in which she herself was a key informant

In this, more than any other part of the project, I was a subject of my own research, and the research became my biography...Like the women I researched, I found windsurfing an exhilarating experience that gave me a huge sense of self-involvement and confidence in myself, and, as their narratives illustrated, for 'us' it was a physically and emotionally empowering experience (Wheaton, 2002, p.257).

In outlining some of the personal identity roles and relationships adopted and enacted during the fieldwork, and discussing the implications of these positions in producing her findings, Wheaton concluded that her experiential approach and involvement as an embodied researcher (and native informant), brought into relief the multiple aspects of her 'self' that were involved in the production of knowledge. In acknowledging this, she argues that such critical awareness effectively blurs the lines not only between the insider-outsider binary but also between biography and autobiography, in the ethnographic enterprise (Wheaton, 2002).

Borrowing heavily from the "Gonzo" journalistic approach of Hunter S. Thompson, Sands reports on two experiential ethnographies, investigating the life of the sprinter (1995; 1999) as well as the world of the Collegiate American football player (1999; n.d.). Sacrificing the comforts of conventional ethnography, R. Sands (an all round athlete) has argued for an approach, which advocates complete immersion in the field "where the ethnographer travels through a series of "doors" or stages, each providing a deeper understanding of the culture and requisite behaviour of that population. Unlocking each door is similar to successive rites of passage" (Sands, 1999, p.16). Sands argued, that within his research, these "doors" and "stages" have invariably linked acceptance by (and thus understanding of) these sporting cultures, to physical attributes, performance and demonstrated skills of manhood. In other words, it was within the realm of his body's



*performance*, that the perception of Sands as a researcher eroded, and made way for him being perceived as a cultural member, first and foremost.

As well as enduring the same physical and emotional pain of competition, rescheduling my life around track and football, and dealing with the same problems of intensive participation created for me a role similar to that of the athletes and allowed me the same view of cultural reality  
(Sands, 1999, p.29).

Along these lines, Sands goes on to describe how, for him, it was necessary to participate in these cultural worlds on multiple levels, in order to fully experience “what is meant by being a member of a population” (Sands, 1999, p.25). In this way (and this way only), he contends that insight transcends the limits of traditional interpretative ethnography (namely cultural transmission, translation and interpretation), so that the researcher “becomes, in essence, an informant who can use experience to validate or “check out” the experiences provided by other members of the group” (Sands, 1999, p.31). Sands, argues that this experiential approach adds a dimension of validation simply not accessible with traditional participant observation methodologies (1999; 2002).

As a consequence, he noted that by anchoring his ethnographic text in his positioning as a cultural informant, he was well placed to produce a more richly descriptive text which melded his experiences with a multiplicity of others’ voices, so as to enable the reader to step into the shoes of the ethnographer (as informant)

I wanted to reproduce what it felt like to be an athlete, the types of social interactions that took place in a team, the dynamics of an athlete-coach relationship, the joy and pain of competing—all these factors combined to make up the identity of a football player or a sprinter. Observation, passive participation, and interpretation would not replicate or give me the experience of living those features, and the voice that emanated from the experience was through the “eyes of a native” from a “native”  
(Sands, 1999, p.33).



As a corollary to these attempts to adopt more embodied and participatory research methodologies, researchers have also had to consider how to place their body's experiences and those of the researched others, into their research reports and presentations. Participating in the post-structural dialogue, which has melded together the *embodied* and *narrative* turns, researchers have had to re-think the links between practice, discourse and theory (e.g. Sparkes, 1999; 2005). How has the re-turn of the body interrupted traditional discourse patterns of presentation, expression and communication? How does placing the body back into theory, influence what we come to mean by the term, theory?

In an early collection of embodied sport research reports, put together as part of a special edition of the *International Review of the Sociology of Sport* entitled *Narrative Sociology* (1994, 29(1)), the editor, Henning Eichberg (1994a; 1994b) suggested that by re-inserting experiential bodies into sociological analyses, academia is in need of appropriating other discourse patterns, which enable tacit and sensuous experiences to be expressed and communicated.

The texts of the present collection try to solve the discourse problem by different narrative patterns: telling the story. This should not be regarded as a step "backwards" from tables and mathematical formulas to the traditional discourses of events, history and observations. The epistemology of the vast ocean of sensual implicit knowledge surrounding the narrow island of explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1996) together with the growing conscience of the body in sociology (Turner, 1984) do not allow such a linear understanding. The narrative process of knowledge production is a process of knowledge production of its own type...The new narrative is, therefore, an answer to challenging questions of philosophical anthropology. We know more than we can say. How can we say more? How can we be aware of what we cannot say? Rarely can a scholarly field make these problems clearer than in the study of sport, treating a form of bodily practice and body implicit experience (Eichberg, 1994a, p.2-3).



More recently, in outlining some possible avenues for the development of an embodied sport and exercise psychology, Andrew Sparkes (2005) asks us to consider what an embodied sport and exercise psychology might not only *look* like, but also *feel* like (Sparkes, 2005). In discussing this matter, Sparkes argues that the expression of embodied and sensuous experiences, can perhaps find an appropriate home amongst evocative narrative texts and moreover, through the power of storytelling. He suggests that this narrative turn has had implications in the field of body cultural studies as “In recent years...scholars have begun to treat seriously the view that people structure their experience through stories and that a person is essentially a story-telling animal” which he feels “has led to a more sophisticated appreciation of people as active social beings and focused attention on the way personal and cultural realities are constructed through narrative and storytelling” (Sparkes, 2005, p.31).

In drawing reference to the methodological dilemma posed by embodied research practices, the likes of Eichberg and Sparkes (see also Denison & Markula, 2003) understand that traditional discourse patterns aren't (on their own) adequate to convey the nuances and depths of the body's ocean of cultural, historical, biographical and tacit know-how. As a result, numerous body culture researchers have sought to nurture and enrich their vocabularies, as well as experiment with linguistic devices and strategies so as to re-word the body and re-actualise the sensuous and dialogical dimensions of the body's languages. Languages which had (until recently) been held in check by the hegemonic (disembodied) discourse patterns traditionally favoured by academia (Eichberg, 1994b)—where there are heads that see and think, but no situated bodies that feel the cool breeze blowing on their backs or experience culture and history running through their veins.

Whilst the issue of narrative and embodiment is dealt with in greater detail in chapter 6, it is important to give some indication here of how some researchers have attempted to create narratives and stories, to help them portray something of the living worlds of body culture (e.g. Nagbol, 1993; 1994; Rinehart, 2003; Tsang, 2000). So as to give a feel for how these three researchers have attempted to place living bodies within their narratives, brief extracts from their body stories will be reproduced before discussing



why narrative methodologies have helped each of these scholars with their specific research projects.

## Hegoland

There, that's how it looks, far out, the swimming baths stand and sway like a sea-green architectural pearl. There is a calm sea and Indian summer. An incredible destination after the jumble of impressions of experiences in from the city. In that light we are facing a mirage to which we have our own keys. We ride out on the bathing jetty. After 15 metres, there is an iron gate standing there like a barrier in the middle of the jetty. Herluff puts in the key and it opens. We ride in, slam the gate, lock it and cross across the water. Cycling across the narrow wooden planks, a metre above the water, is a light, floating sensation. You notice the air and the light-weight material as if gravity and resistance are no longer in force. It feels as if the bikes roll by themselves. On either side of the jetty is a one metre high railing painted rustic red. A stripe of sea gulls perch on both sides and stare. Some rise in the air, others remain on their perches as we glide past them. We trundle out to a platform where there is an ice-cream kiosk. In summer, when Hegoland is open for everybody, you can buy tickets there. To the right of the kiosk is a bicycle shed with room for several hundred bicycles. On it is painted in large black letters – HELGOLAND.

The kiosk is closed and Herluf says: "Soren, out of season, we take the bikes all the way out to where we swim." So we continue and ride out on a 100-metre-long jetty like the first one. Herluf tells me that there used to be a section for school children on this part. But it has been swept away by the wind, weather and ice floes. Now, swans, grebes, ducks and other birds swim around here. A lovely introduction before we reach the little square leading to the Ladies Section and the joint swimming baths, the Sport. Sport is the common area where men, women and children can swim together in the summer if they have trunks on.

We swing to the right and cycle along the back of the swimming baths towards the men's section where we are met by two doors facing each other. On a notice is written – MEN. The door to the left is open. The one to the right is a sliding door must be locked in the summer season.

We can see into land from the jetty leading us to the Vikings' area. We are far away and by ourselves on a pale green island on posts. Here men walk around without clothes and enjoy life without seeming naked. The tone is friendly and straightforward. Some men lie basking like large lazy animals on mattresses. We go to a wooden hut. On the door is written: For members of "The Cold Shiver" only. This is the changing room. Along all the walls are benches with pegs above. There is also a bench with pegs on both sides in the middle of the room. In the other half of the



clubhouse is a dining table and desk. Here are also a radio, a television – and a weighing machine. The dining table is in front of the window out to the open men's section. The view is across the Sound of Sweden.

Herluf tells me about all the unwritten rules that are good to know if you don't want to give offence or be conspicuous.

We change, that is, undress. Herluf goes into the water directly. I start in the sauna.

The air, the light, the quick swim and water from the outdoor cold shower are, all in all, a quick pick me up.

The trip home goes over the yacht club, where we have a drink and look at the marina – before we cycle into town – and separate.

Taken from *Helgoland on Amager* (Nagbol, 1994, p. 90-93), *Helgoland* was one of four short narratives describing something of the author's affiliation with and experience of a local Danish (in Copenhagen) sports club. This narrative text was the product of a project, which focused on the intersection and "relationship between architecture, regionalism, body culture and identity" (Nagbol, 1994, p.86).

Growing out of his interest in the human geography and the ecology of movement, as well as his awareness of the methodological paradigm shift signalled by the likes of Eichberg (see also Nagbol, 1993), Nagbol argues that, "Architecture, urban planning and sports facilities are expressions of a practice that can be experienced and interpreted as a cultural staging" and as "A collective symbol of people's relationships with each other" (1994, p.86). The use of narrative to explore and tell about life at Hegoland, enabled Nagbol to write within the "sensuous configurations that help to produce experience patterns and corporeal experiences that sink into the individual, giving expectations about how we can live" (1994, p.86). Given Nagbol's awareness of the concrete links between the built environment and the body's subjective experience, he suggests that the use of evocative narratives, enables the configuration (the culture of Hegoland as concrete practice) to be explored and expressed through "A discourse that is based on sensitizing peoples' perception of space, an experience which has both a corporeal and social foundation; research that accentuates the significance for identity of people's experiences with space, body, movement and time" (Nagbol, 1994, p.87).



Nagbol sought to develop a scenic awareness of Hegoland as a living cultural space. The adoption of a storied approach provided Nagbols with a linguistic opening to more appropriately communicate and portray something of the concrete dialogical relationships between the sensuous body, architecture, movement, culture and the landscape, in so painting (through words) some living pictures of Hegoland, as a living, breathing regional, body cultural experience, and identity practice.

### Sk8ing

He dropped in smooth-like off the slanting concrete, too a quick last puff, then tossed his Malboro aside and went for the grind. They were skating on the concrete abutment to the library building at the state university. It was 2 a.m., a Wednesday morning, and the pinkish orange halogen lights reflected dully off their faces. A light drizzle fell. The air was thick and wet. He could see the fading lights of the two bicycling campus rent-a-cops as they left for the other side of the school. They had about an hour between the cops' rounds.

Three others—Sandy, Josh, and that blonde girl Corky—watched him. The tossing of his smoke was deliberate, and the timing was essential: too early, and he looked like a feeb; too late, he'd miss the trick. Same with the Ollie: to get good air, to ascend magically up to the slight rise of the coping, he timed the heel and toe pops just right, carrying the board, no hands, up with his jumping body.

He'd rented *Rebel Without a Cause* seven times, and he loved James Dean. Loved his in-your-face, "fuck you" style. And loved his timing.

Timing, and style—in lots of way, they were everything. His friends understood this, but his mom and dad didn't. Usually, non-skaters didn't, either. His teachers definitely didn't. Claimed that he would never amount to anything...blah blah blah...same old story. James Dean, and Marlon Brando in *Streetcar* got that spiel, too.

He hit the steel handrail about mid-board on the deck, balanced easily, careful to let the backside up. He balanced, front and back, then dropped down the coping for the three-foot slide, deftly popping the board off in a heel flip, and settled down on the deftly popping the board off in a heel flip, and settled down the three-foot-wide concrete ridge. They called it "black ice," it was so slick and welcoming. He'd practiced this move thousands of times on quite a few sets of copings. But this pipe was what he considered "home," so what looked difficult was not.



This extract came from a story written by Rob Rinehart (2003, p.152-153), based upon extensive ethnographic fieldwork on urban skateboard culture. Oriented around the trials and tribulations of a Generation X teenager, Bennie, deemed “at-risk” by the adult authorities. Later in the prose, we here that amongst other things Bennie used to smoke dope, gets into occasional fights and has issues communicating with his mother, who calls upon the advice of a counsellor trained in ‘treating’ adolescent ‘pathology.’

In taking the form of a short story, Rinehart wanted to explore “ the question of conveying what it was like to be a white, suburban teenager in the late 1990’s” because he doesn’t believe “that all the studies, with all the statistics at hand of “at risk” kids, could convey the kind of affect and processes of growing up as such a child accurately” (2003, p.164). For Rinehart, the usual compartmentalisation accorded to youth “at-risk” studies (breaking down into components of; working single parent; peer group influences; media effects etc.) invariably means that “much of the totality of being a teenager is lost” (2003, p.164). In this respect, the use of fiction enabled Rinehart to express something of the complexities of teenage skate culture—as a cultural, historical and visceral phenomenon—through the body of the central character, Bennie, who is followed and juxtaposed in different situations (in the urban spaces of skate boarding and in his wider biographical landscape), and through, multiple standpoints and voices.

In this way, Rinehart used “fictional methods to convey feelings, to express the magic of life...to see the whole subject, in its own logic of complexity, more “truly”” (2003, p.163). Given his intention of wanting to attend to the tribulations of teenage skate culture, as both a cultural and visceral phenomenon, Rinehart argues that ethnographic textual experimentation, enabled him to make a closer link between the really real and that which is written “In this way, perhaps, the evocative ethnography may serve to interconnect the body and the mind of audience and creator alike” (Rinehart, 2003, p. 163).

## **Hairy Legs**

One of my teammates, Christine, who is sitting on the grass before me, must have been staring at my legs as I stood before her. She is one of my closer friends on the team and quite the jokester.



She squints up at me and half-jokingly says: “So are you going to shave your legs before the Olympics?”

You see, I am female. More precisely, I am a Canadian female—and I am a Canadian female with hairy legs. I don’t shave my legs and haven’t for years, and I like it that way. As long as most of my teammates have known me, I have never shaved my legs. And really, questions or comments from my rowing friends have rarely come up about my legs...until recently.

“Maybe Rebecca and I will have to tie you down and Neet your legs for you,” Chris quips. A few of my crewmates laugh at this. It’s a joke. Or is it? For a half-second I wonder to myself if they will actually try something along those lines in the name of team hijinks. A flutter of fear or panic scampers across my consciousness as I picture the scene she has suggested, and then it is gone. These are my friends. The panic in my mind is replaced by a multitude of different thoughts and emotions surrounding the subject of my legs. I feel a slight resentment at being pressured to change something about myself that has been a choice characterized by struggle. The struggle of knowingly going against cultural standards of beauty and thereby risking the acceptance of friends, of potential lovers, and of employers. Not to mention my own internal struggle with myself and my choices: deep down I actually prefer the aesthetics and sensation of smooth, soft legs, yet intellectually and politically I feel it important enough to act against these impulses. I think of the political reasons I have for not shaving my legs both in terms of myself as an individual outside of the whole sport and team context, and specifically as someone at a high level of sport who may soon become a role model for others. I like the simplicity of this one (in)action, and the extent to which it challenges myself and others and what this says about me.

These thoughts pass through my mind in a whirlwind lasting mere seconds and only as fragments of thought, not as the coherent wholes that I have presented here. Christine has barely finished her sentence and is looking at me, waiting for me to respond, her head cocked and a half-grin on her face.

Instead of saying no and going into a longwinded explanation as to why I don’t shave my legs and justifying my choices to this crowd (some of whom have already heard the reasoning), I try to turn the question around, “Why does it bother you so much that I don’t shave?”

“It doesn’t bother me!” Christine vehemently replies, as if someone has just made the ludicrous suggestion that she has grown wings out of the top of her head. I press further, and the conversation spins off into a rare non-rowing discussion on the topic of conformity and standards and rules of society. It is a glimpse of some of the differences (heterogeneity) between us that get veneered under the identity of elite athlete (homogenizing) that we are usually organized/subsumed under.



I have succeeded in diverting the attention from myself as “deviant” or “problem-to-be-solved,” for now. But this attention to my furry legs seems to be increasing as we get closer to the Olympics and the “world stage.” I wonder why that is...

Hairy Legs (Tsang, 2000, p.48-49 - paragraphs 1-2 omitted for the sake of brevity) is one of four short stories, which explored some of the disjointed, multiple and often, contradictory dimensions of Tosha Tsang’s embodied (elite athletic) identity (or identities), enabling Tsang “to tell my experiences to you from multiple standpoints simultaneously, to merge as athlete and academic” (Tsang, 2000, p.46). In discussing her decision to explore the living world of elite women’s rowing culture (in North American context), using the genre of auto-ethnography, and specifically through the medium of storytelling, Tsang argues it is in the telling of stories that we make sense of our life experiences, and thus this medium is one of the ways we, as embodied beings, construct (and re-construct) our identities (see also Frank, 1995).

For Tsang, in telling dis-jointed, fractured and messy tales, she felt that the medium of narrative was useful in conveying to the reader some of this lived ambivalence. By engaging the reader with her stories, her hope was to help readers to reflect on their own experiences of identity, in so far as “These are also the readers’ stories, for through reading, readers construct their own meanings and identify with or resist certain elements of a story” (Tsang, 2000, p.47). In other words, for Tsang, the act of telling stories was a strategy, which may “summon different experiences from different readers in a variety of ways and with each reading (by the readers” (p.55). In reflecting on her storied efforts, Tsang argues that the narrative enterprise underwrites a post-modern sensibility, which understands identity as being far from fixed. Furthermore, in concluding she argues that the writing of evocative tales is, in itself

...a valuable source of knowledge for the reader. Emotionalism allows the introspection and reflexivity that I have engaged. It encourages the connection between researcher and subject to the extent that researcher can be considered as subject, as was the case with my presentation of what Sparkes calls “self-narratives” (1995)...Finally, I have also tried to re-enact the lived experience in these stories. This is another challenge of the narrative: to write a *good* story. The



story must be engaging to be able to draw the reader in, to evoke some kind of response, otherwise it fails as method (Tsang, 2000, p.56).

There are numerous examples of body stories, which have been penned as part of sport scholars embodied research projects. This brief overview is limited in its scope (for a more detailed discussion see Denison & Markula, 2003; Sparkes, 2002a), but hopefully, it has helped to give a sense of some of the reasons why a growing number of researchers interested in exploring and portraying body cultures as lived experience, have adopted narrative patterns of communication. The ‘narrative turn,’ which, in this discussion, included the scenic tale of life in an indigenous Danish sports club (Nagbol, 1993), the portrayal of life as a teenage skateboarder (Rinehart, 2003) as well as describing some of the overlapping identity sagas, as lived by an elite rower (Tsang, 2000), all attempted, by feeling their way into the life of an other body (whether actual, or imaginary, as with Rinehart’s ethnographic fiction), to give a sense of *what it is like*, within these worlds.

These authors have all argued to varying degrees, that the language and vocabulary of narrative storytelling is well suited to describe and portray the nuances and subtleties of situated and embodied life. If we may recall, in exploring the body’s experiential awareness of space, movement and time, Nagbol felt that the medium of narrative enabled him to communicate something of his lived experience of Hegoland, which accentuated the concrete and dialogical links between the built environment and the moving body’s subjective experience. For Reinhart, his decision to tell stories about the life and times of an imaginary (based in ethnographic fieldwork) teenage character, Bennie, was based upon his discontent with traditional “at risk” research which, by reifying experience into discrete categories, tends to lose sight of the lived and felt sense of teenage biographies. In using the genre of fiction, by feeling his way into a body of Generation X, Rinehart attempted to describe something of the complexity and ambiguity of growing up as white middle class youth in suburban North America, without recourse to abstract categories of experience. Finally, Tsang’s “book of tales” gave her an opportunity to explore her embodied sense of self, in ways that allowed the concrete biographical links between culture, race, gender and athletic identity to be brought to life, as well as enabling her to



express identity, in multiple and contrasting ways. To borrow from the vocabulary of Eichberg, these storied efforts enable the “living configurations” of body culture to be situated and expressed more fully, within the words.

What is more, all these scholars have noted, that the value of telling body stories, lie in their potential to talk, not only *to*, but also *in* the reader; to summon a response from them, where they make sense of it, by placing themselves within the story. In advancing the idea of an embodied research process, narrative knowing for these scholars is a creative opportunity to help express and portray aspects of concrete bodily life. But also, these efforts can be seen as attempts to communicate from one body to another (author *with* reader) a felt sense of what it is (i.e. discourse isn’t only or primarily about bodies, but coming from within bodies).

In other words, as *embodied* knowledge, narrative knowing evokes and touches the reader, not only cognitively (in the head) but also in the reader’s body where they themselves, experience and live their life (e.g. Richardson, 1997). Recently, Sparkes asked us to consider just what embodied approaches should entail. Here the potential of narrative knowing, in responding to issues of embodiment, is made most evident.

...we might begin to ask what an embodied sport and exercise psychology might not only *look* like, but also *feel* like? How might this operate within not just a singular disciplinary programme but within a multidisciplinary programme of engagement?”

(Sparkes, 2005, p. 33).

Recent initiatives within the realms of Sport Studies have attempted to respond to searching questions asked by the likes of Sparkes. Through such efforts, we may be witnessing the emergence of more dialogical approaches, where bodies are beginning to be felt and expressed within the words, allowing the everyday experiences of people to be portrayed and communicated, so as to become partially, yet personally knowable to the reader.



#### 4.6 Towards and embodied approach: Intentions and aims

The literature and ideas reviewed in this chapter, point towards a vastly different research methodology, than that adopted in the first study. This radical departure was not only pre-empted by recourse to this literature, but also through my own involvement with exercise and dance culture. The aftermath of the first study left me feeling that the concrete body, so central to how exercise and dance is experienced, was totally erased from the research and subsequent analysis. What is more, I had been perturbed that the extant sociological literature had been oriented heavily towards specific theories of the body, without acknowledging how theory and insight develops from the body's concrete experiences. Yet this was exactly what my own experiences were reminding me, that exercise and dance cultures are distinct body exemplars that are enacted and practiced within differentiated and particular spaces, giving rise to different stories (and by extension, theoretical knowledge) about subjectivity, community, life and death.

Furthermore, it seemed to me that the discourse patterns favoured in the mainstream social sciences simply weren't able to portray the nuances and particularities of moving, experiencing bodies, and yet, in a sense, this is exactly what the social study of movement culture requires (Eichberg, 1994a; 1994b). These related impulses and concerns formed the basis of my critique (that emerged from the first study), and helped to re-orientate the project, so as to enable issues of embodiment (which acknowledge the perspective of the body as central) to be placed in a primary epistemological position. Not only this, the critique outlined the relativity of the body in relation to questions of identity, and thus, brought into awareness the significance of the inter-cultural analysis of exercise and dance cultures, as a means of exploring questions of philosophical anthropology: How do exercising bodies differ from dancing ones? And, what do they tell us about who we are and become through their enactment and practice?

As a consequence of this re-orientation, the embodied imagination lends itself to a tacit methodology, where, as discussed by the likes of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu (amongst others), the body's experience of itself—the felt sense of, and relationships with the world—becomes a primary concern, one which has been articulated and developed,



most comprehensively within the realms of cultural anthropology and ethnographic methodology.

Developing from the recent initiatives that have attempted to transgress the boundaries and borders between self-other ethnographies (e.g. Sands, 1995; 1999; Gilbourne, 2002; Tsang, 2000), my approach began to take shape. Through prolonged engagement with some of the primary sites of exercise and dance practice (i.e. gym and dance club), developing out of my prior engagement with the fields as a cultural participant (in which I have been a gym member on and off since my early teenage years and a clubber since 1994), my intention was to develop an experiential approach. In this way, the idea was very much to produce ethnographies, which paid attention to the living, concrete configurations of the gym and dance club and related dialogical, sensuous and tacit dimensions of the body's involvement with these cultural fields of body practice. By way of providing further openings into young people's involvement and related identity issues, I decided to incorporate within the period of fieldwork, a series of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, expand the field of exploration and integrate these body stories into the study, so as to produce a multi-layered, poly-vocal ethnography, where my body and voice became one amongst others.

The implications of the embodiment project in academic practice are to be felt in all areas of the research process. Not least, the implications of bringing the body back in, are to be found in the re-presentation of insights, where bodies need to be inserted into language, disrupting the traditional non-body bias advocated in traditional academic discourse patterns, grounded in ocular-centric subject-object philosophy. Some attention was afforded to the storytelling exploits of body researchers in the previous section, and their adoption of narrative discourse patterns, as a means of creating space for, and portraying, living bodies' experiences.

By re-appropriating narrative sensibilities, these scholars (and others) have been able, to transgress the traditional academic writing configurations, which reify and separate experience into neat categories, so as to maintain the concrete links between the body's subjectivity, emotions, history, social structure, culture and biography. In creating "messy texts" these authors have very much brought bodies back, and portrayed them in



their, living and contradictory concreteness, where the boundaries between the personal-cultural and biographical-historical, have become increasingly blurred.

In keeping with this “body logic” and, as an opportunity to increase my repertoire of storytelling skills, like others who have communicated body practices through narrative ploys and strategies, I decided to re-present my findings through re-course to the narrative turn, which has been adopted in a number of contemporary body culture studies (e.g. Denison & Markula, 2003; Sparkes & Silvennoinen, 1999).

By adopting these positions and strategies, through an approach that fuses ethnographic and narrative sensibilities, my hope is to explore young peoples’ involvement with exercise and dance cultures as situated practice, and to bring into awareness how the enactment of these social rituals implicate the body in different ways and give rise to contradictory relationships and understandings about subjectivity and identity.



# Chapter Five



## 5. Study Two: The ethnographic phase

### 5.1 Towards an introduction

This chapter highlights and discusses the details of the ethnographic study that developed from the research approach advocated at the end of the last chapter. Ethnography is a term, which has been shrouded in some ambiguity and has come to mean different things to different people, incorporating philosophical, theoretical, methodological and textual dimensions. As a field of study, the term loosely relates to research pertaining to develop an intimate understanding of a group of people or culture in their naturally occurring settings by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities and to make explicit participants' taken for granted assumptions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This necessarily involves the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also in the cultural activities, "in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally" (Brewer, 2000, p.10).

In terms of methodology, ethnography has become synonymous as a catch all term that includes any form of qualitative inquiry—e.g. interviewing, participant observation, document analysis etc.—(e.g. Brewer, 2000; Coffey, 1999; Sands, 2002; Wolcott, 1995). When aligned with its anthropological lineage (as cultural anthropology), an emphasis has been placed on ethnography being more than *just* the application of one or other qualitative methods (what Brewer, 2000 calls 'big' ethnography). Here, ethnography is understood as a prolonged engagement within the field, necessary to gain an intimate understanding of a given culture (e.g. Wolcott, 1995). This engagement foregrounds and contextualises the use of various qualitative methods, which are utilised as sensitising agents and data collecting strategies, in order to describe and interpret cultural behaviours (Schwandt, 2001).

Furthermore, ethnography has been defined as both a process and product, which begins, develops and takes shape in the field and extends out to the finished product, be it, for example, a text, film or performance (e.g. Denzin, 1997; Sparkes, 2002a; Wolcott, 1995). As Wolcott contends in discussing the hardships endured in fieldwork and the necessity of reporting what was learnt in the field



What does count is what others stand to learn as a consequence of the fieldworker's investigative effort *through the subsequent recounting of it...* I take a firm position that there is no such thing as "unreported research." No one can claim to have "done all the fieldwork" who has not also written it up. Fieldwork is validated only through the requisite reporting that results from it. Fieldwork that does not get written is partial and incomplete; alone, it amounts to no more than what may have been anything from an intellectually rich to psychologically devastating personal experience (Wolcott, 1995, p.66).

Accordingly, the following sections outline the shape, scope and specifics of engagement with the cultural worlds of exercise and rave, which entailed fieldwork spread over a period of 27 months.

## **5.2 Into the field: Notes on fieldwork and analyses**

### **5.21 Structure of the fieldwork**

The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted over a period of 27 months (beginning in June 2000), integrating distinct yet overlapping phases of research including; interviews and focus group discussions with 40 students (alongside participant-observation with 11 interviewees); in-depth fieldwork conducted in the primary cultural sites of exercise (gyms) and rave (nightclubs) as well as related life-world environs and situations (e.g. cafes, health shops, parks, bars, record shops, after-parties), and the collection of cultural media artefacts (e.g. magazines, flyers, membership literature, television exposure).

Whilst it is difficult to clearly delineate the fieldwork into distinct phases, chronologically, the study can be differentiated into two broad yet overlapping periods. The first period lasted just over a year, and was dedicated to interviewing participants, individually, as well as in group scenarios. Developing out of these interview situations, I managed to accompany 11 of the interviewed participants to their local gyms or nightclubs (as well as various other culturalscapes), an arrangement, which endured over time (ranging from one to multiple occasions).



The second period of the fieldwork, focused on the gym and dance club as distinct cultural worlds. Accordingly, access to three gyms and four nightclubs was secured, and, over a period of approximately sixteen months fieldwork was conducted, combining and juxtaposing participation-observation and more immersed, participatory experiences. This fieldwork was complemented with the gathering of locally produced cultural artefacts and mediated communications.

Attention will now be turned to fleshing out the details of these two overlapping periods of fieldwork, as well as discussing some of the challenges that I encountered and the tensions and difficulties, which ethnographic research invariably entails.

## **5.22 Phase one: Interviews and observations**

The first phase of the fieldwork began with an extensive period of interviewing, involving both individual interviews and group discussions. In order to recruit participants, an advert was initially placed on the university intranet as well as posters placed in numerous faculty buildings and flyers handed out in convenient social ‘hangouts’ such as the student union bars and cafeterias. The advert was simple and to the point “Do you exercise or go out clubbing regularly? I am a PhD student who is interested in chatting with young people about their experiences as part of my research project. If you would like to participate in this study and wouldn’t object to being interviewed one on one as well as within a group setting, please contact me [contact details]” I was surprised by the initial interest, as within a couple of weeks of circulating the advert, over 50 people had responded. At this point I contacted people by phone to tell them a bit more about the research, inviting questions and informing potential participants, that I also regarded myself as both an exerciser and clubber.

From these initial telephone encounters, the number of people who agreed to take part with the research dropped to 40 (see Appendix B for consent form). The specific details of these meetings; the underlying rationale for using both types of interview as well as; the frameworks used to analyse and interpret these narratives, will now be highlighted and discussed.



### 5.22.1 Rationale for using individual and focus group interviews

As a novice qualitative researcher, the rationale for using both individual and group interview methodologies was not informed by prior (formal) experience (I hadn't any!), but by recourse to the theoretical literature and what I believed to be, common sense 'hunches.' Within the literature, several scholars have contrasted these discursive situations. It has been noted that they provide unique opportunities, which can't be reduced to one another, yet may serve different purposes in elucidating and shining light on human action and meaning from multiple angles, as well as witnessing people inhabiting different masks and speaking their different voices (e.g. Morgan, 1988; 2002; Kitzinger & Farquhar, 1999). Not only do they serve distinct yet overlapping purposes, they are also likely to be more or less appropriate depending on the given situation and the persons being interviewed (Morgan, 1988).

Whilst one-on-one interviews create a distinct bilateral conversation between interviewer and interviewee, group interviews give rise to different conversational dynamics (e.g. Morgan, 1988; 2002; Wilkinson, 1998). The potential of group interviews would seem to be oriented towards the elaboration and witnessing of collective "synergy" (Johnson, 1996), which typifies these type of narrative encounters, such that "The focus group gives the researcher the opportunity to study the individual not as an isolated nomad but *as part of a collective*" (Johnson, 1996, p.522).

In this sense, group situations enable the generation of data and insights that would be less accessible in traditional individual interviews (Morgan, 1988). For example, it has been suggested that focus groups push people into questioning others' taken for granted beliefs and perceptions and personal constructs (Kitzinger, 1994), deepening the circles of enquiry and cultural understandings

Focus group participants often assist the researcher by asking questions of each other (perhaps more searching than those the researcher might have dared to ask), by contradicting and disagreeing with each other...and by pointing to apparent contradictions in each other's accounts...the effect of these questions, disagreement and challenges from other group members is generally to produce enhanced disclosure, as people answer questions, resolve disagreements and defend their views against attack



(Wilkinson, 1998, p.329).

People's different assumptions are thrown into relief by the way in which they challenge one another, the questions they ask, the evidence people bring to bear on an issue, the sources they cite, and what arguments seem to sway the opinion of other members of the group

(Morgan, 1988, p.114).

Whilst it is true that the data derived from group interactions can be rich and insightful, the same dynamics at times can also hinder disclosure. For example, Kitzinger (1994) contends that in her experience "...the group may censor any deviation from group standards, inhibiting people from talking about certain things" (p.112). In a similar vein, Michell sounds a warning "I urge researchers always at least to consider the voices which may be silenced in the particular group research settings they employ" (1999, 36). In contrast, the *particular* qualities of more intimate one-on-one interviews, would seem to allow people to attend to their own recollections and their narrative sense of self (Holway & Jefferson, 2000) without the possibility of being curtailed by others, or subsumed in the politics of group consensus (Kitzinger, 1994). One-on-one situations may be better suited to allowing individuals to contextualise their life, longitudinally, in so developing a sense of their life story and narrative history (e.g. Riessman, 1993).

The theoretical literature makes it clear that the dynamics of one-on-one encounters and group meetings, vary enormously, giving rise to overlapping yet qualitatively distinct interactions, insights and stories. Within my research, I had hoped that using in-depth individual interview methodology would enable me to witness something of peoples' life stories and the links between their involvement with body culture and their wider life journey. I was also intrigued by the potentials of collective 'talk' and the types of interactions that focus group discussions might give rise to. I felt that this type of discussion might allow some of the cultural assumptions, contours of experience and taken for granted cultural norms to be prodded, teased opened and explored, giving rise to more complex, contradictory and contested stories and *collective* tales.



### 5.22.2 Individual interviews

From the initial interest expressed by respondents of my advert, a total of 40 people were interviewed. In more detail, I interviewed 29 people individually (25 of whom I conducted at least one follow up chat with). More specifically I spoke with 10 exercisers (5 males and 5 females), 11 clubbers (5 male and 6 females) and 8 people who regularly did both (4 males and 4 females.) These interviews took place in a number of locations, such as my office, bars, cafes, gyms and people's houses (as well as mine), and were unstructured in nature. All interviews were recorded using a 'Sony' portable tape recorder and an 'Audio-Technica' omni-directional microphone. The total length of time that I chatted with people ranged from 1.5 to over 4 hours (and just under 5 hours for one interviewee). In total, over 65 hours of interview material was recorded (and later transcribed verbatim in the qualitative data management programme NUD\*IST).

It was usual for me to begin the first interview with people by asking a few 'warm up' questions, for example, I wanted to find out how long people had been participating and where they liked to do the activity (or activities). Then I asked people to tell me something about how they got involved and more generally, to tell me about *their* story. On the basis of the responses that I received, I prompted people to elaborate on certain things that they'd touched upon but not fleshed out, in particular, identified significant 'moments.' Throughout the interviews I tried to maintain a role of "attentive listener," giving respondents my fullest attention (I wrote few detailed notes during the chats, just key words), although when it seemed appropriate (i.e. some silences, conjectures and questions asked of me) I did share my experiences with them (perhaps more so in the follow-up interviews). In most interviews, it seemed apparent when the respondent had finished (sometimes prompted by a shrug, extended period of silence followed by something like "That's about it?" or "I don't know if that's any good for you?"), and at this point I checked by asking if they had anything to add.

Following the first encounter, I wrote down my initial observations and reflections, which usually took the form of free-flowing thoughts. Whilst every interview was different, common thoughts and observations included noting any moments which shocked me or caused the respondent to open up (or batter down the hatch), as well as expressing the degree of rapport that I felt was achieved (and the possible reasons why?



such as, shared or dissimilar experiences, age, class etc.). On returning to the office (or my house) I listened to the interview in its entirety and noted any influential themes and incidents that I felt shaped their story, bracketing these as possible avenues for elaboration in the follow-up interview.

In subsequent meetings with participants, I began by summarising the content of the prior meeting, before asking whether they agreed with what they had said or needed to clarify anything, as well as asking them whether in the intervening period they'd had thought of anything else that might be useful to understand their story. These follow-up interviews were primarily an opportunity to fill in 'holes' and 'gaps' as well as continue to develop a sense of rapport between myself and the, respondent. Having completed these follow-up encounters I would note down my observations and/or reflections on how the meeting went, whether or not the sense of their storied experience had taken any important twists or turns, as well as reflecting on my own reactions to what I had heard and witnessed.

### **5.22.3 Focus group interviews**

Asides from the individual interviews, 10 focus group discussions were also conducted (of which 19 people of those interviewed individually also attended), which were organised by activity and gender, 4 of these were dedicated to exercise (2 male and 2 female) and 4 to clubbing (2 male and 2 female), whilst 2 further discussions were dedicated to people who participated in both exercise and dance (2 female groups). The number of people who attended each discussion ranged from between 3 to 7 and the length of the sessions varied between 1.5 to 2.5 hours in duration. All interviews were recorded (using the same recording equipment as in the individual interviews) and later transcribed, verbatim. Approximately 20 hours of discussion was recorded adding to the 65 from the individual chats, making a total of 85 hours of interview material.

All but one of the discussions took place in a small 'counselling room' within the faculty building (the other was held in my house), whereby chairs were arranged in a circle with a small coffee table in the middle (on which the microphone was placed). Throughout all the discussion forums, I was helped by an assistant moderator. In the first two discussions a colleague well versed in interview methodology took this role and in



subsequent discussions my partner assisted me. The assistant moderator looked after the needs of the participants (e.g. making refreshments), and attended to technical matters (i.e. recording issues). The assistant also wrote notes during the discussion, and where necessary interjected at the end of the session to field further questions, which were overseen by myself.

At the beginning of each session I introduced myself (and the assistant) to the participants, and then asked each person to introduce themselves to the others and give some indication why they were interested in participating. Before commencing the discussion in earnest, I made the ‘ground rules’ of the discussion explicit to participants.

1. Primarily a forum to discuss their experiences amongst each other, thus my role was primarily one of facilitating and steering discussion, if and when it goes drastically off course or becomes dominated by any one person or people.
2. As a matter of respect (and to assist identification during the transcription process), it is important that people don’t talk over one another and that they let the person speaking, finish, before adding their own comments.
3. If at any point during the process, someone wants to stop the recording or leave the discussion, then they can do so at any time.
4. Expressed the intent for it to be *their* discussion, and as much as possible to steer the boat.

Before the session (usually by way of a phone call) I asked all participants to consider what benefit they felt they received from involvement with exercise or/and dance, and more generally to think about what they get out of it. So as to ‘ignite’ the discussion, I invited people to share with the group their responses and to use these responses to “see where they take the discussion.” In the majority of cases this served to provide enough discursive material to fan the flames of the discussion. Besides from this, I cautiously wrote down some areas of interest, which I thought might be worth discussion (see below).



1. What goes on whilst doing it? What does it feel like?
2. Is it different depending on where it takes place?
3. What is its relevance / meaning in contemporary society?
4. Why do some do it and not others?
5. What about the overlap into other parts of life?

In general I found that these prompts were useful. Yet, more often than not, these topics were brought up by members of the group. In this respect, I learnt from the early sessions to hold back on asking participants to discuss these areas. In contrast to the individual encounters, I consciously wrote notes throughout the sessions, to help me re-focus discussion (i.e. to go back to *mentioned* yet unexplored areas), as well as to help me avert my gaze from the speaker (which I sometimes found led to discussants specifically addressing me and not the group)

The majority of sessions occurred in one sitting, although in two forums people decided to take a toilet break and split the discussion into two parts. At the end of the sessions, the assistant recounted a brief summary of the contents of the discussion, and asked people if they wanted to add anything or whether they were happy with what happened. Once participants left, the assistant and myself conducted a debrief session, which was used to reflect on what had happened (comparing notes and observations), including how people had interacted with one another, as well as reflecting upon ‘anxious moments’ (see below), which had caused surprise and even shock. Besides from this, as a developmental exercise, the assistant reviewed my handling of the session, and gave pointers as to how I might consider changing my approach in subsequent sessions.

#### **5.22.4 Ancillary notes and remarks**

Perhaps the most common problem that I encountered had to do with discussants feeling that I was after something in specific from them. Whilst this occurred in some discussion groups, it was primarily a feature of the one-on-one interviews, where some participants at the end of utterances would enquire “Is that ok? Is that the sort of thing you are after?” Although not a major problem, for a few it wasn’t till the second



interview that some sort of rapport had been struck, and discussants felt it appropriate to go beyond simply giving answers to questions, so to speak, and offered more in the way of personal exemplars and stories in order to ‘put me in the picture.’

By way of more specific challenging ‘moments’ I recall one instance, chatting with a male gym member, who had got into bodybuilding. I had been asking him about training and competition, at which point the words from his mouth started to dry up and there was an uncomfortable silence for half a minute or so, before he confessed that he had been aiming to compete yet only recently found out that he needed to take drugs to stand any serious chance. This recent realisation had obviously devastated him, and it was only after the interview that he confided that I had been the only person (apart from his flat mate) that he had mentioned it to. Although this may not seem that monumental, it brought into my horizon in a very real way the sensitivity of speech and storytelling, as well as the potential revelations and confessions, seldom acknowledged or rehearsed that may come to be voiced in these sort of situations.

On some occasions, I felt that I needed to share what I had heard and my feelings towards what had been said. At times some support was there, yet more often I refrained as I felt that I didn’t want to jeopardise their confidentiality. In retrospect, I don’t believe this was the best course of action.

Personally, I felt more vulnerable in the group discussions, where people who had never met before, were asked to chat about their lives and potentially sensitive issues. More often than not, before the sessions I became extremely nervous, worrying whether people would get on together, and whether the unforeseen would happen and if so, how would I cope with it? To my relief, in the majority of sessions people were fully aware of the dynamics of these ‘contrived’ discussions scenarios, and conducted themselves with respect and care for others.

The most usual difficulties I encountered, had to do with people dominating aspects of the discussion, which meant that I had to make polite and concerted efforts to stem the flow from one direction, so as to bring others voices in to the discussion. The most pronounced example of this arose midway through the first focus group where I was speaking with five female exercisers, two of whom were in their late teens, and the others were in the their late thirties. The discussion had been stuck on issues of diet and



wellbeing for about twenty minutes, in which two of the older women had turned the discussion into a ‘lesson,’ where they felt it was their duty to inform the younger women that a healthy diet was important, and that starving themselves wasn’t an appropriate behaviour to adopt when partaking in regular strenuous exercise. This exchange had the not unsurprising effect of alienating the two younger women, who were perhaps in shock or had decided to disengage from the situation. The remainder of the discussion had become deflated and I was eager to bring it to a close.

Instances such as that just described, underlined the benefits of using both individual and group interviews. I was happy to interview both the young women in one-on-one situations, where they both felt more relaxed and able to articulate their views and stories. And it was certainly apparent that the juxtaposition of both types of discussion allowed people different opportunities to involve themselves. Understandably, some thrived on the group context, whereas others felt more able to articulate themselves in the intimacy of a one-on-one situation.

### **5.23 Analysis of interview narratives**

The interview phase of the ethnography generated approximately 1300 single spaced pages of transcription, which left me experiencing data overload. Thus, decisions relating to how I analysed this material, reflected both the pragmatic concerns of this vast data trawl as well as my theoretical aims. In setting up the two overlapping phases of interviewing, my intention was that the focus group discussions would be occasions for “collective talk” and that the one-on-one situations, would enable cultural members more of an opportunity to describe and articulate something of their “personal tales.”

I wanted to use a toolbox of approaches, which would allow me to highlight some of the cultural themes and categories of experience, whilst also retaining the concrete links with the personal tales that define and differentiate one person’s journey from another. In this sense, the act of storytelling is an integral practice through which people construct their identity and sense of self-other, marking the intersection of biography, society and history (e.g. Murray, 1997; Ricoeur, 1984).

As a result of this thinking, I adopted two analytical approaches. The first approach, which I applied to the focus group data, drew upon *paradigmatic* sensibilities and the



second approach, which I used with the individual interviews, was more oriented towards narrative hermeneutic understanding (e.g. Polkinghorne, 1995). These approaches are aligned with different modes of reasoning (e.g. Bruner, 1985). In more detail, paradigmatic reasoning breaks down stories into common elements and results in descriptions of themes grouped into taxonomies whereas narrative reasoning, attends to the descriptions and interpretations of events, happenings and characters, focusing on plots, temporal sequencing, motivations and evaluative strategies, in order to configure the constituent parts of narratives into meaningful and coherent stories (e.g. Herda, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1995; Ricoeur, 1984).

As forms of analytical practice, it was felt that these modes of inquiry would allow general insights and themes to be highlighted, whilst also focusing on the more embodied and concrete narrative conventions that constitute a person's sense of identity, expressed via storytelling. The following sections describe how these approaches were used to analyse the interview data.

#### **5.23.1 Focus group analysis**

All the transcripts were saved and transferred into the qualitative software programme NU•DIST. This package was primarily used for its ability to manage vast sets of data, and enabled the tracking and easy identification of text-units (i.e. specific utterances). This package also provided a platform later on in the analysis, to code sections and allow their quick retrieval, as well as linking different data segments within and between interviews.

Whilst I adopted no formal method of paradigmatic analysis, the process bore some resemblance to a grounded approach, where insights and themes emerge from the data, via inductive strategies and deductive hunches, developing from the movement from open codes to more encompassing categories and themes (e.g. Charmaz, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Besides from this, I also employed a hermeneutic attitude towards the text, moving and juxtaposing disparate elements of the text together, to enlarge the understanding and interpretation of a particular theme or category.

At the beginning on the analysis, I highlighted any sections of dialogue that immediately jumped out from the pages, without too much forethought as to why. I



repeated this process on a number of occasions, as I thought that my frame-of-mind might determine how I read the text and thus mark off ‘significant’ passages of dialogue. On the basis of these initial readings, I generated a set of open coded categories, which provided provisional focus points, through which to explore the data further. As the analysis proceeded, the emphasis shifted towards juxtaposing segments of the text from different discussion sessions, and a continual re-configuring of themes and categories based, on these juxtaposes and the highlighting of identified similarities.

Given the nature of group discourse and the inevitable variation in the experiences, viewpoints and perspectives displayed amongst cultural members (Morgan, 2002), I was conscious of not wanting to emphasise similarity, homogeneity and closure at the expense of conflicting perspectives that were subsumed within the categories. Thus the analysis attempted also to highlight exemplars within the text that alluded to these fractures and contradictions. By way of a further analytical step, the emergent categories were also juxtaposed with one another to explore the possible inter-relationships and overlaps between themes.

### **5.23.2 Individual interview analysis**

In contrast to the approach adopted in the focus group analysis—in which the object of the analysis was to structure meaning from the contents of the group conversations, by applying a systematic process of coding and categorisation—the analytical approach favoured for the individual interviews, drew upon perspectives and sensibilities associated with narrative hermeneutics (e.g. Herda, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; 1995; 2000; Ricoeur, 1984; 1986; 1991). The fundamental difference between a thematic approach and that of narrative hermeneutics is that the latter is primarily interested in understanding peoples’ lived experiences, as storied occasions, in so far as the uncovering of a plot takes primacy over structure. Here, consideration of parts of a story in relation to the whole becomes the means through which to gain a comprehension of peoples’ lived experiences, as well as an understanding of how people interpret their life through their storytelling efforts.



Thus the shift of focus (from the group to the individual conversations) was pre-empted through consideration of the significance of storytelling in human consciousness. In the most basic sense, storytelling is the uniquely human way in which people order and configure time and experience, so as to make life meaningful “...*time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence*” (Ricoeur, 1984, p.52). Likewise, people disclose much about themselves and who they are through telling stories about their experiences, which is to say that narrative and the construction of identity are also intimately linked.

We are all storymakers and tellers. These stories guide not only our interpretation of reality but our very identification of ourselves. We use and create stories not only to describe and understand events but to define ourselves and others (Murray, 1997, p.10).

A narrative hermeneutical approach affords attention to two basic (yet inter-related) ways in which people make sense of time through ordering and organising their experiences. The first has to do with the *description* of events, happenings, characters, temporal sequences and motivations, and is aligned with the phenomenological recollection and unpacking of, lived experience (Ricoeur, 1984). In the second movement, the hermeneutic approach takes into consideration the *connections* and *relationships* that people make in selectively assembling experiences and events, in order to evaluate and make sense of their life. In this sense, a hermeneutic attitude attempts to mimic the ways in which people, through narrative reasoning, continually draw reference to different events and encounters, to make sense of their life. It is through this integration and the linking of parts of a story to the whole, that the self as a moral and value making subject comes into being, via storytelling (Herda, 1999; Von Eckartsburg, 1998).

These related movements, whereby consideration is given to specific parts of a story and their relationships and connections with an emergent whole, are part of the



hermeneutic circle, which guides analysis and continually juxtaposes elements of narratives and their relationships and connections with a person's story, more generally.

In describing some of the more practical considerations of narrative hermeneutic inquiry, Herda (1999) suggests that interpretation is a creative and imaginative act, whereby the researcher appropriates a proposed world from the narrative, by taking on the role of a narrator rather than that of an analyst. In this process, the researcher continually moves their attention between description and evaluation, marking off specific narrative recollections, and juxtaposing these encounters with consideration of the links and bridges that people make, to show how they have come to understand who they are. Through this spiral process, the researcher's pre-understanding is continually revised and developed, in light of further juxtaposes and new connections that are made between elements of the narrative, "Such an inquiry is circular, in which parts are understood in light of the whole" (Polkinghorne, 2000, p.460).

These underlying hermeneutic principles and sensibilities were used as the basis for the analysis of the individual conversations. By way of providing an additional frame of reference, some attention was also given to locating participants' stories within the focus group discussions. In this way, other pertinent events and experiences were highlighted and explored, as well as consideration given to the relative positioning of the teller in relation to their peers.



## **5.24 Phase two: Exploring the cultural landscapes of exercise and dance**

After the period of interviewing and a period of participant-observation in which I accompanied 11 interviewees to their gyms and clubs (6 clubbers and 5 gym goers ranging from 1 to numerous occasions, given the developing acquaintances made with some subjects), a second phase of fieldwork was conducted which explored two of the primary cultural spaces in which exercise and rave are enacted, the gym and the dance club. The following sections provide details describing the logistics of this part of the ethnographic study and how it was actually carried out, as well as providing some information about how the data was managed and subsequently analysed.

### **5.24.1 Accessing the field(s)**

Before embarking upon this part of the ethnography, I had no real preconceived ideas as to how this part of the research would map out or what it would entail. From my personal involvement, I had an idea of the range and types of gym and club spaces I wanted to research (as wide a variety of facilities as possible), however, practicalities (and compromises) eventually dictated that I needed to focus on a small number of locations (given the time-span), furthermore, the politics of securing access meant that the clubs that were eventually used for the purposes of the fieldwork, were chosen as much through a spirit of opportunism than anything else.

Gaining access to locations developed on the back of a number of initiatives and from a variety of sources. For example, from the period on interviewing I became acquainted with an aerobics instructor and a personal trainer who both worked in city based gyms and introduced me to their managers, whom I arranged to meet with and interview as part of the research. Despite the interest taken in the project by both managers (one was an old student from my department), it proved unfeasible for me to conduct fieldwork in one of the gyms, which was a women only club (just one example of the practical politics encountered during the fieldwork). Nevertheless, I was allowed to use another other health club run by the alumni's friend (part of a chain of nationwide gyms) for the sakes of research. In a similar vein, I made a contact through the course of the clubbing interviews with a DJ whom was running his own club night and was quite happy to let me conduct research at his venue.



I also decided to use some of the clubs and gyms I personally frequented, as I had already established a degree of rapport and familiarity with these contexts and the people that frequented them (some of whom were part of my kinship group). For example, I had been a (on and off) member of one gym since my undergraduate days, and I had got to know some of the staff, who I had studied with on my (exercise science) degree course. Over the course of the proceeding years, I had experienced much of the city's club culture. I had also become something of a regular at a couple of weekly club nights, where I had previously met the promoters, got to know some of the resident DJ's, bar workers and door staff.

In more detail and by way of a summary, through the course of the field part of the ethnographic project, I conducted research in three different gym spaces. Two of these were large, multi-facility health clubs (e.g. multi-gym, free weights, pool, sauna etc.) owned by nationally known companies (with memberships of several thousand), with branches throughout the British Isles, the first of which I visited on 25 occasions over the course of approximately three months. I conducted research in the second health club over a period of four months (split into two blocks), which included 23 separate visits. The third gym, a university owned facility, which included a small multi-gym section, free-weights area and 25 metre pool (with a membership of a few hundred), I visited one or two times a week, intermittently, for an 8 month period (on approximately 35 occasions).

As regards to the clubbing fieldwork, I conducted research in four different locations in the city centre (as well as visiting a number of other clubs, parties and events throughout the north-west). The first club, was a large well known dance venue (catering for up to 2000 people) which had gained national reputation through two events which regularly took place there, as well as a host of other smaller club nights and one off party's. Over the course of about five months, I attended many of the bigger club nights at this venue as well as some of the occasional one off events. I conducted fieldwork in this location on 18 separate occasions.

The second club was also well known within the clubbing community (with a capacity of about 1000), attracting punters from all over the North West (and further a field), and was particularly popular with the city's gay community (although by no means



an exclusive homosexual space), and had recently been voted club of the year by a well known national dance culture magazine. I attended this club about once a week for approximately six months (approximately 25 visits in total), as well as on other occasions (e.g. monthly 'All-nighters').

The third club, which was situated in a nearby building, acted as an after-club venue, where people from various clubs and parties dotted around the city would ascend between the hours of 3am-9am. I often attended this club after the third club, closed, and thus made a similar number of visits to this venue over the same period of time. The fourth club was a much smaller venue (capacity of about 250), which hosted a number of different events, organised by local DJ's and collectives as well as irregular events promoted by students. I visited this venue less frequently than the others, but still managed to attend around about 10 club events over a period of a year.

#### **5.24.2 Recording field data**

During these periods of fieldwork I utilised a number of data recording methods. For example, whilst doing research in the gyms and health clubs, it was common for me to carry a field notebook, which I concealed in a small bag and often took out whilst resting between exercise reps to make notes and comments. I also carried a small personal dictaphone with me to record conversations with members of staff and other exercisers as well as to record free-flowing and random thoughts, feelings and metaphors in and around the gym space (although, more often than not I would relocate to the changing room to record this sort of data). By way of comparison, recording data in dance clubs seemed more problematic in some ways. For example, in one of the clubs I was not allowed to take my dictaphone in, whilst on some occasions I decided not to take any formal recording media with me as I felt more conscious of standing out from other participants (this also was experienced in some of the gym venues, but to a lesser extent).

Following the fieldwork sessions, I typed out more extensive notes and observations at the end of the day (or following day), as well as re-visited notes at the end of the week, so as add further comments and re-interpretations (this was more evident in the latter stages of the fieldwork.)



### 5.24.3 Living fieldwork: Issues and insights

As with any ethnographic project, the neat concepts and attitudes that are presumed to facilitate the ethnographer's 'smooth' passage through the course of fieldwork, in reality, are met by a much messier affair (de Laine, 2000; Wolcott, 1995). My fieldwork experience was no different. As a project aimed at exploring primarily the experiential dimensions of participation, using my-self as a central informant, the tensions and difficulties of *doing* ethnography seemed to be amplified and exasperated by the inclusion and integration of my self as ethnographic 'other' (e.g. Coffey, 1999). In the following sections I describe some of the roles and relationships adopted through the course of the fieldwork experience, the ethical issues that accompanied these enacted roles.

#### 5.24.31 Ethics of access and participation

Perhaps the first dilemma that I encountered had to do with how I was going to access the gyms and dance clubs, and in what capacity or role. As I had already been a long-term clubber (since 1994) and gym goer (from the latter years of high school life), and considered myself an active member of these cultures, thus, the position I assumed (rather than adopted) was one of informed and full participant (de Laine, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). However, the codes and etiquette of the ethnographic academy forewarned me that if I didn't make my position clear, as not only a regular participant but also a researcher, within these worlds then I might leave myself open to accusations of deception (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). As it panned out, I also became aware that the "distinction between covert and overt research is less straight forward than sometimes imagined" (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001, p.342).

By way of following the established protocol (as an inexperienced qualitative researcher), at each of the venues, upon beginning the stints of fieldwork, I arranged to meet with the managers of the gyms and clubs, under the pretence of wanting to interview them as part of the research project. I used this as a "way in" strategy (although I had already met with one of the gym managers and introduced previously to another, as well as being recognised by three of the club promoters as a regular club goer), and to introduce myself and tell them more about the research. At this juncture, many of the



managers (and promoters) made an effort to introduce me to their staff and inform them that I would be visiting their gym / club quite frequently over the next few months, whilst the others agreed in principle and left me to my own devices. I had agreed to pay my entrance to the sites and be treated the same as other participants. In this sense, the introductions were, I felt, one avenue through which to enable some opportunities and openings to get to know members of staff. Yet, access also followed less formal routes. I had made several contacts during the periods of fieldwork, and had previously established rapport with gatekeepers, through my prior involvement with gym life. For example, some of my undergraduate peers worked within the industry as personal trainers, gym assistants etc., and I had some contacts within the city's clubbing world, ranging from DJ's, promoters, bar workers and door staff.

As I got deeper into the fieldwork, it became obvious that in assuming the position of "just another participant" in gym and club life, it was near impossible to do totally overt research. Moreover, the sheer volume of bodies (sometimes I was in dance events with a couple of thousand people) that entered and exited these cultural fields meant that in practice, what I was really engaged in, could be deemed a pseudo-covert research programme. A few months into the research, I contended with myself that rather than get caught up in the politics of the 'ethics committee' and 'informed consent,' what was more important as a fieldworker was waxing common sense, making decisions as and when they arose and bearing in mind the simple question: What damage could I be doing by concealing my research agenda? (de Laine, 2000; Sugden, 1997).

As it panned out, when chatting with members of the respective cultures, I vowed to tell them I was a researcher only if the issue of vocation came up (this happened more often than not). I would then quite happily tell them about my research (and make it clear that in all likelihood I would go away and document the encounter in some way or other). As with the fieldwork of Sands (1995; 1999), it seemed that by making my intentions explicit to others, and on the basis of my positioning within these worlds, rather than act as a cue to stem the flow of "good data," most people would make an effort to relay what they saw as pertinent and significant features of these cultures.

All this being said, despite the real life difficulties in delineating the research as either neatly overt or covert (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wheaton, 1997), as I



encountered the field, I don't believe that the data gained from the experiences was duly affected, or that the others who formed part of the fields of cultural analysis, were endangered by my actions or presence. Even when it came to the issue of illegal substances, many recreational drug users were quite happy to speak of their drug related experiences. Indeed, when interacting with the occasional drug dealers I encountered during the fieldwork, none seemed unduly bothered or concerned that they might be subject to my analytical gaze.

#### 5.24.32 Knowing through different roles

Somewhere between “going out to places” and “coming back with information...” every fieldworker has to achieve some workable balance between participating and observing. There is always a question of whether those two processes constitute discrete functions or are hopelessly intertwined in the very act of anyone being anywhere, but it is comforting to have our own special label for what we do to reassure ourselves that *our* being there is different from anyone else's. That self-conscious role is what we examine when discussing participant observation—how can we realize the potential not simply of “being there” but of being so agonizingly self-conscious about it (Wolcott, 1995, p.95).

Consideration of the positioning of the researcher, the roles adopted in “getting to know the field,” and accompanying issues of reflexivity, necessary to create the *tension* and *self-awareness* central to critical ethnographic enterprise, are now discussed with reference to my fieldwork experiences.

Given my prior involvement with both of these lifeworlds, I didn't enter these fields as a ‘stranger,’ so the analytical division between familiarity and strangeness wasn't (at least initially) readily available to me. In retrospect, this was advantageous, in so far as, how else could I pursue an experiential protocol where participation was the only avenue through which to re-cover the tacit dimensions of these body phenomena? (e.g. Eichberg, 1994a; 1994b; Sands, 1999; 2002) But also, it wasn't without complications. My



“insider” role didn’t automatically privilege me with the intellectual capacity to recognise and reflect upon this involvement (e.g. Coffey, 1999; Sands, 2002), and this was something that I had to encounter and deal with during the course of the fieldwork.

At the beginning of the fieldwork (for approximately the first 4-6 months), I attended the fieldwork locations, paid my money and got on with working out as well as participating in club culture, pretty much as before (except now I was documenting my experiences). Here, as had been the case before formally researching these worlds I met many other participants, chatted and formed acquaintances, some of whom went on to become co-informants (and friends), whilst others became part of the transitory human traffic that passed through the gym doors or found a temporary retreat on the dance floor of the city centre clubs I frequented.

During this phase of the fieldwork, I focused a lot of attention on the pre-reflective experiences of working out and clubbing, describing what it felt like, for example; to lift weights; run on the treadmill when feeling in (or out of shape); look forward to the shower or sauna towards the end of a session; experience the anxiety waiting in the cue to the club; experiencing and describing the interplay between movement, music and my body; brushing my body up against others in the heated atmosphere of the dance floor etc or; encountering others in the different segmented spaces of the gym. These sort of details and experiential bodywork, formed the basis of much of the early part of the fieldwork, taking up considerable space in my field notes and reflections.

In hindsight, although a lot more complex and nuanced, this part of the fieldwork could be articulated as my ‘first take,’ in which I could access “feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and other aspects not uncovered through participant observation” (Sands, 2002, p.123). However, the downside was that I didn’t feel that my participation and full immersion within the cultural worlds of the gym and dance club, actually enabled me to sufficiently taken myself out of the experiential sea (of these cultural configurations), so as to experience the tension and distance, necessary in prolonged fieldwork.

As a rejoinder, I began to reflect more acutely on my relative positioning within these cultural configurations. Whereas the goal in traditional ethnography can be seen as a journey which takes the ethnographer through a series of doors and stages, where



cultural scripts and behaviours are learnt, bringing the self closer to being aligned with the reality experienced by cultural members, I felt my challenge was the reverse of this. And this is an obvious consequence of researching worlds that you are familiar with (Sands, 2002). Some emphasis had to be placed on unpicking these journeys, so as to gain some distance with my complicit arrangements with these worlds, which I'd been acquainted with prior to the fieldwork.

I began to re-visit my field notes and reflections, and attempted to scrutinise my understanding and experience, in order to *interrupt* and *disrupt* my experience and my sense of perceived involvement. By going over this familiar terrain and hypothetically subtracting aspects and categories of the experiences, I forced myself to re-consider how I was acquainted with these life-worlds, and under what pretences and assumptions. Reflecting on these earlier experiences, gave me some pointers and material through which to problematise my participation and involvement. During this transitional phase, I also engaged in more auto-biographical exercises, which helped to 'get out' some of my biographical terrain out into the open, enabling me to reflect upon the baggage that I had accumulated and had taken into my fieldwork experiences, as a white, heterosexual twenty-something, male.

The transition to incorporate a less immersed and more critical positioning amongst the cultural fields of study wasn't smooth not clear-cut—I envisaged this process as the addition of roles that operated as a community of voices, a community that at times argued and got lost as to who needed to be where, with whom and at what time—however, it allowed me to shift my attention, and to consider the relativity of my participation and positioning. This was by no means an easy task, but it did help me to re-focus, and in doing so enabled me to experience some of the tension and strangeness that I hadn't had to contend with during the first half of the fieldwork. I spent more time questioning my responses to, what I experienced and those that I encountered, as well as questioning what I was focusing on, and considering how and why this was so.

Wolcott (1995) has alluded to participation-observation invoking a practice whereby, the self, consciously observes the self, and this would seem to capture how my involvement changed within the field. Increasingly over the course of the second half of the fieldwork, I spent more time on the periphery of these cultural worlds, literally and



metaphorically. At the end, participation became a more focused and self-conscious practice that I wasn't always comfortable with (this will be returned to in due course).

During this phase, for example, I cut down and refrained from using body technologies (such as alcohol and recreational drugs) when doing official fieldwork in clubs, and saw myself more as an "undercover journalist." At the gyms I frequented (now reduced to two, with one regular haunt), I spent considerable time observing the interactions that occurred between, myself and others, and between people and the gym space and technologies, noticing patterns of behaviour and perceived meaning. I often spent hours, sitting in the confines of the café, which overlooked the main gym space or sitting off in-between reps and writing observations. Likewise in the dance fieldwork, I purposively, reflected more on my own interactions with others, and considered my responses (corporeal and intellectual) to particular situations and scenarios that I encountered. As with the gym work, I spent more time on the periphery of the dance floor, as well as sitting off in the chill-out areas, watching and observing. I still managed to participate yet in this period it would be fair to say that I was much more self-conscious of my involvement.

Although I wasn't able to discern this at the time, by the end of the fieldwork it would be fair to say that I was situated on the perimeter of these cultural fields. Given the changing nature of my involvement, particularly in the exit and write-up phase (where I spent less and less time participating in these recreational spaces) I was no longer sure whether I was an insider, outsider, researcher or participant. Sometimes I felt them all inside me, shouting for attention, at other times just a void, an entity without identity.

Where at the start of the fieldwork I had contended that I was a fully-fledged participant—an insider—the changing course of the research enterprise (which had turned from regular involvement to one of a marginal presence) altered my sense of self in ways that I didn't expect. The necessity of distancing myself from these worlds, and more to the point, people within these cultural spaces, didn't sit well in me. My confrontations with the relativity of the notion 'insider-outsider' left me feeling, at times, marginalised, distraught and often, confused.

It would be easy to dramatise this as an identity crisis, but on the backstage of my life, this was an extremely traumatic part of my research journey, where a whole series of



incidents and circumstances evoked a clash and collapse of worlds into one another. In the latter parts of the fieldwork (continuing through the write-up process), I felt that I became increasingly introspective. I backed out of many social encounters and situations, and found little time to get away from the research project.

My research experience changed dramatically, and it became fraught with tensions, crises and a fair amount of guilt. During the last few months, I started to seriously question my actions and behaviour. It just seemed that I had been scrutinising everybody's actions and opinions as well as my own (I guess because I had). I began to question whether I had been entirely genuine as a person throughout the course of the project (wasn't I just after data after all?) and whether I had given enough time to those significant others in my life, whilst simultaneously questioning my commitment to the field enterprise. Whilst I understand that others engaged in this sort of ethnographical work have managed to balance these roles and manage the community of voices and players within, I found it extremely traumatic and problematic. Two areas of my life, which had been influential aspects of my biography—that of exercise and dance—had gone from being generally positive realms of experience, to problematic areas of my existence.

I thought that researching things I did would be easier and more profitable than things I did not. I did not contend or expect that 'doing research' in worlds I had a vested interest in would 'disrupt' my life within these spaces as much as the fieldwork did. For example, I didn't envisage, that as a result of my project I would no longer be able to differentiate work and play time. Was there not a time when I wasn't thinking about the research or considering going into the nearest toilet (or some other backstage space) to write notes?

There are obviously real advantages and disadvantages to researching cultures that you are familiar with. What I found out from my fieldwork is that the implications of exploring identity spaces you have a vested interest in, may fundamentally alter your relationships with these worlds and your sense of self, in which you may or may not conclude the project feeling quite as much a part of those cultures that you did before. In writing this section, some time after the formal termination of the fieldwork (this is a re-submitted thesis), it is only now that I am beginning to feel (relatively) free from the



extreme pull of insider-outsider tensions and issues that accompanied me through the related stages of the fieldwork, particularly the latter phase and the write-up which followed (where my participation in these cultures, basically, ceased to exist).

### **5.25 Analysing the field data**

Although some scholars have argued that fieldwork and analysis are distinct aspects of ethnographic enterprise (for a discussion see, Brewer, 2000), the very act of experiencing and perceiving, and the process of note taking is implicitly analytical and interpretive, where a position and point of view is being articulated from some bodily position (Denzin, 1997). In this sense, analysing the field through notes and observations was an on-going process that took place throughout the fieldwork. Besides from this a more overt meta-analytic period followed on from the field phase.

Given the volume of recorded field data (i.e. field journal excerpts and reflections) and artefacts (e.g. flyers, magazines and related literature) I used a popular qualitative software package (NU•DIST) to help manage the data. To begin with I index coded the data into basic different types of data (e.g. observational notes; phenomenological-sensuous vignettes; diary reflections). As a next step I read through (and re-read) the data as a re-familiarisation exercise and attached brief memos to give an indication of the contents of the data segments, in so creating a set of open codes and categories, so as to aid the retrieval of data.

The main analytical work, which followed, involved working more closely with the configurational approach (Eichberg, 1993a; 1998; 2001a; 2001b; Nagbol, 1993; 1994). This analytical approach has been discussed in some detail previously in the thesis (4.4) and will not be rehearsed again, suffice to say that it attempts to elucidate how the built environment and the cultural stages (of the gym and the rave) shape and pattern the body's experience of movement and the meanings attached to it.

The aim of the analysis was to work with the data so as to develop some living and embodied pictures of the ecology of the rave and gym. This was facilitated by way of contrasting and juxtaposing the free-floating phenomenological and sensuous data, with the more cognitive reflections and observations. Throughout this process, specific consideration given to how the kaleidoscopic and overlapping dimensions of these



cultural configurations—time, space, interpersonal relations, objectives, energy—pattern and shape the body’s experience of and identification, within the gym and the dance club settings.



# Chapter Six



## 6. Representation and legitimation in post-modern narratives

### 6.1 Representation issues and processes

The related analyses of my ethnographic data allowed the plethora of field notes, observations, reflections, interviews, and associated documentations, which constituted the ‘meat’ of my fieldwork, to be trimmed down to a manageable size, as well enabling me to move into a more *overtly* interpretive space, on the path towards producing a final ethnographic text. Whilst this took considerable time, effort and patience, I was still left with the conundrum of how to represent these findings.

This challenge has become an integral part of the research journey for post-modern qualitative researchers (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Sparkes, 2002a). Writing is no longer perceived as a “...mopping up activity we do at the end of a research project” (Richardson, 2000a, p.923), it is rather, another link in the interpretative chain, in which fieldwork and writing are intertwined in process of coming to understand the ‘other’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Cast in this light, writing has been understood as a ‘method of inquiry’ which draws upon a variety of literary, rhetorical, and metaphoric strategies in order to persuade the reader of the efficacy of the findings (Richardson, 1990; 1997; 1998; 2000a; 2000b). As an extension of the interpretive enterprise, writing is neither apolitical, simple or without consequences to what we come to ‘know’ about any cultural phenomenon (e.g. Atkinson, 1990; Richardson, 1997).

The ‘crisis of representation’ has become a significant checkpoint that we need to acknowledge and pass through, as we make our way from the ‘field’ towards the finished product of our research endeavours (e.g. Coffey, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Sparkes, 1995; 2002a). Van Maanen notes, “There once was a time—some might say a dreamtime—when ethnography was read as a straight-ahead cultural description based on the firsthand experience an author had a strange (to both author and reader) group of people” (1995, p.1). However, during the mid 1980’s several provocative ethnographic texts critiqued the assumption that ‘lived experience’ could be ‘captured,’ arguing that the ‘reality’ of the researched ‘other’ is rather a social text ‘staged’ and ‘constructed’ by the researcher (e.g. Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Geertz, 1988). This process of deconstruction has awoken qualitative researchers from their ‘dreamtime’ and



begged us to step out of our bed, and remember that we did actually help to ‘make it.’ As storytellers, we can’t simply speak of others and the ‘facts of the matter’ in isolation from our positioning as embodied, gendered, ethnic and classed persons nor without contemplating the conventions we use to weave our tales, in communicating our insights.

Much attention has been devoted to highlighting the rhetorical conventions, devices and techniques that shape traditional social science tales (e.g. scientific, realist), as well as expounding the differences in which alternative (and emergent post-modern social science) genres (e.g. impressionist, auto-ethnography) engage the author and reader with the subject matter leading to other ways of knowing the ‘other’ (e.g. Atkinson, 1990; Richardson, 1997; 2000; Van Maanen, 1988; 1995),

Recently Nilges (2001) has discussed some of the fundamental differences between traditional and post-modern texts (see also, Atkinson, 1990; Richardson, 2000a; Van Maanen, 1988; Sparkes, 2002a), by pinpointing four rhetorical strategies—role of author; role of reader; voice; temporal sequencing—used to stage texts and to persuade readers of the efficacy of findings.

As regards to ‘role of the author’, traditional reports are structured so that the author is ‘written out’ of the text and sidelined, as a detached ‘camera-like’ observer, who communicates in third person speech to give an air of experiential authority and interpretive omnipotence (Van Maanen, 1988). This in turn impacts on the ‘role of the reader’ who reads the resultant photographic text (developed from the author’s camera), as a closed and restricted interpretation of events, in other words, the reader *receives* the meaning in a passive manner. In contrast, post-modern textual strategies exchange the third person author omniscience for a first person ‘insider’ presence, in which the author attempts to give a feel of being there in the ‘here and now’ as well as using strategies such as disclosure, to highlight their own embodied relationships with the subject matter (Nilges, 2001). Using strategies such as dramatic recall, metaphoric imagery, complex characters, plots and holding back on interpretation (i.e. showing rather than telling), the text unravels as an experience, which the reader ‘relives’ with the author (Ellis, 1997). In this sense, the ‘role of the reader’ moves from being a passive recipient, towards an active, co-constructor of meaning, who engages with the interior worlds of the ‘other’ crafted by the author.



These rhetorical strategies aren't without consequences for the use of 'voice' within social science texts. In the construction of realist tales, the tendency is to rely upon monologue, or rather, a dominant interpretation, which is underscored by the linking of edited participant quotes, with packaged theoretical themes. In this way, the author implicitly acts "...as the voice of the participants that is ultimately heard" (Nilges, p.237). In comparison, post-modern textual sensibilities understand voice as being multifarious and polyphonic, so that one dominant voice (or interpretation) doesn't predominate, rather the emphasis is on staging alternative, multiple and overlapping voices, dialogue between author and participants and interior monologue (i.e. inner dialogue), so as to keep an open horizon on interpretation and sense making processes as well as displacing the privileged voice of the authoritative author. Besides from this, traditional and post-modern textual representations can be distinguished by the way they play with time or the 'temporal sequencing' of the text. For example, the prevalence of 'themes' and 'topics' within traditional social science tales, creates the illusion that the 'other' resides in the ethnographer's theoretical world space, yet void of actual temporal sequencing (Van Maanen, 1988). This problematic is re-configured in post-modern texts, in so far as the time of the text is something shared by author and reader (as in the illusion of reliving / experiencing together). In another way, the 'thematic time' of the realist tale is displaced by an emphasis on representing the experience of the 'other' as being located in narrative time, where the past, present and future are (for example) adjoined through flash-backs and flash-forwards. Thus, the textualisation that unfolds in time and space is significant to the post-modern take on reality, "...that is partial and constantly shifting" (Nilges, p.237).

Whilst this overview or typology of traditional and post-modern rhetorical strategies is too brief and general in its scope, it is adequate for the purposes of the current discussion (for a more comprehensive analysis see Atkinson, 1990; Kincheloe, 1997; Van Maanen, 1988). The point is, realist texts (the dominant genre used to present qualitative findings) engage and implicate the writer and reader in particular ways, relying upon 'interpretive omnipotence' and closed-ended interpretations, which posits the reader as a passive consumer of knowledge (e.g. Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In contrast, post-modern genres enable social scientists to develop more dialogical, evocative and open-ended texts, which 'write in' the author as an embodied personality and evoke,



active and reflexive readings of the text, which can be interpreted in multiple ways (Sparkes, 2002a), depending upon the reader's own historical and cultural positioning (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998) and relationships to the subject matter—i.e. gender, ethnicity, class, similar experiences.

This post-structural critique of writing (as a method of interpretation-knowing) is not to decry and devalue the knowledge and insights of realist tales. The simple point is that *all* genres of writing rely upon particular rhetorical devices, deployed by the writer to persuade the reader. Post-modern genres, such as ethnographic fiction and impressionist tales are no better or worse than realist tales. They are all informed by particular philosophical assumptions, set up for different purposes and with particular ends in mind (Biddle *et al.*, 2001). Given the aim and intentions of a given research project, one type of tale might be better suited to explore the subject matter (Sparkes, 2002a).

In the spirit of these post (or trans?) modern times, different genres of writing can be seen as 'chances' that expand the researcher's repertoire and faculty for knowing (as *partial* and *situated* knowledges), allowing for different readings (and therefore insights) into the same phenomenon, where no one genre predominates. In this sense, the crisis of representation, has not only afforded a critique of traditional styles of writing the 'other,' it has kick-started new creative and analytical practices and experiments (e.g. Creative Analytical Practices, or CAP ethnography; see Richardson, 1995; 1997; 2000a), which fuse ethnographic analyses and theory with more creative and literary writing styles, teasing open previously unopened windows, through which to come to know about the social world (e.g. Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Tierney & Lincoln, 1997 for edited collections of creative analytical practices and underlying theoretical discussions). This transforms the role of reading into an active and self-reflective process, and recasts the role of the writer as one of an artful-author-persuader (Barone, 1995; 2000).

The reverberations from this crisis haven't left the worlds of sport and physical activity, untouched. Since the early 1990's, there have been some critical discussions concerning how we write the 'other' and how it informs our understanding of the worlds of body culture (e.g. Foley, 1992; Nilges, 2001; Sparkes, 1991; 1992; 1995). Special editions of the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* (1994) and the *Sociology of Sport Journal* (2000) have been dedicated to outlining and discussing alternative ways



of knowing through experimental texts. Books such as *Talking Bodies* (Sparkes & Silvennoinen, 1999) and *Moving Writing* (Denison & Markula, 2003) have offered collections of *alternative* social science tales, that have drawn upon a variety of reflexive and creative textual genres and practices (such as poetics, autoethnography, ethnographic fiction, impressionist and confessional tales), in order to transgress and collapse the dualisms which have traditionally configured social research (self-other; fact-fiction; professional-personal; insider-outsider; researcher-researched; writer-reader) so as to produce evocative texts.

...[E]vocative writing practices such as autoethnography and ethnographic fiction can portray movement in a rounder, richer, more expressive way that both stirs the imagination and enlarges our appreciation of movement in our own and others' lives. More fictionalized writing practices, therefore, can lead us to develop an informed and sophisticated appreciation of the place of movement, sport, and physical education in contemporary society. In this way, evocative research texts must do more than explain differences, quote subjects verbatim, and point out general trends. They must also inspire, illuminate, and challenge us to think and act in critically reflective ways. These ways of writing and doing research we have referred to previously as "Moving Writing" (Markula & Denison, 2000). And moving writing practices, we believe, through the power of language, imagery, and sensory detail have the capacity to change how we view sport and physical activity (Denison & Markula, 2003, p.13-14).

Recently, Andrew Sparkes (2002a) wrote a book "...about experimental writing rather than a book of experimental texts..." going on to note "...I have chosen this tactic because, like Tierney and Lincoln (1997), I think the conceptual issues need to be laid out in sport and physical activity so the scholars in these fields can get on with experiments themselves" (p. x). The book contains detailed chapters, which deconstruct various positivistic, post-positivistic and post-modern social scientific writing genres (scientific, realist, confessional, autoethnography, poetic representations, ethnodrama, fictional representations), in order to make visible the taken for granted strategies and assumptions that help to give form, substance and rhetorical power to these genres, in the hope



...that this book will encourage qualitative researchers in sport and physical activity to experiment with how they represent their findings in the future, as part of an emerging research community that is spoken, written, performed, and experienced from many sites. I also hope this book will assist scholars in these domains to make reflexive, disciplined, principled, and strategic choices about when to use different forms of representation

(Sparkes, 2002a, p.xi).

This book, along with *Moving Writing* and *Talking Bodies* and an ever growing archive of evocative post-modern sport texts (e.g. Bruce, 1998: 2003; Denison, 1996; Duncan, 2000; Gilbourne, 2002; Halas, 2001; Holt, 2001; Rinehart, 1998a; Rinehart, 2003; Sparkes, 1996; Tsang, 2000) have provided new spaces for curious and inexperienced qualitative researchers, to reflect on the processes of writing and the efficacy of using specific genres to explore, craft and shape meaningful realities, as well as giving insights into the moral, political and personal consequences that can accompany these experimental writing sojourns (e.g. Richardson, 1997; Sparkes, 2002a).

These alternative knowledge paths, have contributed to the creation and expansion of a more poly-vocal research community (Garratt & Hodgkinson, 1998; Sparkes, 1991; Sparkes, 2002a); increasing the repertoire of story-telling strategies, available to researchers (Ellis & Bochner, 1996); raising awareness of the links between 'reality' and 'language' (Richardson, 1997; 2000a; 2000b); de-centring and displacing the 'authorial-privileged' voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Nilges, 2001; Sparkes, 1995) as well as; helping to produce reflexive, critical, evocative, dialogical, visceral, embodied and morally aware sport texts (e.g. Denison & Markula, 2003; Eichberg, 1994b).



## 6.2 Representing my findings through auto-ethnography and ethnographic fiction

Given my intention to produce an inter-cultural ethnographic study, contrasting the worlds of the 'gym' and the 'rave' through the bodily tales of young people, combining the bodies and voices of others with my own involvement (as ethnographic 'self'), passing through the representation 'check-point' was a inevitable consequence of my embodied-participatory research strategy. Whilst choosing specific genres of writing to stage and analyse my ethnography was by no means an easy decision to make, after some time *working with the data* and reflecting upon the emergent aims of the project: to develop a conversational and dialogical awareness of these body cultures, I became convinced that a realist tale, ran counter to these intentions and hopes, a point which I attempted to convey in the preceding section.

Instead, I chose autoethnographic and ethnographic fiction (or creative non-fiction) genres to represent my findings; as sense making strategies that allowed the sensual-embodied dimensions of exercise and dance (mine and the *other* participants) to be 'written in,' as well as respecting the open-ended and conversational aspirations of my project. In developing a more focused rationale for this decision, this section will briefly discuss the initiatives of other sport researchers who have used autoethnographic and ethnographic fiction as the means to interpret their data. Hopefully this will provide a context through which to say more about why I chose these particular genres, as well as showing you some of the processes and decisions that informed the transformation of data into ethnographic tales, and the weaving together of these tales into the finished report.

### 6.21 The auto-ethnographic imagination

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing on social and cultural aspects of their lived experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations...As they zoom backward and forward, inward



and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition...In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language

(Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.739).

Whilst the turn towards 'writing in' the ethnographic self as a resource for knowing the 'other,' has been a fairly recent phenomenon, it needs to be remembered that 'doing' self ethnography has always been part and parcel of the research process (e.g. Coffey, 1999; Krizek, 1998). As Coffey observes

In writing and representing the social world we are primarily analysing and producing lives (Stanley, 1993). Conventionally this view of ethnographic practice has emphasized the *other* lives that are being observed, analysed and produced. The ethnographer serves as a biographer of others. In conventional accounts of the field considerably less emphasis is placed on the autobiographical practices of the researcher-self. Yet the ethnographer is simultaneously involved in biographical work of their own. Fieldwork is a site for identity work for the researcher (Coffey, 1999, p.115).

In recent decades, scholars from a range of disciplines, joined by their commitment to qualitative ways of knowing, have begun to write themselves in to their texts in more explicit ways (i.e. not just field notes and confessional tales), by way of personalised stories, which have melded together ethnographic sensibilities and autobiographical introspection and memory work. The result has been the production of embodied research texts, in which "...authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural" where "The power of these narratives depends upon their rhetorical staging as "true stories," stories about events that really happened to the writers" (Richardson, 2000a, p.931). In this way, autoethnographies, by using narrative and fictional rhetorical strategies, attempt to hold back on interpretation and evoke the



reader into reliving ‘moments’ lived and experienced by the author. These self-research experiments are offered to the reader as *another* means of communicating and sharing ethnographic insights and social knowledge, where the reader is reminded of, and experiences something of the author’s subjective relationships with, and experiences of a cultural world (or worlds).

Starting with the ‘memory work’ tales produced by a group of Scandinavian sport scholars in the early 1990s (e.g. Kaskisaari, 1994; Nagbol, 1993; 1993; Silvennoinen, 1993; Sironen, 1994; Tihonen, 1994), a growing number of researchers have reflected upon their own corporeal involvement with physical activity, writing highly personal accounts that have had the effect of transgressing the self-other and researcher-researched divide, in so inviting the reader to explore the researcher’s experiences as a researched ‘other’ (e.g. Denison, 1999; Duncan, 2000; Gilbourne, 2002; Holt, 2003; Innanen, 1999; Markula, 2003; Miller, 2000; Parrott, 2003; Rinehart, 1998a; Sparkes, 1996; 1999; 2003; Sudwell, 1999; Tiihonen, 2003; Tinning, 1998; Tsang, 2000). I will now briefly touch upon some of the reasons that have motivated various sport-focused researchers, to experiment with the autoethnographic imagination, so as to bring into focus its utility and usefulness as an embodied research methodology.

In *Initiation* (Parrott, 2003), the author tells a tale about her life long involvement with equestrianism and polo, sharing some influential moments, which had shaped her sporting life. In reflecting upon her use of self-research and fictional rhetoric in the development of her master’s thesis (from where the autoethnography originates), she comments

...I had carried a nagging sense of dissatisfaction with the traditional academic methods of conducting research and representing people’s lived experiences—positivism, empiricism, realist tales. To me these approaches felt flat, impersonal, and passionless. In graduate school I could not resonate the issues I wished to examine with a research methodology that I felt ignored subjective interpretations. However, as I read about the growing body of autoethnographic research, I was inspired to investigate more experimental qualitative research and creative writing in my own research



(Parrott, 2003, p.104-105).

By experimenting with the autoethnographic genre, Parrott (2003) felt that she could “bring together experiences from different spheres of my life—growing up as a “country kid,” being part of a polo family, going to university—to create what Bochner (1997) calls “a continuous life experience”” (p.105). In telling her tale, Parrott was able to contextualise a sporting career (as an equestrian athlete) in relation to other meaningful strands of the life-web, a process which “...helped me understand my experiences, helped me understand myself and where I was headed, and helped me see the ways in which different facets of my life were connected” (Parrott, 2003, p.105).

For Parrott the use of fictional strategies, such as inflection techniques (e.g. expressing life-in the moment, emotive phrasing, change of pace etc.) enabled her, in the same vein as Richardson’s writing (1997) “...to go beyond the mere words describing her experience to a point that was closer to the meaning of the experience for her” (Parrott, 2003, p.106), which she believed was necessary to express (amongst other things) something of the special relationship (as teammates) between the rider and horse “...coming together in unison, to create movement that is graceful, fluid, fast and strong is a bewitching experience” (Parrott, 2003, p.107). The adoption of these narrative techniques allowed her to express aspects of grace and motion, which she had experienced as an equestrian athlete (the moving body) and that other genres simply couldn’t express or convey.

In writing a story entitled, *Sports Participation, Sports Injury and Altered Images of Self: an autobiographical narrative of a lifelong legacy*, focusing on the author’s past sporting experiences (which culminated in a career as a professional football player cut short through injury), Gilbourne (2002) affords two starting points for writing his, research story. The first, “A methodological rationale...” draws reference to the mainstream literature on sports participation and injury, calling into question the relative lack of ‘author involved’ texts that deal with this subject in general, and in particular, the connotations of such injuries on identity issues, long after the termination of sporting careers. The second starting point “An applied-personal Rationale for Telling My Own Story” whilst being offered as the second rationale, seems to pre-empt the former. Here,



the author draws reference to a particular incident (in his capacity as an applied sport psychologist) that provoked him into reflecting upon his former sporting career, namely witnessing the tale of a footballer who was just about to secure a major contract before sustaining a career ending injury.

In equal measure I was moved and disconcerted by the consultation. For several days a state of melancholy overtook my persona. I mused over the lifelong nature of the client's "struggle" and although I reasoned that I had been probably exposed to an 'extreme' case, I still wondered how many other athletes carry the consequences of sporting injuries beyond that time when maybe friends and peers feel someone has 'moved on.'...During this time I became increasingly preoccupied with my own life story. My own football career also ended approximately 25 years ago with injury as a prominent factor. The fallout from the consultation acted to bring my life journey into focus and so I decided to examine notions of longevity and subjective relevance through my own life story. I reasoned that my 'single voice' may connect with the life experiences of others (as the voice of my client had awakened something in me)

(Gilbourne, 2002, p.73).

As the above quotation alludes, the recognition of his story somehow being meaningful beyond himself, as a means of connecting "...with the life experiences of others," was provoked by Gilbourne (2002) recognising his own (previously submerged and sunken) tale in the experience of another (his client). Through a series of interwoven tales, which juxtaposes the first person 'here and now' voice and third person, Gilbourne recalls and invites the reader to relive some moments in his sporting past (as a school child, football apprentice, injured body in denial), positioning the personal and interpersonal (i.e. father-son relations and peer influences), alongside the cultural and political (i.e. working class upbringing and the world of professional football) as well as the historical (changing face of body-self-identity across four decades).

In bridging the past and present, through the act of writing his autobiographical ethnography, Gilbourne (2002) notes that this method of inquiry helped him re-interpret his narrative habitus; the storied ways in which he recalled and made sense of his past.



That is to say, writing auto-ethnographically, not only served as a means to give the reader, more personal living insights into the relationships between sport, injury and identity through the life-course (helping to re-dress the imbalance in sport injury research literature and provide additional layers of meaning into the phenomenon), but that it also acted as a lens through which to 'discover' something new about his sporting identity (or identities); to bring other information into the foreground, and re-vise his life story.

In another autoethnographic account, Markula (2003) tells a story about her transition from a realist writer to a narrative storyteller, framing the transition through a visit to an international conference. Drawing upon memories and insights into her professional life (as a feminist sociologist interested in body image) and interweaving these with moments from her more personal story (as a dancer, who struggled and continues to make sense of her own body image), Markula draws together the personal and professional 'I', as overlapping, multiple, contrasting and shifting constructions.

In one of the snapshots, called 'Keynote,' she finds herself listening to a highly theoretical presentation at the conference, before switching attention to her own presentation. Here the reader is privy to her script which is written in the first person, and begins by detailing an incident with a colleague (who finds it strange that someone with the perfect body, is interested in the academic study of body image) that prompts her into questioning the relationship between her own body and the academic theory she uses with her students. As the story moves on, Markula flits between moments (as a researcher; as a tutor in the lecture theatre; dancer in the studio etc.), juxtaposing the personal and private domains of her life and the different perceptions of her body afforded by her and others. In the next tale, 'Session,' she zooms in on the feelings and emotions she experiences whilst contemplating her own presentation at the conference, just before delivering it

Instead of a personal story, why didn't I write a theoretical discussion of the possibilities provided by new ways of writing? That was what I wrote originally in my abstract. I am not sure what made me change topic. Particularly, as that would have complemented the other presentations brilliantly. Now my highly personal account will stand embarrassingly alone. But this is not the first time I have struggled with this paper. I have always felt self-conscious about dwelling publicly on such a personal aspect of my life as my body



(Markula, 2003, p.41-42).

In reflecting upon her story at the end of the text, Markula tells about the pain and embarrassment that accompanied the writing journey, of the suffering endured by exposing parts of her bodily story to the public domain and her constant questioning of the legitimacy of writing personal stories. Here, she suggests that autoethnographic writing can move beyond charges of self-indulgence, and speak also about the collective cultural tale, as well as reaching a wider audience

Collectively, I thought, they would present a portrait of me, an educated, feminist academic, attempting to understand her own contradictory body experiences through / with / against / in social theory, as I faced the never ending battle to resist the body ideal in Western culture...Although I still struggle to imprint even the simplest evocative writing techniques into my papers, I continue to experiment with new writing forms because I believe in the power of evocative writing to acknowledge the context of the writer's experience as well as the context of the author's reading

(Markula, 2003, p.48-49).

The reasons why certain sport scholars have chosen to write autoethnographically, would seem to be numerous, diverse and idiosyncratic in their nature, reach and scope (as the brief exploration of the above texts has attempted to illustrate). These methods of self-inquiry reflect some of the specific challenges and problems presented by the researched phenomena (and the authors' attempts to know these phenomena more intimately), which have taken researchers—in some shape or another—out of the cosiness of the academic skin and into the experiential world of 'otherness,' by way of living (and wording) the experiences and questions we normally ask about others (e.g. Mair, 1989).

Asides from the more personal reasons for experimenting with writing ethnographies of the self, these projects would also seem to highlight a more communal concern with evoking and connecting the reader with the visceral, lived-in and relational dimensions of body culture and matters of identity (for further discussion of these matters see, Denison & Markula, 2003, Section One; Sparkes, 2002a, Chapter Five; Sparkes &



Silvennoinen, 1999). It is also evident that these writing experiments have created spaces where researchers have begun to reconcile their professional and personal voices (e.g. Bochner, 2001; Davis, 1999; Ellis, 1997; Richardson, 1997); develop knowledge through the reflexive interactions of self-other lived awareness (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Richardson, 2000a; Sparkes, 2002a, Chapter 5), and; displace the privileged authorial voice, so that the author's experiences become those of *just another body* (Bochner & Ellis, 1996).

The processes of introspection and inscription do seem to hold much pedagogical potential for those that experiment with the autoethnographic imagination, in so far as they can enable researchers to bring together, and word into existence, often disparate aspects of the self, juxtaposing scenes, situations and memories to produce new understandings. As Sparkes (2002a) has noted "...my own use of autoethnography can be seen as but one attempt to accept and nurture my own voice(s) and to acknowledge the multiple subjectivities and positions I inhabit, with a view of disentangling some strands from the web so that they can be re-worked into a different configuration" (p.104-105).

In relation to the legitimacy of these efforts as 'proper research' it needs to be remembered that autobiographical ethnography can't be conceived and understood as *just* personal and individual accounts of lived experience. As the exemplars of Gilbourne (2002), Markula (2003) and Parrott (2003) illustrate, the narrative 'self' always remains (to varying degrees) a *relational* self (e.g. Ellis, 1997; Reissman, 1993), which inhabits the stories of particular (and multiple) histories, drawing upon cultural narratives and resources, witnessed, experienced and interpreted through the body, flesh, skin, senses and language(s) of an individual (e.g. Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Eakin, 1999). This makes autoethnographic research a potentially powerful methodology, which can produce rich insights into the embodied cultural worlds of sport and physical activity (Sparkes, 2002a).

## **6.22 The ethnographic fiction imagination**

Fiction writing is using the imagination to discover and embody truth  
(Ernest Lockeridge cited in Richardson, 2000a, p.933).



Differentiating post-modern ethnographic writing genres, from one another, is by no means, an easy or clear-cut task (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). In reflecting upon these (imagined and actual) boundaries, some scholars have felt the need to distinguish between works of fiction, where the author's imagination takes free reign and other, fictionally crafted tales, which are based upon field work and actual ethnographic data, in which the author claims to have, in some way or another "been there" (Sparkes, 2002a; 2002b). In discussing this issue, Richardson notes "Social science writers who claim that their work is fiction privilege their imagination, seeking to express their visions of social scientific "truth." Usually they encase their stories—whether about themselves or a group or culture—in settings they have studied ethnographically; they display cultural norms through their characters" (2000a, p.933).

Sparkes distinguishes ethnographic fiction (also know as creative non-fiction) from creative fiction, by suggesting that "A significant difference between the two is that ethnographic fiction claims to draw on actual data gathered by the researcher in the field. In contrast, creative fiction makes no claim" (Sparkes, 2002b, p.2). By using a variety of fictional methods (e.g. point of view, dialogue, development of plot and characters, internal monologue, flashbacks and forwards, alternative points of view, unusual phrasings, first and third person voices, omniscient narrator etc.), ethnographic fiction attempts to "...combines the realist goals of academic ethnography and fiction with an eye to both instruction and feeling" so that "writers may attempt to relate the chaos of the world to the reader" (Rinehart, 1998b, p. 204).

The use of ethnographic fiction within the field of sport and physical activity, hasn't been as widespread, visible or pronounced as the plethora of autoethnographic accounts that have emerged since the 1990s (yet in another light, these tales can also be regarded as a particular type of ethnographic fiction). However, a handful of published ethnographic fiction 'experiments' can be found within the literature (e.g. Bruce, 2003; Denison, 1996; Helias, 2001; Nilges, 2001; Rinehart, 2003), all of which have condensed fieldwork, interviews and other qualitative data into richly detailed, reflexive, short stories and tales.

Integrating cultural insights, interactions and biographies based upon field notes, observations, interviews, journal entries and her previous teaching experience at a North



American adolescent treatment centre (which ran an active living program for marginalised youth with severe emotional and behavioural problems), Joannie Halas (2001) published a collection of 24 short fictional vignettes, which attempted “to create a running narrative, that like a kaleidoscopic lens, focuses in turn on the various lives lived at the school” (p.79). By condensing her data into an imaginary day, her aim was to “provided a multifaceted portrait of how a day at the treatment center/school unfolds, not just on the basketball, but also in terms of interconnected life issues” (p.79).

Whilst the short stories or snapshots of daily life are diverse and varied in their nature and scope, the central focus of the interconnected tales had to do with showing the influence and effects that ‘shooting hoops’ had on, student’s desire to attend school, and exploring what it is about the basketball space that attracted the attention of marginalised and troubled youth as well as highlighting its possible impact on their ability to perform in school. Given this rather nebulous focus (in which she attempts to link the space/place of basketball alongside individual biographies, situations, circumstances and the wider cultural patterns that shape this group’s habitus), Halas noted that the genre of fiction held particular appeal to her, given her aims. Drawing upon Denzin (1998) and Richardson (2000a), she endorses their belief that the “real world” translated through metaphor, tropes, tones and stylistic tricks favoured by fictional writers, allows the reader to empathically engage “with the story’s characters, setting and plot” (Halas, 2001, p.79) and in her study, served “as a means to capture the evolving, often frenetic world of one treatment center/school’s group of students and their experiences playing (or not playing) basketball” (p.79).

In one of the first published works of ethnographic fiction that focused specifically on physical activity, Denison (1996) crafted three short stories (entitled *Spirit*, *Scared* and *Blind Satisfaction*) based upon in-depth interviews with 12 former elite New Zealand athletes (and his own experiences as a once elite track runner who narrowly missed Olympic selection in 198?). In priming the reader, Denison provides a brief context for the stories, by alluding to the “problem” which faces elite athletes when they retire, calling it a “death of sorts,” going on to note that “the loss of participation, camaraderie, competition, excitement, and identity associated with the athletic role requires a serious adjustment” (Denison, 1996, p.351). Via the short stories (which focus on a runner, a



cyclist and, a former All-black rugby player), Denison attempts to show the reader how this loss is experienced.

Whilst Denison holds back on providing the reader with a dense theoretical platform through which to situate and justify his tales (which incidentally I believe do not lose anything through this omission), he is forthright and clear as to the reasons why he chose to represent his findings using stories and the fictional imagination

I chose to represent my subjects' experiences through stories because I didn't want to write about sports retirement in a way that centred on theory, where my subjects' voices would be buried beneath layers of analysis...With fiction I felt that I could write about sports retirement in a more evocative way...to open up the dimension of mystery that surrounds athletes' retirement experiences. Furthermore, with fiction I could avoid closure, enabling the reader to see that interpretation is never finished

(Denison, 1996, p.352).

In concluding this brief overview of sport oriented ethnographic fiction, I'll discuss the work of Nilges (2001), who wrote an impressionist tale about the gendered experiences of a mixed physical education class in a North American school, based upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted over 12 weeks with 21 children (observations, interviews etc.). In telling her tale, she chose to focus on the 'plight' of one girl in particular, Alice, whom "showed dramatic signs of physical and social alienation within the context of her gendered-integrated physical education class" (p.233). Using Lewis Carroll's (1872) story of *Looking Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* as a metaphoric framework for exploring Alice's physical life, Nilges (2001) takes Alice and the reader through the looking glass and beneath the surface of Wonderland (i.e. her school), via nine themed tales set over the course of an imaginary school day.

What is of immediate interest to the reader is the background story, which pre-empted the crafting of her ethnographic fiction. For as Nilges alludes in the title (The twice-Told Tale of Alice's Life in Wonderland) this tale had been told before, using the rhetorical tools of a realist storyteller (Nilges, 1998), but which had left the author with some doubts and questions "This article, however, directly responds to my dissatisfaction



with what I was able to say and not say based on the rules of conventional textualization that structured my writing” (Nilges, 2001, p.232). By way of illustration, the reader is presented with the ‘participatory’ impressionist story and given some pointers (by way of a parallel commentary) as to how her fictional re-telling opens up certain spaces through which to encounter Alice’s journey and the multiple layers of meaning that constitute her experience, as well as enable the reader to engage with a series of related identity dilemmas and puzzles, in ways that her realist telling skimmed over, or couldn’t express.

Nilges maintained that, by crafting her ethnography through the adoption of narrative techniques, the blending of fact and fiction as well as imaginative metaphoric word play, she was able to “construct an abstract model for understanding Alice’s gendered “physical” life” (2001, p.233), which allowed her (and the reader) to learn about gender, physical education and identity in other (previously inaccessible) ways. Which is to say, that the crafting (i.e. the process and journey) of her ethnographic fiction, acted as a significant, analytical and interpretive tool. In reflecting on the writing of her story, Nilges makes explicit reference to this issue

In addition, by opening up the impressionist tale to temporal sequencing and dialogue, I came to know gendered life in Wonderland as a relational process where the intervening of “live” voices and events combined to reproduce a complex system that silently maintained traditional gender ideologies. Ironically, when the conventional text was published, I was disappointed by how little I had actually revealed about gender life in Wonderland...In my view, the flat and emotionally removed themes and the diminished sense of self in the conventional text resulted, at times, in a disappointing representation of the fieldwork I did in Wonderland. I studied real children in a real school with real voices. There was a good deal more seeing, feeling, hearing, saying, and knowing that could not be put forth given the rhetorical boundaries of conventional textualization (Nilges, 2001, p.255).

The above writing experiments, have all suggested that fiction is a particularly useful genre well suited to communicate the complexity and messiness of human (inter) actions (as a series of open ended plot-lines) and the embodied experience of time (as



multiple horizons, bridging past, present and future), as well as unveiling aspects of people's personalities, characteristics and emotions, and their social meaning(s). Writing in this way can help the reader to viscerally inhabit the storied worlds and participate with the texts' actors, plots and scenarios (e.g. Barone, 2000; Pelias, 1999; Richardson, 1997; Rinehart, 1998b).

This is no mean feat, as scholars who have adopted fiction as an ethnographic tool, have been keen to stress. In a special edition of the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, entitled *Sociological Imaginings*, the editors (Denison & Rinehart, 2000), suggested that storied accounts have to fuse social insights with artistic and aesthetic awareness, a balancing act which as Rinehart (1998, cited above) notes, needs to integrate the goal of social science along with a visceral and aesthetic quality, associated with the craft of fiction.

### **6.23 Some notes about crafting and composing the tales**

The crafting and composition of my ethnographic stories was one of the most stressful and arduous tasks, within this programme of research. Using the genre of ethnographic fiction, incorporating auto-ethnographic writing and accounts of others' experiences of exercise and dance, proved to be much harder to implement in practice than I envisaged. This was because, there is no set way of moving from data to stories, no magic formula or recipe, rather, only an open expanse, a blank canvass upon which to write into being self-other stories, and secondly, my experimentation with these genres marked the first foray into the world of narrative composition, having been primed and trained in the realist tradition, by way of my schooling and university education, in which I veered towards science and social science subjects, rather than the arts.

The process and structuring of my "book of tales" (e.g. Tsang, 2000; Halas, 2001; Nilges, 2001) threw up two major challenges. The first had to do with the actual composition of the stories—the sitting down at the blank computer screen, with ethnographic notes, interview quotes and summaries, experiential notes, thoughts, feelings etc.—and the second, yet related challenge, had to do with how to sequence the stories so as to provide some sort of structure (or anti-structure) to the reading journey. Although in practice these issues evolved and took shape in conjunction with one another,



I will briefly outline and discuss these processes individually, so as not to unduly complicate the matter but instead, cut to the chase.

The data collected and analysed from the fieldwork period, was differentiated into two parts. The first included the analysis of interview material, incorporating both individual and group discussions (as well as observation notes taken when accompanying some of the participants in their work-outs and nights-out), and the second included the experiential fieldwork notes, observations and the more auto-biographical memoirs, mind maps etc. It was my intention to work with the interview material to produce some individual snapshots of peoples' storied involvement with the studied body cultures, and to juxtapose this with a more auto-ethnographic story (or tales), whereby I attempted to bring to life a visit to the gym and dance club, to enable the reader to explore various spaces within these worlds, and at different times (i.e. pre-club "getting ready" through to post-club "chilling out"). From this initial starting point the stories began to take shape.

In working with the interview material, through familiarity, more than anything else (although there were a couple of exceptions), I decided to use participants who I'd spent most time with (through attending both individual and group sessions, and through my experiences of participating with them) as the focus of the ethnographic fictions. I had already made considerable notes about their life stories (through the narrative analysis, participant-observations and dialogue from the content analysis of the focus group material), highlighting; insightful passages and quotes, comments on personality, relationships with others, key moments in their journeys; metaphors and analogies alluded to when describing their stories and the like. Using these sorts of data as the "raw elements," the tales began to take shape. There didn't seem to be any clear rationale in how I worked into existence the stories from one participant to another, some I found more difficult to write than others, some took a couple of drafts where others were written, re-written and trashed before starting again.

I will give some details now, as to how one of the tales came into being, what was involved and why (at least as much I can describe and articulate). I refer to the story of Jon and Brian (7.42). My acquaintance with these exercisers developed over the course of a few months at the beginning of the fieldwork, which included formally interviewing them both on a couple of occasions, as well as witnessing them talk and converse together



in a focus group, and also through exercising with both—with John a couple of times and Brian on three occasions. The meeting of the two in person (at one of the focus groups) initially drew my attention to their tales as being, both complimentary (for example, they were approximately the same age, neither had found favour with sport or exercise at school and had only begun to exercise when into their twenty's and seemed to get on with one another, there was a spark so to speak) as well as differentiated (in so far as the extent and commitment of themselves in their body projects were very different, lying at the extremes of those I'd interviewed). For all intents and purposes there already seemed to be a storyline that brought them together. I was keen to explore this, and through juxtaposing their tales, throw up some contradictions for the reader to ponder.

By way of a starting point, I began by contrasting their commitments to the gym. Recently one of them had suffered from illness, and this had caused him great distress, whereby he felt that he was letting himself and his body down, yet in contrast the other's commitment seemed less intense and intimate, grounded in a more "give and take" relationship with the gym. So the narratives begin with them contemplating going to workout, and explores what happens. In introducing them to the reader I attempted to bring into view what had got them into exercising, and how this impulse had developed and changed over time. In practice, the writing of these adjoined tales developed through this initial impulse, yet took on a life of its own, as I began putting their tales down on paper. I brought in various props and metaphors that they'd personally used to describe their bodily relationships with exercise, health and life in general and set about massaging them in at different points and juxtaposing them, removing them, bringing in others and just working and re-working the tales. Whilst I struggled to fully integrate narrative strategies into my writing, I made an attempt to incorporate elements of tension, emotional tone etc., whilst also exploring how dialogue and interior monologue added additional layers of insight.

I also wanted to change the orientation of the reading, so towards the end adopted a more "video-diary" sensibility, whereby the actors became conscious that they were the subjects of the story and attempted to articulate, in their own words (introducing direct quotes from the interviews), by addressing the reader. This was something I seemed to rely on quite a lot throughout the process. In looking back at the writing of this and other



tales, I do recall that I was heavily influenced by the fetish with video-diaries that had found much favour on the television and popular culture, at the time (and continues to, so it would seem). By way of substantiating this, a vast proportion of dialogue used in these stories (approximately 95%), were lifted directly from quotes taken from the interview material (incidentally, it should be fairly evident where the quotes are fictive, for example, in the story about Brian and John, at one point the exercise machines start talking).

Although having a wealth of descriptions, props, available storylines and observational material, it was only in the writing and editing that the stories took semblance and shape. In this respect, there did seem to be an esoteric dimension to writing, whereby setting the words together and then re-ordering them acted, as a method of enquiry in and of itself. It felt that this process was initiated and provoked by putting something down on paper, which acted as a catalyst, throwing up other ideas that were then drafted into the stories. On this basis, the tales took shape.

Alongside the writing of these ‘snapshots’ of participants’ experiences, I also used the analysed data from the fieldwork, to help in the writing of the auto-ethnographic stories which primarily focused on depicting (although there are some other ‘fragments’ in which I write in a more auto-biographical way), describing and analysing a “trip to the gym” and a “night-out at the dance club” which served as the other major narrative vehicle of the book.

As with the writing of the individual biographies, the process of crafting the auto-ethnographies proved to be a somewhat trying and difficult part of the my research journey. I wanted to bring into the reader’s awareness *what it is like* (wrought through my body and voices) when going to the gym and to the nightclub. In setting about this task, I decided to depict some scenes from these experiences, which were loosely related to influential parts of the journey. For example, with the trip to the nightclub, I used my notes and diaries and mapped out what appeared to be insightful “moments,” not in an essentialist sense, just parts of a night-out that gave different glimpses of these multi-layered experiences. So, for example I began with “getting ready to go out” and then proceeded to write about moments to do with “being in the queue and first impressions”



through to “being in the heat of the dance-floor” etc., and culminating in the “after-party and chilling out.”

Writing these sections of the auto-ethnography, I loosely worked with my fieldwork notes, observations and introspections, attempting to juxtapose the personal and cultural, brining into play some of the challenges and tensions that I encountered, whilst also remaining attentive to aspects of the “cultural narrative” that I had observed and witnessed through chatting with others (and including some of the themes which emerged from the group discussions). By way of a more overt analytical orientation, I was also conscious of the dimensions of these cultural configurations, and wanted to explore how these inter-related dimensions temper the body’s relationships with these movement worlds. Here I found the, juxtapose of the “inner experiential” notes alongside the more observational data and reflections, to be useful. As with the individual snapshots, the writing of these “moments” were subject to several re-writes and drafts, which I felt were necessary to get me deeper into the storied worlds.

In terms of the structuring of the book of tales, I had several initial ideas as to how to navigate the reader. I wanted to create a labyrinthine structure, whereby the reader would move in-between the ethnographic fiction snapshots to the situational moments (i.e. auto-ethnographic accounts) and back again. In the end I settled on a format, whereby the reader would first meet up with the world of exercise (juxtaposing meeting some of the people, and accompanying me in a visit to the gym) and after that, the world of dance culture (following the same structure – flitting between meeting some of the people of rave and moments from a visit to a dance club). Asides from these snapshots, I also wrote some other ‘bits and pieces,’ which include some dialogues from the focus groups.

Having outlined some of the issues to do with the crafting of my narrative stories, the next section focuses specifically on related issues to do with legitimation and the judging of ethnographic narratives.



### 6.3 Judging and evaluating narrative tales

#### 6.31 Crisis of legitimation: Disappearing foundations

Along with the representation debate, issues related to the evaluation of qualitative research have become infamous as qualitative enterprise's 'dual crisis' (Denzin, 1997; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), situated at the epicentre of the social science meltdown, criss-crossing the modern and post-modern lanes, casting a long shadow (or rainbow) over the qualitative highway, depending upon one's positioning. This section of the chapter deals with this ongoing debate, as well as thinking through the question that inevitably follows from writing the 'other,' using non-traditional language games. So, how are we to judge these different tales?

Before outlining some possible 'enabling conditions' (Schwandt, 1996) that I believe would be useful for evaluating the tales I have crafted from my ethnographic data, it is perhaps necessary to situate this effort within the more general legitimation debate that has arisen as a result of enlarging the repertoire of writing genres available to qualitative researchers. Following this discussion, an attempt will be made to outline a more 'transgressive' or 'letting-go' approach (e.g. Lather, 1993; Sparkes, 2002; Wolcott, 1990) informed by 'practical philosophy' (Schwandt, 1996; Garrat & Hodgkinson, 1998), which jettisons the cornerstone of foundational epistemology—validity—in the search for a more *situated* approach to evaluation (Smith & Deemer, 2000) drawing upon literary theory and criticism for evaluative pointers and guidelines (e.g. Blumefeld-Jones, 1995) as well as the responses and reflections of the reader, in a more dialogical and conversational process (Sparkes, 1998).

The legitimation crisis bares an uncanny resemblance to the paradigm debate that has undermined and challenged all attempts to seek a common qualitative methodology and language. This paradigmatic headache has had particular consequences for qualitative enterprises adopting narrative modes of knowing, in so far as these kinds of texts would seem to problematise traditional (neo-realist and quasi-foundational) notions of validity (e.g. Lather, 1993; Richardson, 1997), thus drawing attention to the limitations of applying a set of rules from one game (of knowledge writing) in order to referee another (e.g. Sparkes, 1995; 1998; 2002a). In discussing the responses given at a conference, to an interview with a single mother, written up as a poem, Richardson speaks about the



ways in which non-traditional ethnographic writing, problematises *all* social scientific writing and accompanying “truth” claims

Writing Louisa May’s life as a poem displays how sociological authority is constructed and problematizes reliability, validity, and truth. Poetics strips those methodological bogeymen of their power to control and constrain. A poem as “findings” resituates ideas of validity and reliability from “knowing” to “telling.” Everybody’s writing is suspect—not just those who write poems. In sociological research the *findings* have been safely staged within the language of the fathers, the domain of social science writing. “Louisa May” challenges the language, tropes, emotional suppressions, and presumptive validity claims of masculinist social science

(Richardson, 1997, p.166)

Garratt & Hodkinson (1998) and Smith & Deemer (2000), as well as Sparkes (1998; 2000; 2002) have dealt with this challenge to validity, by referring to a specific transgressive autoethnographic text, *The Fatal Flaw* (Sparkes, 1996). This article aimed to take the reader into the intimacies of the author’s lived reality (a failed fragile middle-aged athletic body), by pasting together medical reports, fragments of emotionally charged and evocative autobiographical (situational and introspective) narratives as well as interviews with friends and relatives, through the use of ‘facts’ ‘facticities’ and ‘fiction’ where

...facts refer to events that are believed to have occurred, facticities describe how those facts were lived and experienced by me, while fiction is the narrative I construct to deal with these real or imagined facts and facticities

(Sparkes, 1996, p.467 cited in Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998, p.525).

Garrat & Hodkinson (1998) and Smith & Deemer (2000) ask, in relation to this work of Sparkes, whether the neo-realist criteria proposed by the likes of Hammersley (1992; 1995)—plausibility and credibility—are relevant or appropriate for judging an autoethnography that makes no claims to universal truth or a single, closed interpretation



...this would entail asking ourselves whether the claims made within the research seemed plausible given our existing knowledge. Yet, herein lies the first problem: How could we begin to make judgements about an autobiographical narrative of the self, immanently characterized in terms of its subjectivity, uniqueness, fragmentation, and novelty of expression, on the basis of either the empirical claims it makes or in terms of the match with existing research?...Any judgement about the credibility of a claim necessarily involves a judgement about its accuracy, which entails a closer examination of the evidence collected using the relevant methodology...Yet, such procedures appear incongruous in understanding the research produced by Sparkes (1996)

(Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998, p.525-26).

Clearly the intentions of such writing experiments aren't based upon the establishment of the 'truth of the matter,' wrought through a 'gods eye view' and an accompanying 'correspondence' model of reality. Commenting upon this matter, Sparkes (2000) draws specific reference to a realist reading of *The Fatal Flaw* by one of the article's reviewers, noting that through the lens of the traditional realist paradigm, such a report is bound to disappoint as well as end up being judged as 'not research.' In discussing the implications of applying criteria from one paradigm upon another, he concludes

Attempts to do so are, at best, misguided and, at worst, arrogant and nonsensical, a form of intellectual imperialism that builds failure in from the start so that the legitimacy of other research forms is systematically denied  
(Sparkes, 2000, p.29).

As an applied exemplar, this autoethnographic work illustrates the pitfalls of adopting validity criteria as a means of judging experimental and evocative narratives that are incongruous with the aims of quasi-foundational and neo-realist inquiry. Faced with this problematic, what do we do? Smith (1997) and Smith & Deemer (2000) understand this dilemma as one that involves relinquishing the safety of the cult of foundational



criteriology (see also Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998; Schwandt, 1996), and fundamentally *changing the conversation* in which questions of evaluation and judgement take place.

This shift in conversation entails transgressing the traditional notions of validity (e.g. Lather, 1993) and even *letting go* of the term altogether (e.g. Sparkes, 1998; 2000; 2002a). These scholars (amongst others) have argued that foundational validity and truth claims would seem particularly irrelevant for narrative modes of representation (such as auto-ethnographies, fictional accounts and poetic representations). For example, in citing the work of Catherine Riessman (1993, p.65), Sparkes (2002a) contends “For her, validation in narrative studies cannot be reduced to a set of standardized technical procedures, so that “traditional notions of reliability simply do not apply...and validity must be radically reconceptualized” (Sparkes, 2002a, p.201). Such an assessment would seem to be congruous with the ideas of Bruner (1986) who believes that the *narrative* mode of knowing is distinct from the *logico-scientific* mode of ordering, conceptualising and understanding reality, and thus requires us to consider *not* how science and reason operate, but instead, what makes a good story “In contrast to our vast knowledge of how science and logical reasoning operate, we know precious little in any formal sense about how to make good stories” (Bruner, 1986, p.13).

With all this in mind, there is a real need to distance the foundational notions of validity from narrative knowing experiments, not only due to the irreducible differences between the scientific and narrative paths of knowing, but also because of its historical attachment with the world of science. As Smith (1993) and Garrat & Hodkinson (1998) as well as Sparkes (e.g. 1998; 2000; 2002a) have alluded, all efforts to recast and revise the term inevitably end up (given the cultural and historical baggage that lives with the term) re-producing its effects (i.e. re-inscribing the black and white notions of research being trustworthy or not trustworthy, valid or not valid), by acting as lists of *prescribed* criteria used to police and validate research. There would seem to be a very practical need, then, to break the bondage with validity, and to ‘change the conversation,’ by which we come to discuss and evaluate the legitimacy and merits of narrative modes of knowing, such as autoethnography and ethnographic fiction



I think we have labored far too long under the burden of this concept (are there others as well?) that might have been better left where it began, a not-quite-so-singular-or-precise criterion as I once believed it to be for matters related essentially to tests and measurement. I suggest we look somewhere else in our continuing search for and dialogue about criteria appropriate to qualitative researchers' approaches and purposes (Wolcott, 1990, p. 148).

### **6.32 Letting-go of validity: Moving beyond foundationalism and criteriology**

Art: I think there's a fear that we cannot trust ourselves. Science has given us a lot of comfort. It is comforting to believe there is Truth to be found and criteria that do not depend on our utterances or modes of inscription. It's the same kind of solace many people find with formalized religion. If we lose faith in scientific method as a path to Truth beyond human subjectivity, then we have to rely on ourselves to decide what to believe.

Carolyn: And that scares people who were educated to treat human subjectivity as a threat to rationality and to believe that differences of opinion can be arbitrated by objective criteria beyond dispute. They were taught that objective truth has to be given priority over emotion and opinion.

Art: But that's what is important and liberating about the so-called crisis of representation. It allows a more sober understanding of words like truth, knowledge, and reality. We can become more comfortable with contingencies of language and human experience. We no longer have to see social science as a culture that is distinct from literature—you know, either you write literature or you write scientific reports.

(Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p.20-21)

Letting-go of foundational criteria—such as validity, reliability and repeatability—in the evaluation of non-traditional texts, such as autoethnography and ethnographic fiction, doesn't necessarily mark the death knell of assessing qualitative



works that experiment with these kinds of genres. However, in changing the conversation—from knowing to telling; from talking *about* to talking *with*; from universal truth to multiple realities—there is a fear that in switching off the foundationalist truth machine, a relativistic approach could lead researchers to eulogise an ‘anything goes’ agenda (Schwandt, 1996; Smith & Deemer, 2000), where any experimental writing is championed as better than nasty old realist tales, and where perspective, integrity and judgement fall by the wayside.

Such a scenario acts out modern social science’s worst nightmare, the escape into the infinite regress. But is this really necessary? Does the letting-go of validity and other *scientific* criteria, necessary to begin assessing evocative narrative texts, have to lead us into a black hole of anything goes? If not, how should we begin the task of changing the conversation, so as to find more appropriate ways in which to make judgement calls about auto-ethnographic texts and ethnographic fictions, for example?

The likes of Bernstein (1991), Gadamer (1979), Rorty (1985) and Smith & Deemer (2000) remind us that relativism isn’t another epistemological game or theory of knowledge, rather, it is in a very practical sense, the way in which we go about our lives; positioned and situated from *somewhere* we make sense of and evaluate our lives and others. Therefore, relativism is “...more or less our condition in the world—it announces that as human beings we are, and can be nothing but, finite” (Smith & Deemer, p.878). There can be no such thing as a view from nowhere (Nagel, 1986). This being so, the charge of ‘anything goes,’ doesn’t make sense (nor hold true), as we can’t totally escape our own finitude (Schwandt, 1996; Smith & Deemer, 2000). We can only write and evaluate stories within historical, contextual, gendered and embodied positions and frames of reference. This re-configures the task of evaluation and judgement as primarily a relative (and relational) matter.

In a similar vein, the belief that *letting-go* of the foundational legitimacy gold standard (Sparkes, 1998; 2002a) equates with relinquishing *responsibility* for judging and assessing narrative texts is also unfounded. Whether or not we rely upon universal validity mechanisms (which have been chosen by a historically and culturally situated scientific community), we would still make value judgements, wouldn’t we? Some stories are better than others—more engaging, revealing, informed? In this sense, the fears



associated with *letting go*, aren't justified. However, it does bring a heightened sense of responsibility to the table, a practical responsibility, which both author and reader (via the text itself) negotiate and share.

One of the principal lessons of postfoundational epistemology is that we must learn to live with uncertainty, with the absence of final vindications, without the hope of solutions in the form of epistemological guarantees. Contingency, fallibilism, dialogue and deliberation mark our way of being in the world. But these ontological conditions are not equivalent to eternal ambiguity, the lack of commitment, the inability to act in the face of uncertainty. Nor need those conditions eventually resolve into a convergence of *the* truth—a kind of long-term evolutionary process of error elimination so favoured by social scientists calling themselves critical multiplists and evolutionary epistemologists. However, that there may be no final convergence, resolution, or Hegelian *Aufhebung* does not translate into anything goes and obviate the necessity of our taking a stand on what is right to do and good as social inquirers (Schwandt, 1996, p.59).

The current discussion has attempted to alleviate some of the fears associated with a letting-go perspective (e.g. Sparkes, 2002a), as well as bringing to the fore an alternative worldview that is necessary to inhabit, in order to assess and evaluate narrative modes of inquiry. Here, the process of judgement isn't seen as something that can be conceivably fudged by recourse to universal truth claims, it is rather, something mediated by the conversation that takes place between the writer (as a situated being) and the reader (as a situated being). The efficacy of the *conversation* between writer, text and reader develops from the skill of the author (via the construction of the text) to engage the reader into participating in the worded and storied world.

In this sense, the journey ceases to be *purely* epistemological. The Truth and Knowledge straight-jacket that foreshadows traditional neo-foundational qualitative inquiry is displaced through concerns with developing both a *practical* and *moral* awareness of the researched worlds, in which there can be no definitive and objective



reading of the text—and therefore transmission of meaning—(e.g. Denzin, 1997), only an open-endedness that continually asks the reader: What do you make of this? Can you write yourself into the text? Is this life-like? Is it believable? Does it move you? Does it challenge your understanding?

Accordingly these sorts of considerations have been discussed within the sport-focused narrative research, as important ‘touchstones’ and ‘enabling conditions,’ through which to contextualise the conversation (between author and reader) and make judgement calls (Sparkes, 2002a).

### **6.33 Evaluating auto-ethnographies and ethnographic fictions**

In returning to the sport-focused autoethnographies and ethnographic fictions discussed previously, some consideration will now be given over to highlighting how the authors of these tales have contextualised their work with regard to questions of legitimacy and evaluation. In other words, what “characterising traits” (Sparkes, 2002a) and “enabling conditions” (Schwandt, 1996) have these writers chosen in order to help assess the value of their stories?

Gilbourne’s (2002) draws reference to the conversational nature of his story to encourage self-reflection in the reader, which he aligns with a catalytic potential for the enhancement of individual and collective re-storying, which may result from the reader engaging with and participating in his story. He acknowledges the relativity of the story and draws reference to the open-endedness (and multiple interpretations), which he signals as a primary aim of his text. His account works (that is, it is successful) by enabling the reader to insert him or herself in his story and reflect upon it through the filter of their own biography

I am conscious that different readers will themselves see a different story, and also reach different conclusions from my own. In this sense, I hope that my account of my own ‘sports injury’ does not frame any one message or engender any singular response

(Gilbourne, 2002, p.87).



In elaborating upon the interactions between text and reader in a priming paper, which accompanies his ethnography of the self, Gilbourne (nd) also draws reference to literary markers as being integral to the process of evaluation. In substantiating this point he cites Richardson (1998) who argues that in assessing these tales, “Accuracy is not the issue; rather narratives of the self seek to meet literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude, and interest...as imaginative renderings, they allow the field worker to exaggerate, swagger, entertain, make a point without tedious documentation” (Richardson, 1998, p.356 cited in Gilbourne, nd, p.13).

In discussing the evaluation of her self-writing experiment, Markula (2003) also draws explicit reference to Richardson (2000a) and her understanding of autoethnography, as a means to communicate personal stories that actually happened, through the cultivation of narrative power and the ability of the writer to evoke the reader to emotionally relive the event. On this point she notes “Through autoethnography I hoped to write about my lived body experience in a vivid manner that would resonate with other women” (Markula, 2003, p.46). In discussing the writing process she highlights her unease with the legitimacy of personal writing as a form of therapy, and contends that to have value beyond this personal domain, autoethnographic experiments have to reconcile personal ethnography with an artistic sensibility. Here she cites Morrison (1998, p.11) who believes that “without art, confessionality is masturbation. Only with art does it become empathy,” thus for Markula her personal story “had to resonate with the experiences of a larger audience” (2003, p.47).

In resolving her (self-indulgence) dilemma Markula goes on to state “I concluded that it was necessary, after all, to write my body, but I resolved to emphasize the cultural boundaries of my experience instead of simply complaining about my terrible body troubles” (p.47). By drawing reference to the need for self-inquiry to include, yet speak beyond the personal whilst also depicting the cultural context of her body struggle, it is the aesthetic qualities of the text that Markula pinpoints as the key to whether or not her story succeeds in engaging the reader and resonating with the experiences of the Western female physically active body.

Parrott (2003) understands the inherent value of autoethnographical stories as laying in their potential to act as *participatory* texts, which go beyond description. In



particular, she believes that it is the literary qualities of such texts, which enable the life-world to be crafted by words in ways that more accurately recreate, lived experience, helping her further her goals of bringing the reader into her body cultural universe (that of a polo and equestrian athlete), and making this world more viscerally accessible to others not familiar with it, “For example, I wanted people outside of polo and outside of my family to understand something of the joy, sadness, conflicts, and contradictions that polo held for us” (Parrott, 2003, p.106).

Later on in the text, Parrott alludes to the use of literary devices (she affords the reader four pages of commentary, in so outlining the use of specific literary techniques), which she used to help assist her “in drawing readers into the story, making the writing seem real enough for them to become involved in the story and hence believe in it” (Parrot, 2003, p.107). In this sense, Parrott (2003) feels that the efficacy of her tale (as a legitimate form of social scientific inquiry) lay in its ability to speak in the reader as both an ‘engaging’ and ‘believable’ story, characterizing traits which seem to be broadly congruous with both, Gilbourne’s (2002) and Markula’s (2003) intentions. She amplifies this notion at the end of her reflections by stating

Of course, representing an experience completely is impossible, but I hope that my writing does come close, well, at least closer than more traditional social scientific writing styles. Because by doing so, I believe I can invoke a response from my readers. I want them to be actively engaged in my writing, and involved and consumed by the story. Without doubt, inflection is a key component in achieving those aims

(Parrott, 2003, p.112).

Moving on to the ethnographic fictions discussed earlier in the chapter, Halas (2001) used fictional storytelling as a “prism to illustrate new meaning” (p.78) in an explicit attempt to communicate and “demonstrate the possibilities of physical education within a normalising institution, where the gym can be a space or gap in the institution for change to occur” (p.90). For Halas, evaluation of her efforts centre upon her fictional account’s ability to get the reader to participate in, and get a feel of the day-to-day workings of the adolescent treatment centre and the possibilities that the gym affords



young people. On this point, Halas includes some discussion of specific literary techniques (in a section entitled *A Short Reader's Guide to the Text*), which have been used by her to *mimic* aspects of daily life. For example, she notes that the inclusion of several names in her account, is a reflection of the realities of a transient school population “where it is often difficult to remember the names of many students who come and go, let alone develop relationships with them. Although the reader might find it challenging to keep up with the changing landscapes of personalities, I have chosen this structure to more closely simulate a day at the school” (Halas, 2001, p.81).

In developing a context through which to evaluate his short stories, Denison (1996) argues that new styles of representation give rise to new standards of legitimisation. Accordingly, Denison believes that his efforts should be judged in ways that are akin with the evaluation of fiction. Drawing upon the ideas of Denzin (1989) he asks the reader to consider if his tales engage us in to feeling that they have, or could, experience the events being described? The affirmation of this question in Denison's mind would suggest that, “the text then establishes its own verisimilitude and tells the truth” (p.358). By way of practical assistance in his personal verification process, he tells the reader that several retired athletes who've read the tales, agreed that they work as a well told ‘collective story.’

In expanding the horizons of his fictional accounts, Denison agrees with Eichberg (1994b) that such tales can stand alone as good social science scholarship, primarily because the genre of fiction may be uniquely suited to explore the subjective nature of athletes experience and express a fuller approximation of retired life, as well as enable others outside of the immediate circle of retired athletes (e.g. coaches and administrators) to face up to the trauma that accompanies retirement and develop “policies and programs to help these young and women exit sports” (Denison, 1996, p.359). Not unlike the accounts of Gilbourne (2002) and Parrott (2003), Denison alludes to the inherent value of fictional accounts as a means for those not ordinarily familiar with the researched worlds, to gain a sense of what it's like, in this way Denison alludes to the potential of storied accounts as acts of witness.

Finally, the impressionist tale scribed by Nilges (2001) also suggests some pointers that may be of use in judging her ethnographic fiction. Nilges makes it known to the



reader that the genre of fiction enabled her to construct an abstract model for understanding Alice's gendered physical life, and that the 'looking glass' analogy acted as a *metaphoric* lens through which to communicate 'what she found there' (at school). In this sense, Nilges stresses that her story, whilst not being true in a literal sense, does attempt to analyse her experience via metaphoric insights, so as to help the reader interpret Alice's life. Along with the other cited authors, Nilges similarly draws upon literary criteria, framing her efforts within the wider postmodern project, where no one interpretation dominates. In this sense

Literary standards of validity align with postmodern theory and suggest that knowledge is produced when pen and paper meet. In the postmodern, therefore, it becomes the written product itself that is subject to standards of validity such as (a) interest (Does the story attract and hold the attention of reader?); (b) coherence (Does the story hang together?); (c) fidelity (Is the story possible, persuasive, and believable?); and (d) reflexivity (Does the story encourage reflexive meaning by turning the reader inward on their own experiences?)  
(Nilges, 2001, p.254).

#### **6.4 Judging my ethnographic stories: Some characterising traits and markers**

I propose that the central imaginary for "validity" for postmodernist texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter but are not amorphous...Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity" (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves); and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know  
(Richardson, 1997, p.92).



Richardson's much cited crystal metaphor has become synonymous with the task of conceptualising and evaluating "blurred genres" texts and representations, with an emphasis on multiplicity, partiality, shifting and overlapping boundaries, voices, as well as multiple angles from which to engage with such performances. These post-structural sensibilities are evident in the intentions of those scholars that have crafted autoethnographies and ethnographic fictions. For example, Gilbourne (2002) argues that by inserting the self into his text, the reader may well see a different story and reach different conclusions. Parrott (2003) contends that in crafting her evocative narrative the aim was to allow the reader to not only read the text, but also to viscerally inhabit (and feel into) her cultural world of polo and equestrianism. Nilges (2001) intentional use of the *Alice through the looking glass* served as a metaphoric template through which to re-interpret her ethnographic encounter with a mixed physical education class, in so opening up other avenues for exploring and getting to know Alice's world. These authors (amongst others) have demonstrated through their storied efforts that there is no one right way to write or read the world, rather they have created narrative spaces which open up the possibilities of many sided and multi-dimensional interpretations, which facilitate both a deep and complex awareness of the researched phenomenon.

In these and the other cited sport specific narratives, the authors have attempted to craft open and reflexive participatory texts, which bring their researched worlds into the bodies of the reader, in so making them *partially yet personally* knowable. Accordingly, the authors of these tales have turned to literary and aesthetic strategies and conventions, using them as practical tools that aid reader participation. The *successfulness* of these narratives lay in their ability to lure the reader into engaging with the tale, which is why literary criteria and markers, such as fidelity, believability and verisimilitude (e.g. Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995) have been used to evaluate such efforts.

I also draw upon these literary markers as a basis for assessing my interwoven narrative tales. In crafting and wording my tales about young peoples' bodily lives in the cultural worlds of exercise and rave, my intention has been to make these worlds personally knowable to you the reader. I want you to meet some of the characters that I have encountered in my research, to feel your way into their bodily lives and share in some of their predicaments and tensions as young exercisers and dancers and as players



in these post modern times, as well as communicate from within the spaces of exercise and rave (i.e. gym and dance club), to bring into your awareness the gym and dance club as living and embodied cultural worlds. By offering some of my personal experiences and biography as *another* participant, I hope to expand the interpretive and reflexive horizon of my ethnographic project, and afford you, the reader, some additional narrative frames through which to interpret and make sense of my research endeavour.

Nevertheless, the successfulness of my efforts can't only be assessed as an aesthetic project. As many sport scholars who have journeyed through the narrative labyrinth have pointed out, the use of the fictional genre can't replace the social scientific desire to communicate cultural insights (e.g. Sparkes, 2002a), there has to be a point (or points), and there has to be a sense of balance.

It is important to realize that we are not just speaking about aesthetics alone...a storied research account must contribute to our understanding of social life while also being artistically shaped and satisfying. This is a tough task and requires a high level of skill and dedication both to the craft of writing and the analytical skills of a scholar. Only by following this type of commitment will critically informed stories have value in their own right, with the power to illustrate, illuminate, inspire and mobilize readers to think and act critically and reflectively (Denison & Rinehart, 2000, p.3-4).

Accordingly, my tales have to contribute to the existent social scientific knowledge. They have to be critically informed and constructed, not only aesthetically pleasing. And in the realms of aesthetics, I make no claims that my storied efforts can compete with fictional and literary genres that stand outside of academic ethnography, but I realise that by making a commitment to using fiction as a mode of social scientific inquiry, there are inherent risks. However, I take some heart from the remarks of Richardson (2000a; 200b) who has suggested that in experimenting with alternative genres, the idea is not to turn the researcher into a poet or novelist, rather such sojourns provide opportunities to nurture our own voices and to use these chances as processes of discovery, so that self knowledge and knowledge of our research topics develop together via the process of playing and experimenting with alternative narrative forms, hopefully producing critical



and reflexive cultural stories. Richardson (2000a; 200b) similar to the comments of Denison & Rinehart (2003), is adamant that the criteria or characterising traits (Sparkes, 2002a) through which to judge ethnographic fiction and auto-ethnography should integrate aesthetic sensibilities and scientific insights, which is seen as craft in itself. How to get the balance right? I also believe that evaluation and assessment, must also take into consideration the element of *process*; of reflecting on the journey and not only the destination. What have I learnt from this walk through the narrative labyrinth?

These characterising traits are offered as additional opening remarks, in judging the efficacy of my tales. In the spirit of post-modern ethics, these are not the last words in the conversation, aimed at foreclosing discussion. You will undoubtedly add your own markers, whilst also disregarding others. As I understand it, this is part and parcel of the never-ending dialogue that has come to typify the process of assessing narrative tales in these post-modern times.



# Chapter Seven



## **7. Entering the Liverpool labyrinth: A tale of two cultures**

### **7.1 Some navigational notes**

How to approach this chapter?

How to navigate through the words?

A journey separated into two parts, the first part (Part One), a walk through the week where we shall focus on exercise, the second (Part Two), we shall jump into the weekend and concentrate on, dance culture. Why is it organized like this? Because it seems right to situate keeping fit alongside the weekday energies and even more so, to place rave culture within the confines of weekend life and that is about it really.

What follows is a series of ‘snapshots’ / ‘postcards’ from the urban sprawl that are loosely connected, to one another. In traveling through the pages, you’ll be familiarised with the movement experiences, meet up with some of the people of exercise and dance culture, be brought into contact with the actual exercise and dance situations as they ‘pan-out’ in real time, hear something of my involvement as well as some other ‘bits and pieces.’ The action will move from one snapshot to another, integrating different camera angles and views, with the idea of getting a feel for these worlds of movement culture.

**So here goes...**

**You are fast approaching the city of Liverpool...**

**Hold tight whilst we transport you through time and space...**

**Put your gym and dance shoes in a bag...**

**Are...you...ready?**



## 7.2 A postcard from the metropolis: The weekday workout

A montage of greys, greens, yellows, browns and blues colour our vision. Zooming in, the shades gain form and definition. Winding rivers and oval lakes, farmland, fields and sprawling motorways en-circle a dense built up area of towering buildings, spider like roads, twisting and turning, filled with automobiles. And besides the roads, dot like bodies moving randomly, hurriedly they march. Bumper to bumper the human and machine traffic flows, growing in numbers, going where? Who knows!

On the other side of the concrete theatre, we see a river estuary, which leads into the Irish Sea. Following the dock road, we descend ever closer to earth. Rushing past dilapidated warehouses, industrial estates, with the seagulls we now fly, the salty sea-weedy smell of the coast-line rises up and enters into the nose. Now in the viewfinder, the sight of two Griffin like birds on top of a building and behind in the distance, the outline of a gothic like cathedral cuts a shadow over the metropolis and to the right another cathedral stands erect. Two towers watching over the people, below. We are hovering above a European metropolis, replete with hotels, football stadia, high-rise flats, museums, galleries, schools, theatres, shopping malls and market stalls.

Coming down to earth and hitting the streets we find ourselves in the heart of the north west of England. We are in Liverpool at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the industrial era, the city's port was one of the busiest in Europe known for its cotton and slave trade, in industrial times it was the second city of England. Nowadays in this age of information, Liverpool's biggest earner is itself; it's stories, traditions, and institutions of learning. The Beatles, the city's two football clubs, the Grand National and the city's heritage that makes this place unique, is packaged and sold to tourists from around the world. With three-quarters of a million inhabitants and a student population of 50,000 spread around the city's three institutes of higher education, urban life is enriched with young peoples' energies from all over the world.

Snaking through the streets we pass a local newspaper vendor who shouts out today's headlines, "Echo...Echo...Echo...Reds secure signature of Valencia striker at cut price...Chancellor has announced that Britain will not have a referendum to join the European single currency until the five economic tests have been passed...PM maintains that the intelligence reports used to persuade MP's that Britain should invade Iraq were *not* sexed up...The number of refugees seeking asylum in this country has increased again this year...Echo...Echo...read all about it..."

On the other side of the street we see a council worker sweeping the roads with a huge vacuum cleaner, collecting the takeaway wrappers and beer bottles, the only visible remains of



the weekend festivities. The stench of beer vapour, stale and festering in the summer sun contrasts with the smell of fresh coffee in the café on the left. Here we see business folk, chatting and smoking, sipping on espressos and lattes, recharging their batteries from the weekend just gone. Hung over and fuzzy, moving tentatively into this new day, the sun shines fiercely, eyes squint, muscles loosen, out goes the weekend, incomes the week.

Continuing on our way we make out a gang of Japanese tourists standing by the bombed out church on the corner of Berry street. They have a map in hand, trying desperately to find out where they are. We pass them and move onwards to the top of a hill. Now we are in a narrow alley. On the right there is a three-storey, 1960's style building. Plain and grey in style and colour, this is the Student Union for Liverpool John Moores University. On the right, there is some floral fauna, which shades a huge white washed futuristic construction, the library.

In-between the buildings, students wander to and fro with books and files under their arms. The scene is animated and frenzied as people rush to get assignments and coursework completed. Others make their way to afternoon lectures and some go to their part time jobs, in order to finance their studies. Inside the library, men and women are eagerly typing away on the keyboards, scouring the internet, sending e-mails and working on dissertations. Whilst this ensues, a few weary bodies stare off into the distance, ambling around in their minds, neither in the weekend nor here, at the beginning of this new week.

Picking up the threads from the end of last week, moving out of the weekend and back into the week. Re-focusing energies, looking up at the big clock in the sky, tick ticking away. Goals to set, deadlines to meet, anxiety forming in the body and the feet. Coursework staring you in the face, and underneath the surface, bubbling away, a hard drive full of issues, unresolved, ignored and denied, "Who am I? What is my role? Am I loved? What do I fear? What is expected of me? Who will judge? Do I really want this degree or am I out to please others? What shall I do when I finish? Where is my place in society? Do I look alright? What of my bum and what of my thighs? Does he really fancy me? Does she really go? Can't stop now, got to keep on. Hold it together. Things to do, deadlines to meet, anxiety forming in my hands and my feet."

In a darkened corner of the library maze a man sits tapping away at the keys, before sending a text message...your way: **wlcm 2 lpl...care 2 jn me this wk?...excise is on de agnda...r u redi 2 wrk out?...letz go...**



## **7.3 A trip to the gym**

### **7.31 Part One: Stepping off the bus**

It's early afternoon, there is a little cloud cover but it's quite humid. I step off the bus at Edge Lane, situated on the outskirts of the city centre, and cross the busy main road. In front of me is a retail park. Amongst the fast food and retail outlets, resides 'Total Fitness'. This private health club is one of twenty centres that have opened in England over the last five years or so, and is amply equipped, with over 200 pieces of cardio and resistance equipment. As well as this specialist equipment, there is an Olympic sized pool, hydrotherapy suite, saunas, steam rooms, dance studios and creche facilities.

Making the short walk to the entrance of the club, we pass a double-glazing outlet on our left and a biscuit factory on the right. Plumes of smoke splutter out of one of the chimneys of the factory.

In the club's car park I see a couple of business executives get out of their cars, but besides from this there is little activity in the parking area, with maybe ten or so vehicles. This part of the day is off peak. It won't get busy in here until about five or six. Making my way into the foyer I pass the manager's office on my right, and continuing down the corridor I notice that the walls are emblazoned with promotional monochrome posters, which depict, fit and healthy families, walking hand in hand, through a forest trail. I also spot some posters of highly sculpted bodies, flexing their hardware besides pieces of gym equipment.

In the reception area I sign in and check the timetable...Tuesday AM: spin, studio circuit, boxercise...PM: total tone, legs, bums and tums, mega-aerobics, aqua-fit. Beneath this there is a display, advertising the services of the club's personal trainers, "Simon Mongommery lost two stone and ten centimetres off his waist through the professional advice and experience of our longest serving trainer. You too could do the same..." with a picture of Simon besides the text. He looks well chuffed with himself "I've never felt this happy before. Losing this weight has transformed my life and I now feel confident with my body for the first time." I make my way to the changing area.

Pushing the red door I enter the changing room. There are two large mirrors on the facing wall. There is a heavy stench of chlorine from the swimming pool, which permeates the air. I pass by some tanning showers on my right before turning left into a small alcove. Placing my bag on the bench I undress and change into my training kit. I hear the sound of chatter as two men walk into the alcove and change back into their work clothes, having showered. I wait for them to change and leave. Sitting on the cold tiled floor with my legs together I lean forwards bending my back, stretching to reach my toes I can feel tension in my neck and shoulders. I contemplate what



I want to focus on and begin to slow my breathing down, as I get myself ready for the exertion that will follow, shortly.

## **7.4 Let's meet some exercisers**

### **7.41 Belinda**

A door opens. Having placed her tracksuit and shower gear into the locker, Belinda twists her head like an owl and looks down, at her bottom and bites her lip. She pauses, deliberates and then opens up her locker and takes out a sweat top, ties it around her waist and says hello to Brenda, one of her regulars, before catching up with her boss. Inside the office, Belinda's boss passes her time sheet, she looks down the schedule and notices that she has been allocated the beginners "tums and bums" class every day for the next two weeks, again. She sighs and wonders how on earth she'll be able to fit in the intensity work she's been promising herself since putting so much into her final year studies. Caught between a million and one tasks, her boss has little time to sit and chat "Belinda could you phone Mrs Johnson, she hasn't been in for a month," Belinda is Vivian Johnson's 'Guardian Angel', her personal trainer if you like. Whenever Vivian goes AWOL for longer than a couple of weeks it's Belinda's job to rear her back into the fitness ranch. 'Lady in Leisure' is a compassionate PLC, you see. She picks up the phone and dials.

We are now in the dance studio. The walls are pink and white replete with piney-shiney floor tiles and there are mirrors on the facing wall. Very 1980's! A high tempo commercial trance tune fills the sweat soaked 'Calvin Klein 1' air, "Der der der der...I feel wonderful...I could sky dive from the moon...sail the oceans on my fingertips..."

Belinda stands at the front with her Reebok step, building up the session with her unmistakeable enthusiasm. She is twenty minutes into the routine, which the five regulars at the front are now well versed in yet which the stragglers at the back are finding it hard to keep up. "I wish she'd slow down a little, she gets so excited and forgets that we don't know the steps that well", "...yeah, she's like away with the fairies isn't she? Miss 'High intensity...the love you give to me!'" whisper Kay and Jean. "Let's go girls, reach and stretch," sings Belinda, the aerobic diva. Five minutes later the session ends. Bums are less rotunda, thighs have flown high and arms have on many occasions, touched the sky. High intensity fun and frolics, but now the girls are spent. Belinda thanks them all and urges them to come regularly to feel the full benefits.

Belinda has made her way over to the window ledge. It appears that she is limping a little. Crouching down she presses the rewind button on the tape player and opens the window. Leaning out Belinda takes in a breath of the city air "Training makes me feel good about myself, it gives me tons of confidence..." she looks down at her left leg "...that's why it was such a blow last



year when I find out I had tendonitis. I couldn't do anything for six weeks. I was teaching loads of step then. I really needed the money and it was coming up to summer. It's like you work so hard to get as fit as you can, and it all goes down the pan. You just end up back at square one. The first time you exercise after that sort of lay-off you feel completely crap because you can't do it, well you can but you get tired more quickly and you've just got to work your way back up again. I hated it, cos I love working at a high intensity, you know."

Belinda's training has had to take a back seat recently, which frustrates her and reminds her of last summer, "I didn't really put much weight on, but it did change my perception of meself. I didn't feel good. Actually you know I'm really really paranoid about the way I look. I don't know why but I just am. I think a lot of people are. I'm just being honest I suppose. I don't know, I just want for *me*, I don't mean for any men, to look the best that I possibly can, if you know what I mean. And if I don't really feel like I am looking as well as I could, then I do get a little bit down."

Belinda steps back, closes the window and breaks into a more cheery smile, "Exercise has certainly taught me that's its important to look after meself, to keep me feeling good about meself. I don't know, I just think it should be an important part of anybody's life. You know it would make me feel great if I knew that people coming to my classes, really enjoyed it and got benefit out of it and either lost the weight, or just got fitter, that would mean a lot to me, that's where I get my job satisfaction."

Belinda checks her watch and then looks over to see if the tape has rewound, "I suppose it's difficult to put into words how exercise has changed me. At school I was never really into sport. I was really an unhealthy specimen, drinking and smoking. It wasn't until I was 18 that I went to the gym, and now, ten years on, I'm an instructor. If you exercise you've got a better quality of life haven't you? I mean this might sound awful but sometimes you look at people and think 'Mmm, you could do with doing a bit of training' and for whatever reason, they would feel or look much better." Belinda puts her towel and water bottle in her bag, "I think it makes you realise how lucky you are that you're involved in something like this, when you look across the board at people and think 'Oh, you know'. You know, you don't do anything too stupid, cos you're trying to prolong your life and live as healthy a life as you can. I just think that's really important. It makes you more confident about yourself. I'm just so much more confident when I've been doing it, yeah."

There is a faint clicking sound in the background, Belinda reaches over to the tape machine, presses the eject button, takes the 'Ministry of Sound Ibiza Mix' cassette out, picks up her bag and makes her way, to the cardio area, puts on her walkman, her sign for telling the clients she's



not in, gets on the cycling ergometer, turns the dial to high. She closes her eyes, places her feet into the pedal straps, cranks up the gears and continues to accelerate.

### **7.32 Part two: The design studio**

Here on the ground floor there are many cardio machines: steppers, ergometers, cross-trainers, treadmills, stair-climbers and the like, which are crammed into a central gym space. On the facing wall there is a large glass panel, you can see the swimming pool through the window, which extends round the perimeter of the building, so that on the adjacent wall you can view the hydrotherapy suite. Opposite the swimming pool, just behind the cardio equipment is a staircase which takes us up to the second floor balcony. Walking up the stairs I see about twenty treadmills on the balcony. In front of me and just behind the gallery there is a free-weights area with a mirrored wall. A group of six highly muscular men are doing bench press and squats. Turning right I walk past the free weights and then right again, round the corner, where there is a space set back from the balcony, home to 50 or so, resistance and multi-gym machines.

There are some people using the treadmills on the balcony and below, on the ground floor, I see about fifteen to twenty people using the various ergometers. Besides from this a man paces up and down the length of the balcony, he is covered with sweat and looks deep in concentration as he readies himself for his next challenge. In the far corner, beyond the resistance suite I see three members of staff. One of them is demonstrating how to use the equipment safely to a new client, who looks on anxiously as she copies his actions. The other two are sitting behind a desk, checking and updating members training profiles and attainment records.

You know, whenever I'm in a gym, especially one as well equipped as this, I always feel a little daunted as to what machines to use. There are so many types here all professing to build up specific parts of the body, yet despite having a sports science degree, I must confess I really don't know what they all do. That's why I try and keep it fairly basic. I want to have basic aerobic stamina, to have a degree of fitness that allows me to do what I need without feeling out of breath, but also I want a little strength, a bit of muscle, not huge, just not...

I find some space behind the balcony and begin my warm up stretches. Placing my legs together I bend down, touch my toes and hold. In this position I feel the muscles either side of my spine stretch like a piece of hardened bubble-gum, fresh out of the wrapper. I close my eyes and grimace my face. In the background I hear the sounds of the gym clashing; the 'chink chink' of the weights, the 'ruur ruur' of the multi-gym pulleys, the motivating cries of the weight lifters, "That's it Ste just two more...come on," and the radio, "You're listening to Radio City 106.7fm. Next up Eminem." As I relax and lift myself up I can feel a slight twinge in my back but nothing



serious, I hope. I continue my warm up and, gradually the bubble gum begins to soften at the edges.

Ten minutes have passed and I'm sitting on a bench by the stairs. Watching people get on with their routines, I observe the effort and determination painted on their faces, whilst trying to psyche myself up. I must admit, I don't feel all that motivated and the prospect of pushing my body to extremes doesn't enthrall me at the moment, my body just doesn't feel that awake. I look up at the clock on the wall to my left, 12:55, take a swig from my water bottle, pick up my towel and jog over to a treadmill on the balcony. OK, let's get moving!

#### **7.42 Jon and Brian**

Tonight is 'kebab night.' If Jon and his mate don't go to the gym, then no kebab, that's the deal. John shuts the door and makes his way to Gordon's.

You know, joining the gym really helped Jon, It gave him some oomph and belief at a time when he was down on his luck. Lisa dumped him and ran away to Scotland with some other bloke. Round the same time his own dreams of being the next Axl Rose went up in a puff of smoke, leaving him choking on a forty a day habit, couch potatoed on the sofa. For six long months he turned into the guy out of the Xpress-2 song, "I'm lazy when I'm loafing I'm lazy when I play...I'm lazy when I'm speaking I'm lazy when I sleep...no tears are falling from my eyes I'm keeping all the pain inside...oh won't you come and save me..." Six months later he applied to do a philosophy degree.

Jon has been at Gordon's house for twenty minutes. They're sitting there with a brew in one hand and a ciggie in the other having a laugh and gossiping over the stories in the 'Daily Farce'.

"Did you know that Kylies' dumped Robby for Bobby, who's just given up coke and dope for spiritual hope, after meeting the Pope?"

"And what about Beckham. Have you seen his new hair-do? He's shaved it into a chessboard and dyed it blue. Blue I say...and I thought he was a red!"

"Did you know that Saddam Hussein might be dead, a special-forces guy shot him in the head...but that's a joke right?"

Throwing the tabloid to the floor in mock disgust, they get their stuff together and walk to the bus stop.

They have just got off the bus at Wavertree, sparked up another ciggie and are walking the short distance to the gym they joined, three years ago. As they get to the doors, they take one last



toke on their Marlboro's. Looking at one another they stub the butts out, grin and then break out into a cheeky chuckle.

They've changed and are warming up. Side-by-side on cycling machines they begin. Huffing and puffing as they go, blowing away the cobwebs, warming their torsos, arms, shins and toes, shins and toes. Transfixed on the TV's playing MTV above, the beat of the music gives them a path to follow. Ten minutes later, they've coughed their way into a rhythm, up come the nico-greenies, fat-globuolies and Heineken toxiquins.

Gordon has just spotted 'Flossie,' the five foot ten blond long legged yoga teacher who wears only a piece of dental floss under her leggings. Watching her get on the Stepper, their eyes are fixed on her bum. Up and down...up and down...up and down, "You're under my spell, I'm just a girl, but boy can't you tell," the background music sinks ever deeper into the background. The only sounds the two can hear, are the voices inside their heads, "Would you get a load of that, raaaaaaaa I'm a tiger, down boy, quick grab the fan I'm gonna explode."

Jon really didn't enjoy sport at school, two right feet and little motor control, he would play, but it wasn't the thing that sparked his conkers. You see Jon enjoyed music. Aged eight he got his first electric guitar, and he played it whenever he could. His school was into winning. The strongest, fittest and toughest lads would take to the field to bring home the cup for the adulation and valour of the school, whilst he and the others would be told to go and do art or play with the rabbits, or as good as. He wasn't arsed, I mean, "...a ball and pubescent kids getting excited and all touchy feely."

57 minutes into the workout. They are on their last piece of apparatus, the bench press. They've been trying to get up to level six, trapped on level five the last three months, tonight's the night that this could all change if they could only, "Urrrgggghhhhh," "Go on John you can do it, 8,9....this one's for the kebab," "I...c-a-n-t...d-o...i-t...I...t-h-i-n-k...I...n-e-e-d...a...a...a...a...S-H-I-T!" "10."

They're exhausted but have completed another episode of "We're gonna make you sweat. That's right folks they've made it to level six, the last couple only made it to level five. So, next up is the celebrity round." **Brian** switches the TV off, gets out of bed and puts his clothes on, laces up his shoes, picks up his rucksack and swallows a couple of ibuprofen.

Brian worked in the film industry for five years, at which point he found himself enticed in a kind of, spiritual journey "Don't you want to find something more to your liking dude? Dig deeper Brian, your purpose here is to..." The voice said no more. Now Brian's doing a creative writing degree. He's been going to the gym since he first went to university some ten years ago. He goes regularly, about five times a week.



Brian was forced to play rugby and football at school, yet he abhorred the aggressiveness and the macho culture. Often he'd sit in the library, reading poetry and works of literature, whilst peers would stand at the window and taunt him "Oi moley boy..." He'd sit on the sidelines of the rugby pitch pondering what it all meant, "What is it to be a man? I can't stand the aggression they display. It frightens me. Does that make me *not* a man? So who am I this mole like creature? Who am I? I am nobody!" Brian's Dad so desperately wanted to make a man of him, but he only knew one way to go about it. But now it's too late.

Brian is only five minutes from the gym. Turning left, shuffling through Chavase park, he begins to feel nauseous and dizzy, "Got to get to the gym...got to work it out...feel better soon." Exercise has been the one constant in Brian's adult life. Jobs have come and gone, friends and lovers have kissed and parted, but the gym, faithful son of a gun, has never left his side. They are best of friends. When Brian's feeling stressed the gym obliges. When he's feeling happy the rowing machine feels joy with him. When depressed, the treadmill lends its ears, and when Brian needs a shoulder to cry on, the treadmill feels his anguish and catches his tears.

For the last day or so Brian has been bed ridden with a head cold, insomnia, migraine and pains up his back. These ailments have made him feel vulnerable, "What's happening to my body? Am I gonna turn out all fat? Damn pain and flu turning me nauseous and blue. I just can't understand how the germs invaded. I exercise you, I feed you all that is healthy, for fucks sake body I give you the best..." He blows his nose once more, wipes the feverish sweat from his brow and continues walking.

In the gym, Brian reacquaints himself with his mate the treadmill "I've missed you where have you been? You know to miss another session would be a sin. If you want to keep this friendship going get on. Begin!" Brian steps on the rubber matting, summons his "me" shield to protect him from unnecessary distractions and presses start. Half an hour has passed. The repetition and tempo, the repetition and tempo, repetition and tempo, repetition and tempo of this motion is like a potent mind altering drug. Fifty minutes have elapsed and Brian feels high, released like a dove set free in the sky. Soaring and swooping he's flying within his mind's eye. The anxiety has gone the pain inside has run away, he's in his zone, in a place that he calls home.

One and three quarter hours have passed Brian is so exhilarated, he's forgotten that he's been under the weather, "Just another ten minutes, could keep this up forever..." Two hours have elapsed. Getting off the Stepper, he makes his way to the shower. As he leaves, the Stepper whispers "Come back tomorrow and we'll make sure we keep those body invaders out. Think of me, always." Once showered, Brian walks past the mirror. He sees his bodily reflection and checks it for imperfections. Caught mid gaze, ten men burst in from a session of 5-a-side. A 10



pound testosterone bomb has landed and is filling the space with hormonal gasses, "...can't breathe...got to get out..." He makes his get away, walking past the men who are joking and full of banter. The aroma and communal vibration simultaneously attracts and repulses him. Possible. Yet unattainable. He looks back for a second, averts his gaze just as quickly, bows his head, bites his lip and walks on.

What is it to be a man (on a mission)? John has showered and applied his new bodily scent 'Giorgio Gennani' and makes a beeline to the kebab shop. We can smell the roasted lamb, spit spitting away. Tucking into his culinary reward Jon enthuses, "I'd split up with my long term girlfriend, was on the dole and general lethargy had set in. After half a year I told meself I needed to do something about it. It started off with squash. We'd totally exhaust ourselves for an hour. Gordon was anxious to get rid of his belly whereas I wanted to put some weight on. After four months of this I started going to the gym, summer was just around the corner, and well, you want to get your shirt off in public don't you?"

Taking a colossal bite out of the kebab Jon chomps on, "Cos I started from such a low base I noticed the benefits very quickly, also I felt a lot better in myself d'you know what I mean. Erm, I suppose I saw it as taking some sort of control over what was going on in my life, it felt as if I was doing something constructive. Because before I was like erm, I was in a big rut." Taking another bite and washing it down with a swig of Sprite, he belches "My world is full of temptations and I'm buggered if I'm gonna deny myself the little pleasures. I wouldn't say I enjoy going to the gym. I don't like subscribe to erm Arnie in those muscle videos, 'Everyday I come to the gym and pump iron, the burn feels amazing don't you think?' I see people in the gym, they base their whole identity on their body's. I s'pose it's understandable. We all need some sort of capital, and if you haven't got money, if you haven't got a fulfilling job or relationship, then all you've got left, is your body. Personally, I can't take it that seriously, I mean I won't lose sleep over a missed session."

Scooping up the last morsels and dipping them in chilli sauce, Jon opens his mouth, nice and wide, drops the meat in the hole and throws the container into the bin. "I suppose it's like putting out the rubbish. You've got to do that, if not your house will overflow with all sorts of crap as well as leaving a bad smell...like my body. That's why I need to clean it out and keep the engine ticking over. It does make me feel invigorated, but it's like one of those achievement buzzes, like when I've finished an essay."

Jon and Gordon walk to the bus stop. Waiting for the 605, they light up a fag. "Exercising really taught me how physically weak I was, I wouldn't like to feel like that again, always huffing and puffing. I suppose it's reminded me of my tendency to lethargy. I'm now more aware that by



deliberate actions you can overcome stuff, yeah. But erm, I still see that the vanity element is important. I'm 28 and my hair's receding. So, the body *has* to be maintained. I suppose the gym helps me stem the onset of physical decay." Jon stubs out the ciggie and gets on the bus "But erm. to be honest the way I look at it, going to the gym allows me to have my kebab and eat it, if you'll pardon the pun."

Having made his exit from the changing room, Brian finds himself at the bus stop. He seems visibly shaken up by his impromptu meeting with the five-a-side teams.

"I had very low self esteem when I went to University, I hated the sight of myself naked, not that I've ever been really fat, but there was just something funny going on, I just didn't feel right. Even now I have a very shaky relationship with my body, and that extends to life more generally." Brian pauses for a moment, as someone climbs the stairs and takes a seat a couple of rows down from him. "I mean there is a great temptation for me to spend all afternoon in the gym, but I think it's at the level where it's healthy. You know, recently I've been reflecting on how much I use exercise to sublimate negative emotions. Say if I have some sort of desire or craving, I'll go to the gym. I'm using it as a way of emotional hygiene, if that makes any sense? I went through a phase recently, and this is going to sound crazy, where I wanted to be really promiscuous, so I used exercise as an alternative. I think I was very conscious of that. I wonder whether other people do that too, or if they just, you know..." Well, have you?

Brian takes a polo mint from his pocket and places it in-between his teeth, he then sucks the mint up into the roof of his mouth, "Exercise is a central part of my life. If I didn't do it regularly I'd start to feel sluggish, uncreative, fat and well erm, depressed. It's something that's in my mind somewhere all the time. I'm thinking 'Well this is forever, for the whole of my life I've got to keep doing this in order to keep fit.' I think the prospect of any diminishing of your fitness...you know your body not functioning as it used to, is a fairly depressing thing. It would be great if you could take a pill or something, but there isn't so..." Face blank. He bites the mint...an expression of fear interrupts for a brief moment.

As the bus tears through the dusky lanes and alleys Brian thinks aloud, "I'm extremely self critical. I can have a day where I feel alright but that's not where I'd like to be, cos I'd like to feel absolutely great. If I do have a day where I feel great then I think 'Yeah, OK I feel great now but...' I suppose exercise has changed the way I see myself. Growing up, I had such little confidence in my body. I felt pathetic and weedy. I feel differently about myself now, I do feel that change. I think doing exercise and having a healthier attitude to my body has prevented me from feeling that I'm a wimp. It gives me a sense of control over that...yeah."



The bus stops, Brian gets off and makes the short walk to his flat. He fumbles around in his coat pocket for the house key. Placing it in the lock he bites his lip, “I’m not sure how exercise has helped me develop as a person, I’d like to say ‘yes’ it has, but I couldn’t be categorical about it. My self-esteem has risen, and I do feel I have some sort of balance between my mental and my physical. But ‘no’ in the sense that you could say that I’m imprisoned by this sort of body culture. I suppose my life is like being on a treadmill. You know, sometimes I envy people who can just get off it and chill out. But, my life is complex...it isn’t that, straight forward. ” And with that Brian pushes the door open, takes the key out and shuts the door behind him.

## **7.5 Bits and pieces**

### **7.51 Autobiographically speaking: Part one**

As a child I was fascinated with anything to do with sport. Much of my teenage life was spent training and competing, both in team and individual sports, particularly athletics, the pinnacle of my modest teenage career being...knocked out in the 800m heats at the National Championships. When I moved to Liverpool in 1994 to study sports science, it seemed the logical step to make. Since the sixth form I had been grappling with the dawning realisation that I was not going to fulfill my dream of becoming an Olympic athlete, and had acknowledged that I was one of those all-round athletes, but master of none. But I knew of no other life and was desperate to remain involved in sport in some capacity. The prospect of helping athletes reach their potential was for me, the next best thing.

I remember in the sixth form sitting in the canteen talking with friends, the subject had got on to what we wanted to do with our lives, and I sat there feeling all smug with myself. I thought I had it all planned out. I was to take a year out, travel round West and East Europe before venturing into China and then spending the summer teaching football at a rich kids camp in North America, before studying in Liverpool and then joining the airforce as a physical education officer. Simple, I just needed to join up the dots!

The intervening gap year changed a lot of that. My year away was one of the most rewarding and enriching experiences I’ve ever had, or likely to have. It shook my world up big time. I’d been on package holidays before, but had never explored so many cultures close-up and met so many different people. I travelled and spent time with Americans, Swedes, Italians, Spanish, Canadians and many other nationalities along the way. I had been brought up in a village outside London so getting the opportunity to explore countries as diverse as Russia and China catapulted me out of the box called ‘little Britain’ and into the global village. Much of the rigid scaffolding that had supported my social conditioning came apart at the seams, whilst I was away.



The year out changed me irrevocably, I suddenly didn't seem so sure of what I wanted to do anymore or be, not that it was a problem, in fact the opposite. I felt that everything was up for grabs, that this experience, some how marked the beginnings of a new adventure, where I hadn't a clue where it was going to take me, but it seemed exciting.

My dad had left when I was eleven to seek his fortune as an actor, and within months my mother was seeing someone else. That really affected me. I would sit in my bedroom sobbing my eyes out for hours when the new man came round to visit. It took me a couple of months to meet this man in person, and then when I did it was a rather contrived situation. My mum came and told me that this guy wanted to meet me and that I was being rude staying in my room, and that if I agreed she would buy me the Puma tracksuit that I had dreamed of getting. Walking down the stairs, I thought to myself "He's not my dad, who does he think he is seeing my mum?" In the living room, I began to cry and ran out into the hallway, he gave chase and grabbed me by the arm. Standing there shaking, he squatted down and looked me square in the eyes, "Scott, I am not your dad I know, but if you give me a chance we can be friends, I can't replace him, but maybe I can be the next best thing."

A year later he moved in with us, we didn't get on at all, we were forever fighting, and this intensified as I got older. The last couple of years of my school life I recall so much tension and friction in my home life. I desperately wanted to get out of the house it felt like a prison, I couldn't spend any length of time in there for fear of another encounter with him or my mother. Any opportunity to get out I took it, I found sport helped me release much adolescent anger and frustration, and going out for long runs would settle my mind after a 'clash' at home. On the playing fields I didn't feel like I came from a 'dysfunctional' family life. Sport gave me a space to feel that I was of worth, that I did belong, and this is what I yearned for. I tried to keep my home situation from my friends. I didn't dare tell them that my dad had left, I guess I got used to seeking refuge in my sporting identity at school, it was on the field of play that I felt most myself. I wouldn't have to think of anything. I just got on with it. I didn't feel like the odd one out.

When I turned up in Liverpool ready to begin my studies, I not only felt a little more worldly wise after my travels, but also, having gained some space from my home life, I felt much more at ease with myself, I didn't have that anxiety looming in the air. I relished the prospect of studying in a different city. At last I could finally break away from the status quo at home. It meant I could start again. The year away also turned out to be a year off exercise (save the football coaching in America). I arrived in Liverpool with a couple more inches round my waist, and less gas in the tank. But it didn't seem like a big deal to me. A year before at school, it



seemed imperative to keep my fitness up to a certain level, and now with sport off the horizon, I didn't need to be fit for a reason. I just felt so much more at ease. But...

My first recollection of the sports science course came when I attended the Freshers' fair. I got accosted by, second and third year students at the athletics society stand. We got chatting. I mentioned that I had run competitively in the past. They asked me if I wanted to join and gave me some information about the society as well as a fixture list, but I declined the offer and told them that I'd think about it and give them a call. When I got back to my halls of residence I looked through the leaflets and found out where training took place and how often, and paused mid-sentence to think about it. I got off my bed and looked out of the window. With the city's skyline in view, it dawned on me just how much I'd enjoyed not having to train over the last year or so, having not had to place myself under the duress of competitive stress, either thinking about the next race or reflecting on past performances. To be truthful, the thought of putting myself back into those pressured situations, like getting ready for a race or the next match, actually made me feel a little nauseous. And now here in Liverpool, it was like I didn't have to do anything I didn't want to. So...

Looking out of the window that evening, I felt like a child holding a box of chocolates. I felt excited by the prospect of indulging in the delights of city life. What lay in store for me? There was so much to do here in the city, sport was just one thing amongst many, and besides I'd spent so much time doing that before, I felt burnt out, bored and disillusioned with it. I never actually got round to joining the athletics club that year or the next. I haven't run in a competitive race, since 1993. Little did I know at the time that my undergraduate days would be spent wrestling with my sporting past and trying to shed the skin that my flesh and bones had inhabited throughout my childhood.

I can't recall many of the details of my first year in Liverpool, I know that I spent much money going out and drinking my self silly, partying, making friends and revelling in my new found freedom, life in the urban metropolis, 24 / 7. On the backstage of my life, the wheels were turning over. I was coming into contact with different situations and people, which were set to change my outlook on life. My identity was in transition. Another bodily tale lay round the corner.

Some time in the second semester I got introduced to a group of people through one of my flatmates. We were all roughly the same age and we ended up getting a house together in the second year, John, Richard, Mark, Jim and me. When we met we had much in common, three of us had been involved with sport for much of our lives, and these shared memories of competition, triumph and disappointment became one of the bridges that initially allowed us to feel our way



into each others lives. We'd all scrummed down, taken penalty kicks, sprinted eye-balls out for the line with rugby ball in our hands.

If our paths had met up under the memories of our athletic pasts, then something else within the post-sportive landscape was set to re-invigorate our bodies. Having spoke so much about sport when we first met up, as a group it was to be under the shiny disco ball, and not the goal posts, that we were to actually experience each others' bodies in motion, most frequently.

We all got into dance and club culture in a big way. It became the focus in our house. We'd be forever looking forward to the weekend, travelling up and down the country to find new clubs to experience. It seemed such a contrast to the sport I'd been used to. Throughout my undergraduate days I was running regularly and, going to the gym about twice a week to keep myself in shape. I was glad that I know longer had to train towards something, like a race or competition. I guess it could have left a big void in my life, yet my sudden involvement with dance culture completely reconfigured how I felt about movement. It made me think differently about my body, about what physical activity could be about. I suppose it gave me a vantage point, upon which to view my life in sport, and it was this past that I found myself re-visiting on a daily basis, on my sports science course.

The more I went into college, the more I witnessed traces of my sporting past, a life that I was become increasingly uncomfortable with and estranged from. Everything at college seemed to be intoxicated with Macho-performo-vibrations. This was most notable in practical experiments. It felt as if I was back on the playing field. We'd have these sessions when we'd have to perform VO2 max tests to measure our aerobic fitness. They invariably developed into contests, where a hard core element of the course would go round comparing results and within a few minutes everyone knew exactly who was the fittest. Comments would fly and gestures made, which helped to clarify what the results actually 'meant.'

It was strange experiencing this. Throughout my school years I would have had no problem meeting this sort of challenge. It was just the situation that I would have thrived on. But now, I seemed really detached from what was going on. I felt under the spotlight. In and amongst these elite bodies, my fitness wasn't what it used to be, I was keeping myself fit, but that was it, just ticking over.

My undergraduate days were shot through with these kinds of encounters. Whenever the sports science crew met up we'd head off down the same alley. In the bar, the beers would keep coming, and next thing it would turn into a drinking race. I couldn't keep up with them. After the first semester of getting pissed, the sparkle had left the pint glass and the banter no longer amused. On one occasion when I refused to play the game, the ring-leader came up to me and



asked whether I was gay, I said no...he sniggered and walked off giggling. That just confirmed to me that I know longer wanted to be in this environment.

I began to imagine what it felt like for those boys at school who didn't possess the athletic body, those who didn't get picked in the first half of names, in the makeshift footy games on the playground. Being on the other side of the divide, I was feeling uneasy about my body and what it meant to others, about its lack of performance. What was also being brought into my view and this alarmed me more, was something of my past at school, where I'd think nothing of trampling over other bodies, physically and verbally. At uni, I was continually confronted with this ghost, and it was circling round my mind that I still had a foot in this world, it was my past. I couldn't deny it. I struggled to make sense of it. After the first year, I found my self sheltering on the side lines of the pitch, watching the action from a distance, declining offers to partake in college sport and social outings and doing my 'own thing' instead.

What do I do with my past, now?

Am I turning my back on sport because I simply cant hack it?

Am I not man enough?

It came as a great shock to my parents why I had decided not to continue competing. Old school mates sounded confused when I told them I wasn't really training towards anything. At school I was one of the inner, sporting sanctum. For much of my undergraduate life, I grappled with what was going on with my athletic identity. I couldn't forget it so readily could I? Should I just unzip the sporting costume and put it in the loft with my medals and trophies? Why did I need to train, now that I wasn't competing? Why not ditch running altogether?

I graduated in the summer of 1997. The same year I was offered the opportunity to do a PhD. I felt really proud to have been given the opportunity. It seemed really important. I didn't even know what PhD stood for before I was offered it. I was overwhelmed by the fact that I had been recognised for my scholarship, rather than what I did on the playing field. I was noted as a weak academic performer at secondary school and had told myself that I was a bit thick. It seemed quite ironic then, that the impression that I had made on the course was academic.

I settled in to post-graduate life, but my landscape was changing. I had numerous friends living in Liverpool, but all but one of my flatmates had moved out of the house, either to get a job, move in with partners or to go travelling. So it was just Ben and me, sharing a house. We got on really well. We were soul brothers. Ben is an exceptional climber, and although I didn't climb with him that often, I would go out training with him. Over the next few years I found it difficult



keeping up an exercise program, I was getting more in to my studies and the motivation to train was slipping, I suppose it had been for a while. In the aftermath of my divorce with sport, I was left in a void as regards to the point of exercising. Throughout my youth, exercising was what I did before competing. There was a point to it, an end goal. But now, I would just tick along with it, but it no longer gripped me. I started to question to what extent I really enjoyed all the hard work anyway, and whether it was the buzz of competition that had driven me, and what about my parents, was I just doing it to keep up an appearance? Was it something that I thought made my dad proud of me? On occasions I'd get remembered glimpses of the sheer fun I had playing in the playground or competing against a rival school and scoring a try, like when speaking on the phone with old school mates. The good old days. But that was nostalgia, right? I'd moved on from that. I was an adult. This was another chapter.

The last of my college flatmates moved out of the house in the spring of 1999. In the months prior to his departure, my exercise patterns were all over the place. I'd not train for a couple of weeks and then feel guilty and go everyday, after which my body would cease up and the cycle would start again. My fitness was at an all time low, and I think it was just Ben's presence that kept me going, I didn't want to be seen to be letting myself totally go. Ben was training most days, and I felt that I had to do my bit as well, even though in the background of my mind I no longer enjoyed exercising or felt compelled to do it, even running, and my visits to the gym were less regular. I changed gym a few times, believing that a new environment, new machines and a sauna would reinvigorate my enthusiasm, but...

Later that summer, my life entered a period of upheaval. I spent two weeks away in South Africa with my dad. It was the first time we'd spent any length of time with each other since 1986. We caught up on so much. However, the other reason we went to Africa was to visit my sister, who lived in Jo-berg, but from the moment we met up we couldn't stop arguing, so much stuff from the past was brought up, which had been lingering in the air for ages. We didn't speak for two years, and this was to cause a major rift within the family. So this was very much on my mind when I got back. However all was not well when I arrived home.

The landlord had refitted my kitchen but hadn't done a very good job of it. The house was full of plaster dust and you couldn't breathe for more than a minute without choking. He'd used the living room as a skip. Underneath the broken tiles, kitchen doors, cooker and panelling lay, hundreds of pounds of my stuff. I phoned him and told him in no uncertain terms that I wasn't going to pay anymore rent until he'd made the house inhabitable and, reimbursed me for the ruined gear. Some days later he visited me and demanded that I pay him his rent. After refusing he beat me up, leaving my upper body bruised and battered and my esteem in shreds. To make



matters worse, he changed the locks to the house, so that I had to break in and gather my belongings. After pressing charges against him, I was scared shitless that he would find me and beat me up again. Soon after I moved in with my friend's flat. We became lovers and partners a few weeks later. I gathered my thoughts and licked my wounds. It felt like someone had broken into my bodily home and pissed all over the carpets. For ages it plagued me why I hadn't fought back, but I despised violence...

"Bastard!"

I screamed till my face turned blue, walking in the park a few weeks afterwards (I then proceeded to kick a nearby tree).

"I'll fucking murder you!" A few months after moving in with Jan I began to get threatened by her ex who lived below us (We were good mates...!!!???so I thought???!!!...until I began seeing her). I felt scared, confused...becoming increasingly...isolated...retreating...hiding in a shell...my shell...like I wimp...unable to defend myself. I sort refuge more and more in my PhD studies...and my physical side slipped. On the rare occasions when I did venture out for a run or a cycle, I couldn't keep going for longer than ten minutes without huffing and puffing. Each time I placed myself in this situation, the result was the same. Over the next few years, it felt like I'd upped sticks and settled within my cerebral villa. I was like this head floating around without a body, isolated, anxious and afraid, and seemingly unable to escape. I gradually lost contact with friends, and would hardly ever go out in social situations, unable to make conversation. A cloud of depression loomed over my lot, and I didn't know what the hell had happened...what the fuck is happening?

...smile

...hide the hurt

...smile...keep it up...don't let your guard down...for a moment

...smile...make conversation...deflect attention...say goodbye...smile

...open door...close door

...cry.

#### **A random day (some time in 2000)**

Sitting on the windowsill you stare out onto the tree-lined park on the other side of the road. You see cyclists speed by, legs moving up and down, the wheels spin effortlessly, a few minutes later some joggers catch my eye, striding out, they turn and head into the park. Mothers



walk by now and again with toddlers at their sides, they skip and bounce up the avenue, caught in the moment, moving their tiny bodies in flowing patterns, holding coloured windmills and kicking small plastic balls. Excited and excitable, they approach the giant playground. Without hesitation they live through their movement, expressing the energy that flows through their dinky frames, unashamed, unhindered. This scene brings a smile to your worn, dishevelled face. You've been sitting here for some minutes, and seem to return here often, recently. It's where you sit to escape, but it feels more like a 'pit-stop' area. You can see the track in your wing mirror and are aware that you're still in the race, the noise is deafening. You haven't been able to write a sentence today...again. You don't know where to start. Frightened to pick up the pen or switch on the computer. The pressure in your head is intense, thoughts rebound off the walls, but you can find no door for them to escape. Tears wait to rise from the depths of your tummy and flood out of your eyes. You should get back to the studies, but you want to escape this numbing pain. You want to break out of this prison, maybe one day, who knows...

#### **October 2000**

I walk to the reception area of the university gym, hand my application form and cheque to the assistant. The man looks over it, smiles and then sticks the passport photo on to my membership card before laminating it. With card in hand I walk through to the changing area and get ready. I'm visibly nervous, my palms are sweating, my breath is shallow and the palate of my mouth, dry. In the gym, I scan round. There are maybe five people here. Today everything seems so alien, the cardio machines and strength apparatus seem cold and daunting, I shuffle over to the treadmill, it is an island of security in this otherwise uncomfortable jungle. Ten minutes later I step off the machine, covered from head to toe in sweat and with a stitch in my stomach. I look round, not wanting to appear too knackered, people are getting on with their workouts, flowing from one apparatus to another like well oiled machines, in automatic. I feel like a rusty bike and am concerned that I'm moving like one.

I sit down and gather my thoughts, inside I'm shaking. After spending twenty minutes on the cycling ergometer and rowing machine, I know that I've got to do some strength work. My body feels weak and frail like an old man and my arms and legs, brittle, like a stick of Blackpool rock. I end up doing three sets of ten reps on the leg, shoulder and arm press before warming down on the treadmill. I pick up my towel and wipe my brow, looking around again, I'm gob smacked at how cold this space feels to me, I haven't been in a gym for ages. It's like I've visited the dentist's surgery. I make my exit, walking through the corridor I glance through the glass panels and see a body sitting in the dentist's chair. He reaches for the bar above and



squeezes...ouch! In the changing room I collapse to the floor. I crawl to the shower, punch drunk...hiccup!

I wake up and roll over. From my neck down to my calves, my body is immobilised. Strange, as I don't recall being napalmed in my sleep! It takes me two days for this feeling to dissipate. I make my way back to the gym, summoning all my will power and strength, which is at the bottom of the energy strip on the Duracell battery. I go through the same exercises, but feel helpless when I look at the strength equipment, my arms and legs droop at the prospect, but I have to go through with it. Twice a week for about two months this continues. After which I come about four times over the third month. Then my membership expires and I don't renew it, but the memory of exercise is brought into view again, I can't ignore this call now. I have to face up to it and do something.

### **Re-membering my body**

Having summoned the energy to join the gym, in a rather spluttering manner, I spent the next nine months getting a basic level of fitness back in my body. A period of time which felt like a re-initiation, a re-membering of what used to be within me, that which I'd take for granted since early childhood and those sport filled teenage years. My fitness.

The events of this period of inactivity are still quite difficult to recall, I cannot remember many of the chronological details (I wrote only a few diary passages), as this chapter in my life has, as yet, no spaces separating the sentences from the paragraphs. And, furthermore, after a childhood life in sport, which only began to dip when I came to Liverpool, I don't feel able to 'box-off' this period of my life off yet...but no doubt I'll try to.

When I stopped training in 1999, it didn't feel like I'd lost anything. For so long I had been struggling with the basic question of why I still needed to train. In the furore of events that occurred in the summer months of 1999, it seemed a good place to bury exercise, once and for all. At the same time I was reading a lot of post-modern literature about the exercised body, and felt quite critical about the fitness industry. When I look back now, I get this impression that I was like one of those ex-smokers, you know the worst critics. But more than this, I became completely submerged in my studies and once the basic fitness left my body...like a kite lost in the wind...It all seems like one big blur. One moment.

I suppose if I'm being honest and this is what a friend has said to me, I think I was having a kind of mild breakdown.

I couldn't make head or tail of anything. I found myself engrossed in this abstract-theoretical world that I called my PhD. But there didn't seem to be any clear distinctions between



my personal life and my studies, I was basically living through my research. The boundaries overlapped and then merged and once this happened I was stuck in the game, with no way out, or at least, I couldn't remember where the door was. I think running has helped me in that sense, like when I was completing my final year of my undergraduate degree, I remember going out for a run quite often, if not I'd dance around the room, put the music on, try and escape from one world and enter another. But caught in this haze, it didn't feel like anything could help me. I was still going out clubbing occasionally with my friends, and it was always nice to get out and have a dance, but I started to feel exhausted really quickly and I didn't feel like I had that same closeness with my friends.

They knew I was having problems with my research and was struggling to make headway with it, but I didn't tell them in any detail what was going on inside, I wanted to make out everything was ok, but it was a silly game I was playing. They knew I wasn't myself. I'd be one of the first to leave the party after going to a club. I felt so estranged from what was going on. Sitting in the corner with my girlfriend, watching my friends chatting and laughing. You know, before, I was a joker, always trying to have a laugh and a giggle with mates, but now nothing seemed that funny, I just couldn't relate to what was going on. I just observed and that was it. I felt unable to add anything to the conversation...unable to add...to give.

On occasions my friends would come over and ask if I wanted to come out with them. They'd always be playing outdoors, and would think nothing of going away for weekends to the Lake District, Wales or the Peak District, to climb, walk, bike and camp out. I really enjoyed this experience in my undergraduate days, it was like we were doing exercise, but it was more a, social exercise. Anyway, they would phone me initially to ask if I wanted to accompany them, but I would tell them that I needed to be studying and couldn't afford the time out. They were cool with that, and after asking on numerous occasions they must have thought I wasn't interested and so didn't bother. I think I came to resent them for not asking me again, like I began to hear about what people had been up to over the weekend and I was pissed off that no one had invited me.

Looking back on it, I'm sure that with my behaviour and the isolated existence that I was leading, I can hardly of made myself that accessible. I felt hurt that I was being 'left-out,' but it was a lot of my own doing. I didn't tell them that much of what was going on in my life. I didn't feel I could trust them, even though deep down, I wanted to share it. It was great going away with these people in earlier years, we didn't have any secrets, we always got so much out of the weekends away, it was like the activity, whether that was climbing or walking or biking, was the medium through which we could share an experience. I guess this was something that was



missing now. I missed the time with them, yeah. But I also felt secure knowing that with my body on the wane, I didn't have to expose my lack of fitness, or my wilted physique to them (especially over the summer months), not that this was what I was conscious of the time. It's only more recently that I've made this association.

Over the space of a year, I kept getting this recurring dream. I'd be walking through this passageway and there were tall bushes on either side, it reminded me of this narrow avenue that joined my childhood estate with the main road. So, I'd be walking down this avenue and then feel this tremendous anxiety within me, as if some one was coming after me, I'd lift my legs up and start pumping my arms but just couldn't burst into a sprint. If anything, the harder I tried the slower I'd move.

Traces of that recurring dream lived, and still live, within me, somewhere in the background, obscured but alive. After the initial stint back at the gym and the re-appropriation with training, it was the first time that I actually acknowledged to myself, that I wasn't comfortable with my lack of fitness. It didn't hit me like a bullet, but it was like a warning shot, lifting me temporarily out of the grey, dank playground that was my mind. I found it so difficult to get back into the routine of the gym, I'd never been that keen on the set-up and felt restricted, but I knew that it was imperative to get a little strength back in my body. I was struggling with seemingly menial tasks, like walking up a flight of stairs. When I started to get back in to the gym and my running I didn't want to rush into things. I was conscious that in the past when my training had lulled I'd push it too much getting back into it again. Now, I just wanted to get back to a level where I found it comfortable to run round the park and to take it in, I wasn't interested in keeping up a pace. It was now about getting round in one piece, and being able to make it a regular thing. Something I could rely on again.

I don't think it got me out of my depression, yet it gave me more focus and structure, which had been lacking from my life for so very long. I would go days not being able to concentrate on my research, just ambling round in my own little world, it had become so common place, that I wasn't aware that I had any control over it. I'm thinking this is maybe what getting exercise back in my life has helped me with, it takes me out of my head a little, I'm exerting my body, which takes the emphasis away, a little at least, from worrying about things so much. And of course I look in the mirror...



## 7.52 Changing room chatter

### 7.52.1 Women's talk: Part one

I used to go to the gym, but since I've come to Liverpool I just sort of like to run round the park or play hockey...I find it a lot easier to go to the gym, I feel like I'm doing, you know, some serious exercise. When I'm with a group outside, it doesn't feel like I'm exercising so much...**Like if I go on a running machine, then I know that I'm working on my leg muscles and stuff, like you know what your heart rate is, you can see what you're doing...Yeah, that's true...I feel a lot more focused when I know I'm training. If I'm running round the park and I'm thinking 'I'm feeling tired' and you know 'How far have I gone?' But at the gym there's a dial in front of me saying 'You're doing this speed and you've gone this far', it kinda keeps me going...Yeah, that's it, you've got something visual in front of you...**I think I'm more the opposite cos I, I just like running round the park and thinking 'Oh, I know, I'll go and run round this tree or the lake you know, and I'll just run until I get bored. I feel less restrained...I must admit I do get bored with the gym sometimes. I only train there because I work there, but having said that I do find it social cos I know loads of people in there, so that can take your mind off the time aspect, but y'know I do find some of it quite boring, especially the exercise bike...*But like in the gym you've got the radio on, you've maybe got your friends, you've got the displays...***Yeah you've got TV or music on, or people to talk to, so you've got stuff there to take your mind away from what you're doing...Yeah. But I find it quite irritating talking whilst I'm exercising...Especially if it's getting you knackered and out of breath...I mean If you're talking it makes it even worse doesn't it?...**But the other thing is, if you're in a gym you sort of feel restricted, you do 5 minutes on the bike cos you've already typed it in, and then you have to do erm, so many miles on the bike cos that's your target that you said you were going to do...Mmm, yeah...Like outdoors you lose all erm, all feeling of time when you do it...**Yeah you do actually, that's very true, yeah...**You go on the bike in the gym for ten minutes and...*You're watching the clock all the time...That is so true...***Yeah, yeah. Definitely, that's a good point actually...**I find, whether I'm in the gym, or out running, whatever, it just completely takes you away from everything else in your life, it's like the stresses about your dissertation or boyfriend problems or whatever, you know, you can just get away from it all, and for that period of time you know that you're just getting all these benefits from it and it's great...**I feel like I can get away from the stresses of life whenever I exercise, but I feel less like that in the actual gym itself although it does still do that for me, like in my aerobics classes. But again, running outside, especially in the countryside sort of thing is great, rather than in the city centre like I'm doing at the moment, breathing in all those nice car fumes...God yeah...umm...**



### 7.33 Part three: Treading the mill

Stepping on to the rubber matting I place my towel on the handrail and my water bottle, in the holder provided. Besides me is a young woman who is connected up to a walkman, she is looking straight ahead, a picture of focus and determined expression. On the other side, a guy, must be about fifty, is struggling to catch his breath, he looks like he's at the end of his work-out. His green T-shirt is soaked in sweat. Taking a deep breath I gaze at the electronic 'head-up' display and type in my particulars...age, weight, height, fitness level, speed?...would you like to run a manual, a fat burn, a hill climb or a fitness test?...I opt for the manual setting and type in 20 minutes. I press the start button and a couple of seconds later the conveyor belt, begins spinning.

At first it seems difficult co-ordinating my running and breathing. I'm trying to settle into a rhythm, but my lungs are tight and around me people are running at different speeds, which puts me off. I feel out of synch. Five minutes in and I am striding out a little more comfortably, I look up at the TV screen, golf is on which doesn't interest me so I focus in on my breath, trying to increase the depth of the inhalation-exhalation cycle, whilst relaxing my shoulders....1,2...1,2...1,2...1,2...1,2...I whisper to myself.

Droplets of sweat are dripping from my forehead and splashing on to my chin, I reach out for my bottle and take a sip of water, which trickles down the back of my burning throat, cooling the embers in my bodily furnace, which are glowing red. I look down at the display...14:59...15:00...15:01...that's five minutes to go. I continue counting my breaths, now in sets of five...1...2...3...4...5...1...2...3...

19:01...In to the last minute. The last couple of minutes have felt great, a zip fastener in my chest has opened up. I can breathe more deeply, more fluently. There are just 15 seconds to go. I keep my back straight and concentrate on my posture, trying to keep my form till the end.

The rubber belt begins slowing as I move into the two minute warm down phase. When the two minutes have elapsed, the machine stops. Looking down at the display, it tells me that I have covered 3.7 kilometres and burned 298 calories. Picking up my towel I pad down my face and shoulders and throw some water over my head. Stepping off the matting I have a rest on a near by bench. My head is spinning, and I feel the pressure of my blood pushing against my artery walls. It feels like I'm still running. Everything is spinning round. With my head tilted back, I look up to the ceiling and notice this burning sensation in my calves and thighs.

I pick myself up off the bench and walk down the staircase and onto the ground floor. There is a plethora of cardio machines staring at me, and I'm deliberating what I should exercise next. Umm let me think. That stair climber looks like fun, but I'll probably end up in fits of



laughter. So instead I settle for a little bit of cycling, but which one shall I use? There's a standard bike ergometer and a fixed wheel trainer. I opt for the latter.

Stepping over the cross bar I place my fingers on the handle bar and lift my bum up onto the saddle. Settling myself I scan the instructions. It says you can simulate one of twenty real life Tour-de-France stages or test yourself against a computer-generated opponent. Wow this looks fun. So how do you get it to work? I'm gonna be here for ages fathoming out how to get this working. I'll catch up with you soon...

#### **7.43 Richard and Andrea: Part one**

We see the number 86 pulling in to a bus stop at the top of Hardman Street. The time has just turned 5 o'clock and twenty or so predominantly student folk, are waiting to be transported back to their abodes and elsewhere, after a busy day at college. We see a picture of tired youngsters with bags and folders in hand.

On the top floor of the bus. It is busy and noisy. At the back there are a few empty seats and, if we look closely, we can make out the outline of a young man. Aged about 19, roughly five foot ten, quite stocky and with short black hair, wearing a blue and black Nike tracksuit...it's Richard. Let's go sit down and catch up with him.

Richard has lived in Liverpool all his life, a local lad you see. Aged 14 Richard began using the gym in PE lessons, and soon found that he enjoyed lifting weights more than doing team sports. I mean, he could go at his own pace and didn't have to rely on other people. He was his own boss. As he got more into the gym thing Richard began to do less cardio work, concentrating more and more on power lifting, "I was going to the gym after school for about two hours until I was 17. I got into it in a big way."

For Richard, getting into weights, came at an important stage in his teens. Many of his friends through sheer boredom were hanging out on the local estate, getting themselves into all sorts of trouble with the police. Getting into lifting helped Richard stay off the streets and out of mischief, whilst reminding him that he wasn't just a passenger on the bus called Destiny. About a year ago, he injured his shoulder having a kick-around in the park. After the injury cleared up, he found it difficult to get back into the routine again, and it began to slip. At first he wasn't bothered but then he felt really guilty. He started to smoke again and fell in with his old mates. Naughty boy.

It's only been in the last three months that he's got back into his gym routine "What started getting me back into it was, well, I was looking through a photo album and I saw what I looked like a couple of years back and thought 'Good God! I'll have to get started again' and



basically it was me dad saying I wouldn't go, so I went to shut him up. When I went back to the gym I met this guy there and he sorted me out this high protein diet. I've started to get into it again, you know, like getting back into the routine of it."

Fumbling around in his pocket, Richard takes his wallet into hand and pulls out a small photograph of himself, "That's me when I was really happy with me body. It was taken about two years ago. I mean I'm not vain. But the way I am now, I'm just not happy with the way I look and I was happier then because, I looked, I felt fitter. I mean the comments people make, like my uncle, he said to me "You've let it go to the wall." So I just want to get meself back to it, I'll feel better in meself you know..." Placing the picture back into the wallet Richard stares out of the window for a moment and sighs. He knows he's got to get his body feeling good again. A little piece of him. A slightly crumpled piece of him. There. With him. A reminder of what was, and what could be.

"Like I'm going to the gym now to do a couple of hours before I go and do me shift at the pub. It's better than sitting in the house waiting to go to work. I know I'm doing something productive, you know getting meself back into this routine, is the best thing. I get a good feeling when I come out, not on a high as such but I feel happier, cos you know, I've done something productive. It's a far better feeling now than it was sitting round the house doing nothing basically." Richard presses the red button on the rail above picks up his stuff and walks down the aisle.

The bus slows down and Richard wipes his nose, "I suppose I go to the gym now to get meself, to be happy with meself, to make meself fitter you know, make me fitter to everybody else and basically cos I enjoy it. It beats sitting round the house, it's more productive and stops me smoking so much. And the thing is, since getting back into it I feel I've got like a target to aim for, I've got a goal. But I don't want to get too big because you look stupid. If I get meself up to a level where I can say, compare meself to the photograph, and say 'I look alright, that's it, I'm happy now'. Cos if you keep on doing it, you can get to a stage where it takes over your life. Like you HAVE to go the gym to keep yourself happy. I don't want to get like that." Richard steps off the bus and makes the short walk to the gym.

As the bus sets off again, we turn round and look for a place to sit. Moving down the bus we see a, young women aged 23, called Andrea. Taking a bite from her chocolate bar, Andrea signals over to us to come and sit with her. You sit there and I'll park my bum here. Andrea lives by a park and thinks nothing of taking her bike out for an hour here and there, most days. She likes to walk whenever feasible, but tonight she feels particularly weathered, having completed a five hour shift at the clothes shop she's worked at for the past two years. She's been in the library



all day trying to get a piece of coursework completed, as well as revising for an end of year examination.

It's only been recently that Andrea's got involved in more structured forms of exercise, "Well, I started about 2 years ago. I went to circuit training but I didn't really carry that on because I'm always skint, so it was always on and off. Erm, a few months ago I started Kai-Bo, which is like aerobic martial arts. I've always been pretty fit, I've never really had to bother so much about doing exercise as it's always been incorporated naturally into my daily routine, you know. I don't particularly care about my weight, I've never put any weight on really, but getting older, I want to make sure that I keep it this way, cos as you get older things start to sag. So, I want to make sure that they don't."

We can hear a mobile buzzing. Andrea checks the incoming text message and puts her phone away. "As long as I can feel comfortable in my clothes, and me size 12 Levi's still fit me then it's not that big a thing. As long as I still feel healthy. I mean if you feel healthy, you start to look better the more toned you are. Obviously I'm not active enough to be perfectly toned in every area, like I've noticed that my stomach's been getting a bit podgy. But feeling confident in your body is important. It's like, if you can go out in a bikini and know that you look good, then that makes you feel happy, that makes you feel nice and you know, if you're exercising and you FEEL healthy, that's the, the best thing I think."

The bus swings right and we find ourselves in the suburb of Allerton. Continuing down the busy main road Andrea collects her belongings and makes her way to the front of the bus. "I'm not really a vain person but I suppose the motivation is just like err, when you look in the mirror it makes you think about things." Andrea moves through the crowded bus, ready to disembark, "...and sometimes I get wheezy, sometimes my chest feels tight and I don't like that. So I suppose it's a bit of both really."



### 7.53 Supermarket sweep

I move bumper to bumper with the other shoppers, negotiating the supermarket maze. I tick off the items one by one. Just three more things to find. Some ice cream, some cereal and umm...a magazine.

Moving from aisle to aisle and from offer to offer, you've decisions to make. I pass the bright signs that tempt and tease, my body is under attack, from all quarters. Full-fat, low-fat, mid-fat, value, healthy option, without additives, sugar-free, diet friendly, chocolate, chocolate substitute, multi-buy...

Turning left into the frozen foods section you take into our mind, something of the supermarket sweep. "Buy one get one half price...new **Not Quite Ice-Cream**: with only half the fat of regular soft scoop and now with half the taste...indulge yourself with **Luxury Soft & Creamy**: extravagance without the expanding waistline: 84% fat free...feed your kids **Charley-Chocomulsh**: with enriched additives and weapons strength kryptonite, your child will be packed full of energy and glowing green all night long...buy five boxes and get fifteen for a third of the price...have you tasted **It's Not Ice Cream**, the ice cream substitute? Scientifically tested and proven, the cardboard cornetto cut-out will leave you guilt free. It contains no calories or fat...buy four of the above and don't get any of the others, for **FREE**.

In conversation with the contenders we listen to their pleas,

"Choose me big boy, I'm far and away the most sophisticated soft scoop on the shelf. I'll be anything you want me to be. You can smear me all over and lick me off, be indulgent, be a bad boy, spoon me out, spank me, lick me, trick me...I'm your ice dream..."

"Don't listen to her, she'll rot your teeth and make you fat, choose me and we'll change that. I taste kinda similar but without the fat. Even my packaging looks delicious...what do you think of that?"

"Taste similar, yeah right! It's simple big boy. Half fat, low fat, call it what you will, but they just don't taste like the real deal. And I thought you were after *proper* ice cream. I mean, if you went to buy a sports car you wouldn't go away with a moped, would you?"

"Well, if you carry on the way you're going you'll be lugging a spare tyre around in your motor. So?"

"Choose me..."

"No, choose me..."

"No..."

I extend my arm and my hand wavers over the two plastic tubs, breathing out, my hand picks up the luxury scoop. For a mili-second or so a wave of guilt overcomes my being as blood



rushes to my face, within another split second I've argued the case with my conscience and justified my choice. If only for now. Walking off, the two contenders spot another piece of flesh

“Hello big boy...”

We make our way up the central crossroads. Here we are. In front of you a young women has her calculator out. It's her special calorific converter. She presses the total button to discover that she's 250 calories under her weekly limit. A smile alights and she goes in search of a small treat. I go to place a cereal box into my trolley:

“Sensible eating for a healthy lifestyle! Nowadays, we are all trying to make healthier food choices...Cornflakes are low in saturated fat, contain B vitamins to help you concentrate and is high in carbohydrates for your body's energy's needs as well as containing, no more than 3%fat. Newly published research from Carefree University has shown that if you eat a bowl everyday for two weeks, it will help REDUCE FATIGUE by an average of 10%, improve your MOOD & ENERGY levels and help you LOSE WEIGHT as part of a calorie controlled diet.”

Reversing out of the aisle I check my watch and accelerate past the human traffic and make a beeline for the magazine shelf. I signal and overtake the family minibus. Five kids dangle from the young mother's trolley. She opens a multi-pack of Coke and hands each of her children a can. Super Sugar Man to the rescue! As this ensues, another mother hands an apple to her child from the trolley. Observing the scene you compare the contents of the trolleys; the first contains twice as many items and calories, mostly 'value' foods, whilst the other trolley contains 'healthy' options yet costs more. Healthy living pays...but what's the cost?

I've made it to the magazine shelf. I scan the Lifestyle section. GQ, Cosmopolitan, FHM, New Woman, Loaded, Men's Health, blah de blah. Overcome by the collage of near naked bodies, I indulge on the eye candy before picking up a copy of Men's Health, place it in the trolley and head to the checkout. The magazine's sound-bites follow us to the checkout. Standing in line. Reading between the lines. You spy with my little eye...



**How**  
**Kylie’s New Amazing Body** BUILD SIX PACK IN SIX WEEKS

**LOOK SEXY EVEN ON MONDAYS!** Airbrush helps models look lean **Are**

Fix your body for fashion titilation **What has happened to Shirley’s Bum?**

**We** **HOW TO GET YOUR SELF IN SHAPE FOR SUMMER**  
456 Hot Fashion Tips Quick Tips for Shapely *bits*

**Shed pounds in seconds: Wonder diet revealed** **Young**

**People** **I exercised myself to infertility** we sell magazines: What sells them?

**Britney’s Personal Trainer Reveals Secrets** Have you lost confidence in your body?

**Romantic Rich and Fit: Still Can’t Get a Girl?** **To**

**Make** **We disclose what really turns men on**  
**Free Fat Burner’s Bible** **Sense**

No calories please, we’re British: The truth behind our diet obsession

**Have men lost their way? The truth behind 21<sup>st</sup> century man’s search for an identity...** anxiety is in the body

**Of** **DO CRASH DIETS WORK? WE TEST THE TOP TEN** sex sex

Sex and anxiety sells our magazines: we make your life more difficult for you (not revealed!) **Our**

**Are women everywhere obsessed with food?** Body paranoia is all around  
Are men obsessed with the gym?

**Size does matter: WE reveal all about what women don’t want in bed**  
This is a women’s magazine: stop looking at the fashion photos, you devil

**JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE BARES HIS SOUL** . . . look inside for soft porn picture of Justin!!

**Bodies???**



Schumacher's Formula: GetFitFast!

# Men's Health

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MUSCLE

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=====

**25 QUICK FIXES FOR  
STRESSED-OUT GUYS**

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**MAKE GOOD  
SEX GREAT**

START TONIGHT! P110

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**27 EASY STEPS TO  
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Placing the last of my shopping in the plastic carriers I collect my change and head out into the central shopping precinct. I pass advertising hordes and shop displays, where mannequins and photographic images of shapely bodies mediate between the needs of the seller and the desires of the buyer.

Passing by one of the market mirrors, I gaze at the shirt on the model, squinting my eyes I see my reflection temporarily superimposed onto the dashing model. The outlines of what I look like and what I *ought* to look like merge and I find myself neither on this side of the glass nor on the other, *déjà vu*. Have you not been here before?

Bodies of expectation (?) and truth (?) haunting and taunting. The mirror of my complexion...confusion...infection...in need of direction...what of this body...what of this display...am I standing on the outside looking in or...body on show...for sale...to be bought and sold...a piece of flesh in the market place...young...or...over the top?

I close my eyes for a second and wiping some 'sleep' from the corner I continue my walk down the urban catwalk in search of a bus to take me away from the maddening crowd.

The bus pulls up and I alight. Crammed full. Bursting at the seams. Heading through the city roads. Engulfed in a theatre of billboards and adverts. I'm reminded of my fate. A child of market forces I am. We journey through the urban labyrinth. Along the way the streets suggest. Buy...some more? In-between the conversations with human folk. Never far away from taking a commercial break. Close eyes then open wide and a billboard entices me.

I take out the Men's Health magazine to pass the monotony.

Flick

FLICK

FLICK

FLICK

HUGO BOSS GANT PATRICK COX ADIDAS RALPH LAUREN. Models and celebrities adorned in the latest threads, fragrances, shoes and accessories. Provocative and suggestive, "Do you like what you see? Does the brand speak in you? Then buy through me"...**FLICK...FAT REMOVAL** – we can remove stubborn fat from the stomach, bottom, thighs, knees and ankles to give you a more pleasing look, and a new found confidence. For a confidential consultation, without charge, call the number below 0870 603...**FLICK...Fat burners bible**. We eat more sugar in a day than our ancestors did in a lifetime. Sugar is one of society's favourite drugs and for those hooked on the stuff, it can cause weight problems...**FLICK...MH Gear**: The MH gadget team have sourced the niftiest in-car gizmos around...**FLICK...The Basics**. How to do a bench press. To achieve that upper body 'V' shape



you need the bench press...*FLICK... FLICK...*An Olympic Swimmer with a mean physique looks in to my eyes: Mark Foster uses Wellman's advanced formula to safeguard his diet. It's not only used by athletes, but is designed for men with especially hectic or demanding lifestyles too...*FLICK...*What do women really want from us in bed? MYTH: Size really doesn't matter. Distracted by an image of an athletic scantily clad women in a provocative pose....*FLICK...*Instant SEX appeal, sound appealing? We thought so. So we asked Blah de Bloh to explain the one male attribute no woman's psychic armour can withstand: Confidence. Women look first at your attire, and second at how you walk, but remember confident people are not in a hurry...*FLICK...FLICK...FLICKETY FLICK...*Health Bulletin. A cream commonly used to treat acne may also help people smooth out the wrinkles and sun damage that come with age, new findings suggest...*FLICK...*Have a one to one with our relationships and sex editor Q. I find it hard to start relationships with women. I'm a bit bald – is that a terrible thing? Q. Can I make my erection harder with surgery? Q. Contrary to what I tell my girlfriend, her bum is getting bigger. How can I discreetly help her stem the wide tide?...*FLICK...NIKE...FLICK...VW Cars...FLICK...APPLEMAC computers...DUNHILL clothes...FLICK...*A man wearing a pair of jeans sporting a rippling muscular chest leans on a motorbike...*ARMANI JEANS...FLICK...MORE FU...FLICK...KING* adverts...

#### **7.34 Part four: Row row row your boat...**

Up and down, up and down, up and down. I lock onto the sound of the seat as it traverses the length of the steel shaft. My arms extend and the chain loosens off, the flywheel rotates making a wooshing noise as it goes. Occasionally, I look up at the TV, golf...boring, or allow the sounds of the radio to enter my head, but my attention isn't held for too long. As I pull back on the chain, I feel a pain shooting up my right thigh and into my bum, which is rubbing against a ridge on the plastic seat. Letting the chain go once more I exhale and cough, temporarily I lose my rhythm, but at the same time the intrusion wakes me from my drifting slumber.

How much longer have I left? I glance down at the LCD screen...1:34...1:33...1:32...1:31...A middle aged man lowers himself on to the seat next to me and positions his trainers into the clips, steadying himself he grips the wooden pole and pulls back. I notice his presence but neither of us, exchange glances. I am focused and honed in on my task. Now and again my eyes wander though. I see the odd person chatting, exchanging tips and training advice, and the occasional smile between people, shared recognition of the effort exerted. But mostly people are poised and focused, getting intimate with the machines is the major conversation going on.



I've got one minute to go on this rowing machine and my calves are starting to seize up. "45,44,43,42,41...Come on, nearly there, keep pushing, only a few metres to go now. Start pushing it lad." Looking down at the screen Bobby (the boat) informs me of where I am and pushes me on at the end, "10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1...well done you have beaten the computer and burnt 175 calories in this race...would you like to warm down before leaving the lake?" Collapsed in two I close my eyes and drop my head, sweat gushing from every pore, with the help of Bobby my electronic motivator, I've broken through the pain, by turning it into a chase, the clock ticks down, the anxiety builds, next thing you know...we're in a race! Thanking Bobby I un-strap my feet and in a dizzy mess I clamber to my feet. With towel in hand I shuffle my way to the bench by the gallery, which overlooks the ground level. I look up at the main clock, which reads 1:45pm. That's fifty minutes down and only forty to go. I collapse on the seat and fan myself with my towel.

Sitting on the bench I congratulate myself on getting past halfway. A few seconds later I begin psyching myself up...for the next half.

Taking in deep gulps of breath. I look down at the squeaky plastic floor. My vision narrows. Observing the bodily motion. Patterns manifest in my awareness; contained in space we move, shoulders square and arms, to the side. In right angles. Up and down. From left to right. Moving bodies in partial freedom. Legs are strapped down. Hands grip the side. The design of the machine dictates the contours of the bodily ride. Moving in partial freedom. Upwards and forwards. Downwards and back. Angular patterns we cut. We run, we row, we cycle. Yet going no-where. Rooted to the spot.

#### **7.52.2 Changing room chatter. Men's talk: Part one**

...I'll try and get down 3 times a week to the gym but er, I like to but it's not a, you know, a big problem if I don't...*It's a problem for me, I hate not going...*Even one session?...*Yeah...*How often do you go?...*It's usually 4, I'll sometimes do 5, you know, I find it a problem if I don't go. I was working last year, doing long hours in Manchester, and I had this feeling of panic cos I had to get to the gym in the evening and if I didn't get there then I felt really terrible about the whole day. So, I'd force myself to go, even if I was really knackered...***I know what you mean. I mean personally if I don't go to the gym for a day, or not even if I don't go to the gym, if I don't get out in some way, the exercise, the whole day will just go slower and I'll maybe not eat as much...***On a day when I want to do some form of exercise, if I don't do it I don't like the feeling, you feel guilty, but it's not a problem...***Yeah, it's frustrating that...***Yeah...Yeah, I'd probably still do something, even if it's just to walk up to the train, I'd still do something...**I never*



*miss the gym, I haven't missed the gym in ages, a little twinge in me shoulder's not going to stop me...Yeah, I was talking to a guy in the gym and he's got a permanent back injury through exercising, and now he just can't do much exercise because he's in constant pain and it worries me. I've kind of made all sorts of contingency plans for if I should be injured because then I would hate to be, the thing of being unable to do what I want to do...I tend to train through it...I've been laid up with a knee injury, it was a long recovery cos I tore a ligament here, stupidly on a drunk occasion. I mean I was finding excuses to not go because of the leg. I mean it didn't take long for me to start feeling like, clogged up, I just felt clogged up, the whole thing gets my system moving you know, and sluggish, yeah, I was starting to feel that...Yeah that was what I got...*

#### 7.44 Jessica

"42, 43, 44...45...46...47...48...49...50" Jess lies back on the deep pile carpet on her bedroom floor and melds into the soft fibres, a wry smile interrupts the heavy panting. She has completed her post-run, 'Abs' session. She shakes her legs loose and wanders over to the window. The early morning sun fills her energised body with a sense of calmness and serenity. She gazes into the warm orange centre and dreams about relaxing on a beach somewhere in the Med. Last month Jess booked a holiday. Most days you'll find her making strides, crunches and sit-ups in her quest to tone up for the summer sun.

As a youngster Jess was a junior dance champion and county cross-country runner. Over the last few years Jess has found herself in a more, hesitant 'stop-start' relationship with exercise. She opens the window to let some fresh air circulate within the room, "I suppose now I exercise for different reasons...erm...it changes with what mood I'm in. Like at the moment, cos I'm going to Majorca in a couple of months, I thought 'Well I don't look too good in a bikini at the moment' so I thought 'Right, I'm going to start'. Then me and my boyfriend started this like plan of what I'm going to do," she points to a wall-chart, "It's like 50 crunches a day, 10 leg lifts and then its like press ups and then I go for a run every other day. It's more toning rather than weight loss." She goes to the kitchen to get a glass of water.

Jess has been reflecting on her relationship with her body. She can't help but feel that the enjoyment she once got from moving her body had been drained out of her arms and legs. And it all happened so quickly. Four years ago, aged 16, she'd be out in the street after school, making up dance routines with her best mate. Jess was fascinated by sport and games until "I think it was during school when I joined the cross-country team. Suddenly I wasn't going for a run for fun



anymore. It was like more training to win, you know to get better at it, but. I think the older I've got the more laborious and less fun exercise has become."

"I know that it's good for my bum and my thighs and that's the only motivation I suppose. Unless it's a really nice day, then it's good to get out for a run in the park just to escape the madness, but even that can get a bit boring. You know, just like one step after the other." Jess finishes her drink and showers.

Having showered and dried off, Jess is back in her bedroom trying on her new bikini. Placing one hand on her bum and brushing her fringe to the side with the other, she laughs, "Yeah. Yeah, there'll be times when I stand in front of the mirror and I'll go 'Oh', you know, I'll stick my stomach out and I'll think 'Oh, I should go and do some sit ups now'. And like, if I sit down and I look at my thighs and I think 'Oh no, they look so big', I mean they don't today, which is good. I'm having a skinny few days which is OK, but erm, no generally I do think 'I wonder if people think I look fat or if my bum looks big in this?' It's self-deception I'm sure but...I am one of those typical women." Turning to the mirror again, she blows her reflection a kiss and giggles. "I suppose I've always been active, always felt like I needed to be doing something. I was brought up in the countryside, so it felt totally natural to be enjoying the outside. But I don't know, like I say I've always been active, it's just part of me now, I can't seem to escape it."

Jess measures out her allotted cereal ration with the scales she got free from last month's copy of *Women going places*. She tips the cereal into a bowl and pours some semi-skimmed milk over the morcels and waits for the 'snap...crackle and pop.' It makes her giggle like a little girl. Sitting at the breakfast bar she chews over what she has said "Yeah, I was probably quite a hyperactive child, I still am I suppose, it helps me to calm down a bit, exercise helps release a lot of that excitement. There are times when I sit down and I'm like 'Oh I've got to do something' especially when I've been 'vegging' in front of the TV or haven't done any course work, you know, done something productive. But, if I go for a run then generally I won't be like that. So say if I've got revision to do and I'm going to be sitting down all day, it's usually good to go out and do a few exercises before I get on with it. It doesn't focus you on your work, but it just makes you not focus on exercise and like...being all twitchy." Jess has just remembered that she has an assignment to finish, so let's not keep her too much longer.

With the spoon next to her mouth, she pauses and then shrugs her shoulders, "I reckon most of it is the whole body thing. You know that you're doing some good for your body and it influences your self perception to be more favourable, and well erm like I said before, summer is just round the corner and I'll want to wear more loose fitting clothes without feeling so conscious of bumps and lines. But then there is also this feeling I get from it. It just brings you up a little bit.



It's sort of that motivational thing. Like if you wake up in the morning and you go for a run, for the rest of the day you feel more active, and you know," she breathes in, feels her lungs expand and smiles, reassuringly

"...when you feel more active you feel more, you know, just more happier I suppose."

### 7.52.3 Changing room chatter. Women's talk: Part two

...This semester I've put on half a stone. You could say 'Oh, it doesn't look as if you've put half a stone on' but I have, it's there and I know the way to get rid of it is to do the training. I am slightly addicted to it, I openly admit, it's just, when I don't do it I don't feel as good about myself ...**Yeah...Yeah...If you're going for a night out and you haven't been training, you feel frumpy and ugly and just horrid, and then you get into training and you feel invigorated, refreshed...**That's right, you can sort of tell can't you?...**It's a confidence thing...Yeah definitely...Cos you probably look no different...**You don't at all (LAUGHS LOUDLY)...*You look the same, but it's the way you feel...*Yeah, oh God yeah...**My weight hasn't changed since I was about 12, so I don't use weight as a focus point, I use how I feel, like if your muscles are toned and if your clothes fit and you feel good, that sort of thing...**I've never, ever had a weight problem, there's only this time now when I feel that I have. So that has made me want to train, but yeah, I just do it to feel good about itself...*Yeah, like one of my mates said to me 'Oh, you've put on a bit of weight', and so I said to my flatmate, I said 'Right, we're going to do 100 sit ups a day' and stuff and then like that sort of died off in the end. So erm, we just did that because we felt a bit flabby...***As long as what I've got is toned then I don't care about how much I weigh, and that's what my size is supposed to be...That's right...That's how I look...**Instead of trying to be something that you're not...*Yeah...and looking at yourself and saying 'OK I'm never going to be this kind of stick model'...Yeah, you've got to be realistic haven't you?...I often think 'I wish I had her figure' which makes me want to do some sit-ups or something but it never lasts...*

### 7.35 Part Five: Strong men

Upper body...shoulders...triceps...biceps and...back. I sit myself down on the seat of the lateral pull down machine and put the pin in the fourth weight down. Then, filling my lungs with the sweat soaked air I prepare to take the strain. As I reach for the bar, my body hesitates for a second and pulls me back. I feel a slight twinge in my lower back. It's like my body is reminding me of something, but I can't remember what. Recomposing myself I settle and reach for the bar



again. Gripping the serrated steel length, I feel the tension. Pulling the bar down behind my back I take a deep controlled breath in and hold. The tension seeps into my neck and shoulders, causing them to stiffen and solidify. Then I let go, breathing out a fine thread of carbon dioxide, and relax. I do a set of ten repetitions. This continues for another three sets. As I get up and shake off the lactic acid building up in my arms and shoulders, I come over all dizzy for a moment and so have to take in some water, my vision is narrowing, I need to sit down and relax, but...

I look up at the large clock on the facing wall. I'm counting the minutes, only half an hour to go. This is hard work. I lie down on the bench. I am suddenly engulfed by this presence, it stifles me, my skin clams up and I feel my heart speed up. As I lift my head, five muscular blokes huddle round the shoulder press, preparing to pump iron. One of the men pulls the pin out and repositions it, to a much heavier load. He laughs and makes a comment to a friend, "Who the fuck's been on this?" I now feel intimidated and smothered by the muscular landscape that threatens to swallow me up and spit me out. I just can't breathe. Give me some air...please? Fizzing...deafening...pulsating...suffocating...down below in my chest....heat rises up in circular waves...nauseous...nauseous.

Trying hard not to grimace too much, counting in my head...quicker and quicker...I complete the final set. Desperate not to draw attention to myself...tip-toe past the men...head level...eyes half closed. Laughter in the background

...or

...in my head

...sweating

...nauseous

My brain throbs...pulsating...suffocating...squeezing deep...into...myself. Running down the stairs in the tower in my head. Sprinting faster and faster. Pull the cord and free-fall down....down into my chest...then...down into my legs...into my groin. Frozen. Remaining quiet. So that no one knows I'm here. My penis sniggers "Do you feel inadequate?"

One body

Amongst many

Bodies

My Body and me



#### 7.52.4 Changing room chatter. Men's talk: Part two

**Yeah, it's the only time where I'm not having to relate to somebody else and if people try to talk to me in the gym, I can't be bothered with the small talk, I'm chatting all day...Yeah. I can't stand the chit chat, that's why I take my walkman...*Yeah but I often need that, someone else, you know what I mean...***I see people leaning on machines and chatting, and I can't understand it...*For me the whole social thing is basically to keep my mind off the fact that I don't really enjoy what I'm doing. It's just a chore I've got to do...Yeah?..***If I'm working out with a friend, we just get on with our routines. Afterwards we'll socialise. But I think whilst you're doing it, people chatting can be quite off-putting. But at times it can be good to go with someone, especially if you're not feeling that motivated...Umm...*I find it difficult to get myself motivated. Like at the moment I'm just getting back into it after a lay-off and I find I'm struggling cos my fitness isn't there. It's demoralising...*****I suppose psychologically, it's a sort of competition going on with yourself, d'you know what I mean. You've just got to, keep it going, just working through the pain...It's like a challenge. It can get quite strenuous, but that's part of it. Like pushing yourself on that last rep, when you just want to give in. And then afterwards...You've survived, you've done something, you've achieved...I kind of watch the amount of work I can build up, on the little monitor. It can keep you going...It's like a compulsion with me, the more floors (on the stepper) that I can go up virtually. Like if I've walked up 300 floors, if I could get it to 310 then I would feel really, a sense of achievement, and if I felt completely exhausted by it then I'd feel as if I'd done a good thing...Umm...Yeah, yeah..****I like it cos I can switch off from my work. I mean that's why I love it on the running machine so much, cos the rhythm, I just get into it, you know that noise when your feet hits the treadmill, and the breathing...I find I can just break through the wall and go on for ages. You just focus on your breath, getting that going and finding your rhythm don't you?...*But I'm not that fit at the moment. I know my cardio-vascular system is pretty weak I'm having to work quite hard just to support the exercise I'm doing, you know what I mean. I'm not one of these people that exercises religiously, I just consider it a maintenance dose. I'm not one to really push it to extremes...*****Yeah, its difficult to get in the zone when your fitness is down...**

Umm...

Yeah...

Yeah...



I think some forms of exercising I find quite relaxing, I find running round the park relaxing. But I think when I'm in the gym, I don't find it stressful, I don't think I could say I hate doing it but I, I have a set number of exercises to do and I just think 'Yeah, I'm going through them to get to the end of it' and then you get the good feeling after that...I prefer it in the gym cos you know exactly what you're doing to the body, like which muscles you're working on. And I like that buzz of doing what you set out to. It's more erm, the feedback you get is more exact...I actually run on the treadmills in the gym quite a bit, if you've got you know a television screen in front of you to watch it's alright, but if you've nothing to look at I think it can be quite boring because you're looking at the same thing the whole time. But when you're running outdoors, you're not so bothered about keeping at an exact pace and like, the scenery is always changing. It's just more stimulating...*Yeah I reckon that as well...*I don't really mind where I do it, it's all just training. If it's raining really hard I won't want to go outside, but I can go to the gym and do my work out still...*True...Mmm, yeah...*But if the weather's nice, you can't beat going outdoors. Like cycling in the Peaks or even in the park. You're killing two birds with one stone, you're getting the exercise in but you're really enjoying it. It's the experience, but also you're exercising at the same time...

#### 7.45 Dave

Dave is 21. He's been into sport since his early days at school. Let's go and see him. Find out more about his story.

In this gym there are about ten men working out, all have highly defined physiques. On the walls are posters advertising muscle competitions and, there is a cabinet by the office full of trophies, which presumably lads from this gym have won. Dave has just finished his warm up. When he was 18, some of his mates from his Sunday league team got him interested in the weights. For three years now he has been coming to this power-gym, about five times a week.

Dave readies himself before the next set of shoulder presses. "I love coming to train. I love the camaraderie, you know like all lads training together. I suppose it was the challenge that got me into it, like trying to lift stronger weights and well er, like the motivation you get from fellas who are at a better stage than you." Dave lies back and begins the next set, besides him, a trainer partner spurs him on, "Nice and easy Dave, remember your breathing. One...two...three..."

Meresy muscle gym is a second home to Dave. Everyone knows one another. Last weekend he and the lads went to Southport for the North West championships. His training



partner Ste, came third. Later that night the lads went into town to celebrate. All the lads together. Unfortunately, Dave he wasn't able to compete, "Yeah well the thing is, you need to make an impact at this level. I was a little pissed off when I found out...(SIGHS)...it sort of devalued it, but you know, I'm not gonna try them. For me it's about doing it naturally, you know." Dave tells me that there are a few natural competitions and so hasn't given up the idea of competing, altogether.

Just finished his shoulders, catching his breath he continues, "I suppose you're thinking that I do body building cos of vanity. I mean there are vanity reasons but it's more about the experience, more about the drive and determination to achieve your goals. I don't really see it as total fitness, I mean health is really important to me, but I don't really do cardio work, I find that boring. So it's more about enjoying the actual experience of lifting you know, the competition and achieving your goals, that's why I do it." Ste adds another 10 kilos to the bar. Dave has been after this weight for a month now and begins to get him self fired up for it.

Five minutes have passed. There are smiles all round the gym as Dave makes the weight...his. "I love this feeling, it's a real buzz knowing that you've just lifted more. Sometimes it can be really difficult to get yerself motivated, you know sometimes you just think 'I can't be arsed', but achieving little goals gives yer a real buzz, it really like er energises you, makes it worth while." The pressure is off now. Dave continues with his session for another hour, every now and again stopping in his tracks to share a story and a joke, with the others.

Having showered and changed Dave goes to get his bus. Let's walk with him. Noticing once more that I'm standing there with a Dictaphone, Dave obliges, "Yeah you know going to the gym helps me a lot, it gives me something to focus on. When I was a kid I liked doing stuff, but I didn't really have the determination and discipline. There's a big aspect of mental discipline to going to the gym five times a week."

Dave takes a tissue from his pocket and wipes his nose, "Like last year I got glandular fever and I couldn't train for two weeks, it was horrible. I'd lost so much weight and couldn't train at all. It really got me down. Like normally if I have a little pain or illness I'll just train through it, but I couldn't. I wanted to get back so badly that when I finally got in to training again I said to meself 'I can't afford to have a bad training session, I'm going to go there and I'm going to do it', and it was a bit hard because I'd lost so much weight, so I wasn't lifting as heavy, which was demoralising. But you know, just having that mental drive and determination helped me get back into it, to get to the weight I was before and then carry on from there. So yeah I think that the mental drive and the discipline thing I've got from training has helped me, but not only at the gym, also in other areas of me life."



Dave looks at his watch, he's got to meet a friend in twenty minutes, the bus takes half an hour, he looks a little anxious, "Also I think it's given me somewhere to go if it all gets too much. Like with my exams the other month, I could have just sat in front of the TV worrying about them, but I found going to the gym allowed me to distance myself from the stress. I suppose it's my way of dealing with it, some people talk about it, but I don't really like that, I like to deal with it my own way."

We can see the number 145 bus at the top of the road. Dave takes his wallet out of his pocket and searches for his pass "So yeah, I really love the camaraderie and friendly competition at the gym...all lads together you know. It's helped me a lot you know. It's made me realise that with a bit of determination and discipline you can achieve yer goals, just by trying hard and putting in the effort sort of thing." The bus pulls up. Dave puts out his hand to say farewell, gets on the green bus and the door slams shut.

### **7.36 Part six: Lactic acid**

I'm on the ground floor sitting on a bench by the window overlooking the hydrotherapy suite. In the last ten minutes there's been an influx of about thirty people, god knows where from. This means that for certain pieces of equipment, some people will have to wait. At busy times the rules on the wall stipulate that you can't use the same piece of equipment for more than ten minutes, which is fine with me. But looking around, I'm sure it won't please some, especially those who have a routine and don't like impinging on it. I know that many people here workout early afternoon, specifically to avoid the rush hour of human traffic that pours in, between 5-7pm.

I have about fifteen minutes left of my session and I'm exhausted. In the background of my mind a voice entices, "Come on big boy, come and make love to me. Just fuck it off now, you've done enough to deserve your reward," the sauna calls out, but I told myself that I wanted to do one and a half hours, and I'm determined to get through this last bit, however knackered I feel.

I ponder which machine to finish on. I've decided on the stepper, as I like the sensation it gives you. Climbing on to the foot paddles I hold on to the hand rails at either side. Acknowledging the woman beside me, I ask her how to start the machine. She is just warming down and is a little short on breath, spluttering, she replies, "That one's broke. I think the one next to it is alright though." Moving to the next stepper I type in my particulars, and opting for the random hill climb, press begin.

It really is a surreal feeling. Like walking on the moon, or better still, walking on floats on the sea. Yeah. I'm desperately wanting to giggle. On each up step, I spring up about half a



metre. It brings a smile to my face. A couple of minutes have elapsed. The laughter inside has transformed into another energy. The novelty has worn off. Every time I feel my way into a rhythm, the machine moves up a gear and the workload required, increases, knocking me off my stride, messing up my breathing pattern. Got to keep going though...won't give up...nearly there.

Five more minutes have elapsed. I can feel my shoulders hunched as I squeeze every last drop of myself into this machine. But it just aint satisfied, it wants more and more and I...don't...know...how...much...more...I can give. Bouncing along the ocean waves on my magic floats, the magnetic pull of a nearby whirlpool draws me into its lair. The pull is tremendous. Sucked into a treacle whirlpool...muscles molten...and...lactic acid...kicking in.

One minute to go. Head tucked into my hands and the treacle has worked it's way into my legs and is traversing the length and breath of my body; chest, arms, shoulders and neck. Trying desperately to push down on the foot paddles. It's getting more and more difficult. Now the winds above are blowing down on my shoulders, hardening the treacle into toffee.

Vision narrowed and blurred, the muscles in my throat have contracted, leaving a pin head of a hole, for oxygen to pass through.

Just can't breath.

Counting the seconds, each hangs in the air for what seems like an eternity.

A hammer begins bashing the insides on my cranium.

Vibrating, my body is on the threshold of imploding.

Holding on.

Grimacing.

Can't push the paddles down

Limbs have hardened into toffee

...9,8,7,6,5,4,3...2...2...1...1...1...0.

Legs buckled. I huff and puff.

Can't breathe or move.

The gym spins me round and round.

Like a fairground ride.

But this is no fun anymore.

I need to get off.



#### 7.46 Karen

I met Karen—aged 35 and the mother of two young children—on two separate occasions. The second time round, I caught up with her after she had finished the last of her thrice-weekly swim sessions. She spoke passionately about her love of water; the space it gave her from everyday commitments—college work and the stress of being a single parent, amongst other things—as well as the physical sensation of her body moving in the water, a feeling of being at one, of moving with the flow.

Karen was not particularly active as a kid. Throughout her teens she smoked, drank and ate whatever she fancied. It was back in the late 1980's after a summer of working in Jersey, "...which was basically months on end of general hedonism" that things began to change.

A week or so later she started doing aerobics and signed up to a 'Weight-Watchers' programme, "I was about 19, it was my first year of exercise. I became determined to get fit and healthy, but I think it was also tied in with the concept of beauty as well, like I went on a diet even though I was lighter than I should have been for my age and height. So then it got blurred, all the boundaries were blurred. I recognised that I needed to be healthy, but it was also about having a size 8, size 10 body you know. For a while, I would oscillate between the two extremes. I'd be the world fat queen or in complete self-denial. Like I'd weigh out an ounce of All Bran for breakfast, have a lettuce leaf and cottage cheese for lunch and like going mad with exercise. So I'd end up like emaciated. There was no balance there. I think it was related to a lot of personal, emotional and family unhappiness, and trying to address it, like it was about self destruction a lot of the time, but abstinence can be as self destructive, that kind of denial, as much as any kind of excessive behaviour."

Chatting over this period of her life, she strongly believes that the 1980's were a peculiar decade for women. Do you remember the 1980's?

Aged 23 Karen heard the pitter-patter of tiny feet. She gave birth to her first child. This event had a dramatic and irreversible influence on her, "Yeah, I did 'Step' for a while but I wasn't convinced that it was so good, so I used to do gentler things up until the birth. Alex was two weeks overdue and I was the size of an elephant, I was just so uncomfortable. I remember thinking '*I will never take my body for granted again*'. I will always cherish the fact that I've got mobility and not forget the joy of exercise and being able to use the body."

Later on Karen told me that after having her first kid, she spent a lot of time getting to re-know her body "It wasn't now about living the life I wanted, or striving for a body that had shape. It was more about being able to push a pram up a hill, whilst carrying five shopping bags. I needed that basic fitness. I loved being pregnant but it was so debilitating. I don't think you



realise, I think you think you're going to have a baby and you'll be skipping down the street straight after, but it just isn't like that. It tore my body apart and knocked me for six."

Karen told me that pregnancy taught her first hand about the fragility of her bodily self, "I think the motivation was different. It wasn't about like wanting to fit into those trousers, it was about going 'Oh my God', it sounds awful, but things go, like I'd laugh and I'd wet my pants (LAUGHS) it was like 'Oh my God, I'm incontinent, I need to do something to sort this out'. So it was about trying to get all of those things back in the right place. I don't think you can ever, fully, but it was about trying to feel that I was a whole person again, with all of my faculties. It sounds terrible doesn't it? But these are things that aren't addressed. Nobody talks about them. It's quite scary, it makes you realise just how fragile you are and how important it is, you know, to keep yourself well just for day to day activities, and for that you need your body don't you. So it was about trying to retain, it was about going 'OK, I'm a mother, but I'm still Karen and I want to remember some of that person I was before these two bodies inhabited mine and took it all to bits'."

She spoke candidly about her bodily journey, the 'ups' and 'downs' of motherhood and the changing role of exercise in her life. One of the most striking lesson that the passage of time had gifted her, had to do with the transient nature of human life and particularly, the fleshy body in these times "Yeah, I think the weight thing's an obsession, like for my friend it's about the weight whereas I always say it's about how I feel you know. Often, because of things like the media, people are trying to attain an ideal that is unattainable in terms of body shape and weight. The thing is, as you get older those things don't matter so much anyway. I mean, I don't think fitness culture is as masochistic as it used to be like in the 80's with the Jane 'Don't stop till you drop' Fonda thing.

"Having said that, it's taken on a much more sinister framework now, in terms of surgical enhancement, it's almost become so extreme that women recognise those images as just being completely artificial. They don't empower you, the images that you see. It's just laughable you know. Every woman knows that they're airbrushed and sili-conned, nipped and tucked. Models are so incredibly young and thin that most women see those as either computer generated or as images of *girls*, but that is not WOMEN. So in many ways, as long as the backlash is there we'll become much more relaxed, or maybe again that's an age thing. Maybe it's just as you get older you give up that ideal because it's empty, it's nothing you know, it doesn't mean anything."

Before we left one another the second time round, Karen drew my attention to an elderly lady she used to see at the swimming pool. She recalled a story about this lady. Maybe you'd like to hear it?



You know, there used to be this old woman who swam at the University, she must be dead now. The first time I saw her I was about 20.

I remember feeling really horrified at seeing this naked woman, cos she must have been in her 80's. I'd look at her body and think 'Oh my God!' because she just looked so hideous. But gradually, over time, my perception changed.

As I got older I found myself respecting her.

I mean she could hardly walk, but every time I was in that swimming pool she'd be there.

She was so old her skin was kind of translucent, you could see like every vein and she was also arthritic, so it was obviously very difficult for her, but she'd be there with her costume on and her hat.

As the years passed by I was really moved seeing this.

So yeah, there's a fear about getting older and not being able to do things in the same way, I've recognised that.

But now I just think through life, even if you are physically able, other things can encroach. So yeah, that's a fear. I know there'll be a day when I won't be able to do these things, but then that's just life isn't it?

That's another reason why I think you shouldn't be too excessive with exercise, because you don't want to wear your body out, it's with you for life, so everything in moderation. I mean hopefully I'll be that old woman, hobbling to the poolside until the day I take my last breath. But then again, there's no guarantee *is there?*''

#### **7.52.5 Changing room chatter. Women's talk: Part three**

**...I think young people are, without any shadow of a doubt a lot more obsessed with their appearance and weight than 10 years ago...But there's a lot more problems because of that, because they're all worried about what other people think of them...So many develop eating disorders and exercise excessively. It's doing their body good because they're becoming physically stronger and fitter, but mentally their self esteem is probably at nil, cos they're constantly trying to achieve these socially set standards of personal appearance...My flat mate does that, she used to have anorexia, she's always in the gym, every single day she's in the gym and she's really, really thin anyway for her height, she's much thinner than she should be**



*and she's always eating healthily, but, she could be eating her meat and two veg but she'll cut out certain things that are good for you, cos she thinks it will make her put on weight...* I know its a bit of a new thing, but I mean the Spice Girls, mega status, you know, your super models, Kate Moss and if you look at the super models of years gone by, like Cindy Crawford and Claudia Schiffer and that, they're quite big girls, whereas now we've got the waifs and I know they're kind of taking the emphasis off that now but, you know, the fashion is very gaunt, very sort of heroin chic...**Do you reckon that puts people off, from actually going to the gym?**...What do you mean, the people who don't feel that they conform to those sort of stereotypes?...*Yeah...* I think in the past there was that kind of like 'Oh, if you go to the gym its full of girls in skin tight bikinis and tops and Lycra', but there's so many gyms now I think that stereotype's been a little bit sort of overcome. I think people want to look good a lot more than what they fear looking silly or out of place in the gym. That want to conform is so great, that they will overcome their fear of going to the gym...

#### **7.52.6 Changing room chatter. Men's talk: Part two**

*...I'm reading a lot about how fat and sedentary everybody's getting, there this sort of body culture where you get magazines like Men's Health, and it's just very discouraging in the sense that it's giving you these things to achieve that you could never dream of. Making yourself thinner or more toned, more vigorous, virile, the whole thing. It's like this sort of 'Superman' thing. I sometimes wonder if we're subject to pressures like having to achieve a perfect level of health, and if you don't you've somehow failed...* Isn't this pressure that women have been under for years?...*Years and years, yeah...* **Well, since the media really invaded our culture, and it's just getting to us now...** *Yeah, and I just wondered whether that's involved in making some people exercise heavily...* One of the main reasons I started was cos of vanity. Before I was skinny and I had no chest, you can get away with that when you're young, but you get to about 23, 24 and pale and thin doesn't cut it any more, (EVERYONE LAUGHS)...*I wanted to get in tone, I think the worst thing that really triggered me off was the sense that I didn't have, I didn't have the right kind of tone and I think more than muscle, having...* **Like shape?**...*Well, just so that you don't look as if your body's hanging. I didn't want to feel embarrassed if I had to take my clothes off in front of somebody, I wanted the constant feeling that I looked OK you know, I think that's instrumental in my exercising...* *Yeah...* **Definitely, there's an element of that...** *I started exercising cos I was fat and I thought 'I've got to do something about it'. I lost over 2 stone when I started doing it and kept it up cos I felt a lot better for it...* I used to get back pains from sitting at a desk, but since I started the gym there's been no trouble at all, so that was a



definite incentive to keep going, you know what I mean cos, once the vanity thing starts to recede there are other benefits...

### **7.37 Part seven: And relax!**

Drenched in perspiration and with towel round my neck I hold a bottle of cold water up to my mouth bought from the vending machine opposite, and knock it back like there's no tomorrow. Leant up against the locker my only wish is to lie down and fall asleep, but the key digging into my shoulder blade, is instructing, "Come on mate, get your towel and go and have a sauna and shower yourself off. You'll feel better for it...Well?"

Summoning the energy, I make my way to the sauna. Passing through the hydrotherapy suite along the way, the sudden contrast in atmosphere plays havoc with my head. The strong chlorine vapour, which lingers in this humidity, enters into my pores and makes me feel sick. Walking past the teaching pool, I notice a group of OAPs in the middle of an aqua-aerobics lesson. My sudden presence startles them and I hear the instructor commenting, "Let's wait for this young man to pass through and then we'll begin the next exercise. I said...we'll begin the next exercise, shortly. Can you here me at the back Doreen? Doreen!"

With arms folded underneath my chin, I close my eyes and melt into the pine veneer bench. Very quickly, within seconds it seems, I drift off into the nether reaches of my mind, off into the slumber-lands I float. The door opens and I'm awoken, turning my head to the right, I notice a middle-aged chap who is sporting this huge belly, which is partially covered by the colourful towel, draped around him. He says hello and asks if it is alright to pour some water on the burning charcoal, I nod and close my eyes once more, too tired to make conversation. Aggh, so pleasant so sweet, so utterly warm. The red-hot rays, penetrate, radiate, deep into my bones. Massaging muscles, cleansing cuticles and pores, the toxins rise to the surface, expelled once more. I lay in comfortable throes. I roll up into a ball, glowing, snuggled up in my Scandinavian retreat.

Having spent a good ten minutes in the sauna you find me standing underneath a traditional cold shower. You know the ones, just a chain levering a tin bucket. Splaaaaaash....aggh...cold...penetrating...droplets of water drip down the back of my neck and into the spinal ridge, trickling wet particles, tickling my spine and I scream silently...no more! I pick up my towel and venture into the shower area. Feeling much fresher and definitely more awake after my enforced cold shower, the shivers of which, I still feel, deep in my bodily core.

I've showered and changed. Placing my sweat soaked kit in a plastic bag, now, just a fleeting memory of my workout. I tie my shoelaces and shake my hair, like a dog jumping out of



a river, before walking to the mirror and doing my hair. As I stare into the silver reflective glass, I breathe in a sigh of satisfaction and procure a smile from the make-up box in my face, then venture back into the reception and into the coffee shop by the entrance, overlooking the first floor gym space.

“Do you want that milky?” As it is, is fine. Taking the mug of hot chocolate off the counter. I find a seat. I can feel a fireball in the lumbar part of my spine, which is aggravating me a little. But, I’m used to it, it’s an old injury I picked up at school, whilst playing rugby, and is something which doesn’t seem to want to go away...ever. Right, I’m getting out of here. Hitting the road. Back into the jungle. I’ll meet with you soon, I guess!



# **Chapter Seven**

## **Part Two**



## 7.6 A postcard from the metropolis: The weekend approaches

A Mersey ferry comes into dock. The captain, with binoculars in hand, scans the glorious waterfront and zooms in on the Liver building. At the front and back of the stone structure, there are two clock towers that rise up skywards, into the clouds. The iron hands on the clock faces have turned well over 100 revolutions since Monday, and now here in Friday, the end of the week beckons. Inch by inch, the little hand moves closer to the transition point. Down below in the streets, the people wait in anticipation to let go of the weekly patterns and...

In the nearby business district, office workers rush through their last telephone calls, crossing off the remaining tasks, tidying their desks, struggling to contain their pending relief, every few seconds checking their watches, eager to disperse. On Church Street, shop assistants stand at the doors turning people away, "I'm sorry, we're about to close..." whilst others herd the shoppers to the checkouts. At the accident and emergency unit in the hospital, the nurses gear themselves up for the casualties of the night time economy. In one of the city's bars, the day shift deals with the early bird drinkers, now tipsy, whilst the manager braces herself for the flock of workers that will congregate, shortly.

The drivers parked up in Paradise street bus station anticipate the bedlam, in the end of week rush hour. In the lecture theatre, the Professor maintains an air of composure yet inside she's busting to get out of the heat. In the back, students whisper and mumble, both teacher and students are eager to leave. And in the library, a student pens the last words in her essay, takes out her mobile phone and checks the water: **wot u doin now? fncy a drnk? am in nd of releef...**

The time approaches...telephones down, collars loosened, walkman on and press play, in the car winding the window down, pumping Hip-Hop and R 'n' B flavas into the streets. Buses are brimming, bars are heaving, people eager to get home and unwind, others content to frequent the nearest pub, marking the beginning of the weekend adventure, "Where will we end up?"

The hours pass by...6...7...8...9...10pm. Nature's lamp fades and makes way for the twilight hour, before the man made fairy lights illuminate the city sprawl. Taxis shuttle the folk to and fro, twisting and turning through the roads, and inside the cabs people sing, laugh and joke. Passing a street on the city's boundaries, we hear youngsters getting ready to hit the bars, pubs and clubs. The radio is on and the dial is turning...This is 107.6 City fm...If you're travelling into town tonight don't forget that there's a 2-for-1 drinks offer at the Arena bar, all night long. I'll be playing at the 051 later on with Lee Butler, so if you like your music happy...97-99fm Radio One...Hi I'm Judge Jules and you're listening to the essential selection, next in the mix is the new one from Cosmic gate. This is the soundtrack to the weekend...



Funky beats...urban streets...radio on loud...pumped up to the max...make-up going on...bottles of booze opened and...going down a treat "...can't wait to get to the bars, I wonder who I'll meet? Maybe tonight I'll bump into Mr. Right?, yeah right!"

Down the road, some students take a hit from the bong. Getting into their zone, they become one with the super skunk, very soon they'll be floating into town Maaan, hoping not to bump into the beer boys. You see, they're nice and safe, don't want no aggro, just happy to chill, watch the world do its thing, have a beer and smoke some blow, "Please no, no aggro!" One of them opens the window, peers out into the darkened sky and exhales.

Up above circling in the sky, a police helicopter shines a spotlight down on the student house, "They're after me, they've spotted the bong..." But tonight they're off the hook. In search of much bigger stashes, the police chopper scans the night lit urban playground. In search of gangsters, which frequent the world, below. The underworld. In full force tonight. Out on the town, with guns in the boot and bags of cocaine up the nose, they do shoot. They're kings of the streets, driving BM's and Merc's in search of a buzz, drop off some pills to a Scally drug dealer in a quiet side road, then off to bang some pussy before maiming some pissed up bloke. "But not tonight..." the helicopter pilot chuckles, locking in on the shiny car, tonight this gangster, won't get far...

Heading down to earth again, we float back into the urban sprawl. On Matthew street (one of the main bar areas), neon lights illuminate the bar facades, flashing in time with the tunes that blast through the speakers. An amalgamation of sounds, each bar a time machine, taking you back to the 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's and the noughties! In the middle of the street, people pass to the left and the right, some are giddy and happy, whilst a couple of "yoofs," are up for a fight. An ambulance light flashes and stops outside Flannagans bar, on the street, amongst the puke and broken glass, blood pours out of a man's neck. A female onlooker screams and shouts. In the night-time weekend adventure. All is not rosy and light.

Walking on, you find yourself in a precinct, less congested and quiet. You see a beggar by a bench with his hands open and head down. You walk towards him. You look down and catch a glimpse of his John Travolta-esque dancing shoes

He looks up, smiles

"I've been waiting for you. Fancy a dance?"

"Then, come this way..."



## 7.7 A trip to the club

### 7.71 Part one: Getting ready

Press 'open' and pop CD in. Waiting for the green light to flash. Fiddle with the bass knob. The light changes and a vo-coded voice exclaims "Welcome to radio Soulwax, we hope you enjoy our DJ set..." Turning the volume to three-quarters I take a step back and hold my arms up, pretending to be a conductor in a concert hall. The first beats drop in and a smile alights, my face. "Turn it up babe I can't hear it in here..." that's my girlfriend, she's in the bedroom getting changed. We're off out clubbing tonight, our first time for a month or so and not a moment too soon.

There are butterflies circling within my lower chamber, caressing my intestines and tickling my heart, the night is young and I can't wait for the action to...start. Know what I'm saying? With towel round my waist I look down at the bed and and pick up my favorite clubbing T-shirt. Rubbing my face in the cotton garment, I get a whiff of eau de Daz-automatic, umm fresh, "Come on slow coach get a shift on the taxi will be here in a minute."

T-shirt and trousers on, old school trainers laced up nice and tight, I look into the mirror and have a word with myself...you're looking damn sexy if I do say so myself... why thank you...where do you come from?...oh I live near by...what you up to tonight? I'll be on my local dance floor, ripping it up with moves so sexy you'd want to eat my feet for dinner...well I might see you there then...you betcha.

But we need to get a shift on. But hang on! I thought that's what I'm trying to get away from. The clock that ticks "No time no time at all."

Well fuck you mister time-piece.

The beats coming out of the speakers are gonna be calling the shots.

Tick-tock...Tick-tock....Tick....Tock

I said...

"Relax...don't fight it"

Looking down at the coffee table. Pick up two pieces of card...*BUGGED OUT! Presents a night of fucked up beats and twisted rhythms for the more discerning amongst you – doors 10PM-4AM*. This night's been running for about five years or so, they have events all over Britain. In Liverpool, the night takes place in a hangar type building in the city centre and has enough space for 2,000 gyrating bodies. I like the ethos behind this night. They have a wide selection of house and techno music as well as a loyal following of regular punters. What is more



there's no dress code, appearances aren't important. You go as you please. Some nights in town you really have to make an effort. But I often don't feel comfortable dancing in shoes. I hate all this waiting about. It's like being in no-man's land. I just want to feel the music in my bones, and all those happy people. Just can't wait to meet.

...BEEP BEEP. "That's the cab, you ready? You got everything?" yep. You look beautiful Jan, "Thanks." Let's have a blinding night, yeah? "Too right!" BEEP BEEP.

Say goodbye to the cats...music off...lights off and out of the door we go. Catch up with you soon. I'm so excited...and I just can't hide it...I'm about to lose control and I think I like it...

## **7.8 Let's meet some clubbers**

### **7.81 Richard and Andrea: Part two**

It's about 10:30pm. On this summer evening we find ourselves walking down Seel street, one of the main bar areas in the city centre. Revellers pass from one bar to another, some are already sloshed, whilst taxis drop off new editions dressed up for the weekend, eager to quench their thirst and let their hair down. Passing the 'Palace' shopping centre on our left, we approach a public square full of party-goers who spill out of the adjoining bars with drinks in hand. Outside one of the bars, huge speakers boom out 'Scouse House' (a brand of uplifting cheesy dance music).

Somewhere in the crowd are Andrea and Richard, who we met earlier on in the week (7.43). Andrea is out with some of her mates from work and Richard is with his girlfriend and some college friends. Let's get a drink and catch up with them. What are you having? Are you sure?

Dressed in a blue crop top and black silk trousers, Andrea is sat on the steps outside 'Modo' bar, holding a bottle of beer. She looks quite merry. Andrea has been going out clubbing for about five years, and goes whenever she has time, which isn't that often at the moment because she usually has to work on Saturdays and Sundays. Tonight is the first time she's been out with her mates for over a month.

As the conversation proceeds, people push past us eager to get to the bar. Most are well humoured, but some look a little worse for wear, and are causing a little bit of trouble, shouting abuse and what have you. Andrea takes a swig from her beer, "You know, it's completely different to being in a club, like here everyone's bladdered, falling about and burning you with their ciggie and spilling drinks on you and leching. But in a club, everyone's a lot more considerate."



Some of Andrea's friends are dancing by the steps and egging her on to come join them. Giggling away, Andrea continues, "I suppose it's got something to do with the music. Like in a club, everyone's there for the music, and the atmosphere is amazing. You can't get that, anywhere else. You can dance in your room and feel dead good, but being in a massive club with so many people who are experiencing the music with you, nothing surpasses it, it's amazing."

A friend grabs hold of Andrea's arm and pulls her into the circle, she shakes her hips a little, smiles, twirls, turns and faces us, "It's just, the feeling when you're there is just happiness. It's like..." she picks up her drink and takes another swig, "...you can't really describe it. Like imagine a tune building up, you can feel it in your body, it gets faster and faster and around you, people are cheering cos they know the tune, and then it kicks in and everyone starts jumping about. But it's more than a word, you can't put a word or a phrase on it."

Andrea normally drinks water to keep herself hydrated on the dance-floor. She has taken ecstasy and speed, but on the whole she feels it's exciting enough, just getting off on the atmosphere, "You've got no inhibitions. You just dance and you don't care whether people are looking at you cos everyone's doing the same thing, just dancing like a lunatic. But no one cares. It's like another person comes out of you. Like I'm quite calm and subdued, but when you go clubbing, you can let go."

"I just love the feeling you get when you dance, it's like all me friends say 'You're going to be on the dance floor with your zimmer frame', cos I love it that much..." Andrea's friends are signalling to her to come over. They want to go to another bar. "As long as I can keep doing it, I'll do it, I mean I've got friends in the 30's who go clubbing. I mean, my mum occasionally comes out and she's 41. So yeah. It just makes you feel so alive, and that feeling carries over to the next week as well." Andrea looks over to her mates, but they seem to have slipped off...

Picking up our drinks, we turn and walk up the concrete steps behind us. Up high we have the survey over the crowd and begin looking for Richard. Oh yeah, he's over there by the corner. Come on let's see what he's up to. Richard is sitting on a bench with his girlfriend, Sarah. They are with another two couples and are celebrating Sarah's birthday. They are all in high spirits, and are having a celebratory drink before going to a club night, which takes place in an old theatre, just down the road.

"The first time I went out was when I was 16, me and me mates were at the school prom and it was crap, so we went into town. I mean cos I look older than I am, I'd been to bars before, but it was the first time in a proper club, and the instant I walked in, it just all clicked. I mean I think it was to do with the music and atmosphere. Like I was used to going into bars and things kicking off, you know. But in a good club you know you're in a safe atmosphere, you're relaxed



and that means you can have a good laugh with people. You don't feel threatened by anyone, that's what makes you enjoy it so much.

"I don't do drugs every time. I can have a good night without them, whereas some people I know through university, they take them every time they go to have a good night. If somebody's got tablets, I don't buy them personally but if somebody's got them and they offer me one, I'll take it, but I never take more than one. It just gives you more energy. It's not like when you smoke weed, you go daft and you're laughing at everything. It's like with ecstasy you've still got your wits about you."

Richard feels particularly strongly about the way in which the issue of drugs is swept under the carpet by the government. He believes that as long as drugs such as ecstasy, are illegal, people will never be sure what they are taking, "I mean put it this way, if the government legalised ecstasy, they could control the tablets we're taking, so that you'd know what you were taking. But the way they're going now, people are coming up with tablets, they don't know what's in it, you don't know what's in it, you don't know how much to take. And that's when you get problems. So, it's about quality control. But as it is, no one knows what's in the tablets they take."

Richard's mobile rings, it's his one of his mates. Somewhere down the line Richard got the information mixed up and was supposed to meet up with the guy ten minutes ago. The group is slightly unsettled by this, and the mood changes. Now in a rush "I don't know, I mean the thing with clubbing, what makes it so unique like, is erm, you meet so many different types of people, you know, they're into all sorts of different things and I think it sort of does cut off your prejudice, your prejudices you know. And because you're meeting so many different people you start to think 'Well what's right and what's wrong?' you know. There's nothing else like it in my life. Nothing compares to it. Like you go out, you go to a club, have a dance and all that and get a real buzz going. I don't think I get that in any other part of life. No."

Richard and his gang look at one another and a smile washes over the group. They say goodbye and make their way through the crowd, excited to be going for a dance. Right. Where next?

## **7.9 More bits and pieces**

### **7.91 The 'Cream' of Liverpool**

It's 4am in the morning and we are in the heart of the city centre. A police car is patrolling the streets. Two men see the approaching vehicle and tiptoe into a side alley. As the patrol car moves on, the men get to work. One takes a fly-poster out of a bag whilst the other



begins brushing the poster the glue. In the time it's taken you to read this, the poster has been stuck on the wall of a bank, besides other posters, advertising club nights within the region. They move on to another illegal advertising space.

Zooming in. We can make out the details of the fly poster. The advert seems to be for a large outdoor dance music festival, called 'Creamfields', taking place at the old airport in August. Organised by 'Cream,' a Liverpool based clubbing organisation, this event has been running for about seven years. It is one of many outdoor dance festivals that have become a regular fixture in dance culture's summer season. The story of Cream tells us something about contemporary club culture in Liverpool. But also as one of the first, so called 'Superclubs,' responsible for giving club culture such a mass appeal, their tale gives us one insight into the rise of the contemporary dance scene in the imagination of the British youth, over the last decade.

Cream opened up in 1992 and was the brainchild of three local lads, James Barton, Andy Carroll and Darren Hughes, who had all been inspired by dance music, through their involvement with the Acid house scene, and their regular trips to the legendary Manchester club, 'The Hacienda.' They had all been central figures in the early years of the city's electronic dance scene, opening 'The State' and 'Quadrant Park,' two of the city's first rave clubs. They closed down at the start of the 90's, due to drug dealing and gangster activity. In 1992, the three began a new night at the Nation complex, five minutes walk from here, as a way of filling the void, determined to keep the city's dance energy alive.

Cream was just an outlet for us to stay in dance music, for me to continue to DJ...(For the opening night we counted 450 people), that 450 dwindled to 250 the week after. I DJ'd that week and I remember playing a brilliant set, but at the same time thinking, 'This is not gonna happen.' But then it steadily grew: we put another 50 in the next week, another 100 the next week, and within nine months to a year we were selling out, 900 people a week. It was a great vibe...Then we did a Boxing Night party and it went through the roof. We must have locked a thousand people out. Completely ballistic, ticket touts outside, which is always a good sign. We steamed through the rest of the year, it was flying. We got to the point where we were turning away more than we were letting in. It became the worst-kept secret (James Barton, quoted in Du Noyer, 2002, p.202).

On the back of this success, the organisers decided to extend the premises to an adjoining warehouse, increasing the capacity to over 2000. As well as alterations to the venue, they established Cream, the company and brand, and invested heavily on advertising the night in



national and international magazines, as well as increasing the commercial profile of the club (Garratt, 1998).

The commercial success of the club was to become synonymous with a new era of UK club culture, and at the forefront of the global commercial dance culture explosion. Alongside the likes of Ministry of Sound in London and Gatecrasher in Sheffield, Cream heralded the birth of the 'Superclub' era in the UK. Rave culture moved from being a series of subversive underground tales, which had taken form in the metropolis, to touching the lives of kids in towns and villages, via the marketing strategies of big business—a respectable face of youth leisure. By the middle of the 1990's, the Cream emblem, a reworking of the Chinese yin-yang motif, had entered into the pantheon of youth culture iconography. Brandished on jackets, t-shirts, baseball caps and mix CD's, played by eager teenagers, given their first glimpse of club culture. At the start of the millennium, Cream had become a global brand.

We do about 250 Cream events around the world...We're in Japan once a month, we're in Argentina once a month, Australia too. We're absolutely everywhere...We have a music division which does about a million compilation albums a year. We have record deals around the world. And we have a fledging little media business, a small TV production company, some radio licence applications. It will grow dramatically. My long-term plan is to create a music and media business, which not only operates Cream but is involved in other things as well

(James Barton, quoted in Du Noyer, 2002, p.204).

In Liverpool the clubbing phenomenon has become extremely influential in the regeneration of the night time economy, with people travelling from all over the country, staying in the city's hotels, eating the restaurants, shopping and drinking in the bars. More generally, club culture is an important player in the urban tourist industry, throughout Britain. To give some indication of the impact of dance culture on city life, a survey conducted by John Moores University in 1996, showed that over 70% of first year students chose to come to Liverpool because of its night life, specifically, because of Cream (Garratt, 1998). More recently the City Council has adopted Cream as one of its cultural ambassadors, in its successful bid to become European capital of culture in 2008, depicting the city's club scene as being on the cutting edge of global youth culture and musical innovation.

Over the last 15 years, rave culture has undergone a remarkable journey. In many ways the staging of huge outdoor dance festivals, which have become a prominent aspect of the contemporary clubbing calendar takes us full circle, back to the halcyon Acid House days,



typified by large warehouse parties and outdoor events, which kick started the British rave revolution, back in 1987.

The birth of Cream came at the end of the 'illegal' era of the rave story, whereby the oppressive Conservative government, via targeted legislation, most noticeably the Criminal Justice Act of 1994, effectively banned the running of outdoor rave events. This forced the scene indoors, into the clubs, into the container, and under the surveillance and tighter control of the authorities. By acting in the capacity of a business and working closely with the local council and police, the likes of Cream have helped to bring an air of respectability and legitimacy to the scene and turn it into a mainstream leisure past time of the masses.

The City Council have been a great partner for us. We've had our ups and downs but they've supported us when we've had issues with licences and the police. Cream has had problems, dealing with drugs and gangsters. And to be fair, unlike what happened in Manchester with the Hacienda, Cream was protected by its City Council and by Merseyside Police  
(Barton cited in Du Noyer, 2002, p.206).

Despite the increasing acceptability of this youth movement it cannot be overlooked that it is illegal for groups of over one hundred people to dance to electronic drumbeats in outdoor public spaces without a license. The very fact that commercial dance festivals such as Cream, are positively endorsed by the council, does say something of the growing acceptability of the scene, by the authorities and society at large. It is a marker of how far the scene has come. But this isn't the whole story. We may remember that at the beginning of this walk, we saw a game of cat and mouse taking place between the fly poster gang and the police patrol car. This is revealing. Fly posters are illegal in Britain, yet we see them all over the metropolis. They form part of the urban collage, illegal, *yet* accepted on the streets. The city would be changed irrevocably without them, as would the lives of the young urban population, without clubbing. But, at the heart of this phenomenon there lives a fundamental contradiction, club culture is not only an acceptable face of youth leisure, here at the start of the twenty-first century, it is also an inherently *illegal* one.

## **7.72 Part two: Standing in the queue**

Passing through suburbia and into the night-time urban sprawl, in our taxi we sit with bodies touching and arms linked, the amber glow from the street lamps above, like candles flickering in the warm stillness of this summer eve, soothing our souls, welcoming, soft and gentle, hearts aglow.



Approaching the city gates the taxi driver hangs a left onto Berry Street. Neon lights—green, blue, pink and red—and revelers—young and old—adorn the streets, welcoming us into this adult fairground. The daytime maze of this metropolis, transformed, decorated, sheds it's skin. From the depths of the city's soul, overcome with the habitual strains of the race to keep apace, it loosens its grip and lets rip to reveal a magical night-time picture. A labyrinth imbued with mystery and adventure. Just around the corner party-goers step into the unknown, between the lights and shadows we venture with merriment and wonder, for just around the corner a...surprise...who knows?

“OK kids, I'm gonna drop you off by Mello Mello, there's not a cat's chance in hell of being able to turn around up there.” Taking a fiver from my jacket I pay the driver. Keep the change mate, “Nice one guys. Enjoy your night.” Stepping out into the spring night, we make the short walk to the club. Getting nearer now, we see in the distance the tail end of the queue. Looking at one another the butterflies inside break out of our chests, together they flutter and dance before embracing, wings touch, I place my arm around Jan's shoulder. In the corner of my eye I see Jan's face awaken, for we both know that just around this corner...

Standing in the line about fifty strong, a light breeze ripples through the alley. Waiting in anticipation, the muffled bass from the club's one million pound 'Phazon' sound system penetrates the wall we are leant up against. Teasing and serenading. *Can you feel it?* The excitement builds and all around people are bobbing up and down. A bouncer with a black puffa jacket paces the queue, “I hope you've all got tickets, cos tonight's a sell-out. Yep that'll do.” Behind us, a lad dressed up as a school-girl, with pig tails and painted on freckles is cuddling up to a girl. Her hair is dyed pink and she has bright flared trousers on, her nose and eyelid are pierced and when I catch her eye she pokes her tongue out at me, to reveal a flashing yellow neon bar. I smile and she nods her head. This mood is infectious. The bouncer opens the door and a sigh of relief washes over the queue. We are now just five metres from the door. Are you ready?

Inside the foyer a security person pads me down checking my person for drugs, before stepping aside. Now, by the entrance I see Jan, who cannot hide her excitement any longer, she's waving her hands in front of her, “Come on let's get in.” Yeah lets!

A heavy throbbing bass noise reverberates and pierces my chest. The bass thuds. Oops. Someone's just pulled the cork out of my bottle. The excitement and nerves flow out...of an orifice. Pardon me! I unzip my jacket and breathe a sigh of relief. Yes, we're in, I whisper. Making our way through the crowd that has congregated in the bar area, we soak up the funky beats and rhythms, looking from left to right bodies dance and twirl, enticing us to unwind. As we



queue for the cloakroom, our heads swing from side to side. The guy takes our coats and we move into the heat of the dance floor, my palms are sweating and my pulse is rising.

We are ready to play!

*Can you feel it?*

## 7.82 Heather

We're on an estate in north Liverpool waiting for a lift. Inside number 27 is our driver Heather, aged 22. She's going to pick up her mate, Louise and then her boyfriend, Simon. Heather has been a raver for some seven years. Heather goes clubbing about once a month. It has only been in the last year that her best mate Louise has been going out with them. Louise is a single parent, in clubbing she's found an avenue in which to partially come to terms with her lot, as well as gain some space from the pressures of bringing up two kids on her own. As Heather told me awhile back, "She's on anti-depressants at the moment cos she's been feeling dead down you know. Looking forward to the weekend is the thing that gives her the will to go on."

I'll go and knock. The door opens and standing there is a young woman, with mousey-brown hair, about five foot seven and approximately 13 stone. Sitting in the car heading down Rice lane with the glow of the street lights covering the road like an amber duvet, Heather begins chatting, "Yeah, I love dancing, I've always, since I was a little girl. But it wasn't until I met my boyfriend that I got into it properly." At the junction where Rice lane meets with County Road, we see some youngsters, cueing up outside a cheesey night-club. "When you go to some of these Ritzy clubs you feel like you have to impress the men, and they look at you, they pinch your bum and try and prove their masculinity. When I go out I want to have a good time. At a *proper* club no-one pinches your bum, they shake your hand and they're mates with you, you know what I mean, they're not interested in copping off, they're just want to be your friend. That's from a women's point of view I guess" Heather quips.

"You go to different types of clubs and you gradually learn that you've got to accept people the way they are. I mean there used to be a guy who came in a wheelchair and it made me dead happy that, you know. He's making the effort to come to a club and everyone's making him feel dead welcome..." she pauses for awhile and changes gear, "...and that's what I enjoy about these sort of clubs, no one judges you. If you're at a decent like proper club, everyone's your mate and you know. I'm making them sound perfect but they are perfect for me. I think you can be accepted more because people aren't interested in your size and your looks, they're just interested in if you're having a good time or not. So you feel encouraged by everyone around you to just let-go that little bit more."



We are only ten minutes from Lou's. "Well I've been on a diet for ages now like, and I've lost like, I think it's three stone or something like that. I mean I go to the gym now and again, but when I go out dancing it hit's me weight you know, the calories are burning. So I suppose that is an aspect of it yeah, thinking of the calories that I'm burning when I am dancing. But that's not me biggest concern. If I was to dance and not burn off any calories I'd still dance cos I *enjoy* it so much."

We are approaching Lou's street. Heather finds a spot and we park up. "I'm quite scared of meeting new people, I'm very nervous. Once I know them I'm fine, I can chat away for hours but meeting new people, I'm a bit paranoid of and I feel like when you go to a club, it takes the edge of it. It might be because you can't have a proper conversation cos the music's blasting so you can just shake hands and walk away sort of thing, but its like you don't have to talk properly. I'm trying to think of what I've gained out of it, just an open mind I'd say, yeah, I've learned that people are different and you know, everyone's different and you should accept people the way they are."

We get out of the car and make the short walk the house. The door opens and we walk in, Lou has just put her young children in bed, the babysitter is sitting in the living room, we say hi and then walk into the kitchen.

Heather and Lou have opened up a can of Red Bull each and begin giggling. Heather takes a spliff from her jacket and gives it to Lou, "Go on girl take this it will take the edge off it." So you take drugs then when you go out? "Well if you can call a spliff drugs, then yeah. But that's all. I don't take ecstasy, coke or speed. I mean I don't take them cos I've got epilepsy you know, I wouldn't take the risk of it. But, I think if you haven't got a medical condition or you know you're safe taking the drug, then why not? I don't know, it might be a stupid opinion but I feel like every time you see someone who's on alcohol they're causing more fights, criminal damage and stuff like that.

"I tried an ecstasy tablet when I was 15 or so, cos everyone was raving on about it, it made me feel all loved up, everyone's your mate. I suppose it might be the drug that's amplifying that. But what's the harm in that? I think I've taken about two or three in me life. But it's just not worth the risk with my condition..." Lou buts in, "We don't really need them, the atmosphere is so electric..." "I mean a lot of people would disagree with me but I feel like it's all in the head. I feel like if you want to go out and have a good time, I think if you pretend you're on drugs it can still work you know."



7.92 Autobiographically speaking: Part two  
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Reader's letters, Edited by James the disco alien) Dear James, I sit in my cell in New Hampshire State prison, USA, serving an 8-20 year sentence for conspiracy to possess ecstasy (7000 hits!). Conspiracy! I didn't even have or own the drug. People have been put in prison for many years over a drug that makes you feel happy. I'm 28 years old and sit here surrounded by murderers and rapists. So that's America. If you ever come to the USA, be sure not to get caught with 'E' or even talk about it, it may be your life you trade for it...**FLICK**...(Advert for mobile phone) Sony Ericsson...**FLICK**...

The Balearic island of Ibiza is regarded as one of *the* spiritual homes of global rave culture. Every year, millions of people from every continent descend upon the island, over the summer months, to partake in a hedonistic ritual. Searching for the perfect high, indulging in the pleasures of the body, sharing times with friends and strangers, dancing the nights and the days away, in clubs, on the terraces, under the sun and the moon and the stars, chilling out, and consuming recreational drugs, both legal and illegal.

This experience has been a feature of British youth culture for over a decade now, and recent reports suggest that upwards of quarter of a million young Brits visit the island every year (Bellis, 2000). It is commonly acknowledged as the place that sparked the fuse paper which ignited the events of 1987, which was to give so much momentum to the British rave phenomenon. So, Ibiza has a special place in British rave folklore.

The history of Ibiza's contemporary party scene dates back to the middle of the twentieth century. In the 1960's, the island became an essential stop over on the hippie trail, attracted by its natural beauty and energies, and regarded for centuries as a holy place. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's the island attracted an increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan mix of people; celebrities eager to keep out of the limelight, through to music producers from the U.S., unemployed and bored youths from around Europe, exiled persons, homosexuals etc.

It became a huge melting pot of cultures and creative energies united by the island's receptivity to 'strangers' and their belief in cherishing life and enjoying it. This mixing of culture's extended also to the creation of the Balearic sound, which fused many elements of electronic music, English and American pop, reggae, disco, indie and the emerging sound of House music, produced in Chicago, New York as well as Europe. Accompanying this hybrid soundscape was the introduction of MDMA (or ecstasy) on the island, a drug, which originally had found favour with many of the Island's New Age community, before making its way on to the dance floor.



By the middle of the 1980s, a growing contingent of young people from Britain began to share this experience. For some, Ibiza was to have a deeply profound influence on their lives, so much so that, upon arrival in the UK, they attempted to recreate the vibe. Setting up their own parties and spinning the same mix of tracks. And this was soon to spiral into one of the biggest and fastest growing youth crazes that this country has ever witnessed.

The end of the 1980's, are generally regarded, as one of the low points in the contemporary history of British young people. Living in a country in economic recession after the indulgent and often grotesque economic boom, wrought under the eye of the Thatcher government, a third of people between the age of 16 and 24 found themselves' unemployed (Osgerby, 1998). In 1987 the Conservative government had been elected into power for their fourth consecutive term. At the time, speaking about British life, Mrs Thatcher had proclaimed 'There is no such thing as society, only a collection of individuals.' This was part of the social story that young people had found themselves in, and, it is worth remembering that it was under these circumstances, that the rave phenomenon emerged. Old and emergent worlds were clashing.

By the start of 1988, numerous ad-hoc nights were established up and down the country. In gyms, car parks, pubs, warehouses and fields, in fact, just about anywhere promoters could find a venue. One of the founding club nights in the south of England, 'Schoom', was set up by Danny Rampling, who had been one of those personally touched by his experience of Ibiza.

But it was very spiritual. Some of these moments in the club were unbelievable. People literally went into trance states, including me. Not from the use of drugs, but through the music and human energy that was going around. That was most unique and special. It happens on the plains of Africa and South America, but it's not something that's happened in Britain for centuries

(Danny Rampling, quoted in Garrett, 1998, pp.116).

By the start of the next decade, rave was expanding at an exponential rate. This 'Acid House' period became synonymous with large collectives such as Kaos, Sunrise, World Dance, Helter Skelter and Fantasia, who organised large spectacular events, attracting tens of thousands of people. However, increasing media attention afforded in particular, by the tabloid press, who demonised the dance culture as being amoral and drug fuelled, had a profound influence on the older generation's perception of the culture.

Rave found itself involved in a game of hide and seek with the police and authorities, working on the edges of the legal system, finding loopholes and the like, in order to keep the show running. Yet, despite this game, it was clear that a growing minority of the young British



population were remembering something that had been pushed deep underground in the national psyche. A culture of tribalistic dance and trance, buried since medieval times, was being awoken. And as it grew, it moved from the metropolis and onto the ring-roads, into the towns and villages.

We'd all got our tickets in advance and we headed out on to the M4. The directions were given on a series of phone lines; you were directed to a certain place, say a service station, and then you called for the next set. I remember thinking to myself that I had never seen so many cars...Nothing was coming into London, but hundreds of cars were leaving London in a great convoy...Eventually, we got to the turn-off and found ourselves suddenly in a village side-road. The gardens of the houses came right down the road, and the road was bumper to bumper with cars. There were people standing in their pyjamas and looking out of their windows in their dressing-gowns, wondering what the hell was going on: the sleepy village road suddenly had cars three abreast, all packed with sweaty, gurning kids with their music pumping...We got to the bottom of the road and found it was the entrance to an airfield...There was a huge queue to get inside the main hangar. The security were patrolling the queue saying, 'Don't sell your drugs out here, sell them inside'...It was a huge hangar, absolutely massive, with big spheres hanging from the roof which were being used as screens to project images on to – some trippy, some downright scary. There was what looked like a tube strung from the roof which ran the whole length of the building with pulsating lights and lasers, fire-eaters, unbelievably huge dance platforms and towers...It was incredible

(A raver called Simon, reporting on a 'Sunrise' event in June 1989. Quoted in Harrison, 1998, pp. 141-142).

In 1989, I was 14 years old and my first real impressions of rave culture were beginning to take shape, off the back of three sources. I remember being bombarded with an overload of images and information by way of the tabloid press and the TV news. Everyday for months the newspapers were full of sensational stories about the drugs being taken at raves and the next killer batch of ecstasy tablets that were being devised and about to flood the market. The onslaught was relentless. My mother looked on with alarm.

Another influence came from school. By 1990 a small contingent in my year were regularly making their way to all night parties in and around the M25 London ring road. In the playground they had gained themselves a reputation for being 'dropouts.' Having known them since I was eleven, I couldn't really see what they were doing as being so bad. I mean I was more concerned that they were taking illegal drugs, I feared for their safety. I remember being incredibly health conscious at the time. Taking drugs seemed the antithesis of being healthy. Yet all that I had to go on, in making this assumption, was the information that I was being fed by the tabloid machine. Nevertheless. It scared the living daylight out of me.



As well as the insights from the peer group at school, my best friend's sister, who was a year older than me, had started to get into the scene. Jenny went to school in a London suburb and seemed to be in closer contact with what was going on in the streets. It was no big deal for her, and her bedroom soon became a shrine to the culture, plastered with flyers of raves she'd attended.

She would often let her brother, my best mate, and me, listen to the mix tapes that her DJ mates had produced. The music seemed so different from the soft rock and indie music that accompanied my passage through those teenage years. I wouldn't say that I really enjoyed it, but I couldn't deny that there was an incredible energy to it. I used to say to mates, whenever the topic of rave music came up, 'Well you know, it's alright but it's not really the sort of music you can listen to whilst sitting down', and I suppose that was it, it wasn't. But that's because you were meant to dance to it. My teenage years were fraught by the prospect of getting up and dancing. At every school disco, I would be struck down by this tremendous fear at having to dance. I knew I had to if I wanted to get a snog at the end of the night, but I had convinced myself that I couldn't dance for toffee.

Having completed my A-levels in 1993, me and my best mates Toby and Dave, decided to celebrate. We went down to the travel agents and booked a last minute holiday to Ibiza. I'm not sure why, I think we were just incredibly curious, and also I suppose it seemed a 'cool' thing to do. It was here that we went to our first proper rave, a foam party at 'EsParadis'. However, the strongest drug I took was the occasional toké on a spliff. But it felt like an initiation into adulthood. I must concede that we were on the fringes of what was going on. Peeping through the window.

Much of that holiday drifted into the background of my mind. The following year I embarked upon a trip round Europe, Asia and the States. It wasn't until I came to study in Liverpool, the following year, that I began to experience what raving was really all about.

In my first year, one of my flat mates, Jason, had a friend in Liverpool, who he knew from back home. One night some time in the spring semester, he asked me if I wanted to go and visit this friend and his flat mates. At the time, I thought this would make a welcome change, as previous to this I had been spending most of my spare time frequenting local bars and getting drunk. One Wednesday evening we made the short journey to their flat in a nearby suburb. When we called round, the three of them were chilling out watching the football and smoking spiffs. I introduced myself to them and they all seemed very friendly. I vividly recall walking home at the end of the night thinking that I had met some really cool people. It was like I clicked with them instantly. It's funny how that happens sometimes, isn't it?



Every week for the rest of the semester, I would go round to their house on a Wednesday to chill out and get stoned. It became something of a regular feature, which I looked forward to. It was the highlight of my week. As I got to know them better, I met up with some of the others they went clubbing with. A mix of students of all ages and local people from Liverpool. They all spoke with such enthusiasm about the scene. It was fascinating. As the trust grew between us I knew in the back of my mind that I would eventually go out clubbing with them. Sitting in a stoned haze I really felt a lot more attuned to the somatic effects of the music, and started spending money on buying my own mix tapes and building up a collection of dance music. So, the music was there, and I suppose I knew deep down, that it was just a matter of time before I would go out and drop a tablet of ecstasy.

Each time the group returned from a night out, I'd go round and catch up with them, they would be full of stories and anecdotes, but none of them seemed to show signs of having a bad drug experience, asides from the odd bit of paranoia...who said that? By getting to know the group and witnessing what they were like whilst 'off their heads,' I felt that I was personally getting closer to confronting my own fears and anxieties concerning 'hard drugs.' Back at my halls of residence, I would sit on my bed and stare out of the window questioning myself, "Well look, none of them have died. Maybe I'll try it next week. Do I really need to take them to have a good time? So why do I drink alcohol?" The day was fast approaching.

That summer I returned to my mum's home and worked at the local supermarket to earn some cash to help me through the next semester. I would spend the evenings with some old friends. We'd go to the boozer or find a quiet spot on 'One Tree Hill', share a spliff and gaze out onto the Kentish countryside. At the weekends we'd make the journey to Tunbridge Wells, where there was a renovated oast house, which had been turned into a club. DJ's from London would come and play, and it was here that I met up with many school friends who had also been away to university. It seemed like so many of us had caught the dance bug.

The week we came back after the summer holidays, we had decided to go to a club in Burnley called Angels. About fifteen of us were to go. In the car on the way to the club, everyone was bopping up and down to the tunes booming out of the car's sub-woofers. There was this real sense of becoming, of waiting round for something incomprehensible, yet truly exciting, to happen. I had this feeling of anxiety and excitement welling up inside of me, transmuting from fear to laughter and back again, "Don't worry be happy..." I silently sang to myself.

We arrived at the club at about 9:30. Sitting on a comfy sofa, I took my jacket off sat back and took it all in, "So tonight's the night...I'm so scared." I turned and there sitting besides me was one of the women in my new gang. She took my hand assuredly and opening it placed a



small white tablet with a dove emblem engraved on it, into my sweaty palm. She passed me a bottle of water and nodded, as if this was the perfect time.

Holding the tablet in my thumb and forefinger I placed it on my tongue and washed it down with a swig of water. It tasted disgusting. Placing my hand in hers I sat back and waited. Within half an hour, people all round the periphery of the dance floor were getting up and joining in the action. My body was warming up and the loudness of the electronic drum-beat was getting to work on the thoughts flashing through my mind. A couple of my mates came up to me, “Scotty, come on mate we’re all waiting for you, you don’t want to sit down all night do you?” Shaking my head I found my way onto the dance floor...was I gonna be alright? What if it doesn’t work? What if I collapse? Why did I swallow it?

I saw these smiling faces and lucid bodies cutting rhythmic traces through the smoke filled space. Sweat pouring down my face. Close my eyes. Feel the warmth of the music fill my tummy. It was talking with me, “Relax, let go...” Opening my eyes. Met by a tidal wave of bodies reaching...barriers dissolving...Feels so natural. Coming out of a dream remembering something. A feeling of togetherness. All these people. Celebrating.

Now and again, people approach.

Hugging and offering water.

I sit off

Enjoy not having to do anything

No expectation

No striving

No bullshit

Enjoy doing nothing

Doing nothing

And doing it

Well

Sat in the car. Smiling. Melting into the seat. Speeding through the urban streets, the orange glow of the lights caressing the tarmac carpet. A new day. This new dawn. Thinking lots about what has happened. A new story that my peers, my generation, were in the process of choreographing. I too would be part of this tale. A co-author.

Traces of urban life at the end of the twentieth century whizzing through my mind, data streaming, computer and human worlds meeting, bodies dissolving, virtual and virtuous realities injected into my flesh, flowing through my veins. I had to feel it. Just couldn’t deny it.



Sitting in the car I thanked my friends for the secret they'd shared...a secret that was for me...a secret no more. I began to go out more regularly, about twice a month. It was great being part of this gang. Over the next few years, clubbing became central to my way of life. It was the glue that held it together. We visited so many places, in search of the perfect high. We used to do this clubbing exchange with an old friend who was studying in Sheffield, me and some of the gang would travel up there and hook up with his posse and then a month or so later, the return leg. It's always been like an adventure going out raving. One of the best trips into the world of partying came on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. My friends had arranged a surprise party for me which was awesome, all the faces were there, but if that wasn't enough they'd arranged to go to a free party in a quarry in Derbyshire. When we got to the site, there were police cars forming a blockade, we didn't think the party was going to happen, but the police said that too many people had already congregated. They were content just to watch on and make sure it didn't get out of hand. Which it did not. We danced through the night and watched the sun come up. It was a beautiful morning. This colourful patchwork hot air balloon floated over us. We looked up and started cheering and waving, the people in the balloon looked down at us. I didn't think they knew what the hell was going on. 500 people with tops off dancing round this quarry in the Pennines like lunatics. But they smiled back and waved, and when they did you could hear everyone, and I mean everyone, scream back. Magic moment! Last year, me and my girlfriend went to Brighton, FatBoy Slim had organised a free beach party. It was a sublime occasion, 250,000 people dancing on the Brighton sand. There was little trouble, maybe five arrests.

It's hard to put into words what has happened to me on the dance floor, and for that matter a large minority of my generation. It just felt like we'd stepped into this magnificent wonderland. Each time I go out and see more people partake in this experience, it becomes obvious to me that this phenomenon is no fluke. It's like this culture has emerged at a time when we need guidance, to experience for ourselves that there really are other ways of living in a community, just subtle things make the difference, a wink, nod of the head, recognition, confirmation, from one person to another.

This has not been the whole tale. Rave culture speaks of tearing down walls and dissolving boundaries. Yet outside the clubs, back in the everyday scenarios of life, raving has not only helped to bring people together it has also been the source of much mis-understanding and anxiety. My own story is also located within this confusion.

Some time in 1997, I invited my younger sister to come to stay with me, we had arranged to go to a local club in Liverpool. I hadn't seen her for over a year as she had just returned from traveling around Africa and Australia. Waiting for her at the train station, it suddenly occurred to



me that she didn't know that I took drugs, well she knew I smoked cannabis, but she didn't have an idea that I took ecstasy. As these thoughts flashed through my mind, I began patching up the holes, to ease my concerns, "Well she's just traveled around the world, she must be cool. I mean you've got to be quite open to go traveling, meeting with all those different cultures...She went to Ibiza the other year, yeah she'll be fine..."

My sister had been at my flat for an hour or so. Some friends had come over to arrange the details for the night and to say hello to my sister. Later, we got ready and ordered a taxi to take us into town. The night proceeded and people seemed to be enjoying themselves, my sister was dancing away with some friends and the music was really kicking. Later on my sister and me, sat off, watching the action from the sidelines. It was then that she asked me if I had taken anything, "Well yeah, I've had one tablet..." she looked visibly repulsed, she was a little drunk and as we continued chatting, the emotions in her welled up and she began crying. I put my arm around her and attempted to comfort her. She told me that she didn't really feel that she knew me anymore and said that she was disappointed that I felt the need to take ecstasy. I tried to explain to her that I didn't really need to do anything, that I had a choice in the matter and that I chose to take it. There was a silence lingering between us, which continued. We hugged briefly and I told her that I loved her.

The next day, I arose from my bed feeling a little anxious as to the repercussions from the previous night's encounter. It only took ten minutes or so for my sister to mention what had happened. She told me she didn't agree with what I was doing with my life and that I had let her down badly and what is more, the family. The conversation flared up into a heated argument, voices were raised and the whole thing degenerated into a scene from our childhood days. We would often argue and fight. She collected her stuff and began walking to the bus stop, "Come back sis...please come back...let's discuss this..." "I'm going back home, I don't want to speak to you for a while, I'm gonna tell mum everything about this. You can't continue like this you know..." she sobbed.

The phone rang. I knew who it was and I kind of guessed what would be said, "What do you think you're playing at, I've got your sister here crying her eyes out, what the hell are you doing taking drugs, what the hell has come over you? I've spoken to your father and he's not at all happy and your other sister, she can't understand it...I don't know what's happened to you since you've gone to Liverpool, you used to be into sport and, your running. But now look at you...If your grandparents found out about this, they'd be so disappointed with you. Do you know the trouble you've caused? Well do you?" I tried to talk with her, but it took about half a year before we could conduct anything resembling an adult conversation. In that time, I tried to



understand what was going on. I couldn't get my head around it. I pictured my mum at home distraught that her son, who she was so proud of, had turned into a drug user.

For ages I was haunted by this image. I was at home watching the TV, I must have been about 12 and the news was on, there was a report about Acid House and the arrival of ecstasy in Britain. At the end of the report, the journalist held an ecstasy tablet in his hand and proclaimed, "You can die from taking just one dose of this. Just think, this could be your own son or daughter," before throwing it symbolically into the gutter. My mother shook her head, "Promise me Scott, you'll never touch drugs, promise me..." "Never mum, I'll never take them" I replied. If only I could explain to her that really the drug wasn't evil. But she didn't buy that. She definitely didn't buy that. I know, cos naïve fool that I am, I wrote a ten page letter to her, describing in great depth my thoughts.

...So I take ecstasy when I go out. But it isn't really about the drug. It just helps open you up to the experience, to feel the music and the atmosphere. It's like if you go to the pub with some mates, you'll have a drink or two. But I'm part of a different generation who have grown bored of getting pissed up all the time, forgetting how the night went and acting like a prick. We don't take drugs just to get 'off our heads' and we don't take drugs because we're stupid and don't think about the consequences of what we're doing. And besides, many more people die each year through alcohol related causes, yet it is deemed socially acceptable. So that's alright then? We've been singled out as this 'drop-out' generation, but really it's because society doesn't understand what we're about, these days. They focus so much on the drugs, yet fail to appreciate what actually goes on in the club. If they did, I'm sure many of them would be reduced to tears, to know that us kids have tapped into 'love', in a big way. You see, when you go out clubbing, you become part of this family, of like-minded souls, it's like you don't have to prove anything to anyone. You feel welcomed, whoever you are and whatever your background. You feel more in-tune with what is going on around you and you feel telepathically connected to one another. All your fears dissolve as you get to realise that everyone is the same. We're all afraid, scared and suffer so very much. When you're out clubbing, you can drop all that pain and rejoice and celebrate the simple things in life. This is why I go out clubbing. I take ecstasy only sparingly and I'm aware that it is a powerful drug. But you see, the greatest ill of the drug culture that I've grown up with is the ignorance displayed by the authorities who continually try to sweep the issue under the carpet, in the hope that it will disappear back into fairy land. By saying 'drugs are bad' the government believes that people will not continue to take them. But all this does is push the scene underground. Criminals cash in on the drug trade, people



end up not knowing whether they have good or bad ecstasy, and above all else, it turns people like myself and my friends who are decent people, into criminals...

But nothing would change my mother's mind on the matter. The tabloid hysteria had taken her in a long time ago and there was nothing I could do to change that. I'm guessing that it took us about two years to come to terms with what had happened. In this period of my life, my friends all spoke to me about their concerns, about wanting to tell their family about what they do at the weekend, about wanting to face up to it, to bring it out in the open. Not because they wanted to cause trouble with their folks, but because they didn't feel right, as adults, keeping things from their parents. From what I can remember only a few of my friends have ever told their parents about taking ecstasy. They've all kind of agreed that what their parents don't know won't harm them. But at the same time they really wish that there was a more balanced drug debate depicted within the media and parliament, so they could at least broach the subject without having to deal with the extreme sensationalist misinformation that typically adorns the newspapers.

I've been going clubbing now for nearly a decade. Try as I might to tell you what I've got from it, the words do escape me. I genuinely believe that rave culture has fundamentally altered the way in which young people relate to one another. Although I might add, the phenomenon isn't exclusively to do with generation X and Y. I've met people in their 60's in clubs, indeed my father who is 63, has found a space to let himself go and enjoy the music and company of others. He's not just my dad, he's a brother, part of the gang. Not least I feel that clubbing has given people a place to learn about the many differences that make us human beings, individual. Before I went clubbing, I had no idea that young men and women could socialise in a public space in which the atmosphere is sensual as opposed to overtly sexual. I had no idea that gay people were just other people. I had no idea that the childhood taunts that I often threw at people, "Gay...homo..." were actually saying something about my ignorance and lack of understanding. But now I've come closer to these fears and insecurities. I know now not to judge the magazine by the cover. Raving has taught me this, in a most tangible and accessible way.

It has shown me that there is more to life and that everything that we could ever want is right here within and between us. After a childhood that was dominated by wanting to win, rave has re-invigorated my body with other energies. I am passionate about dance music. It fills me with such satisfaction and emotions. It makes me want to dance and cry. Honestly, I have never had so much fun moving my body since I was a kid. And maybe that's what dance culture has



given me and my peers, a space to act like children, to remember that life doesn't have to be so bloody serious. We can make fun of it and we can celebrate it.

I don't go clubbing so frequently now. I've other priorities and there is also more to life than partying every week. It takes me longer to recover from a weekend, and I've found over time that taking drugs, whether legal or illegal, can really drain you and often I don't want to be hung over. But having said that I haven't always taken drugs when I've been out, the atmosphere is often so electric that you get 'high' off it, the music lifts you up. In my experience, the music is the key, not the drugs. But...

### **7.73 Part three: The early hours**

Reaching into my underpants I procure a hidden plastic bag and take out an off white tablet and place it under my tongue, and grimace before taking a swig of water and swallowing. All around me I hear chatter, people are filling their bottles with water from the taps and talking with anyone that will listen to their story. Moving to the sink, I lower my head and I take a gulp of water to wash down the medicine. Then the door swings open and a security man storms in with a blank expression on his face, he moves towards one of the cubicles and banging on the wood tells the person inside to get out, we all look on knowing that if the guy in the cubicle has drugs in his hands. He's for the high jump. I don't wait to find out, I'm eager to get back out there on the dance floor. Heading out of the toilet I turn right and begin to bounce, tentatively at first.

I saunter round the club, checking out what's happening and feeling the vibe. Getting into the spirit of the night. If you like. I make my way through the bar area and into the back room, which holds about 400 people. I'm submerged in relative darkness. Making my way into the room I'm met by a cloud of dry ice which reduces my visibility and nearly chokes me.

I spring up and down on my toes whilst looking at others unwinding and getting into their groove. At this early stage of the night we're telling ourselves that it's OK to let-go, to enjoy what the music can do to our bodies. But I'm finding it difficult. I don't know. My body is used to acting and behaving in certain ways, I have to keep on telling myself that it's alright to let go, as the rigidity of my habitual bodily ebb and flow isn't used to being free. It just isn't accustomed to spinning and twirling, but that doesn't mean it's wrong to, does it? Bouncing up and down, I tell myself it's alright, just let it come naturally, feel my way into the music. Closing my eyes I swing my head and shake my arms loose.

It's alright to let-go.

It's fine.

Just feel the music.



Let it enter in.

All that's important now is to feel the music, to forget the worries, to let the beat enter in to my arms, legs, feet and head and hips swaying from side to side.

I've spotted a small crowd of people by a large stack of speakers, to the right of the DJ booth. Here my body can experience and feel the booming bass, as loud as you like and feel the warmth of human contact. For a brief moment one of the reveler's catches my attention. Feel a spark from his bodily movement. A second elapses. Heart receives his love "It's alright mate, we're together now, just let it happen," his feet suggest. Hiya, "Alright lad...havin a top one are ya?" of course, I smile, before we embrace. Moving away. Soaking up the vibes in another part of the building. I love exploring. You just never know what you may find. Some people have made such an effort with their outfits. I've just spotted this man dressed up as a Barbie doll...and another who has come as a soldier complete with tin hat!

Out of the hidden recesses of our collective memory, we await to be re-housed in a much bigger, yet invisible bodily home. We begin working together, to allow our collective wish to move out of the realms of fantasy and dream like wonder.

Here, we can play together without fear, anger or hate lurking in the mist. Communicating through bottom heavy basslines and smiles the size of the beach, we'll do all we can to enjoy this moment, and this one too. And in so doing, by moving together, sensually, sexily, finally, we will join the dots between the waking world and the labyrinth in the sky.

Let the lasers illuminate and the beats fill this space.

Bring it on I say...

Bring it on!

### **7.83 Dominic**

"I'm not sure Jon, I've kind of made plans to go to Gatecrasher...I'll give you a bell next week sometime." "Go on Dom mate, it'll be like the old days, you know get totally lashed and maybe pull a pig. We could even go to that new lap-dancing club that's opened up." "Yeah maybe...listen Jon I've got to go and get ready, like I say, I'll phone yer next week...yeah don't worry...alright...laters." Dom puts the Nokia onto the table and sits down in his comfy chair, picks up the remote and turns the stereo on. It's early Friday evening and Dom can't wait to go out, yet the telephone conversation with Jon, an old school friend, lingers in his thoughts, and has



albeit temporarily, plunged him into a past that he no longer recognises nor cares to recollect. Dom puts on his favourite Utah Saints album, and takes a shower.

Dominic came to Liverpool two years ago. Like many young people, moving home and going to university opened up his eyes; relative freedom; a sense of independence; some distance between him and the past, the world he left behind – north London, and some space to make a new life.

There he was sitting in the pub with his mates, getting pissed up just before coming to Liverpool, a little apprehensive at the prospect of what was to follow. But never did he envisage getting involved in the dance scene, I mean, “I just thought it was for a bunch of drugged up wankers.”

Dom gets out of the shower and makes his way to the bedroom. On the walls are posters advertising club nights and above his bed is a notice board covered with photos of friends that he has met in the two years he’s been going clubbing. Many of the pictures show Dom posing with his best mates, Eve and Becky, who he met on his media course. It was these two who got him into clubbing. Since then Clubbing has taken him by the hand and spun him around and around, so giddy so high the music gets him, every other week this feeling drops by. Buttoning up his shirt, Dom looks into the mirror and smiles, “The best way to describe it is when you get up onto the podium in a REALLY big club and you just look for MILES and just see everyone just doing exactly the same thing, everyone dancing. It’s just like, for that 6 hours or however long we go clubbing for, it’s just like everyone's part of the same thing, in the same place, doing the same thing.”

The phone beeps, Dom rushes down the stairs and picks the handset up: **hi gorjus, cnt wt 4 nte 2 bgin. lets get luvd up n grin! cu l8tr...eve...ps no joy with vitmins,will kp tryin :-)** Dom’s face drops as the enjoyment of getting ready meets with the realisation that he might not be able to get hold of any ecstasy tablets. I mean it’s not as if he needs to take them to have a good time but...

Dom slumps back into his comfy chair and takes in this latest news. He tries to console himself, “I remember one night, the first night I went to Cream straight sort of thing, I remember just thinking it was really good. You can still get the same buzz but without having to do anything, which I think is really, a sort of really nice thing to find out. It means that it is clubbing and not the drugs. Its quality tunes, the atmosphere and being with loads of different people, all experiencing the same thing. But also, I think taking ecstasy can heighten the experience.

“The way, one of my mates said it, is that you've got two options. You can watch Star Wars, a quality film, on a black and white TV and have a good time or you can go out, see it at



the cinema with full on Dolby surround sound and it'll be amazing. She said that's what doing drugs in a club is like." Dom sits upright and attentively on the sofa checking over his story and nodding his head in recognition of the useful analogy. He looks at the blank TV screen and contemplates whether tonight he'll be stepping out into glorious Technicolour or watching the highlights, in black and white. He bites his finger nails, one by one and then checks his mobile...YOU HAVE NO NEW MESSAGES.

A few minutes have passed. Dom begins moving round the living room, almost breaking out in dance but...not quite. He checks his mobile once more and turns the radio up. Trying to unwind, trying desperately to forget about his week...course work deadlines...arsey lecturers...financial worries blah blah blah...

So tight so rigid does the weekly body becomes. It's only by freeing this corpse from routine, that real respite once more will come.

"I think with the group of friends that I've got now through clubbing, like obviously that feeling you get when you're in a club, of being at one, sort of thing, it brings you a lot closer to people. Cos you're closer to them you're not afraid to show your emotions..." picking up his phone, Dom fiddles with the handset, "...Once you can show emotions, you can sort of express yourself the way *you* want to. I think it does make you sort of, grow as a person, it's a stepping-stone really.

"Like before, I was confident but I wasn't willing to show as much emotion, it wouldn't really have been acceptable in the group of friends I had. They would've just laughed and said I was a pussy. With them I had to keep up with this 'lad' image that goes with being drunk, pulling all the birds and getting into fights. But with clubbing, you can like, be yourself. You don't have to act in a certain way." Dom checks his watch. It's time to depart. "I think it has definitely brought the real me out, I appreciate what I've got now a lot more. Cos before, I didn't really know any of this existed. I didn't realise a group of people could be this close as friends and stuff, and it's just...you just appreciate what people like friends do for you and that."

### **7.93 Beats on da streets**

It's late Saturday afternoon. I'm standing in '3-Beat,' an independent dance record shop in the heart of the city centre. On the walls we see huge posters advertising club nights and in the background, we hear Latin tinged house music booming out of some industrial speakers, and besides the wheels of steel an assistant sorts through some records, which have just arrived from the States. Weekend party people come and go, purchasing tickets for events and bootleg CD's,



bedroom DJ's are listening to records at the listening posts and some of the city's established DJ's are in, chatting and joking ahead of tonight's gigs. The mood is upbeat.

3-Beat opened in 1987. Having started off as a small outlet supplying imported records for a handful of Liverpool enthusiasts, who had caught onto the emerging sound of house music at the end of the 80s, the shop has witnessed much of the city's journey into contemporary dance culture. It is now a high profile international mail order distributor, supplying records to DJ's in North and South America, Asia and Europe. As well as this, the shop is involved in the production of tunes, having run their own record label, for the past ten years. It is common practice for independent dance record shops to run their own labels, and this perhaps says something about the backstage of club culture. For the majority of the staff here, selling records is just a small part of their involvement with the scene. Most have their own residencies in the city's clubs, as well as producing their own tunes and promoting nights, and I know a couple who have set up their own DJ academy, introducing youngsters to the technical side of mixing records (a.k.a. mixology or turntablism)..

Ste, the assistant manager, is one member of staff who is heavily involved in the city's scene. In 1998, he began a night called 'Alderan' at the 'Lemon lounge', which is a small club holding no more than 300 people. At the time, he'd been DJ'ing for ten years and was struggling to find a club where he could play on a regular basis, and so, promoting his own club night seemed the best thing to do.

As Ste recalls, he just wanted to have a party on a regular basis, bring his friends along and anyone else who wanted to come along, "You see, I knew this guy who worked at the printer's, so it only cost us a few quid to get a thousand flyers sorted and a hundred posters, just a small scale venture. We didn't start the night to make money we just did it for the buzz. Through contacts at work I got hold of some really quality DJ's to come and play, and we managed to get away without paying them we just bunged them some petrol money. Over the space of some months we built up quite a reputation for throwing a party. And because it was a small venue we'd have no problem filling it, most nights." Off the back of this success, Ste has DJ'ed at clubs around the country, as well as playing in Italy, Switzerland and Mexico, where he has a residency. Over the last year or so he has started a new night called 'Aztec', with a slightly different music policy, and has been in the studio recently producing some tunes.

Ste's story isn't unusual and highlights something of the DIY attitude that is prevalent within dance culture. The club scene in Liverpool is awash with nights to cater for a wide spectrum of tastes. Electronic drum culture is not one sound or style. Having lived in the city for nine years, I have seen hundreds of nights come and go. Yet over the last few years, there would



seem to have been a marked diversification in the type of nights and the club spaces that accommodate such festivities. The student population has played a big part in this tale, bringing with them a thirst for experiencing alternative styles, which has transmuted into the beginnings of new scenes in the city's beat-scape. From drum 'n' bass, funk and tribal house, through to break-beat and hip-hop, the student population have added a certain something to the fabric of the city's party scene.

A recent example of the input of student energies, is the 'Chibuku' night which started about three years ago. At the time, the Liverpool scene seemed to be going through something of a crisis, the stronghold that 'Cream' had on the city's dance scene had been in decline for a while, and there seemed to be a real need for new energies to be injected into the mix. Chibuku was set up by a collective of ex-students, as a rebuke to the commercial formula of the Superclubs, based on paying huge amounts to well known DJ's, passing on the expense to the clubber through elevated ticket prices, and going for a music policy that was not too challenging. The Chibuku people wanted to attract more diverse DJ's to Liverpool and create a music policy that didn't follow one particular style. Underlining their philosophy was the need to concentrate on the finer details of the club experience. Keeping the punters involved with the music policy and not charging, the earth. It just so happened that they managed to find a venue that would allow them to turn their idea into reality.

The 'Masque' venue was originally a theatre that had been abandoned and left derelict until the mid 90s after which it was restored by the monies of a local celebrity, and turned into a nightclub. As I recall, the night flopped after a couple of months and it wasn't until a few years ago that it began to get used as a club venue, again. Along with a number of smaller nights, Chibuku started holding events at the 'Masque,' which not only includes an amphi-theatre, but also another three rooms. It's not uncommon for drum 'n' bass to be playing in one room, deep house in another, breaks and beats in a third and more ambient music in the fourth room. Somehow the music and venue complement one another, it is great dancing on the steps of the amphi-theatre. The novel use of space adds something to the occasion. The night has become so successful over the last year, that it has gained something of a national following, through word of mouth, and is often reviewed in the dance music press. They have gained a reputation for continuing to bring new acts and DJ's to Liverpool.

I've just picked up some flyers from the shelf. As I look through the bunch of advertising cards, I'm searching for another of the city's clubs to tell you about. In my hand I have a flyer advertising the club 'Garlands.' This night is one of the city's most popular and also holds fond personal memories. It is well attended by local people as well as students, and the club seems to



have a real mix of age groups. In this club I see teenagers and fifty something's dancing together and think nothing of it.

I first went to this night eight years ago, when it was a predominantly gay club, but it has always maintained that it is all gender-friendly, and I have always enjoyed the experience, finding it to be one of the most friendliest clubs in the city. It's hard to try and define the Garlands experience, but I'd say that it has turned clubbing into something of an art form. This is immediately evident when you look at the design of their flyers, which have gained such a cult following that they have even attracted attention from the city's Tate gallery, which held an exhibition of its artwork at the end of the 90s. Their flyers are very often sensitive to the pop cultural zeitgeist and always totally camp and extravagant. And this says much about the Garlands experience.

Every week they have a different theme, which means that many people dress the part, from gangsters and tarts, through to Kings and Queens, Vikings, Baywatch babes, Mardi-Gras, Angels with dirty faces, Elvis, you name it, the club has probably already covered it, or about to. Whenever I've been, they've always made such an effort with the décor, they will transform the space so that if the theme is Kings and Queens, you'll find yourself in a castle, a slightly mad one perhaps, replete with dwarves running round as jesters and transvestites dressed as pageboys!

So, they're big on fantasy. I used to go to the all-night parties in the, mid to late 90's and they would always be incorporating events like fashion and hair shows into the club experience, with an emphasis on the exaggerated, trashy and insane. At the club, they are always giving out toys to the clubbers.

The Garlands promoters are big on setting. Something of an institution has been the 'Fairies Cross the Mersey' boat parties, which they hold throughout the summer months, and as the name implies take place on the river Mersey. Of course with the current legislation in Britain, which makes it very difficult to use the outdoors as a rave space, promoters are often tied to the 'Container.' The boat parties are an example of one of the ways in which Liverpool club culture has attempted to transgress this legislation, although it would seem to be an isolated example of 'getting away with it.' As well as their regular Saturday night event and boat parties, the club has also been beach parties in Ibiza over the last couple of summers.

Thumbing through the handful of flyers, I've just spotted an advert for a club which resides down the road in Manchester, called 'Tribal Gathering.' In association with the Liverpool club 'Chibuku,' they are planning on reviving the spirit of the acid-house warehouse years by promoting a one off event, with DJ's from Britain, France and the United States playing, this August in an as yet, undisclosed venue. They promise:



Just when many of the true Tribal believers began to falter and lose faith, a message of hope filtered down from the head of the column. A vast Victorian industrial amphitheatre had been discovered that resonated with the rhythms and ghosts of the golden years of Acid House. Immediately a clarion call went out worldwide to the dispersed tribes of dance devotees as feverish preparations began to convert its two cathedral-like chambers and palatial forecourt into a pure party paradise, a techno mecca for the lucky 11,000 revellers who would attend the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-energising rituals (The 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of: Tribal Gathering promotional flyer).

This type of collaboration between clubs helps to illustrate something of the energies that sustain urban club culture. Since the heady days of Acid House, which kick-started the rave revolution, the geographical and cultural boundaries that separate young people from different regions of the British Isles have become less significant. This is taken for granted now, however it is worth noting that rave culture emerged at a time when there was a huge problem with football hooliganism (Garratt, 1998; Collin, 1997). In contrast to the heavily defended territorial identity, which has shaped and sustained football culture, establishing many inter-city rivalries, contemporary dance culture has fundamentally transformed the way in which young people from different cities, relate to one another. On the streets, it is generally acknowledged that club culture has had a profound influence on the football terraces. The following excerpt is taken from a fan who has followed Manchester football for decades and who has conducted ethnographic research on the terraces. In referring to the season 1989-1990, this fan notes how the promotion of Manchester City that season signaled the first time for years that there would be a derby game with United, which was marred by hooliganism, not two years later something rather remarkable was witnessed.

...The first derby game in the 1991/92 season fell on a Saturday, but by this time something quite remarkable had happened. Many of the hard-core lads from both (clubs) had spent most of the summer dancing the weekends away to the sounds of house music at raves fuelled by the drug Ecstasy. They had done this together!...On the night of Friday November 15, 'derby eve', another traditional time for preliminary skirmishing, a group of United's lads were preparing for the game not with the traditional pub crawl followed by a beery night club but by attending a low key rave at a smallish club in a nearby town and taking ecstasy...As they sipped their drinks waiting to 'come up' on their ecstasy tablets, they noticed a small group of City lads with whom they had crossed many a sword...One young man who was new to the ecstasy/rave scene, but something of a veteran of derby match violence, said that a shiver went down his back at the thought of what he expected to happen... "Anyhow, one of the City lads comes over and the last



time I saw him he wanted to kill me and everybody like me. I thought, 'Hello, here we go,' and he just stands at the bar at the side of me and says; 'Well who'd have thought that we would be stood side by side the night before a derby game and there's no trouble in any of us. It's weird innit? It could never have happened before E'...And he was dead right it was much better, much better. They even came back to this house where we go for a smoke after the raves. I went home to bed about 5am and, as I lay there waiting to get to sleep, I couldn't stop thinking how right he was; this could never have happened before E."

(Mark Gilman, cited in Saunders, 1997, p.55-56)

It is common place for coach loads of party-goers to commute from one city to another to visit a night-club. Every weekend, thousands come to Liverpool by car and train, coach and airplane as short stay tourists. People will think nothing of travelling to several cities over the course of a weekend; Manchester on Friday, Sheffield early Saturday morning for an after-party, then off to Liverpool late in the day to pick up friends before heading down the motorway to a club in Birmingham for Saturday night. In this respect, British club culture is probably best understood as a nationwide 'playground.'

The territorial boundaries of clubs also would seem to be less easily marked off and differentiated. There is a healthy tradition of club events originating from one particular city to be taken to other Metropolises, whereby many of the club's 'regular' members will travel with the club, like it was an 'away' fixture.

This type of venture co-exists with instances of different clubs co-hosting events, perhaps the most tangible example of this can be seen in the recent development of dance focused summer festivals ('Creamfields' in Liverpool, 'Global Gathering' in Warwickshire, and 'Homelands' in Bristol and London). Alongside the carnivalesque backdrop of funfair rides, circuses, entertainers and fireworks, these events bring together numerous clubs, who host a marquee with a sound-system, and a lineup of resident as well as guest, DJs. These events have become a regular feature of the scene's calendar, and attract tens of thousands of people from all over Britain, marking something of a pilgrimage for the clubbing 'tribes.'

The burgeoning dance scene, which has flowered over the last decade has fundamentally altered the contours of the city as an adult playground. Such has been the pervasiveness of this movement that, the more traditional spaces of night-time leisure (e.g. pubs and bars), have also been touched by the electronic drum machine.

In Liverpool, the many sounds of dance music are just as likely to filter on to the streets from bars as it is from clubs. In the popular bar areas of the city centre (e.g. the Seel street and Matthew street districts), it is very common for drinking establishments to install specialist DJ



equipment, many of which host ‘pre-parties’ for some of the city’s clubs. Alongside the more traditional bands and jukebox culture of bars and pubs, the DJ is now just as likely to be providing the soundtrack in social meeting places.

Over the last ten years, electronic drum culture, from hip-hop to ambient and from techno to R ‘n’ B have provided prominent sound tracks to weekend life in the city, yet the prevalence of the drum in city life extends beyond electronic music. If you were to visit Liverpool, you could celebrate with the sound of Salsa and Soca from South America laying down the beats, or just as likely to feel the beat of the West African djembe drums. The sound of the drum has increasingly come to the fore in urban life, and this is not only to be found inside, in the clubs. Alongside rave festivals such as ‘Creamfields,’ the drum can be heard energising the people in the numerous street festivals that have emerged in recent years. For three weeks at the end of July, the city centre is home to the Brouhaha international street festival, which brings together the sound of reggae, samba, African drumming, hip-hop in the spirit of carnival. This year rappers, bmx’ers, skateboarders, street theatre, scratch DJ’s and graffiti artists were also to be found participating, providing pictures, words and colours, perhaps representative of contemporary youth street culture, of a new wave of music, movement, poetry (rapping) and art (graffiti).

#### **7.74 Part four: Peak time action**

We hear a faint drum beat in the background. It is getting louder and louder. Resonating within our tummies, circling within our ribs, it massages our soul. The anticipation is building, we know something is coming, but what? The drumbeat quickens before mutating into a squelching drill like sound which drives us all into a frenzy. We’re all shouting and screaming, willing the DJ on, “Let’s go...come on...” and then the bass kicks and the funk hits the floor!

With a huge grin on his face the DJ points to us, he touches his ear and teases us, “I can’t hear you.” A stranger rubs past me, grabs hold of my hand and plants this huge kiss on it. This makes me rush and brings me up. We hang on to every next beat, poised and ready for another rhythmic signature to seize control and then....then....another bass line kicks in...and...as it does, an overkill of pink and orange laser light illuminates the room. Sonic booms thunder out of the speakers, reverberating through the wall and floors. Like a tuning fork we, as one, vibrate, resonate. In the DJ booth, a man with a camcorder films our beautiful selves. The images are projected on to the screens on the back wall. This is...peak time. *Can you feel it?*

Here I am. Down the front on the podium just by the DJ booth, yeah that’s it. Behind, to the front, on my left and right, colourful bodies touch one another. Kissing and caressing, flesh rubs up and down, perspiring, inspiring, glow sticks glow, all in flow.



The drum beat connects us, directs us, inside and in-between  
Rhythms linger  
In these spaces we meet  
In-between my skin bag and yours, arms aloft  
Smiling like Cheshire cats our sweaty bodies  
Revolve, dissolve, fizzing and expanding  
Our souls connect

Each contrasting sound rips through me. Bass heavy bullets explode in my chest, sending shock waves down my spine into my genitals and legs. Mid range grenades blow up in my shoulders, traveling east and west, sending tingling shock waves along my arms and into my finger tips. High hat harpoons pierce my throat, from which a fountain of joy erupts in my brain. Electronic, synchronistic, bodies in flow, where the direction comes from, I do not know. Wave upon wave of soft edged warmth and tingling sensations pass through my body, my head is free from all thoughts. My only concern is to keep on moving. It feels so amazing.

Without edginess or rigidity our bodies melt into the music  
Consumed by the beat  
Living democratically  
We vote with our feet.  
*Can you feel it?*

I cannot resist these beats.  
I've got the urge, the urge to merge, to merge with the music  
With him and her, you and me  
Together as one  
Sweating  
Dripping in ecstasy.

Wiping the sweat from my brow I look up and picture a sea of lov'd up bodies. On the other side of the room, my princess is deep in a trance. I send her loving vibes that pass from one body to the next and then another and another, and within a nano second, her eyes open and she looks up. Blowing me a kiss I reach out with my hand and pluck it out of the air. The beat



connects us, directs us, inside and in-between, rhythms linger and in these spaces we meet, in-between my skin bag and yours, arms aloft, smiling like Cheshire cats, our bodies revolve, dissolve, fizzing and expanding, our souls connect...we meet. I close my eyes and see fractals mutating within the cinema in my head, journeying through this inner labyrinth I transgress the lines between alive and being dead.

Is this a dream or is it for real?

I just don't care anymore.

I LOVE YOU!

## **7.94 Chill-out room chatter**

### **7.94.1 Women's talk: Part one**

It's so euphoric...*The only thing that compares to it was London NYE 2000 by the Thames, there were millions of people and everybody was going absolutely mental, that's the only time I've felt that feeling you get on the dance floor...*It's like you're completely, you're, everybody, it's not just you, it's knowing that everyone around you is totally un-self conscious, totally uninhibited. When you dance you feel confident to express yourself in your own role, not in a role you're pretending to be, like in normal life....*Yeah...*You feel at one with yourself, you feel so happy, it's like self-realisation...*It's like being at a football match but everyone's supporting the same team...*Yeah, I know exactly what you mean, it's overwhelming...It's shared, it's definitely a shared feeling as well...Yeah, like you don't have to be dancing with your friends either. There have been times when I've been dancing and got tired or whatever and someone, who has obviously spotted me, comes up and says, "Come on, come on, dance!" and they just stand next to you and dance, it makes you want to get up and join them. And that's like a stranger, everyone looks out for each other don't they?...*Yeah, it's so nice to have that feeling with a stranger...**Yeah...Yeah...Everyone's* like on a level, you're all there for the same reason. I mean if you're a criminal it doesn't matter, they're all there to enjoy the music...*Even if you're a doctor or whatever, everyone's on the same level, yeah....*I just love it when you hear a tune you really like and you feel the hairs stand up on the back of your neck, d'you know what I mean and you get goose pimples and...God yeah...You just look around and see everyone feeling it as well...Ooohhh! You just want to scream and dance and cry and jump about...And hug your mates and hug a stranger...*Yeah...The music is just so important...It's like the DJ takes you on a journey, if they're good at their job they'll take you to places All the people feed into it you know, like the DJ*



*works the crowd and everyone feeds off one another...Definitely...Yeah, it's like being on a roller-coaster or something, you really get off on it...Yeah. Like being on a ride.*

#### **7.94.2 Men's talk: Part two**

In the throes of it, it's just absolutely comfortable...**I think that's the best word to describe it...Yeah, definitely...**It's just comfortable...**Everything feels comfortable, it's just an incredible feeling being on the dance-floor...**Yeah, everything's going right...You might be dancing like a twat but no-one cares, you know...**Yeah, you just do what feels good and everyone's getting on with it...**It's the whole friendliness of it, isn't it?...It feels so free and easy...*Looking around the dance-floor all you see is a sea of smiling faces and wide eyes...*It's just such fun, dancing, jumping and spinning, and like when it's really crowded it feels like the whole club is moving together...*It's like the music allows you to express what you're feeling and the crowd lets you feel comfortable expressing the music, whatever way you want...***Yeah, like everyone expresses their individuality in the way they dance, but we're all dancing in time with the same beat, so it really is a collective experience, there's no ambiguity, we all know what everyone else is feeling, you can see it on people's faces and in the way they react to the music...**Yeah, that's it. It's like telling a story, interpreting the music through the way you move...Yeah yeah, people I've spoken to have said the same...Yeah...It's like when you look at someone who's good at dancing, it's so amazing, like good dancers with glow sticks, I could sit there for hours on end watching them...Yeah, they feel like part of your body...My mate reckons when he's dancing with glow sticks they give him magical powers...And the way it feels when you're dancing, it reminds me of that film the 'Matrix', at times it feels as if you're moving really slowly, in slow motion...**Yeah, the way you dance feels so easy and effortless, you're not really trying at all...**Yeah definitely...It's like sometimes you feel knackered, but the music keeps you there, you just don't want to stop...Because the atmosphere is so electric you don't want to miss anything do you?...*Yeah, like when, when the DJ changes the sound or brings in another tune, and the whole crowd picks up on it and goes mental, jumping up and down. It's hypnotic...*That's it, I mean with certain tunes, there is so much energy in them, they just make you want to move, it's just so exhilarating, and like when you know what tune is about to come in, like if the DJ teases you by bringing just a bit of it in...**You can see the anticipation and excitement on people's faces can't you?...Everyone is in motion together, everyone is in this perfect world...**The whole crowd picks up on it, everyone's really going for it, shouting, screaming, waving their hands in the air, everyone is buzzing and then the tune, it gets to the climax, lights are flashing and everyone is



really loving it, and when it finally drops in, when the tune finally drops in, it's like the whole club has been defibrillated and brought back to life.

#### 7.84 Kirsty

It's 5:20. Saturday has dragged. The strains and pressures have but 10 minutes to prove their worth and then that's it. This game is up for another few days. Looking through the mobile phone shop window, we see Kirsty attending to an elderly gentleman. Why don't we pop in and have a word with her? She's in the communications business after all!

Kirsty combines work with her studies. The cash helps with the bills, but more than this gives her some pin money to spend at the weekends. She can't think of anything better to spend here money on than going out clubbing with her mates. A tall, young and attractive woman walks towards us. She has brunette hair, brown eyes and must be no older than, 23-24, "Yep it keeps me sane. I don't know, it's like I can have the most stressful week at uni and I'm just thinking 'I've got nothing to release myself from all this'. But then you can go out at the weekend, dance it all out and just forget what all the stresses were, next day you're like, 'Yeah, I feel alright now, I can't even remember what I was worrying about.'" The manager looks over at us, he's been assessing everyone's performance, but how many units has she shifted today?

She offers up a faux smile to a customer with the boss in full view and whispers, "Clubbing is very different to normal life you know...here everyone is extremely competitive...it's like we're always competing. But the only thing you're competing for when you go out clubbing, is dance space!" Kirsty checks her watch and grins. She tells us she'll be back in a minute and then goes to the staff room to grab her bag. We'll wait for her out in the street.

It would be a lie to tell you that clubbing has been the answer to all of Kirsty's anxieties, insecurities and cries for freedom. It hasn't, but...

She's been reflecting on this experiment that has captured the imagination of the young and not so young; the trials and tribulations of taking ecstasy; the many ups and downs in search for the perfect high. For her, the honeymoon is over.

Kirsty waves goodbye to her work mates and takes us on a little walk into her life, "We all went through a period over the winter of just absolutely caning it and taking far too many pills. I suppose you go through a stage every so often when you just work out what your limit is and see how much you can cope with. I mean every pill has got a different name and every time you get a new one, you think maybe it will be better than the last. But now we're having a better time because we're going out taking less and enjoying the night more, we're not so worried about the



effects of the drugs, we're more concerned with just getting on with the night, enjoying the music and each others company. I suppose it's about growing up isn't it?

"Like I used to be quite uptight, worrying about what everybody else thought I looked like and the clothes I wore and...I was that little girl all dressed up...but recently I've felt a lot more laid back. I suppose you just let everything go...you go with it rather than against it." Maybe we've been here ourselves? But as Kirsty points out, if we turn right now we'll get caught in the Saturday rush hour traffic. So, let's turn left into this side street, escape the gaze and see where it takes us?

We find ourselves in a courtyard, the noise has subsided and we are alone. To our right we see a bench. Let's go and sit for a while. "You know when I was really sporty when I was a kid, all I did was play sport and do my homework. It was my brother who got me into dancing. He used to go to all the free parties in Bristol. I started to enjoy that I heard coming from his room when I was in the sixth form. That's when I went to my first rave. I didn't take drugs or anything, cos I was so fit and just got off on the atmosphere. But having said all that. I remember, as a young kid, my mum would always tell me if I ever had any problems, just to 'Get up and dance'. So yeah, I suppose in one way or another dancing is in my blood. Although, it's only been over the last few years that I've remembered this."

"On the dance floor you can really express yourself, but also it's a good place to hide and disappear. I mean nobody's asking you about your personality, nobody judges you on the way you dance. It's great. You can make friends out of the most unlikely people erm...people that possibly could have been an enemy outside of the club you can just sit there and talk to and feel comfortable with them. Nobody wants any hassle..." Kirsty's mobile beeps: **whre r u me luva? We nd 2 gt shw on rd, jst cnt wt 2CU I thnk im gonna xplode ☺ ☺** That was her boyfriend. "Erm yeah...clubbing has totally opened my mind. It's shown me a lot of things I'd never thought I'd see. It's given me the freedom to be myself in a way that nothing else probably can. Not sure what else to say...go see for yourself."

### **7.94.3 Chill-out room chatter. Women's talk: Part two**

...Some people who don't like people who take drugs have never been to a night out, a proper night out, they don't really know what it's like, and they're often the ones who are out drinking on a Saturday night...*The way drugs are projected in society, its like whether you smoke one joint or whether you inject heroin, you're all the same anyway, you're all going to end up skinny and pale and spotty and everyone reckons that if you smoke a joint, the next thing you're going to be shooting up and its not that way at all. But I mean, what is the danger of taking ecstasy? About*



*the same as dying going fishing...* And you compare that to taking a paracetamol...*Yeah...* But I think that having ecstasy as a class A, I really don't think they should do that, I mean there's one off cases like Leah Betts and like you compare that to cases over alcohol...**I spent three hours on alcohol once and I was incredibly ill and I've never had that on pills...** I've never been as ill as I've been on alcohol...**No...** I think that wipes me out for more days than it does after taking a pill...*I think cocaine's coming into the story more now...* **Yeah...** I don't think drugs are the main part, but you know, you can't do it every time you go out and I like do it on special occasions, like if everyone's doing it together it's quite a good laugh...*I used to take them but I don't any more cos I've got epilepsy now so I take er, the legal highs but they're dead good...* **I wouldn't go out ON drugs to be honest, I never have done and I don't go "Oh drugs, get away I don't want to know you". I understand for a lot of people it's a big part but for me, no offence, I don't feel safe with them and I, I prefer to do it without...** Yeah, it's more of a feeling, I know what you're saying, I've had the same feeling without drugs...

#### **7.94.4 Chill-out room chatter. Men's talk: Part two**

...Every person that I have spoke to says that the first time they took a pill they think they are going to die, cos of everything they have heard in the papers, people who I know who don't take pills say they are scared that they are going to die...**My friends say the same thing. Its like with my parents they will always feel worried cos of the papers...***The thing is, I looked at all the statistics and stuff like that before taking them, and I thought about it all. I remember driving one time and thinking "...am I gonna die, no of course I'm not, lots of people do it" and then "wicked". Then I read somewhere about re-hydration and stuff, and I thought "Ok, If I do one and I'm fine then I'll be alright"...* **I'd never really heard that much before taking it. So that fear of dying wasn't really close to my mind when I did it. But once I'd taken it, I did wonder "...is this gonna kill me? what is it gonna do to me?". But before I'd taken it, I didn't know that much about it, so those fears weren't there. It was just something I felt I needed to try...** I find it so hard to believe what you see in the papers cos they're so far off the mark usually. I say go out and take a pill, and you'll have the time of your fucking life, and, you won't look back...*Yeah, I don't know, it's difficult, like those people who have died, weren't really that well informed, like Leah Betts. I don't know it's like driving a car without driving lessons. Just have a think about it a bit. Cos everything has a risk attached to it...* **I think that a lot of what you learn is through your own experiences. After the first couple of times I thought "...yeah I am not gonna die, I am having a good time, and I'm gonna carry on", and then after that I learnt more about it as I**



went along. You can learn about it from the info and stuff, but you need to go out and find out what it is about...*And you begin to find out what drugs work for you and which don't...*

### 7.75 Part five: The chill-out zone

It's 2:30am and my T-shirt and trousers are drenched in sweat. I'm sitting on a bench in the central bar area having a breather after some three hours of non-stop dancing, and I feel on top of the world I've got to tell you. To my right, there is an archway which takes you back into the main room and behind me, some twenty metres away, there is a partition which separates those of us who want to chill, from the heavy sounds of industrial techno, which fills the back room. Despite the thickness of the concrete partitions, the sound systems in both rooms are doing their level best to blow these walls down.

Taking a sip of cold water I replace the lid and press the plastic bottle on the back of my neck. Up against my flesh, red hot and flaming, the cooling sensation of the plastic causes the hairs on my neck to prick up, sending thin shafts of tingles up into my jaw. Spiraling into the roof of my skull. Savoring this moment, I tilt my head up and close my eyes. In the cranial retreat I step into my chariot and venture up into the sky. I find myself in and amongst the stars, dazzling and twinkling. They speak with me, through the shimmer and light which reflects off their surfaces. I'm safe here, floating on the clouds with all these friends, in amongst the moon and stars. I make a wish.

Opening my eyes I scan the room. I see a guy by the bar holding two glow sticks, one is red and the other is yellow. Transfixed on the patterns that he creates with his body, the soft yellow and red glow cuts patterns in the air; twirling, spinning, grinning, he performs his dance, leaving traces of colour, rainbow-esque. To the right of him I see two girls sitting on the floor. They are getting head massages from two young men who are crouched behind them. Besides them a girl is breathing deeply, sweat is dripping from her. She looks well off her head. I wonder if she's alright. I shout over to her. She nods and gives me the thumbs up. I see a man with his hands on his head pretending to be a bull, I think. He's charging round after this guy, who holds an imaginary cloak. Behind them, friends cheer the bull on. They're in fits of laughter. This brings a smile to my face. So many people, so many strangers, yet so many friendly souls I think to myself.

Some guy taps me on the shoulder, I'm temporarily startled "Scuse me mate, have you got a light?" fumbling round in my pocket I produce a red lighter. The guy holds the cigarette up to his lips and leans forward, as the tip of the stick begins to glow orange a feeling of satisfaction overwhelms me. All I did was light his ciggie. But it just feels amazing to give assistance to



another. However trivial it may be. Taking a toke the guy blows out a plume of smoke, which circles effortlessly into the air, “Thank-you mate. What’s your name?” Scott, “Hiya Todd I’m Toby...” No, the name’s Scott! “Oh Scott, sorry.” We smile and hug. The laughter soon dissipates. Toby gestures to me to come and meet his friends. I stand up and peel my damp trousers from my skin and go and join the party-goers on the other side of the bench.

“This is Scott, if you need a ciggie lighting, Scott’s the bloke to see...Hi Scott I’m Theresa...I’m Mark...So Scott, are you having a good night?” We begin conversing. No words are spoken.

In communion, vibrations pass from heart to heart

Life confirming us kidz are learning

Respect and respectful

Vibrations pass

From heart to heart

Us kidz are learning!

*Can you feel it?*

### **7.85 Eve and Becky**

The bedroom door opens, a Paul Oakenfold mix CD is booming out of the stereo and inside, two young women, Eve aged 22 and Beck 23, are sitting on a bed discussing the night ahead. As we walk into the terracotta coloured room, we see a cowgirl outfit and a nurse’s uniform hanging up on the curtain rail. The room is filled not only with butterflies. Skipping and fluttering. The anticipation of the night is building. It is palpable.

The girls tell us to sit down. Seeing as you’re my guest you take the desk chair and I’ll warm the floor. I should give you some background notes before we find out more from the girls. Becky has been into the scene for about four years. Originally from sunny Bournemouth, at school she found herself repelled by the usual teenage ways. Seeing herself as something of an outsider, she found much more of an affinity with dancing and listening to House music than discussing the who’s who of gorgeous hunks in the playground and comparing notes about the new Versace jeans.

Eve, a Cockney lass has a different story to tell. She had no interest whatsoever in dance music until two years ago. Up until then, she found solace in doing her homework and working behind the bar at her local boozer. That was pretty much it. I mean she could never imagine herself doing anything as outlandish as going clubbing. She was a timid and shy girl. One night, she found out that some people who worked with her, were planning a night out to Ministry in



London. She's not sure why. But they invited her. She took half an ecstasy tablet then threw herself onto the dance floor, and almost immediately, felt a connection with what was going on.

In the time it took me to tell you a little of their stories, Eve has rummaged around her cupboard and pulled out a photo album. She now hands you the book, with a metallic blue cover, entitled: *Heaven is a place called...* She asks you to take a peek.

Inside you see pictures of her and friends in clubs. Every picture tells a story, and from the looks of it these pictures tell of happy and, dare I say it, silly times. As you skim through these pictorial archives Eve turns the volume up a tad and attempts to get you into the spirit of clubbing, "Oh, I can't explain it. You just feel brilliant, you just want to grab everyone and hug everyone, I don't know. You bond with your friends and everything and you feel like nothing in the world can harm you, you know. You're just on top of the world really. Yeah, and it just, it feels like...heaven."

Getting caught up in the forces of description, Becky enthuses, "Yeah you feel really like, what's the word? Euphoric is it? You know and you just, oh (SIGHS DEEPLY) it's just like a wave of something like emotion, it just goes over you, you can really feel it, it just rushes through you, it's just really unusual. I don't think I would ever have it if I didn't go clubbing sort of thing. I've been known to cry before (LAUGHS). I get really excited, like over-excited, its just like you have something inside you, it just bursts and then no matter how much you dance you can't express how much you like the music. It's totally overwhelming."

For these two girls, the world that is the club is unrecognisable from that of everyday life. Eve knows this only too well. In the outside world she often worries about what people think of her. Yet inside the club she feels she is given the ok to let-go and meet strangers, "When I went to Gatecrasher a couple of weeks ago I made friends with this group of people and I just went off for walks for hours just talking to loads of different people and that. I mean I wouldn't normally do that, but that's why I love it, because you're given the confidence," "Yeah, yeah, just anybody, well generally anyone you smile at will just smile back at you and you just don't get that anywhere else. Like in the street, you know, we've tried it before, just to smile at people and they just don't, you know, and they don't in bars either, they're just like 'Oh what's she looking at' or something, you know. It's just, people's sort of friendliness and stuff and you just feel like you can just fit in with ease really." The girls look at one another and laugh. Becky proclaims, "I can't believe we're actually going clubbing! Now, if you don't mind we need to get ready for the night. Wait for us downstairs. And please, make yourselves at home." The door closes, we make our way down the stairs and into the living room.



Both Becky and Eve take between one and two ecstasy tablets when they go out. For Eve, ecstasy helps to open her up, gives her more energy on the dance-floor and leaves her feeling all aglow, a contentment that only visits her bodily home when she's out clubbing. As for Becky, she left it about a year or so before experimenting with the drug. She felt that she loved the experience enough without having to indulge. As time went on, more and more of her mates tried it. Eventually, curiosity got the better of her. Some three years on, she believes that she doesn't abuse the drug, and realises that the experience is about so much more. Nevertheless she strongly believes that a drug like ecstasy can really aid and amplify the experience, adding positive vibrations to the dance-floor.

However, both have reservations about the long-term effects. Beck is adamant that there isn't enough decent research being done, as most start off with the assumption that all drugs are bad for you. She wants to know what people really think about the drug, like what the long term effects are, from first hand experience.

I think I hear the girls coming down. Wow they look absolutely fabulous, dabbled in sparkley face paint and with neon coloured hair extensions. The two have just received a text from Dom, who we've met before. He has managed to score some tablets. Becky settles herself in the comfy chair by the fire and bursts into a wicked smile, whilst Eve goes to get a drink.

Becky can't shut up about tonight. She is overflowing with nervous energy. She keeps saying at this part of the evening she just really wants to get to the club and explode. A few minutes pass before Eve returns from the kitchen with her mobile now fully charged. She passes Becky a can of coke. Taking a sip, Becky waits for the fizz to de-fizzle, and says "Yeah, I just enjoy doing it cos its something you can do as a big group. Like you can see everyone being so happy and everything, and you just know everyone's having a good time. It's just nice that everyone can be like that together and stuff..."

Eve nods her heads and looks at her watch, "You know clubbing, it's changed my attitude to life, I mean I have learnt to enjoy myself a bit more, make the most of it. I have made more friends through it. I spend my whole week looking forward to it, I release all my energy and you know, even if I didn't have drugs I'd do that, I'd still dance and stuff. This is the first time really that I've started to feel...I suppose I feel really good about myself."

All the while Becky has been nodding her head, "God yeah. It sounds so stupid but I'm a totally different person to like three and a half, four years ago cos I used to be quite shy and quiet and it's just, completely brought me out of my shell and you just become so much more confident. I mean like, even when you're off drugs it does make you more confident but I don't



know, I mean people say 'Oh people who do drugs are narrow minded' but I feel a lot more open minded to things. Cos you start to accept different people, that you wouldn't normally.

“You start to see people in a different light and stuff and, really it's just about enjoying yourself and that's the most important thing for everyone, to enjoy themselves. That's all anyone wants to do at the end of the day. I can't see a problem with that, I think that's brilliant, there's so many people I can sort of see like just having a good time, now it's just really taught me how to have a good time. It's like a really good way of socialising as well, just going to listen to the music that I wanted to hear in like a really good club with a really good atmosphere and everything. Everyone is really friendly. Boys and girls, you know, not just trying to pull each other or something, you know. Just people actually want to talk to you and stuff and you, you're all interested in the music, that's why you're there, for most people anyway, and it just really nice just to go out and just do that.”

There is silence for a minute or so. Inside I feel like it is time to move on. The girls wave us goodbye and once more, we're on our way.

#### **7.76 Part six: The last tune of the night**

3:45am. I'm back in the main room dancing on a podium with Jan and some old friends we bumped into some time ago. I said I'm back in the main room, in the middle of the dance floor (oh sorry you heard us first time. It's just so loud in here I thought you missed what I was saying.) Behind me are Chris and Gordon, they're old friends. They've traveled all the way from Newcastle to be here tonight. To my side are Jim, Taylor and Sally, who live in London. They used to share a flat with Chris. By some strange coincidence they all decided to come back for this weekend, yet they didn't inform me about this or each other. Weird shit. But it's a damn small world, even smaller when you're amongst all these happy people, “Oh you say you used to live in thingy street? I don't s'pose you know whatsher name...you do? I used to play tiddly winks with her as a kid, no seriously, so that means you know doobey whatsit...yeah...I saw her earlier...no shit...I haven't see her for years...yeah...she was in the chill out area not five minutes ago...” A small world, indeed.

At this time of the night, into the final hour, the room will empty out considerably. You see the bar stops serving alcohol at 2am, which means that a lot of the drunken folk feel they have no reason to be here anymore, “What no ale...fuck it let's get off,” which usually leaves a die hard contingent to stumble over the finish line together. And I suppose that's what is going on now. As I look around there is still a lot of movement, yet not as energetic as an hour or two ago.



Well think about it, if you got here at 11pm and are still standing now, that's five hours dancing. Any way enough talk, more action! Let's enjoy the last ten minutes or so.

We can sense that this is to be the last tune of the night. We're giving it our all, savoring every last moment, allowing this feeling of community to enliven our bodies, to enrich our lives, before being saved in a folder marked 'Happy times' on our internal hard drives. "OK people. What a fantastic night, we've had. But before we depart, it's Erol's birthday tonight. So, we'd like to wish him a happy birthday." Looking at the crowd, Erol the resident DJ, thanks the crowd and begins clapping us. To show our appreciation we start singing happy birthday, all 800 or so of us. This is wicked. Someone shouts out, "One more tune...one more tune," getting carried away I scream at the top of my voice...one more hour! Then there is a pause of about ten seconds, which feels more like an hour as we hang on to the idea of being able to dance together for a little bit longer...one more tune! We hear the crackling sound of needle meeting vinyl, a rhythm is heard through the speakers and then a kick-drum and then...a voice, "Get off the plane with my Bucci bag in my hand, now...I'm ready to....rock!" and the tune...kicks in. Arms in the air we squeeze every last drop of energy out of our battered bodies.

The lights come on and the music ceases. Standing on the podium we face one another and embrace for a group hug. Then we make our way to the cloakroom, collect our coats and shuffle out into the great outdoors. The early morning breeze chills our sweat soaked bodies, and the sunlight makes us rub our eyes. We wait for our friends to come out before deciding what to do next. Here they are "Well where shall we, go now? Are you up for a bit of a party?" Definitely! Five minutes pass, chatting to passers-by we wait for a taxi. It's time for the second half. Wow I feel fine, a new day is dawning, I wrap my arm round my princess. We head back home.

### **7.86 Phil and Tom**

As Phil strides out into the urban sprawl he looks up into the evening sky. There's a pinkey glow around the little fluffy clouds, mounted on an effervescent orangey-black-blue skyline. The world famous waterfront is just ten minutes walk from here. Tonight this global metropolis has a somewhat enchanted feel to it, which is ever so slightly enhanced by the ecstasy after glow that Phil is experiencing. He took his last pill early Sunday morning, the sixth of the weekend. Accompanying Phil, we make the 10 minute walk to Tom's flat.

Some background info for you: check it! Phil comes from Surrey and Tom from Bradford. They both grew up in single parent households, Phil's father left when he was three or four, he can't remember exactly, his mum an office cleaner won't talk about it much, all he



knows is that Dad was an alcoholic, who this very minute could be choking on vomit in some alley way, a thought that frequently keeps him awake at night. Tom's father, a member of parliament, left when he was about thirteen. He sees his dad occasionally. He loves him, don't get me wrong. It's just that "Dad's always so busy with his constituents, always away on business, always doing something."

As youngsters, Tom and Phil were fated never to befriend one another. One was chalk and the other cheese. In the playground Tom would play footy whilst Phil would look on and whisper "Oh please! Why have they got to be so rough, stupid monkeys trying to act all tough." At 16, Tom discovered booze. Down the local park at the weekend, he'd be drunken and rude "Oi you dickhead, square faced prat. Come over here and I'll thump you, you ugly twat!" Phil would ignore the abuse and walk on to see his mate. They'd take it in turns on the bong, play Nintendo and chill out to Hip-Hop and Hardcore tapes.

We are fast approaching Tom's street which is hidden away from the glare and noise of the main road and is lined with three story Georgian terraced houses and outside, young maple trees adorn the pavement. We feel a warm breeze coming off the river Mersey filling us with a calm summer reassured-ness.

"Yeah so I've been into clubbing for like over two years, well properly that is, cos that's when I took my first pill and like got what it was all about. But I've like always been into the music, since I was about thirteen. Last year sometime I went out clubbing with some mates, dancing away I was...when all of a sudden this bloke with spiky hair fell into me. The guy just looked at us laughing and says in a Yorkshire accent 'Oh sorry mate, good to see yer how've you been?' We looked at each other and smiled, gave each other a huge hug, shook hands and began dancing. Things just spiralled from there, Tom introduced me to his gang and I introduced mine to his.

"Later we sat off and shared a ciggie, then at the end of the night we exchanged moby's. The following day I received a text from him: **thnx 4 tp nght. call rnd anytme 4 smke**, and that's it really. But you know, when you go out clubbing this sort of thing happens all the time." And with that, Phil opens the gates, walks along the path and presses the buzzer.

A ginger headed man opens the window and throws the keys down towards us. Within a few shakes we find ourselves in Tom's flat. We are taken into the living room. It is very spacious. There are huge bay windows in front of us, either side of which there are speakers, with some twisted ambient chill-out beats softening the dusky night time air. In the corner there is a spotlight projecting a soft light onto the ten-foot high ceiling. We sit down and make ourselves comfy.



Some minutes have passed by in which time a bag of skunk has been opened and a five-inch joint rolled. Tom comes back from the kitchen with cups of tea. Placing the tray on the pine floor, Tom Looks at us and says, "How do you like your tea?" then placing the mug into your hands, he sits down on a green beanbag.

Putting the joint to his lips Phil takes a green lighter from his baggie denims and lights the stick. Taking a large toke he breathes in for what seems like an eternity, then breathing out he fills the space in-between you and him, with a fruity-musky smelling odour. Looking at you in a very calm and calculated, I mean, stoned way "I don't know...I don't know really how to explain it. I mean it's just nice to go out and meet people, just talk to people and have a good time. Cos everyone's into the music, you've like got a starting point, and so the music and the drugs help you lose your inhibitions. And the thing is, you get to meet so many different types of people. Students...scallies...doctors...nurses...office workers erm, people from all around the country who like the same music. So yeah it brings the people together."

You take a sip from the tea and ponder what has been said. Tom passes the spliff to Phil "When you go clubbing you don't feel scared to enjoy and express yourself, and erm you can really do that through dancing you know. It's good for you" he smiles and takes another toke, "And also I've noticed that I'm a lot more fit than I used to be. But it's not like exercise because it isn't boring at all. It's just like erm, fun. Before I started to go clubbing I never dreamt that I'd be into dancing, but it's just a fantastic release..." Phil butts in, "It's the best form of exercise I get, it's like stress release. I don't really know how to describe it, you're like involved with the music, moving to the music, but it's your way of moving, of expressing. So it just lets it all out. It's just a release."

Retracing his thoughts, Tom continues, "Yeah...like if you've not been out for a few weeks, you can go to a club, really enjoy yourself, let go of everything. Afterwards, you're a lot more relaxed and can see things more clearly. It's like sometimes you might have a really big problem, well you think it is, but then you go out clubbing, have a dance and a laugh and the problem seems to sort itself out."

There is a brief pause as we hydrate ourselves. So, it's a really friendly and relaxed place to be? I enquire "Definitely. When we go, we normally have a dancing area, and then one of us will say 'Oh I'm going on a mission now', which involves going off and exploring, seeing the sights and talking with people." Phil looks at the spliff and offers it to Tom who accepts. "You can sit down, chat to strangers, share stories, watch people dance and enjoy the music..." he closes his eyes, "...sit back, take deep breaths and just enjoy feeling nice with all these beautiful people."



“The thing is it is really friendly in a club. You can just be dancing and then turn to the bloke next to you and you just smile and they smile back, it’s like there’s a connection, it’s like yeah we’re both getting enjoyment out of the music, out of the same thing, there’s a definite understanding,” Phil continues.

Phil turns the spotlight off and lights a couple of candles and places them on the mantle above the fireplace. Some time passes by. Where were we? Tom takes a sip of tea, “So yeah like, it’s just not a problem being with strangers at a club, like last night we invited loads of strangers back here for an after-party, we didn’t really know any of them, we just met them at the club. It was really cool, we had about twenty people here, music was on, loads of people chatting and talking.” Phil becomes animated. Nodding his head and tapping his hand on his leg, “It’s just wicked to know that you can chill out and be with, what appears at first sight to be total strangers, only to find out that they’re like friends waiting to happen. And we were just talking complete shite with them cos like all your inhibitions have gone. You feel dead relaxed and open, you just want to have a laugh you don’t want any aggro, you know. Cos we’d all been up for so long, with drugs down us and what have you, well, we just ended up verbalising anything that came into our imagination, you know just for a laugh.

“So yeah, you end up talking nonsense, opening up your mind. The way I see it, it’s totally healthy to speak shit now and again, it reminds you just how restrained and stuck up you are in normal life.” I beg your pardon!

Looking at one another Tom and Phil seem a little wary and tired, as if to sum up Tom attempts to put in a nutshell what he’s got out of clubbing, “Well, just enjoyment and fulfillment. It’s a friendly atmosphere, everyone’s enjoying themselves, everyone’s nice with one another, everyone’s sharing everything, and well erm, you can’t really get enough of that kind of thing you know, everywhere should be like it in my opinion.” Phil nods his head in agreement, “The best way I can put it is like this. Before I was sort of shy, I didn’t like meeting people in public, it was always like ‘I’ve got my mates, I don’t need to meet any more,’ but since going out clubbing and taking pills, I’m like ‘Oh I’ve got to meet more people,’ yeah erm...I’m definitely more a people person now. It’s just opened me up, and made me realise that we all want the same thing out of life.”

#### **7.94.5 Chill-out room chatter. Women’s talk: Part three**

...I guess I don’t take anything too seriously anymore. I just think clubbing makes you get in touch with your inner self really...**I think you learn to be more sociable and like more willing in normal life, just to make conversation with someone you don’t know, I don’t know, I**



think it's also got to do with drugs as well, they seem to help people really open up, I mean like after a night out you do feel closer to people and you do feel a difference...*I'm not sure it's really changed me that much, like I've always been quite happy and hyper, I suppose it's made me less self conscious...I just feel it makes you less aggressive and I think clubbing and dancing, the whole thing, helps you to chill out a bit more. Also cos like I'm not the most petite of women, I'm pretty self-conscious really, I like the way that no one stares at you in a club, it's like my defence goes down, I can properly relax and let-go and know one cares what you look like because everyone's lost their inhibitions, so there's that as well...Yeah, I'd agree with that...*Also, you don't really get blokes leching at you in clubs, it's like if a bloke comes up to you they're generally not on the pull they just want to chat and stuff, so it's definitely brought men and women together, it's not just a sexual thing I suppose that's what I'm trying to say...**Yeah...Deifinitely...**I feel that clubbing keeps me young, I might be physically getting older, but when I'm in a club I still feel young inside, whereas you tend to expect that you can't feel like that, but clubbing does that, it keeps you feeling young, young in heart...**Umm...Definitely.** At the end of the day, people have to take themselves away from the stress of college. It's like everyone has their own problems, but when you come together in a club it feels as if they're just, problems, clubbing helps you remember that and to celebrate life I suppose...

#### **7.94.6 Men's talk: Part three**

...So how old are you?...37...My God! So have you a family?...No. I've lost my house, wife, garden, everything cos of clubbing! No, I'm only joking...*You know, I've got to tell you this, my friend goes out and takes ecstasy with his MUM, can you believe that. He says dancing with his Mum off her head is just the best feeling, can you believe that...***I'm not sure I'd like that...Yeah, but can you imagine it, it surprised me, but I thought it was really good, knowing that this goes on...**My parents are pretty uneducated about it all, they know I smoke weed and I think they might have an idea about the rest. I wouldn't tell them I take ecstasy is cos I've got a brother, who is 14, and like he copies everything I do. It's not that I think ecstasy is bad, it's just like I wouldn't want to be responsible for someone else taking it...*Even when someone hasn't taken ecstasy though, and wanted to, I'd say that I had a really good time on it, and to...***Do it...oh yeah, like I tell people about it and if they want to do it, it is up to them, and if they don't, they don't...****People always have doubts about thing especially drugs, I've been taking ecstasy for over ten years and I'm alright (EVERYONE LAUGHS).** I mean, if you're older enough to go out, then you should be treated as mature enough to make these sort of decisions for



yourself. A lot of parents worry, but as long as you don't end up in a body bag, it is infinitely better than what you could be getting up to on the streets...I don't agree with the image that's painted about ecstasy in the newspapers, they're seriously misinformed about it...*They just want to stop people taking it cos it's illegal...*A lot is to do with the generation split, they really don't understand what is going on, that's all...I think it's wrong to picture the scene as being negative, like if you go to the pub, you usually see everyone really smashed and fights and aggro occurring...*It doesn't make sense that drugs like alcohol are tolerated in society, yet it causes so much violence...*Yeah, it's unreal...And the thing is, ecstasy and clubbing is so ingrained in society that they can't stop it, can they?...**Yep, it's part of our culture now.** So much money has been made on the back of it, this city has benefited greatly from club culture, like with 'Cream' being an ambassador for the city. It's taken for granted now, things like Radio One's coverage of dance music is massive, and the influence of dance music in the media...Yeah, it's like part of the mainstream now, like Fatboy Slim getting away with playing on 'Top of the Pops', with families going 'Look at that nice Fatboy Slim'...*I just can't understand why so many people are up in arms about club culture, it's fuelled by misinformation, fear and paranoia. I mean most people who go on about how bad it is, have never been out to a club, never taken ecstasy, so how can they make an informed opinion about it?...***Yeah...**I think the more education people get, the more people can make up their own mind...At the end of the day, a lot of people simply don't realise how much fun you can have in life, clubbing allows people to realise this, I suppose some people are probably really concerned by the idea that there is more to life...**Yeah, like scared to take a chance...**I know for me and the people I've met, clubbing isn't just about the experience, it's about the carry over into the rest of your life, the way you approach life and people in general...*You can approach people more easily, like people in the street, you can speak to them and find out who they really are...***Yeah,** one of my dreams is that the so called 'Generation X' will be able to go into the workforce, become captains of industry by treating people well, not having an attitude but to be nice to people. It sounds a bit trippy and far out, but you know, if it's done it for you, why not other people, why not?

### **7.77 Part seven: Coming down**

The early morning sun gleams through the window and bathes me in a pool of effervescence. With kettle in hand I pour water into the mugs, place them on a tray and shuffle back into the living room. In front of me I see friends lounging on the futon and rocking chair,



whilst others are sat cross-legged on the carpet, playing with the cats and Cris is texting friends, letting them know what a top night he's had:...i...av...u...no!

The room is filled with cannabis smoke. Rays of early morning sunshine collide with the hazy particles. Projecting and refracting colours onto the walls. One of my cats has rolled onto its back and, snake-like, wriggles up the carpet. A happy cat, purrrrrinng! Not hiiiising! Just relaxed, snaking in the sunlight, feeling the motion stroking his emotions, chilled out beats, bounce out of the speakers and onto our laps "Miaow!" The atmosphere is relaxed and light hearted, laughter trickles off the chin, faces glow with glee. We're like that guy in the Ready Brek advert, a candle like glow radiates from our bodies. No jaggedness in sight, contented bodies melt into the furniture, no pretense, we sink deep into the moment and wait for the next choice comment to enter into our minds "What's the height of conceit?...What?...Having an orgasm and calling out your own name?"

Finding a space, in amongst the empty chocolate wrappers, banana skins, magazines, cigarettes, matches and larva lamp, I place the tray down and squeeze myself on to the end of the futon. Sat on a giant marshmallow spaceship, all danced out we descend from the heights, passing through the clouds we pull the shoot and glide down into a lush green meadow, full of feather pillows, besides an oval lake, filled with tea.

I sink into the futon, take a toké from the herbal ciggie, inhale the psychedelic vapour and experience my bodily senses enhancing and amplifying the musical notes that travel through the air. I feel comfortable here with my friends, no one can touch us, beyond (h)arms length we are, the sound of the clock in the sky is silenced, no ticking in here, just moments pass by. For sure we're coming down, the roller-coaster ride is coming to a halt, and sure enough before long we'll be catapulted back into the heat of the week. But for now, we're on holiday and we've got the rest of the weekend to fill, so put your sunglasses on, sit back and...chill!

Some hours have passed. I'm sat here in the garden with my girlfriend the weather is a little overcast, the party has ended and people have gone their separate ways, the weekend is drawing to a close. In the background I hear the faint ticking of the big clock in the sky, I begin the journey back into the default time zone, whilst trying to savour what is left of the weekend.

Evening is here. Lying in bed now, slightly irritable and eager to visit the land of nod. I wonder what tomorrow will bring?



The come-down! \*

\*

...corners of my eyes curl up...black rings circle round my eye sockets...throbbing  
...drained  
...de-hydrated  
...calves sore, back has seized up  
...want to eat want to sleep...but neither can I do...

\*

breathing goes into reverse...  
don't want tomorrow to come...  
for now...hold breath  
...squeeze tight time...delay the return to...  
normality  
normality

\*

\*

\*

\*

Oh well, it's been fun whilst it lasted...

...I think...but inside...it hurts to know I have to return

...to normality...normality...free falling...I hope it'll be ok...if I hope enough will that suffice?

\*

\*

\* pained visions...

traces of panic stricken paranoia come and go...

...who said that!

Please tomorrow, be gentle when returning me to the fold...

...ring ring ring...oh no...my mother...squeeze ears tight and ignore...

...hold my lover in my arms...kiss...and say "Good night"



# Chapter Eight



## **8. Some reflections**

### **8.1 Towards an introduction**

This study has attempted to explore two different cultural practices, through which people experience and make sense of their body-selves. Evidently, they afford contrasting ‘insights’ and ‘tales’ about embodiment, identity and health within the life and times of young people. Having presented some ethnographic snapshots and stories from within these lifeworlds, the following sections reflect on these practices more directly—as occasions for young people to do identity work.

Having reflected on the significance of these body practices as distinct identity projects, some attention will be afforded to returning to the writing of the narrative tales, so as to reflect on whether or not I feel that I have managed to succeed in my task of writing ‘good’ ethnographic fiction. This will be discussed in relation to the wider writing journey, so as to highlight some of the personal challenges that this endeavour presented to me, as an inexperienced qualitative narrative storyteller.

### **8.2 Exercise, young people and identity**

The biographical particularities varied, yet a common root that linked people together within this research, is that in some way or another, exercising was shown to afford people opportunities to exert some sort of agency and self control over *their* bodily-lives. In many respects, exercising acts as an escape route from the day-to-day world, where people can de-stress or take time-out. For example, Dave was aware that going and lifting weights at times helped him deal with exam stress and the like. Within the day-to-day context, it was common for participants to use exercise as a means of stress management—as a get away. This was one way in which people, through exercise, attempted to manage their lives.

Similarly, it has been shown in the study that doing exercise was also used as ‘me’ time, where people switched off and were not forced into having to deal with others. This is not to say that it doesn’t afford participants opportunities to socialise, just that the focus is primarily on the individual body-self. This is evident from the ecology of the gym, with the demarcation of space; one person uses one stepper or piece of equipment, whereby “The continuation of the exercise relies on the capacity



of each client to isolate from others to focus on a personal sequence of movements” (Sassatelli, 1999, p.230). These aspects of the gym experience were highly pervasive, and shouldn’t be overlooked as ways in which people attempted to exert some agency in their lives. However, the findings also suggest that the gym not only provides spaces for young people to *remove* themselves from the rigours of the outside world, but that it also an environment used to *prepare* them for the trials and tribulations of being a young adult, in these post-modern times.

Prone to lethargy and ruing the passing of time, Jon felt he needed to have some sort of say in his destiny, so he began exercising. Belinda confessed that she is paranoid about her body, exercising helps her feel good about herself. Since he began lifting weights Dave feels that he has become more determined, disciplined and able to achieve his goals. Andrea has always remained active, walking and cycling most days, now a little older she is conscious of things sagging, so does a little bit extra.

Beyond the realms of ‘time-out’ and ‘me’ time the gym allows opportunities for young people to work on themselves (and sense of self), in more specific ways, as part of much larger identity projects. The snippets of stories above, serve not to simplify the complexities of participants biographies, but to act as a reminder of how exercise is appropriated as a means of managing the ‘self,’ and to illustrate what these ‘selves’ are about. Here, the body as the construction site for doing identity work moves to the fore.

It was evident from the study that the pre-conditions of practising and maintaining an exercise identity, for some people, had to do with regular practice, and of keeping up a routine and regimen. This was a central strand in Dave’s story. The regular practice of lifting, enabled him to exert some discipline over his body, which was geared towards challenging himself, reaching his targets and achieving set goals over time. This sense of mastery over his body was something that defined his participation, and from it, a sense of worth. For Belinda, it also seemed important to keep up regular practice to maintain the gains and benefits of her bodywork. In recollecting how she felt when subjected to injury, it became evident how important it



was to be continually investing herself into her body project, “It’s like you work so hard to get fit as you can, and it all goes down the pan. You just end up back at square one.” The act of disciplining the self to regularly practice, was often cited throughout the fieldwork and alluded to in the individual and group interviews, whereby illness and injury wasn’t necessarily a reason to stop participating. For others, like Jon, the act of regular practice was something that he found difficult to deal with and enforce yet he acknowledged that his involvement did help him to counter his tendency to be lazy and lethargic. Where Jon’s story differed from many others seemed to be in the investment he was willing to give over to his body project. He wasn’t going to lose any sleep over a missed session. Nevertheless, the study has shown, that to a more or less degree, a central aspect to nurturing the self through exercise, had to do with being able to exert some discipline and practice regularly so as to not nullify the effects of the body work. This was a powerful and pervasive narrative that was drawn upon when articulating participants’ sense of identity through gym and bodywork.

In another way, the study has shown that not only did people gain a sense of worth and identity from putting in the time and effort into their bodywork, but also through monitoring the effects that exercising had on their body’s, particularly, in altering and modifying it. For Richard, getting back into regular exercise helped him feel he was doing something more productive and that through his involvement he could re-claim the body that he previously cherished and felt comfortable with. Before beginning to exercise in his early twenty’s, Brian noted that he always had as shaky relationship with his body and that something didn’t feel right. By going to the gym regularly, he feels he’s been able to get that under control, and now feels less of a wimp. Jessica articulated her ‘seasonal’ involvement with exercise as a means through which she could work on her bum and thighs. What was evident from this study was that body alteration was something of great significance. It was both a pervasive and well rehearsed narrative, that people often drew upon to make sense off their involvement.

On reflection, it should be noted that in making sense of their bodywork, participants relied heavily on a mixture of *discipline*, *aesthetic*, and *health* narratives.



This wasn't the whole story (for example, what about Karen's tale?<sup>1</sup>), yet in attempting to draw some sort of conclusions about how young people manage and make sense of their lives through exercise, these social scripts would seem to be very powerful. What was striking was that very often, these narratives merged into one another, where *feeling* fit it and *looking* fit were synonymous with effort and discipline.

In articulating what participants got from exercise and how it empowered them, it wasn't uncommon for the people within this study to link taking *control* with being healthy. Likewise, feeling and looking healthy were often equated as being synonymous with one another. For example, Brian noted "I think doing exercise and having a healthier attitude to my body has prevented me from feeling that I am a wimp. It gives me a sense of control over that." In discussing how he felt about himself when he was fit and how he feels now, having just got back into training, Richard stated "But the way I am now, I'm just not happy with the way I look and I was happier then because, I looked, I felt fitter..." Andrea believed that "...if you can go out in a bikini and know that that you look good, then that makes you feel happy, that makes you feel nice and you know, if you're exercising and you feel healthy, that's the best thing I think."

Some similar observations have been highlighted in the contemporary research, that has focused on female aerobics. For example, Markula (1995) also noted the implicit merging of health and appearance—of looking and feeling healthy—when participants explored reflected on their participation. In questioning this taken-for-granted *commonsense*, Markula argued that, "the healthy body is only a new and fashionable rubric for the physically attractive body" (1995, p.447). In another study, McDermott (2000) found that participants' body perceptions were often rooted in

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst not wanting to deal specifically with Karen's story within the discussion, it is important to remind the reader that in presenting her story, I wanted to show how she *interrupted* the collective tale of young people and gym life. The experience of childbirth and the breakdown of her body, gave her an opportunity to realise how fragile her body was. This breakdown enabled her to draw on other narratives, allowing her to see through the youthful media ideals that she once subscribed to, as "hollow." Post childbirth she understood that exercising was as much about having a body to sustain her through her new role, where it was "Not about fitting into the dress but getting the shopping home in the pram." Her story would seem to serve as a "lesson" concerning the changing nature of exercise in the life-cycle, post youth, so to speak.



concerns about appearance and health. Here, participants made sense by dissecting the body for problem areas as well privileging an intellectual rationalisation, in which putting in the *effort* and taking *control* was equated with being healthy.

In reflecting upon the fusion of effort, fitness, health and attractiveness, which in no small part linked many of the stories within this study, I feel it is important to situate these narratives within the broader context of the politics of *health* and *health living* in post-modern consumer society.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, the concerns of health and well-being have increasingly been seen as the responsibility of the individual (Ingham, 1985; Porter, 1999) couched in terms of personal and moral responsibility (Loy et al., 1993), and achieved through self-control, discipline and will power (Edgley & Brisett, 1990). As the material signifier of the individual, the body has taken on prominence as *the* site in which the gains of health are manifested and made visible. Here the fit and healthy body is a possession to feel and display as a sign of moral and physical worth (White *et al.*, 1995). In post-modern times, the body has not been left untouched by the commodifying pressures of consumer culture, being valued as a desirable good with exchange value (e.g. Featherstone, 1991). The logics of health and consumption, incorporated under the general banner of body maintenance, taking control and making something of oneself (Bordo, 1990) have fused together, so that the “‘inner’ concerns of health and the optimal functioning of the body merge imperceptibly with ‘outer’ concerns of appearance” (Williams & Bendelow, 1998, p.74).

The social narratives that fuse together discipline, health and appearance are highly pervasive within society and cannot be ignored. It is my belief that these ‘healthy’ discourses are given a unique home within the gym, to be practised and worked on. That is to say that gym culture acts as a living incarnation in which the merged and messy metaphors of the post-modern health project, are brought to life and made bodily; where biomedicine, discipline and aesthetics merge together, seamlessly. The gym is a place where machines measure one’s progress through recourse to improvements in, time, weight, heart rate and the like, whilst also attending to body mass and fat indices. In the gym, one person uses a piece of



resistance equipment to build up their 'gluteus maximus' as part of a rehabilitation programme, then, someone who has just come from a "tums and bums" class gets on it and uses it for another purpose. The men in the corner lift free-weights with focus and determination looking into the large mirror on the wall, whilst a woman takes the control of her body to another level by completing the 'expert' level on the step ergometer.

As I noted at the start of the discussion, doing exercise and going to the gym allows participants (myself included) in some way or other, to manage our lives, to take time out, to recharge and have time for 'me.' Yet, involvement with gym culture is prefaced upon much deeper concerns and challenges besetting young people; of having a body, of living in a body, of being a body in relation to other bodies. The emphasis on being able to control one's body and to make it fit and healthy as well as feeling and looking presentable, has gained much credence within post-modern society, not least within the life and times of young people. It cannot be ignored.

The narratives of health and fitness are much messier and convoluted than the bio-medical notions, which underpin and give credence to the social health project<sup>2</sup>. This study has, along with others (e.g. Bordo, 1990; Lloyd, 1996; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 1995; McDermott, 2000; White et al., 1995; Young & White, 1995), once more illustrated the blurring of boundaries between having a fit and healthy (feeling and looking) body and the, ambiguities that arise when consideration is given to what it means to exercise. Within the sociological and anthropological literature, much attention has been given over to discussing the bio-politics of exercise as an identity project, particularly the power-dynamics that influence peoples' reasons for participation. Here I am specifically referring to the oppression and empowerment debate.

Recent literature has focused on the cultural bio-politics of health and fitness within the context of female participation, under the rubric of gender politics and feminist thought (e.g. Birrell & Cole, 1994; Lloyd, 1996; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998;

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<sup>2</sup> I am not suggesting that the bio-medicine of exercise isn't important or unreal. Clearly having a heart that works efficiently and the strength to carry oneself around is in no small part helped by physical exertion. Likewise the act of upping the heart rate, in itself creates a certain sort of feel good buzz, and this was also something the people drew reference to in articulating what they get out of exercise.



Markula, 1995; McDermott, 1996; 2000). For example, Maguire & Mansfield (1998) fear that the attainment of a healthy-beautiful body "...clearly restate the underlying patriarchal framework of the "exercise-body beautiful complex"...that is women who do not conform to ideal images fear that they are unattractive, worthless, and socially undesirable" (p.126). The findings from this study would in part, seem to concur. As has been shown, women did place a great deal of emphasis on wanting to have a toned and shapely body, perhaps more so than losing weight (Markula, 1995). The study has also shown that it's not only women who live in fear (and curiosity) of the 'body beautiful.' Young men also live under the shadow of the image and within sight of the consumer mirror, which promises that you can "defy both nature and culture and transform yourself into the potent self-assured manly being that you've always dreamed of being" (Wacquant, 1995, p.164, cited in Williams & Bendelow, 1998, p.76).

The pressure to attain *the body*, whether a female one that is firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin (Markula, 1995) or a male one that is strong, muscular and with a ripped physique (Bordo, 1997; Pronger, 1990), is great. However, to attribute these images and expectations to an underlying patriarchy is perhaps stretching the politics of the body, outside and away from the lived experience of being a young man or woman. As Markula (1995) has noted, the feminine body also enables women to obtain power through similar manipulation of traditional channels. My own feeling is that the power of the *image* does indeed hold a great deal of power over young people, whether male or female. Our body-selves are simultaneously, vulnerable, exploited and empowered by these images. I believe that the simple gender dichotomies are intellectually enticing, yet simplify the complexities of the lived realities of being a young person in the post-modern climate.

Clearly, *thinking* about power and *feeling* power in the body are different from one another. Markula (1995) noted that exercisers in her study weren't unaware of the implausibility of attaining the media body ideals yet still felt they couldn't escape them "Against their own judgement, many aerobicizers still desire to look like the flawless models. It seems a lot easier to judge the body image at an intellectual level, than engage in the resistant action in real life" (p.445). She goes on to note that even



as a feminist she's petrified of becoming fat, "We struggle to resist the body ideal but we are not able to ignore it or achieve it. Our bodies remain imperfect" (Markula, 1995, p.446). Within this study, it was equally clear that we (that is myself and the other participants) are aware of the implausibility of the super-model/superman image. We are intelligent and reflective beings who do have an active say on what we do and why, but also in our bodies we cannot escape the pull of these powers; in our felt relationships with ourselves, others, and society.

The over-intellectualisation of the exercised body does not give enough consideration to how we actively negotiate, within the everyday situations and circumstances that we find ourselves, in order to cope with the pressures and anxieties that our body-selves feel and experience. I acknowledge the 'double bind' (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998), yet as the study has illustrated, in various ways, as a cultural body project, exercising does afford young people, time, space and the means to exert personal agency, and take some control over an aspect of life that remains within reach—the body. This is particularly enticing within an individualistic and self-conscious consumer society (Featherstone, 1991), where the body has taken on significance as the most tangible and visible signifier of identity. And this, in a time when the contours of society are changing rapidly, so that the traditional stabilities in the workplace, home and relationships are no longer as stable, as they once were. In this sense, controlling the body through exercising is one way in which young people actively attempt to deal with living with change.

The study has shown that through the act of exercising, young people are engaged in various individual identity projects, to enable them, not only to gain some distance from our everyday lives, to recharge, to take time out and find some space to engage in 'me time' but also, in no small part, to help empower us, to manage and alter our bodily sense of self, and to allow us to feel more assured and comfortable inhabiting our bodily homes.



### 8.3 Rave, young people and identity

The study has shown how in rave dancing, young people are afforded an alternative means of experiencing their bodies, practising identity and securing other forms of 'health.' The implications of rave culture, as an alternative realm of body experience and identity practice, will now be discussed.

Rave and contemporary dance cultures have become an integral part of the weekend recreational landscape, through which young people can gain some distance from the pull of weekday life. However, participants were adamant that clubbing was something qualitatively different from other weekend recreational experiences, for example going to bars and pubs or other sorts of nightclubs. The spaces of dance culture, afford another sort of hedonistic environment and recreational experience. It has been suggested that the rave is a form of 'internal tourism' or a mini-holiday where people experience a break, not only from everyday life, but also from the every day self (Melechi, 1993). Within the study, these analogies held some resonance with the experience of participants. The getting ready, the trip to the club (sometimes travelling to other cities), the club experience and the after-party and chilling out, represented a kind of intense and condensed break away from everyday society.

Whilst acting as a retreat from the everyday, the story of rave culture can't only been understood as acting as a safety valve for young people (Collin, 1997; Reynolds, 1998). This is not to say that it doesn't have this effect. Kirsty felt strongly that by going out clubbing it allowed her to go out and distance herself from a stressful week at university, and this was certainly a *function* of clubbing for many participants. Yet on its own it doesn't begin to describe how this cultural space alters participants bodily sense of self and other, when contrasted against the backdrop of *normal* life.

The escape *from* the everyday that the rave affords, is simultaneously an entrance and adventure into an alternative society. This is a crucial point to consider when deciphering the cultural and experiential aspects of raving and its wider significance as a youth cultural identity project. Reflecting on an ethnographic study of female clubbers, Pini (1997; 2001) noted that in speaking about this alternative world, participants were not simply referring to a physical or material space but also "...to different ways of being and seeing which the rave event is seen to make



possible” (p.158). This would seem to be a common observation by researchers and cultural commentators. In numerous ways, clubbing offers young people opportunities to take part in and experience alternative forms of community, which operate outside of the strictures and norms of everyday society (e.g. Malbon, 1999; Reynolds, 1998; Rietveld, 1998a). The stories within this study allude to some of the ways in which young people articulate and make sense of their bodily experiences within these alternative and subversive social worlds.

The ecology of the rave enables people to drop the usual roles and masks and experience other forms of sociality, which would seem more, immediate, spontaneous and playful (Malbon, 1999). This is constituted through a radical de-centring of the self, in which other selves are explored and expressed, and where the boundaries between people and their bodies are broken down. Dominic feels that “everyone’s part of the same thing, the same place, doing the same thing,” Andrea noted how she can lose her inhibitions so that “another person comes out.” Similarly, Becky recollected the waves of emotion she experiences on the dance floor in which something inside of her, breaks out. Evidently, the dance floor is somewhere in which people can lose their inhibitions and experience other selves.

It has been noted that this de-centring doesn’t simply involve a loss of one’s self, absorbed into a collective body, but moreover enables people to ‘re-do’ and ‘re-construct’ their sense of self (Pini, 2001) in ways that are more attuned and aligned with other people’s experience. Thus one’s identity in the rave “has less to do with distinction and the forging of notions of individuality and perhaps more to do with belonging and the establishment of identifications” (Malbon, 1999, p.182). In this sense, as a cultural practice, raving is based on *connectivity* between bodies, and the felt sense of belonging, triggered from such connections.

As has been shown in the current study, the particular temporal and spatial dynamics of the rave cut through peoples’ body-selves, emotional barriers and personal differences with the assistance of specific ecological and body technologies. Central to this is undoubtedly the somatic effects of the music, creating the basis of a collectively experienced rhythm and narrative soundtrack. Here, dance and non verbal communication become the means through which people express and communicate



their bodily tales and connect with other bodies, who are likewise feeling the music, and interpreting it through their movements and expressions. Dancing was understood by people in this study, as a way in which they could simultaneously express themselves as well as communicate with others. It is this collective body that moves to the foreground and distinguishes rave as a youth culture identity project.

In more detail, the ecology of the dance club, acts on bodies in ways that can't be adequately described *only* in terms of the influence of music on the body. In breaking down the body-self barriers, it should be recognised that the self is reconstructed in terms of "a particular mind/body/spirit/ technology assemblage" (Pini, 1997, p.165), whereby lighting, effects, music, drugs and bodies fuse together, displacing time and space and disrupting the stability of the built environment and giving the felt sense of being part of a living, throbbing organism. In Malbon's ethnography (1999), he alluded to clubbing as a form of continuous revolution, which is "constituted through the immanent vitality of the crowd and the strong emphasis on the 'here and now,' through the intertwining notions of movement and emotion, and especially upon the imaginative spaces opened out through excessive sensory stimulation" (p.182). Through its particular configuration of time, space and interpersonal body technologies, raving bombards the senses and fragments the body's experience of time and space, in ways that seriously disrupt and question, in a felt and embodied sense, the understanding of identity and subjectivity as something that resides solely within the individual body bag.

As a cultural site in which young people experiment with their sense of self and otherness, the study has shown that the rave provides particular resources and conditions necessary to radically alter the way in which young people experience themselves in the company of others within public life. In discussing this in relation to the literature on embodiment and identity, I believe that the rave enables the *communicative body* (Frank, 1991; 1995) to come out and play. The communicative body according to Frank is unlike the other ideal body types (mirroring, disciplined and dominating) in so far as it provides an *ethical* ideal for bodies. His description of the *communicative body* (see also Buber, 1965; Eichberg, 1995; 1998) very much describes and articulates the embodied experience of raving.



The communicative body realizes the ethical ideal of existing for the other. The communing of bodies involve a communication of recognition that transcends the verbal. Bodies commune in touch, in tone, in facial expression and gestural attitude, and in breath. Communication is less a matter of content than of *alignment*: when bodies sense themselves in alignment with others, words make sense in the context of that alignment. When alignment is lacking, even the best semantic content risks misinterpretation or will be unsatisfactory as a message. The body itself *is* the message; humans commune through their bodies...The communicative body *communes* its story with others; the story invites others to recognize themselves in it. Thus the communicative body tells itself explicitly in stories. Reciprocally, stories are the medium of bodies seeking to approximate the communicative type (Frank, 1995, p.49-50).

In alluding to the dyadic and communicative aspects of contemporary dance culture, some scholars have suggested that the rave is a kingdom of 'We' (Melechi, 1993) where nobody is but where everybody belongs (Reynolds, 1998). It has not gone unnoticed that contemporary club culture provides participants a tangible and embodied sense of community, in a time when traditional religious beliefs have begun to erode and established concerns of faith have become challenged and contested (see the edited collection by, St John, 2004). Free from the baggage and regulations of traditional religious practice, contemporary youth dance cultures afford people a sense of spiritual sacrament, experienced through a contemporary filter (Reynolds, 1998); a post-modern marriage between people, technology and the imagination?

Gilbert & Pearson (1999) have suggested that the construction of these communal and communicative spaces, enable people to democratically empower themselves. The present study has alluded to some of the empowering effects of dancing and recreating in the rave. In recollecting their experiences and what they had learnt from their involvement, many participants in this study alluded to being more able to see through their prejudices, as well as being less judgemental. These were some of the ways in which people within this study made sense of their involvement with rave culture. Their stories seem to be threaded together by somewhat profound



existential realisations concerning 'people' and 'life' which had been experienced whilst on the dance-floor. Malbon (1999) observed that the rave club provides people with spaces to act, think and reflect upon one's life and experience others and otherness in ways that are not often possible in most social spaces. This study has likewise shown that young people are afforded opportunities to see, feel and experience themselves in different ways and in relation to other people.

One particular area in which rave culture would seem to have been most influential in 'undoing' traditional subjectivities, is within the sphere of sexuality and gender politics. Within this study it was notable that in recollecting their storied experiences, female participants often pointed out that the rave was discernible as a unique social experience, because they didn't feel under the spectre of the male gaze. Both male and female participants alluded to the uniqueness of rave clubs as social spaces in which there was no underlying pressure or sub-text to chat up or be chatted up. Pini's ethnography (1997; 2001) likewise showed that the pleasure her participants' experienced from raving could be seen as an implicit dissatisfaction with traditional sexual relations and forms of masculinity, operating in most other mixed sex recreational spheres.

This dissatisfaction with traditional modes and expressions of masculinity would also seem to have impacted on the ways in which men experience their sexuality, in this study. For example, Dom vehemently felt that rave culture had enabled him to see through the "myth of the lad" and macho culture, which he had grown up with and which he normally felt obliged, to act up to. From my own personal experiences and those of other young men I have met within this study, I sense that what we have in common is that we have finally been given some public space, to albeit temporarily liberate ourselves from the suffocating emotional paralysis that we've had to endure, through our habitual rehearsing of traditional masculine scripts and acting up our 'manliness' in social spaces. By displacing and de-centring traditional gender roles, the rave has provided both young men and women, some space, in which sexuality and gender can be played with, re-shaped and re-visioned in a safe environment (Gilbert & Pearson, 1999).



In many ways the experience of clubbing and raving can be understood as a form of escape from the everyday, yet as has been shown in this study, this doesn't on its own articulate what the experience represents and means to the young people that participate in it. It is not only, nor primarily a flight *from* everyday society but moreover an adventure into the imagination—as an experiment into *doing* and *experiencing* society in other ways, albeit temporarily. Recently, Maria Pini (2001) suggested that social commentators have often omitted and failed to recognise that what might be empowering about raving and contemporary club culture concerns “its generation and provision of alternative fictions of femininity” (p.169), going on to add

If rave and club cultures are ‘empowering’ women, then they do so by providing the material and discursive conditions for the explorations of different embodiments of femininity...they provide the conditions within which new social identities can be explored, and within which new skills can be learnt. Living with the temporary, coping with confusion and dealing with ‘madness’—those are some of the skills seemingly explored within contemporary rave cultures  
(Pini, 2001, p.171).

I would agree with this observation. I would also add that the availability of these new resources are equally profound within the context of young male participation, allowing men to dis-assemble, reflect and reconstruct notions of subjectivity and self-hood; of what it means to be a man. By providing unique cultural spaces in which subjectivity and community can be re-worked and re-visioned, the study has shown that raving can provide young people new insights into living together as a community, which challenge many societal hegemonic ideals, experiences and beliefs, on a profound level. This is not to deny that traditional forms of subjectivity, gender, sexuality and belief systems aren't being challenged in the outside world, already. Rather, given that the rave is such a radical removal from the everyday, from work and from most other forms of recreation, it is precisely because of its distancing from these societal configurations, that it is a particularly fruitful



place for the working out of new ideas and ways of being, in these changing times (e.g. Pini, 2001; Reynolds, 1998).

The bodily experience of raving and the accompanying *skills* and *resources* that it affords participants could be perceived as the artefacts of a marginal youth body culture (or sub-culture), not wholly without influence, but limited in its scope and outreach in disrupting societal patterns and conditions. This would underline contemporary dance culture as an *interesting* blip on the social landscape. However, it is evident that the impact of rave culture is far reaching and not just an interesting anomaly. It has infiltrated and fundamentally transformed British culture (and impacted on youth culture in every continent; see Fritz, 1999 for an overview), and is no longer an act of rebellion, rather something that a significant minority of people understand as a rite of passage into young adult life.

Placed within the context of a young British urban population, the present study has attempted to show something of this post-modern rite of passage, as a distinct body cultural practice and as a prominent youth cultural identity project.

In a world where young men can no longer expect the easy domination over women that their fathers ‘enjoyed’, where straightforward heterosexuality is no longer a strictly enforced cultural norm, where young women have to learn what it means to be a women when that doesn’t mean occupying a position of weakness, then having the deconstructive *jouissance* of the dancefloor—a place where the dissolution of certainty and identity is experienced as pleasure, where gender and sexuality can be suspended, looked at from different angles and possibly reworked—at the centre of youth culture is surely a step towards a more democratic culture  
(Gilbert & Pearson, 1998, p.181).



#### 8.4 Evaluating the tales: Revisiting the writing and legitimation process

Having read the book of tales that comprised the *products* of my ethnographic adventure—the textual representation and dissemination of my findings—you have undoubtedly reflected upon your own biographical experiences and narrative resources, as a means through which to make sense of the stories and, whether implicitly or explicitly, evaluate the efficacy of my narratives and skills as a storyteller.

Earlier in the thesis, I attempted to articulate why I wanted to use experimental narrative genres—as a means of communicating and portraying the worlds of exercise and dance as lived, experiential and embodied action. I felt they would enable me to give you, the reader, an idea of what life feels like for young people, using my-self (a white, late twenty-something young man) as the USB cable, to connect you with the worlds of the gym and dance club. I very much wanted to juxtapose *what it is like* in these worlds with stories about exercise and dance, as lived and experienced by some of the interviewed participants in my fieldwork. By integrating different angles, exploring these phenomena from various positions and through multiple voices, the intention was to somehow create a bridge between these worlds and you, the reader.

In order to assess the efficacy of my tales and to make practical judgements as to whether I had fulfilled my aims, like many others who have experimented with these genres, you may recall earlier in the thesis that I alluded to the necessity of being able to combine the craft skills of writing with the analytical skills of social science. The problem of course, is finding the balance. In elaborating upon this challenge, I drew reference to characterising traits that have commonly been used to facilitate reader participation—such as evocation, fidelity and believability—that help to draw in the reader. In this way the author helps to craft these worlds, so as to make them *personally* knowable. It is for you to decide whether I have succeeded, and to what extent. Invariably, we all bring our experiences and biographies into the reading process, which means that no two people will interpret identically.

In reflecting on the extent to which I have succeeded in this task, I have mixed feeling and thoughts. I shall now turn my attention to these issues and attempt to discuss them in relation to the wider vestiges of my (research) writing journey. In



doing this, the hope is to provide an additional reflexive layer, through which to contextualise my efforts. As such, I offer the following reflections and comments in the spirit of a confessional-writing story, of a beginning qualitative researcher (e.g. Kluge, 2001).

Having completed the crafting of the stories, which was the last part of the wider writing-up process, I originally submitted the thesis at the end of 2003. The writing-up was extremely troublesome and felt like it was never going to end. Through large periods of the process I was overcome with anxiety and bouts of acute depression, in which I couldn't string a sentence together, let alone a story. I experienced severe data overload and would often sit thinking to myself what on earth I was going to do with it all. There were times when I thought that I would never see the end of it. I had considered quitting on numerous occasions, although never verbalised these intentions to others around me, and that probably said a great deal about me at the time. I was pretty much living in a private world, unable to reach out to others, unwilling to ask for help and spending considerable time wallowing in a pool of self-pity. Somehow I managed to summon the energy to write the remaining quarter of the narrative material in just one month. On the insistence of my partner and mother, I agreed to travel to my family home and lock myself up during the course of December 2003, in order to "get the damn thing done and dusted."

Upon completion I remember feeling satisfied and utterly relieved that I could finally submit the project. I was certainly proud that I had attempted to produce a narrative portrayal of exercise and rave worlds. I was glad that I had had the opportunity to develop my repertoire of writing skills, in so creating alternative versions of experience and reality. And in writing this way I felt that I had tentatively begun to explore the potential (my potential) of integrating personal voices and experiences into the analyses, as well as blurring the line between the personal and academic self (or selves).

In re-reading the book of tales just before submission (admittedly in a sleep deprived state of mind) I believed that in choosing to flirt with auto-ethnography and ethnographic fiction I had chosen genres that hinted at what I had experienced and encountered. Likewise, I felt pleased in the way I'd structured the book of tales, as a



journey of juxtaposed ‘snapshots.’ However, my sense of satisfaction wasn’t left untouched by other thoughts and emotions that had began festering in my body, earlier on in my journey and which left me, when submitting the thesis, with a sense of fear and trepidation (and not only excitement and relief).

It is difficult to articulate this sense of trepidation that I experienced when I submitted the project, but I believe I need to try and put it down on paper. Where to begin?

A real turning point in my journey came in 1999. I had completed the first study and had begun re-orienting my project to include a qualitative phase of study. It was around the same time that I first began to think about incorporating a more *personal* exploration of these body cultures into the research, as well as toying with the idea of narrative accounts and storytelling. Having completed the first study, I embarked on an intense period of reading and contemplation. I digested a number of philosophy of science texts and other post-modern annuals, taking me further and further away from the positivistic starting point of the project, as well as my academic training within my sports science department, which, to use the language of Denzin and Lincoln (2000), was housed predominantly within the vestiges of the second ‘modernist’ moment.

In a relatively short time I found myself in the land of blurred genres (third moment) as well as *imagining* what life could be like in the ‘fifth moment’ (experimental writing) and beyond (post-experimental). This journeying wasn’t without complications, particularly as regards to academic supervision. When I started my project I had an idea that I wanted to incorporate a qualitative phase but was unaware of the changes afoot within the worlds of qualitative inquiry, and little versed in the ontological and epistemological arguments that oriented many qualitative scholars towards more interpretive modes of inquiry.

For all intent and purposes, the allocation of a director of studies who adhered to a post-positivistic worldview, and two other supervisors, one of whom was a Professor of cognitive science didn’t pose any problems. However, as the aims of my research broadened, the working relationship between myself and the supervisory team, became increasingly fraught with difficulties, in which academic and personal identities, clashed.



Looking back at this period, I can see myself as a young researcher who was eager to explore the academic landscape, full of enthusiasm and ready to take on the world (note: *ready to take on the world*). My enthusiasm was matched in stature, only by my stubborn underbelly. I was a naive and idealistic soul, not particularly well versed in the subtleties of professional discourse. No one was going to get in my way. Not that I knew where I was going. I just felt it imperative that I be allowed to explore. Wasn't this what a PhD was about?

Given the drastic changes in direction that I proposed for my project post study one, I began to interpret the reservations that my supervisors held, concerning the changing nature of my project, personally. Whilst I feel there was some basis for me to interpret these reservations as I did (which is probably best left as a reminder of the inevitable tensions that can surface between supervisor and student), I now understand that had I been a more mature soul, I might have been more willing to read between the lines, and interpret their opinions as acting within the confines of particular worldviews.

Nevertheless, at this time I felt particularly suffocated and believed that I wasn't getting the support that I needed. I did try and change my supervisory team, but was told (in a round about way) "Don't rock the boat!" I was livid. Soon after I ceased all forms of communication with my director, where the tension between us had got to boiling point. Going into the second study, I had maintained close contact with my second supervisor, who luckily for me saw that underneath my sensitive yet abrasive—hold no prisoners—exterior, was just a confused graduate student who wanted to follow his gut feeling. Later down the line this supervisor confessed to me, that as a graduate student she had experienced similar difficulties, and felt that even though she wasn't exactly comfortable with what I wanted to do, she would nonetheless be there to assist wherever she could.

As time went on, this supervisor acted not only as a touchstone and critical friend but also as a mediator, liaising with my director, who was still in charge of finding an 'appropriate' examination team<sup>3</sup>. My supervisor and I got together every

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<sup>3</sup> This too became a source of much anxiety. For days I would sit and mull over "Who will receive my work? Will they get it or will they be versed in a post-positivistic worldview? Will it be dismissed as



couple of months or so to discuss my progress. Over time, I detached myself from the department and ceased to take part in social functions and the like. I felt estranged and alone. I now see that I must have, to some degree, internalised the tensions and difficulties that I'd encountered earlier on. I simultaneously believed in what I was doing, but also doubted myself. In cutting myself off from my immediate academic community, this delicate seesaw dynamic became framed within an imaginary world. A world fraught with unrest and disquiet, yet not particularly anchored in anything more substantial. I relied heavily on the feedback of one supervisor, and didn't seek much help from others within the wider academic community. For all intent and purposes, I was *going it alone*.

The more this continued, the more difficult it became for me to reach out and ask for help and guidance. And so it continued. In the run up to submission, apart from giving the stories to my supervisor to look through, I felt uneasy distributing them to others, academics and friends alike. My father looked over a few, and was unsure whether I should be using stories as part of a 'serious' PhD project. He felt that I'd spent long enough doing the project and that I needed to move on with my life "I wish you'd forget all this fancy stuff. I mean what is it you're trying to do?" My fiancée likewise was concerned with my turn to narrative, feeling that the style of writing wasn't 'academic' enough.

And all the while, there was an academic community of others out there, who were well versed in this sort of research. Yet my enclosure was such that I wasn't able, nor did I want to expose myself (and my work) to these would be critical friends. How would they react? And, could my fragile ego accept their critique? I found it extremely traumatic sharing my stories with others, and the idea of finally handing them over to the examiners did fill me with dread. Sat here now, a year and a half after originally submitting, I am more aware that the notion of 'audience' has challenged many qualitative researchers, who have attempted to incorporate more personal forms of storytelling into their research projects (e.g. Markula, 2003; Sparkes, 1996).

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non-serious research?" Fortunately, on the advice of my remaining supervisor, my director did appoint an appropriate examination team.



Sparkes (1996) commented that when he first began experimenting with auto-ethnography he found it difficult to share his highly personal body tales with some of his friends. He noted that in earlier rehearsals of a paper (at two conferences), he went armed up with theoretical ammunition to cover his back, just in case his story didn't hold up, on its own, as good ethnography. More recently, Markula (2003) spoke about her transformation from a realist to an auto-ethnographic storyteller, where she "...always felt self-conscious about dwelling publicly on such a personal aspect of [her life] as [her] body" (p.42). I understand now that my (self?)-imposed isolation made it difficult for me, over time, to trust others. I am not suggesting that my concerns and problems were identical to these researchers (amongst others). But in my own way, I can relate to their experienced difficulties. Before embarking on my writing journey I hadn't come to grips with the problems that might surface in writing personally about my embodied life, nor had I really thought about how I might react to the prospect of sharing these research efforts with others.

In re-visiting this period of the journey, it is still very unsettling for me. It seems kind of ironic now, that in a way I was caught up in my own crisis of representation and legitimation, yet was unwilling and unable (call it what you will) to find some guidance. I now have come to understand this situation as something, that numerous qualitative researchers have encountered when experimenting with alternative forms of representation. Perhaps not surprisingly, when it came to my viva voce, one of the areas in my (originally submitted) thesis that needed serious attention, had to do with a lack of engagement with the post-modern narrative theoretical literature.

In the originally submitted thesis, I had dedicated just a few pages to these issues, touching on the need to evaluate such endeavours using more literary criteria, and framing the task by asking simple questions such as: Does the story work for you? Is it true to life? How does the story leave you feeling? Can you relate to what is being described? I guess I was on the right lines, but I had by no means contextualised and discussed my efforts in relation to others who had experimented with these genres, in any great detail. This lack of attention to these core issues wasn't without implications on how I crafted my tales, and in the more general sense, conceived of the task of being a post-modern storyteller. Together with reference to the



biographical fragments I have typed in the proceeding pages, I now feel better positioned to discuss the merits of my storied efforts.

In addressing the notable shortcomings of my original submission, the renewed attention to the writing process and the parallel concerns of how such tales might be evaluated, gave me time to re-read and reflect on my stories. Despite the examiners not asking me to revise my storied efforts, in re-visiting the tales I became aware of some issues, that left me feeling that I had in part I had succeeded, yet this wasn't without some doubts and concerns. Here, I believe, recourse to the narrative literature which had been relatively absent from the original submission enabled me to come to grips with some of the limitations in my stories and, style of storytelling.

Before continuing, I want to make it clear that in outlining the perceived limitations of my ethnographic fictions, as narrative occasions, my hope is not to trash my storied efforts. I don't feel this is warranted. However, as part of my writing journey (as an inexperienced or virgin post-modern storyteller), I believe it is important for me to reflect on what I have done, and to take stock.

The feeling I get now when re-reading my book of tales, is that I did manage in parts to make the experiential worlds of exercise and rave (in relation to the trials and tribulations of young participants), shareable with the reader. I feel that there are some evocative tales, believable characters and embodied situations portrayed in my writing. Yet I don't feel I push far enough into utilising narrative strategies and sensibilities, when the book of tales is taken as a whole.

I sense that many of the characters are undeveloped and as such, may appear flat and two-dimensional. Also, I now feel that I have perhaps relied too much on letting participants tell you about their experiences and how they understand themselves through their participation (via the video diary style I heavily relied upon). As a result I understand that in some storied occasions, I have not paid enough attention to showing you *how they perform* themselves and their identities, missing opportunities to paint some of the subtleties and nuances of their storied lives, as well as give the reader enough blanks in the text to place themselves. Similarly, as regards to the auto-ethnographic snapshots, I also sense that, at times, not enough attention had been given over to *showing* embodiment in action. The result of this is that, on occasions,



I haven't evoked enough tension, ambiguity and drama, which are the cornerstone of *performative* ethnographic texts (e.g. Denison & Markula, 2003; Denzin, 1997; Richardson, 1997).

In some ways, this critique can be levelled directly at my inexperienced writing skills. I struggled in places to convey what I really wanted to, which left me feeling paralysed and inadequate. The fictional techniques needed to create living storied worlds are numerous and complex, and there are no rules. Looking back, I remember that I felt overwhelmed with the amount of data and notes that I had accumulated, and wondered how on earth to make something out of them. And this sense of being snowed under only served to compound the feelings of inadequacy I experienced when it came to transforming the insights into fictional narratives.

Prior to writing-up I had never really divulged in the practice of fiction writing, and it came as a huge shock what was actually involved, when it came to the crunch. Having now had time to acquaint myself more thoroughly with other researchers' published stories and reflections, I see that I approached this matter without paying enough attention to practicing the craft skills, necessary to become proficient in fiction writing. Likewise, I spent minimal time reading works of fiction, and studying the conventions and strategies which others have employed to craft complex, embodied worlds.

Furthermore, given the complexity of crafting ethnographic fiction, and the time needed to engage with, and transform data into stories, I now wonder if I tried to accomplish too much (I have a lot more data that has been left relatively touched). I was eager to incorporate as many stories and snapshots as possible, yet this wasn't without consequences. In hindsight, I now feel that it might well have been better, to have concentrated on composing fewer stories, so as to develop characterisation, situation and plot. On reflection I feel that I set myself a huge task, which I wasn't fully able to negotiate. My vision was far bigger than what I could actually sustain, as a beginning narrative researcher and storyteller.

Whilst I have alluded to some of the limitations of my tales and given some indication as to the difficulties in crafting them using narrative conventions, I don't believe that this conveys enough. Perhaps more fundamental in discussing the



limitations of my storytelling efforts, was my partial ignorance of the cornerstone of all performative ethnography, which distinguishes itself as a distinct medium of representation and knowing. Here I am referring to the emphasis on the ability of a storyteller to *show* life, and not only *tell* bout it.

However, my skills as a writer have only come with hard work, practice, and study. Primarily, I found that to choose autoethnography as a way of writing research as a way of writing research means shifting from typical social science telling mode into literary showing mode. This is crucial. The most elementary direction or advice. For it is largely through showing that writing gets its power and holds readers' attention (Tiihonen, 2003, p.83).

As Tiihonen stresses, the basic art of crafting good ethnographic fiction(s) rests on the ability of the storyteller to show human experience unfolding and, to resist the temptation to tell. I confess that during the course of my project I found it difficult to grasp and practice this fundamental point, as the basis of making narratives, work. I wonder now whether my biographical journey (alluded to briefly) had anything to do with this? I wonder whether my insecurities in trusting others with my stories, did indeed manifest in my actual writing? Also, did I end up compromising the crafting of the tales because I wasn't sure whether the thesis would be examined by academics only versed in realist story-telling? And following on from this, does it not also say something about the challenge of de-training myself from realist conventions and sensibilities? In re-visiting my stories and reflecting on the gist of my narrative approach, I can see that at times it was difficult for me to move beyond the lands of the declarative-author persuader and into the pastures of the artful storyteller. And central to this, I hazard a guess, is the not too small matter of *trust* and dare I say it, *faith*. And so?

It is easy to harp back to the past and say "If only..." At this moment in time, having coughed up some stuff that has been difficult to confront, I think it might be appropriate (my fingers tapping away, exclaim) to highlight some other *if only's* in the hope that they may (or may not) be of some help to others who are considering



experimenting with genres such as auto-ethnography and ethno-fiction (amongst the wealth of other genres now being practiced and made up, even as we speak).

I would suggest that of primary importance is to remember that (at present) although the number of researchers who integrate narrative genres into their writing repertoires is growing, they are still in a minority, at least within the Sports Studies hinterlands. This being so, if you decide to experiment with different forms of narrative re-presentation, you too will become one of a minority. This can create complications. My advice is, try not to take these complications, personally. It is all a matter of opinions, and opinions are like bottoms, we all have one. Whilst I don't particularly want to indulge in causal-effect logic, it would be fair to say that my rational mind reminds me of what might have happened *if only* I had contacted others who were au-fait with narrative knowing, once it became clear that my worldview didn't dovetail with some of my supervisors? Maybe they would have been better placed to show me the inner workings of how narratives *work*? Maybe, by virtue of shared experiences and difficulties (as a wanabee ethnographic fiction writer), I would have found a space where I could practice trust and faith? Maybe? Likewise, and on a more practical level, the support and feedback of a writing group or the like, I now know would have been of great benefit to me.

In taking the plunge, and by deciding to experiment as I have with my ethno-fiction efforts, limitations asides, I can't say I regret taking the plunge. Tell me, how do you feel when you know inside that you need to try something different? How is that feeling compounded when you don't act on it?

Beginning out as a narrative storyteller I have to say that I value the journey, not only the destination (of which the end of this thesis marks both an end and beginning). I feel vindicated that in choosing to use ethnographic fiction I have done what I needed to. Whilst it is by no means the best book of tales I have read, had I not followed my gut feeling I would have been left thinking, how much more I could have expressed and communicated. Instead, I feel that I did what I could, with what I had and knew at the time, and that in no small part I have set upon an exciting writing journey. And this has only just begun.



I do feel that in beginning to write my-self, I have been given a means to see parts of my existence that were previously obscured, as well as become more aware of my altered and multiple subjectivities and voices. In this sense, I am happy to have started to explore my storied existence, and feel that my efforts within this thesis are the first steps of shifting from a realist to a narrative storyteller<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, by using the genre of ethnographic fiction I also feel I have begun to see and feel in a most tangible way, that this genre opens up landscapes of inquiry that are vast and bountiful, enabling researchers to craft multiple interpretations and viewpoints, and to explore the “other” in ways limited only by one’s imagination, creativity and sense of balance, “What feel rights?”

I would certainly advise others, who may be considering experimenting with these genres, to invest some considerable time practising their skills and enrolling on a creative-writing course, for example. Also, try not to take on too much. The act of transforming data into stories is highly taxing, and whilst some of you may be a lot more at ease with the writing process, I would suggest that it doesn’t come easy to switch to narrative storytelling.

As I have alluded, I don’t feel that within the present study I have managed to fully negotiate these demands. Yet I am happy with the attempt that I have made, and would like to place it within a larger journey, whereby in taking the plunge and giving it a go, I have begun to explore the potentials of narrative storytelling and to increase my repertoire of writing and representational skills. Evidently, this is a major challenge facing social science researchers, particularly within the socio-cultural exploration of body culture, where embodiment, movement and the portrayal of experience, is of particular significance.

In the paradigmatic shift towards creating more, living, embodied and thus, complex and ambiguous interpretations of post-modern cultural life, any attempts to increase the depth of analyses by affording different vantage points, perspectives and (more generally) ways of expressing and communicating life—body-to-body and writer-to-reader—have to be allowed space to grow. In this way, I hope we are

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<sup>4</sup> Or rather, I see this current exploration as an attempt to increase my repertoire of academic storytelling strategies.



beginning to see ourselves, and our conditions, afresh. By re-writing social science in other ways, the recourse to narrative knowing enables us to question and re-think what it is we are trying to articulate and understand.

I also believe that in widening our narrative skills, we are better positioned to potentially reach audiences outside of the academic playground—I mean, who reads academic literature outside of the academy?<sup>5</sup> It is for these reasons, that I understand the turn to narrative knowing as both, welcome and timely. It is reminding us to reflect further on the social science enterprise and to ask questions anew: Why do we do research? Who is it for? How can we touch others through our writing, so as to change people in the place where we live...our bodies?

## 8.5 Outro

Having just about come to the end of the project (and the writing-up process), I believe it is important to reflect briefly on this research endeavour, in terms of what and how it has contributed to the study of body culture, health and identity within the young adult population. And, also to consider this question within the context of what I dubbed in my title “...changing times.”

On one level, this project has attempted to displace the research done on body culture and young people, which typically, emphasises and focuses on traditional configurations of sport and exercise. By placing a traditional body practice alongside an alternative youth cultural phenomenon, this project has in some small part attempted to develop a comparative and inter-cultural understanding of body cultures in the life and times of young people. In exploring seemingly disparate social body practices, the project has, I believe, not only *disrupted* but also *problematised* traditional understandings of health and identity articulated within the Sports Studies research, conducted on young adult populations.

Social body practices are windows through which we can explore some of the trials and tribulations of society within any given historical epoch (e.g. Eichberg,

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<sup>5</sup> On reflecting on this thesis, an examiner suggested that I might want to consider more dramatic forms of representation, such as a short play or screenplay, as a means of re-visiting and developing the project as storied knowledge. I would see this as one possible way of reaching beyond an academic audience.



1998). The focus on exercise and gym culture has brought some of this contemporary story into view. Without wanting to regurgitate observations made earlier in this chapter, the project has shown how exercising is used in a variety of ways to enable young people to exert individual agency and take some sort of control of their (bodily) lives'. Whilst narratives of 'timeout' 'fitness' and 'control' were evident, the tale (or rather, tales) of young people and their exercise habits, spoke not only of inner *health* concerns but also about outward concerns with *presentation*: of having a body and of living as one body amongst others, within a market society; a society that commends individual effort and the productive body whilst simultaneously valuing the aesthetics and maintenance of the 'youthful' body.

There are obvious tensions in being a young person and of possessing a youthful body, the expectations of individual effort and competence, of leading a productive life and of attaining a desirable body, which 'fits in' with the others. The tales told within this study link these narratives with the social body, and make them visible within the context of young adult exercise participation. When positioned within wider societal processes and circumstances, these expectations of health and identity, have obvious cultural currency at the start of twenty-first century.

The conditions of contemporary living have produced numerous problems for the State, particularly when consideration is given to the lifestyles of young people. From the point of view of State governance and policy provision, one of the major headaches that face post-industrial societies, is that of warding off and reversing the current trends of youth inactivity. The "health of the nation" is a priority for the State, which is equalled in importance only by the State's educational concerns and aspirations for young people. On the surface, the emergence of rave and contemporary dance culture, would, if anything, seem to exasperate these concerns.

In many ways, rave culture can be seen as the antithesis of healthy living, and it would be difficult to argue with this 'surface' assessment. Seen under the gaze of the panoptical health viewfinder, a rave club can be an environment of unhealthy excess, where people smoke, drink and consume illegal drugs, whilst listening to loud music. "Just say no to drugs!" is a powerful motif, which has generally discouraged policy makers from exploring dance culture in ways that don't re-inscribe its subversive and



forbidden mythologies. When understood from this perspective, the experiential narratives of participants can only ever be silenced and marginalised, as misinformed (cultural dupe syndrome). However, as the tales told in the research have shown, dance culture can't be reduced to the concerns of 'normative' health narratives. To do so, misses the point and marginalises what it is that young people gain from participation.

Evidently, the health (if we can call it that?) of rave and contemporary club culture is about something else. As has been shown, participants' stories told about their involvement as something that enabled them in a most tangible (felt) way to experience a sense of community, a community which disrupted their usual conceptions of self-other, and to play with subjectivities in ways that ordinarily aren't available. In articulating this sense of community, participants drew upon narratives of inclusion, respect for differences, and of the ability to see and feel the world differently, so as to question their taken for granted prejudices. In many ways, these experiences have provided participants with new (and forgotten?) social resources, narratives and inter-personal skills, and the space to overcome, in the here and now, a sense of bodily alienation. On another level, their tales also point towards a living critique of the often, excessive individualisation tendencies of post-industrial, late capitalist society.

The emergence of rave culture has provided new spaces in which young people can experience their bodies in motion. Whilst not advocating that these are ideal spaces for everyone—they clearly are not—the popularity of contemporary club culture in motivating young people to be active should not be forgotten on health promotion practitioners, for example. Focussing on educating the young as to the reasons why they should move their bodies, is important, but what is the difference between *knowing* that we should be physically active and *feeling* it (and being motivated by it) within our body's. How can music and the drum 'educate' health professionals as to the motivating forces that make those—often marginalised by State endorsed body cultures—actually want to *move* their bodies? Here, alongside much earlier youth cultures (e.g. rock n roll and punk) and more contemporary social movements (e.g. Hip-hop), rave culture might be able to give some insights?



As a marginalised movement culture (within the fields of health promotion and Sports Studies, for example), and an inherently illegal one (through the eyes of the State) raving tells us something about health and identity that traditional movement cultures (such as sport and exercise) cannot. Why is this important? Why, at this time?

Dealing with the related issues of youth inactivity and social alienation within the post-industrial landscape, it is important that we begin to look beyond the rather narrow conceptualisations of what is and what isn't *proper* physical activity. In bringing together a traditional and 'accepted' physical activity, that of exercise and fitness culture, and contrasting it with a more subversive body culture, which young people have been instrumental in 'making,' this project is one attempt to respond to this situation. Clearly, young people are actively involved in finding other spaces and making alternative forms of body culture to meet their changing needs (Wheaton, 2004a; Rinehart & Sydnor, 1999). This is no doubt more prevalent at times of societal upheaval (For a detailed discussion of the conditions and circumstances of the more general post-modern body culture revolution see Eichberg, 1998, Chapter 8).

In situating and contextualising rave and contemporary club culture within the post-sportive landscape at the start of the twenty-first century, it needs to be remembered that it arrived at particularly torrid point in the history of youth politics and social alienation (e.g Osgerby, 1998; Reynolds, 1998). As an embodied critique of prevalent social conditions and circumstances, rave culture has undoubtedly posed some pertinent questions, which aren't without relevance to the realms of sport and physical activity. Why do young people need to find new spaces to move their bodies? What is lacking in the movement cultures already available? How does rave as a new social movement, respond to this 'lack of'?

The study has given some insights into how young people, through their bodily involvement with clubbing and contemporary dance culture, have attempted to make sense on these questions. Whilst it is evident that the rave club affords a certain sanctuary away from the everyday, the study has also given some insights as to how raving has provided the resources to enable young people to make some sense of the changing circumstances and challenges that have availed themselves at this particular historical juncture.



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# Appendices



# Appendix A

## Questionnaire (Study one)





Liverpool John Moore University

# **Survey of Physical Activity Participation and Well-Being**

There has been a gradual increase in the number of people participating in recreational dance over the past few years, particularly "Rave Dancing". This research project is concerned with understanding the effects that conventional exercise and sport have on ones mental health compared with dance. The survey will attempt to gauge how you feel when participating in these physical activities, how you cope with problems that occur, the level of social support you receive from such environments, as well as asking how things are going in your general life.

You are under no obligation to complete this survey, however, your co-operation would be greatly appreciated, as the results will contribute to research concerning physical activity and well-being.

The survey does not ask for your name and as such, complete anonymity is assured. Please read the general information and the questions carefully before responding.

Thank you for your time and co-operation.

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## PART 1 Physical Activity Level Profile

This part of the questionnaire will attempt to ascertain the total levels of leisure time physical activity that you participate in. As well as asking about the number of leisure time activities you participate in.

### Section 1: Total Physical Activity Levels

The following section will attempt to assess the total level of all leisure time physical activity that you participate in.

#### Q.1

Considering a **7-day period** ( a week ), how many times on the average do you do the following kinds of physical activity **for more than 15 minutes** during your **free time** ( write the appropriate number in each circle ).

Times per week

a) **Strenuous physical activity**

( heart beats rapidly )

b) **Moderate physical activity**

( not exhausting )

c) **Mild physical activity**

( minimal effort )

#### Q.2

Considering a **7-day period** ( a week ), during your **leisure time**, how often do you engage in any regular activity long enough to **work up a sweat** ( heart beats rapidly )?

Often

☐

Sometimes

☐

Never /rarely

☐

#### Q.3

How many **leisure time physical activities** do you participate in, on a **regular basis**?

I participate in \_\_\_\_ leisure time physical activities on a regular basis.



## Physical Activity Participation and Well-Being

In PART 2 we are interested in physical activity that you **participate in alone**.

In PARTS 3-5 we are interested ONLY in physical activity that you participate in which occurs in a **social setting** (i.e. the physical activity that you participate in with other people). We are interested in assessing physical activity that is undertaken WITH OTHER PEOPLE who recreate at the same time (e.g. **gym, squash club, dance in a night-club, athletics club, swimming centre, football club, aerobics class etc.**), and assessing levels of well-being associated with such activities.

In PART 6 we are interested in how things have been going in your general life.

Read the definitions below before answering any of the questions

**SPORT:** This is any vigorous physical activity that is pursued for such pleasures as social interaction, excitement, danger, and competition. In order for a physical activity to be called sport, the main criterion should be that there is a competitive element to the activity.

**EXERCISE:** This is any physical activity that is being undertaken for a specific purpose, such as improvement of health or an increase of personal fitness.

**DANCE:** This involves rhythmic movements of both the body and the limbs, generally to music. It is participated in primarily for social interaction or the aesthetics of body movement.

**Q.1**

Do you participate in these types of activity (i.e. sport, exercise, dance) in a **social setting** on a regular basis?

YES ☐ Go to Q.2

NO ☐ Go to Part 2 'Lone Physical Activity Participation and Well-Being'  
( page 3 )

**Q.2**

What advantages do you think exercising with other people has over exercising alone?:-  
(Please list up to *five* advantages)

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

Now go to Part 2 'Lone Physical Activity Participation and Well-Being'( page 3)



## PART 2 Lone Physical Activity Participation and Well-Being

### Section 2: Lone Physical Activity Participation

In this section we are interested in the leisure time physical activity that you PARTICIPATE IN ALONE, i.e. the physical activity that you participate in without others being present in the immediate activity environment ( e.g. jogging [not part of a club or group of runners], cycling on own, walking on own etc. ).

**Q.1** Do you participate in LONE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY regularly?

YES ☐ NO ☐ (go to PART 3: page 6)

**Q.2** What sort of LONE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY do you participate in?

( e.g. jogging on own, walking on own, cycling on own etc. )

( We are interested only in the MOST FREQUENTLY participated in lone physical activity in space number ① )

① .....

In responding to the following questions, answer all questions with reference to the type of lone physical activity that you participate in most frequently (as indicated in the space above) ( $\geq$  = equal to or more than;  $>$  = more than;  $\leq$  = equal to or less than;  $<$  = less than)

*Circle your response choice for each item:*

**Q.3** How often do you participate in this physical activity?

L.P.A	Everyday	$\geq 5/\text{week}$	$\geq 3/\text{week}$	$\geq 1/\text{week}$	$\geq 2/\text{month}$	$\geq 1/\text{month}$
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.4** How long do you normally spend each time you participate in this physical activity?

L.P.A	$\geq 3$ Hrs	$> 2$ Hrs	1.5 -2 Hrs	1 -1.5 Hrs	30 min-1Hr	$< 30$ min
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.5** How strenuous would you rate this physical activity?

L.P.A	Mild activity (minimal effort)	Moderate activity (not exhausting)	Strenuous activity (heart beats rapidly)
	1	2	3

**Q.6** For how long have you participated in this physical activity?

L.P.A.	$> 2$ Years	1 -2 Years	6-12 Months	3-6 Months	$< 3$ Months
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.7** When did you last participate in this physical activity?

L.P.A	1-2 days ago	2 days -1wk	1-2 wks ago	2-4 wks ago	$> 1$ month
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.8** How did you get involved in this physical activity?

L.P.A	Close friend/s	Regular friends	Family	By chance	Local press	Other
	1	2	3	4	5	6

( If you chose other, briefly explain how you got involved )

.....  
 .....  
 .....



**Q.9** List five things that you *value most* about participating in lone physical activity? (in rank order )

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

**Section 3: Lone Physical Activity Participation and Enjoyment**

This section will attempt to assess how enjoyable this physical activity is. Please rate how you **USUALLY** feel while participating in this physical activity.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM								
1. I enjoy it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I hate it
2. I feel bored	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel interested
3. I dislike it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I like it
4. I find it pleasurable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it unpleasurable
5. I am very absorbed in this activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all absorbed in this activity
6. It's no fun at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It' a lot of fun
7. I find it energising	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it tiring
8. It makes me depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It makes me happy
9. It's very pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very unpleasant
10. I feel good physically while doing it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel bad physically while doing it
11. It's very invigorating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all invigorating
12. I am very frustrated by it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all frustrated by it
13. It's very gratifying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all gratifying
14. It's very exhilarating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all exhilarating
15. It's not at all stimulating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very stimulating
16. It gives me a strong sense of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It does not give me any sense of accomplishment at all
17. It's very refreshing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all refreshing
18. I feel as though I would rather be doing something else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel as though there is nothing else I would rather be doing

**Section 4: Lone Physical Activity Participation and Affective Well-Being**

(a) In this section we are interested in how this physical activity experience makes you feel. How much of the time has this activity experience made you feel each of the following items **OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS**.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEMS	Never	Occasionally	SOME of the time	MUCH of the time	MOST of the time	ALL of the time
1. Tense	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Worried	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Calm	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Miserable	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Cheerful	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Optimistic	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Fatigued	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Energetic	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Lively	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Lifeless	1	2	3	4	5	6



(b) The following items ask about how things have been going in this physical activity over the PAST FEW WEEKS.

ITEMS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can deal with just about any problem I am faced with in this physical activity environment	1	2	3	4	5
2. I sometimes think that I am not very competent at this physical activity	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most things I do in this physical activity, I do well	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel I am better than most people in tackling difficulties that can occur in this physical activity environment	1	2	3	4	5
5. In this sport activity I like to set myself challenging goals	1	2	3	4	5
6. I enjoy new challenges when I participate in this physical activity	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prefer to avoid difficult situations in this physical activity environment	1	2	3	4	5
8. In this physical activity environment, I make a special effort to keep trying when things seem difficult	1	2	3	4	5

## Section 5: General Lone Participation Questions

Circle your response choice for each item on the table:

ITEM	Never	Rarely	SOME of the time	MOST of the time
1. Do you feel you can be 100% yourself in this environment ?	1	2	3	4
2. Do you feel this activity is equally accessible to both sexes ?	1	2	3	4
3. Do you participate in this activity for health reasons ?	1	2	3	4
4. Do you participate in this activity for other reasons ?	1	2	3	4

( If you do participate for other reasons, briefly explain)

.....

.....

.....

5. What advantages do you think exercising alone has over exercising with other people?:-  
(Please list up to five advantages)

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....



## PART 3 Social Dance Participation and Well-Being

### Section 6: Dance participation

The following questions are concerned with participation in social dance, that is dance that takes place in an environment with other participants, as well as the feelings, emotions, and social support you receive from such an environment

**DANCE:** This involves rhythmic movements of both the body and the limbs, generally to music. It is participated in primarily for social interaction or the aesthetics of body movement.

**Q.1** Do you participate in SOCIAL DANCE regularly? YES ☐ NO ☐ (go to PART 4: page 9 )

**Q.2** What sort of SOCIAL DANCE do you participate in?

( e.g. Rave; Ballroom; Line dancing; Latin American )

( We are interested only in the *MOST FREQUENTLY* participated in dance activity in space number ❶ )

❶ .....

In responding to the following questions, answer all questions with reference to the type of dance that you participate in most frequently (as indicated in the space above) (  $\geq$  = equal to or more than;  $>$  = more than;  $\leq$  = equal or less than;  $<$  = less than)

*Circle your response choice for each item:*

**Q.3** How often do you participate in this dance activity?

DANCE	Everyday	$\geq 5/\text{week}$	$\geq 3/\text{week}$	$\geq 1/\text{week}$	$\geq 2/\text{month}$	$\geq 1/\text{month}$
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.4** How long do you normally spend each time you participate in this dance activity?

DANCE	$\geq 3$ Hrs	$> 2$ Hrs	1.5 -2 Hrs	1 -1.5 Hrs	30 min-1Hr	$< 30$ min
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.5** How strenuous would you rate this dance activity?

DANCE	Mild activity (minimal effort)	Moderate activity (not exhausting)	Strenuous activity (heart beats rapidly)
	1	2	3

**Q.6** For how long have you participated in this dance activity?

DANCE	$> 2$ Years	1 -2 Years	6-12 Months	3-6 Months	$< 3$ Months
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.7** When did you last participate in this dance activity?

DANCE	1-2 days ago	2 days -1wk	1-2 wks ago	2-4 wks ago	$> 1$ month
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.8** How did you get involved in this dance activity?

DANCE	Close friend/s	Regular friends	Family	By chance	Local press	Other
	1	2	3	4	5	6

( If you chose *other*, briefly explain how you got involved )

.....  
 .....  
 .....



**Q.9** List five things that you *value most* about participating in this dance experience? ( in rank order )

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

## Section 7: Dance and Enjoyment

This section will attempt to assess how enjoyable this dance activity is. Please rate how you **USUALLY** feel while participating in this dance activity.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM								
1. I enjoy it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I hate it
2. I feel bored	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel interested
3. I dislike it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I like it
4. I find it pleasurable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it unpleasurable
5. I am very absorbed in this activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all absorbed in this activity
6. It's no fun at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's a lot of fun
7. I find it energising	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it tiring
8. It makes me depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It makes me happy
9. It's very pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very unpleasant
10. I feel good physically while doing it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel bad physically while doing it
11. It's very invigorating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all invigorating
12. I am very frustrated by it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all frustrated by it
13. It's very gratifying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all gratifying
14. It's very exhilarating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all exhilarating
15. It's not at all stimulating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very stimulating
16. It gives me a strong sense of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It does not give me any sense of accomplishment at all
17. It's very refreshing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all refreshing
18. I feel as though I would rather be doing something else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel as though there is nothing else I would rather be doing

## Section 8: Dance and Well-Being

(a) In this section we are interested in how this dance experience makes you feel. How much of the time has this dance experience made you feel each of the following items **OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS**.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEMS	Never	Occasionally	SOME of the time	MUCH of the time	MOST of the time	ALL of the time
1. Tense	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Worried	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Calm	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Miserable	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Cheerful	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Optimistic	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Fatigued	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Energetic	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Lively	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Lifeless	1	2	3	4	5	6



(b) The following items ask about how things have been going in this dance environment over the PAST FEW WEEKS.

ITEMS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can deal with just about any problem I am faced with in this dance environment	1	2	3	4	5
2. I sometimes think that I am not very competent at this dance activity	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most things I do in this dance environment, I do well	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel I am better than most people in tackling difficulties that can occur in this dance environment	1	2	3	4	5
5. In this dance activity I like to set myself challenging goals	1	2	3	4	5
6. I enjoy new challenges when I participate in this dance activity	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prefer to avoid difficult situations in this dance environment	1	2	3	4	5
8. In this dance environment, I make a special effort to keep trying when things seem difficult	1	2	3	4	5

## Section 9: Social Support in Dance Environment

In this section, we want you to think about your *current* relationships with people from within this dance environment. Please indicate the extent to which each statement describes your current relationships in this environment.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM	STRONGLY disagree	Disagree	Agree	STRONGLY agree
1. There are people I can depend on to help me, if I really need it	1	2	3	4
2. There is no one I can turn to for guidance in times of stress	1	2	3	4
3. There are people who enjoy the same social activities I do	1	2	3	4
4. I feel personally responsible for the well-being of another person	1	2	3	4
5. I do not think other people respect my skills and abilities	1	2	3	4
6. If something went wrong, no one would come to my assistance	1	2	3	4
7. I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being	1	2	3	4
8. I have relationships where my competence and skill are recognised	1	2	3	4
9. There is no one who really relies on me for their well-being	1	2	3	4
10. There is no one who shares my interests and concerns	1	2	3	4
11. There is a trustworthy person I could turn to for advice, if I were having problems	1	2	3	4
12. I lack a feeling of intimacy with another person	1	2	3	4
13. Most of my friends also participate in this activity	1	2	3	4

## Section 10: General Dance Questions

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM	Never	Rarely	SOME of the time	MOST of the time
1. Do you drink alcohol while participating ?	1	2	3	4
2. Do you take dance drugs (ecstasy, speed, LSD etc.) while participating ?	1	2	3	4
3. Do you feel you can be 100% yourself in this environment ?	1	2	3	4
4. Do you feel this activity is equally accessible to all sexes ?	1	2	3	4
5. Do you participate in this activity for social reasons ?	1	2	3	4
6. Do you participate in this activity for health reasons ?	1	2	3	4



## PART 4 Social Exercise Participation and Well-Being

### Section 11: Exercise Participation

The following questions are concerned with participation in social exercise, that is exercise that takes place in an environment with other participants.

**EXERCISE:** This is any physical activity that is being undertaken for a specific purpose, such as improvement of health or an increase of personal fitness.

**Q.1** Do you participate in SOCIAL EXERCISE regularly? YES ☐ NO ☐ (go to PART 5:page 12)

**Q.2** What sort of SOCIAL EXERCISE do you participate in?  
( e.g. Multi-gym; Jogging with friends; Yoga class; Aerobics etc. )  
( We are interested only in the MOST FREQUENTLY participated in exercise activity in space number ① )

① .....

In responding to the following questions, answer all questions with reference to the type of exercise that you participate in most frequently (as indicated in the space above) ( $\geq$  = equal to or more than;  $>$  = more than;  $\leq$  = equal to or less than;  $<$  = less than)

*Circle your response choice for each item:*

**Q.3** How often do you participate in this exercise activity?

EXERCISE	Everyday	$\geq 5/\text{week}$	$\geq 3/\text{week}$	$\geq 1/\text{week}$	$\geq 2/\text{month}$	$\geq 1/\text{month}$
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.4** How long do you normally spend each time you participate in this exercise activity?

EXERCISE	$\geq 3$ Hrs	$> 2$ Hrs	1.5 -2 Hrs	1 -1.5 Hrs	30 min-1Hr	$< 30$ min
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.5** How strenuous would you rate this exercise activity?

EXERCISE	Mild activity (minimal effort)	Moderate activity (not exhausting)	Strenuous activity (heart beats rapidly)
	1	2	3

**Q.6** For how long have you participated in this exercise activity?

EXERCISE	$> 2$ Years	1 -2 Years	6-12 Months	3-6 Months	$< 3$ Months
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.7** When did you last participate in this exercise activity?

EXERCISE	1-2 days ago	2 days -1wk	1-2 wks ago	2-4 wks ago	$> 1$ month
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.8** How did you get involved in this exercise activity?

EXERCISE	Close friend/s	Regular friends	Family	By chance	Local press	Other
	1	2	3	4	5	6

( If you chose other, briefly explain how you got involved )

.....  
.....  
.....



**Q.9** List five things that you *value most* about participating in this exercise experience ? (in rank order)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

## Section 12: Exercise and Enjoyment

This section will attempt to assess how enjoyable this exercise activity is. Please rate how you **USUALLY** feel while participating in this exercise activity.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM								
1. I enjoy it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I hate it
2. I feel bored	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel interested
3. I dislike it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I like it
4. I find it pleasurable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it unpleasurable
5. I am very absorbed in this activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all absorbed in this activity
6. It's no fun at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's a lot of fun
7. I find it energising	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it tiring
8. It makes me depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It makes me happy
9. It's very pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very unpleasant
10. I feel good physically while doing it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel bad physically while doing it
11. It's very invigorating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all invigorating
12. I am very frustrated by it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all frustrated by it
13. It's very gratifying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all gratifying
14. It's very exhilarating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all exhilarating
15. It's not at all stimulating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very stimulating
16. It gives me a strong sense of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It does not give me any sense of accomplishment at all
17. It's very refreshing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all refreshing
18. I feel as though I would rather be doing something else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel as though there is nothing else I would rather be doing

## Section 13: Exercise and Well-Being

(a) In this section we are interested in how this exercise experience makes you feel. How much of the time has this exercise experience made you feel each of the following items **OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS**.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEMS	Never	Occasionally	SOME of the time	MUCH of the time	MOST of the time	ALL of the time
1. Tense	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Worried	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Calm	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Miserable	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Cheerful	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Optimistic	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Fatigued	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Energetic	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Lively	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Lifeless	1	2	3	4	5	6



(b) The following items ask about how things have been going in this exercise environment over the PAST FEW WEEKS.

ITEMS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can deal with just about any problem I am faced with in this exercise environment	1	2	3	4	5
2. I sometimes think that I am not very competent at this exercise activity	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most things I do in this exercise activity, I do well	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel I am better than most people in tackling difficulties that can occur in this exercise environment	1	2	3	4	5
5. In this exercise activity I like to set myself challenging goals	1	2	3	4	5
6. I enjoy new challenges when I participate in this exercise activity	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prefer to avoid difficult situations in this exercise environment	1	2	3	4	5
8. In this exercise environment, I make a special effort to keep trying when things seem difficult	1	2	3	4	5

## Section 14: Social Support in Exercise Environment

In this section, we want you to think about your *current* relationships with people from within this exercise environment. Please indicate the extent to which each statement describes your current relationships in this environment.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

Circle your response choice for each item on the table:

ITEM	STRONGLY disagree	Disagree	Agree	STRONGLY agree
1. There are people I can depend on to help me, if I really need it	1	2	3	4
2. There is no one I can turn to for guidance in times of stress	1	2	3	4
3. There are people who enjoy the same social activities I do	1	2	3	4
4. I feel personally responsible for the well-being of another person	1	2	3	4
5. I do not think other people respect my skills and abilities	1	2	3	4
6. If something went wrong, no one would come to my assistance	1	2	3	4
7. I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being	1	2	3	4
8. I have relationships where my competence and skill are recognised	1	2	3	4
9. There is no one who really relies on me for their well-being	1	2	3	4
10. There is no one who shares my interests and concerns	1	2	3	4
11. There is a trustworthy person I could turn to for advice, if I were having problems	1	2	3	4
12. I lack a feeling of intimacy with another person	1	2	3	4
13. Most of my friends also participate in this activity	1	2	3	4

## Section 15: General Exercise Questions

Circle your response choice for each item on the table:

ITEM	Never	Rarely	SOME of the time	MOST of the time
1. Do you feel you can be 100% yourself in this environment ?	1	2	3	4
2. Do you feel this activity is equally accessible to all sexes ?	1	2	3	4
3. Do you participate in this activity for social reasons ?	1	2	3	4
4. Do you participate in this activity for health reasons ?	1	2	3	4



## PART 5 Social Sport Participation and Well-Being

### Section 16: Sport Participation

The following questions are concerned with participation in social sport, that is sport that takes place in an environment with other participants.

**SPORT:** This is any vigorous physical activity that is pursued for such pleasures as social interaction, excitement, danger, and competition. In order for a physical activity to be called sport, the main criterion should be that there is a competitive element to the activity.

**Q.1** Do you participate in SPORT ACTIVITY regularly? YES ☐ NO ☐ (go to PART 6: page 15 )

**Q.2** What sort of SPORT ACTIVITY do you participate in?

( e.g. Football; Netball; Basketball; Hockey etc. )

( We are interested only in the MOST FREQUENTLY participated in sport activity in space number ① )

① .....

In responding to the following questions, answer all questions with reference to the type of sport that you participate in most frequently (as indicated in the space above) (  $\geq$  = equal to or more than;  $>$  = more than;  $\leq$  = equal to or less than;  $<$  = less than)

*Circle your response choice for each item:*

**Q.3** How often do you participate in this sport activity?

SPORT	Everyday	$\geq 5/\text{week}$	$\geq 3/\text{week}$	$\geq 1/\text{week}$	$\geq 2/\text{month}$	$\geq 1/\text{month}$
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.4** How long do you normally spend each time you participate in this sport activity?

SPORT	$\geq 3$ Hrs	$> 2$ Hrs	1.5 -2 Hrs	1 -1.5 Hrs	30 min-1Hr	$< 30$ min
	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Q.5** How strenuous would you rate this sport activity?

SPORT	Mild activity (minimal effort)	Moderate activity (not exhausting)	Strenuous activity (heart beats rapidly)
	1	2	3

**Q.6** For how long have you participated in this sport activity?

SPORT	$> 2$ Years	1 -2 Years	6-12 Months	3-6 Months	$< 3$ Months
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.7** When did you last participate in this sport activity?

SPORT	1-2 days ago	2 days -1wk	1-2 wks ago	2-4 wks ago	$> 1$ month
	1	2	3	4	5

**Q.8** How did you get involved in this sport activity?

SPORT	Close friend/s	Regular friends	Family	By chance	Local press	Other
	1	2	3	4	5	6

( If you chose *other*, briefly explain how you got involved )

.....  
 .....  
 .....



**Q.9** List five things that you *value most* about participating in this sport experience? (in rank order)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

## Section 17: Sport and Enjoyment

This section will attempt to assess how enjoyable this sport activity is. Please rate how you **USUALLY** feel while participating in this sport activity.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM								
1. I enjoy it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I hate it
2. I feel bored	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel interested
3. I dislike it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I like it
4. I find it pleasurable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it unpleasurable
5. I am very absorbed in this activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all absorbed in this activity
6. It's no fun at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's a lot of fun
7. I find it energising	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I find it tiring
8. It makes me depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It makes me happy
9. It's very pleasant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very unpleasant
10. I feel good physically while doing it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel bad physically while doing it
11. It's very invigorating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all invigorating
12. I am very frustrated by it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I am not at all frustrated by it
13. It's very gratifying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all gratifying
14. It's very exhilarating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all exhilarating
15. It's not at all stimulating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's very stimulating
16. It gives me a strong sense of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It does not give me any sense of accomplishment at all
17. It's very refreshing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	It's not at all refreshing
18. I feel as though I would rather be doing something else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I feel as though there is nothing else I would rather be doing

## Section 18: Sport and Well-Being

(a) In this section we are interested in how this sport experience makes you feel. How much of the time has this sport experience made you feel each of the following items **OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS**.

**PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS**

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEMS	Never	Occasionally	SOME of the time	MUCH of the time	MOST of the time	ALL of the time
1. Tense	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Worried	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Calm	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Miserable	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Cheerful	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Optimistic	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Fatigued	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Energetic	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Lively	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Lifeless	1	2	3	4	5	6



(b) The following items ask about how things have been going in this sport environment over the PAST FEW WEEKS.

ITEMS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can deal with just about any problem I am faced with in this sport environment	1	2	3	4	5
2. I sometimes think that I am not very competent at this sport activity	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most things I do in this sport activity, I do well	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel I am better than most people in tackling difficulties that can occur in this sport environment	1	2	3	4	5
5. In this sport activity I like to set myself challenging goals	1	2	3	4	5
6. I enjoy new challenges when I participate in this sport activity	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prefer to avoid difficult situations in this sport environment	1	2	3	4	5
8. In this sport environment, I make a special effort to keep trying when things seem difficult	1	2	3	4	5

## Section 19: Social Support in Sport Environment

In this section, we want you to think about your **current** relationships with people from within this sport environment. Please indicate the extent to which each statement describes your current relationships in this environment.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM	STRONGLY disagree	Disagree	Agree	STRONGLY agree
1. There are people I can depend on to help me, if I really need it	1	2	3	4
2. There is no one I can turn to for guidance in times of stress	1	2	3	4
3. There are people who enjoy the same social activities I do	1	2	3	4
4. I feel personally responsible for the well-being of another person	1	2	3	4
5. I do not think other people respect my skills and abilities	1	2	3	4
6. If something went wrong, no one would come to my assistance	1	2	3	4
7. I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being	1	2	3	4
8. I have relationships where my competence and skill are recognised	1	2	3	4
9. There is no one who really relies on me for their well-being	1	2	3	4
10. There is no one who shares my interests and concerns	1	2	3	4
11. There is a trustworthy person I could turn to for advice, if I were having problems	1	2	3	4
12. I lack a feeling of intimacy with another person	1	2	3	4
13. Most of my friends also participate in this activity	1	2	3	4

## Section 20: General Sport Questions

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEM	Never	Rarely	SOME of the time	MOST of the time
1. Do you feel you can be 100% yourself in this environment ?	1	2	3	4
2. Do you feel this activity is equally accessible to both sexes ?	1	2	3	4
3. Do you participate in this activity for social reasons ?	1	2	3	4
4. Do you participate in this activity for health reasons ?	1	2	3	4



## PART 6 General Life and Well-Being

### Section 21: Coping in General

This section is concerned with how you GENERALLY cope with problems in YOUR LIFE.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEMS	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I try to fix what is going wrong with the situation	1	2	3	4	5
2. I try to adjust my expectations to meet the situation	1	2	3	4	5
3. I tell myself the problem wasn't such a big deal after all	1	2	3	4	5
4. I try to avoid thinking about the problem	1	2	3	4	5
5. I try to relieve my tension somehow	1	2	3	4	5
6. I talk to someone about how I am feeling	1	2	3	4	5

### Section 22: General Feelings

Try to decide which response option below best represents your USUAL WAY of acting or feeling. There are no right or wrong answers, your IMMEDIATE REACTION is what we want.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEMS	ALMOST NEVER	QUITE SELDOM	QUITE OFTEN	ALMOST ALWAYS
1. Do you like plenty of excitement and bustle around you?	1	2	3	4
2. Does your mood go up and down?	1	2	3	4
3. Are you rather lively?	1	2	3	4
4. Do you feel "just miserable" for no good reason?	1	2	3	4
5. Do you like mixing with people?	1	2	3	4
6. When you get annoyed do you need someone friendly to talk to?	1	2	3	4
7. Would you call yourself happy-go-lucky?	1	2	3	4
8. Are you troubled about feelings of guilt?	1	2	3	4
9. Can you let yourself go and enjoy yourself a lot at a lively party?	1	2	3	4
10. Would you call yourself tense or "highly strung"?	1	2	3	4
11. Do you like practical jokes?	1	2	3	4
12. Do you suffer from sleeplessness?	1	2	3	4

### Section 23: Opinion of Self

This section asks about the VIEWS people hold about THEMSELVES.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

*Circle your response choice for each item on the table:*

ITEMS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	1	2	3	4
2. I am able to do things as well as most other people	1	2	3	4
3. I take a positive attitude toward myself	1	2	3	4
4. At times I think I am no good at all	1	2	3	4



Section 24: Personal Control in General Life

This section asks about the DEGREE of CONTROL OR INFLUENCE you have over YOUR LIFE.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

Circle your response choice for each item on the table:

ITEMS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGRE E	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. I have little control over the things that happen to me.	1	2	3	4
2. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.	1	2	3	4
3. What happens to me in the future in life mostly depends on me.	1	2	3	4

Section 25: Social Support in General Life

In answering the next set of questions, we want you to think about your *current* relationships with people in your general life.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

Circle your response choice for each item on the table:

ITEM	STRONGLY disagree	Disagree	Agree	STRONGLY agree
1. There are people I can depend on to help me, if I really need it	1	2	3	4
2. There is no one I can turn to for guidance	1	2	3	4
3. There are people who enjoy the same social activities I do	1	2	3	4
4. I feel personally responsible for the well-being of another person	1	2	3	4
5. I do not think other people respect my skills and abilities	1	2	3	4
6. If something went wrong, no one would come to my assistance	1	2	3	4
7. I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being	1	2	3	4
8. I have relationships where my competence and skill are recognised	1	2	3	4
9. There is no one who relies on me for their well-being	1	2	3	4
10. There is no one who shares my interests and concerns	1	2	3	4
11. There is a trustworthy person I could turn to for advice, if I were having problems	1	2	3	4
12. I lack a feeling of intimacy with another person	1	2	3	4

Section 26: Well-being in General Life

(a) Please rate the following items, concerning how often you have been feeling the way the item describes over the PAST FEW WEEKS IN GENERAL LIFE.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

Circle your response choice for each item on the table:

ITEMS	Never	Occasionally	SOME of the time	MUCH of the time	MOST of the time	ALL of the time
1. Tense	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Uneasy	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Calm	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Miserable	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Optimistic	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Fatigued	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Energetic	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Lively	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Lifeless	1	2	3	4	5	6



(b) The following items ask about how things have been going in your GENERAL LIFE over the PAST FEW WEEKS.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

Circle your response choice for each item on the table:

ITEMS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I can deal with just about any problem in my life	1	2	3	4	5
2. I sometimes think I am not very competent in my life	1	2	3	4	5
3. Most things I do, I do well	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel I am better than most people at tackling difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
5. I enjoy doing new things in my life	1	2	3	4	5
6. I like to set myself challenging targets in my life	1	2	3	4	5
7. I prefer to avoid difficult activities in my life	1	2	3	4	5
8. I make a special effort to keep trying when things seem difficult	1	2	3	4	5

## Section 27: Statistical Information

The part of the questionnaire is to gather data for STATISTICAL COMPARISON ONLY.

PLEASE REPLY TO ALL THE ITEMS

ITEMS	COMPLETE BOX
What academic course are you enrolled on?	.....
What is your gender?	[     ] Male [     ] Female
What is your date of birth?	...../...../.....
What is your current domestic status? (Tick a box)	<input type="checkbox"/> Married (or cohabiting.) <input type="checkbox"/> Not married or cohabiting (but in a steady relationship) <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced or Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed <input type="checkbox"/> Single
Do you have any dependent children? (If YES please specify how many)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes [     ] No No. of dependent children.....
In terms of educational qualifications:-	
How many GCSE's / 'O' levels (or equivalent) do you have at grades A-C.	
How many 'A' levels (or equivalent) do you have?	
What subjects did you take at 'A' level (or equivalent)?	
Do you have a job outside of college hours?	[     ] Yes [     ] No
If yes what is your job title?	.....
Is this part-time or full-time?	[     ] Full-time [     ] Part-time
What are your parents occupations?	Father..... Mother.....
What is your ethnic origin?	<input type="checkbox"/> White-Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/> Afro-Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> African
Do you have a practising religion? (If YES please specify which religion)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes [     ] No Religion.....





Liverpool John Moores University

# Thank-you for your time spent completing this questionnaire

Following the analysis of data from this questionnaire, the next study will attempt to monitor participation in physical activity environments over a period of time, and psychological well-being associated with participation. This research is the first of its kind to compare conventional exercise and 'Rave' dancing, and so it is thought that the results will help to contribute to contemporary research concerning modern forms of physical activity and well-being.

If you have no objection to being contacted in the near future with details of the next phase of research, then please complete the details below. Once complete, please remove this back sheet from the questionnaire, it will be collected by an uninterested third party.

☺ PLEASE NOTE that by completing the details below you are not agreeing to participate in the next study, you are merely agreeing to be approached again with details of the subsequent study.

☺ PLEASE NOTE the details on this sheet will be collected and retained by an uninterested third party. This means that the researchers involved with both studies will not have access to subject names. As a consequence, the uninterested third party will not have access to individual survey data. As a result the information provided by you in this survey will REMAIN COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS.

SURVEY REFERENCE NUMBER: [       ]

NAME:

REGISTRATION NUMBER:

COURSE TITLE:

YEAR OF STUDY:

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER / E-MAIL (optional):

Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences

Trueman Building, Webster Street, Liverpool, L3 2ET Telephone: 0151-231-4323 Facsimile: 0151-231-4353



# **Appendix B**

## **Consent forms (Study two)**



**Body culture, health and identity project**  
**Information and consent form**  
**Exercise**

***This research project will be exploring young peoples' relationships with exercise, to see what meaning it holds. This part of the project will be divided into individual and focus group interviews, which will be conducted at a mutually convenient time and date, over the next couple of months. The interviews will be informal in nature with no set schedule, but will likely cover areas such as the actual exercise experience, issues to do with your body and more generally, consider the role of exercise in relation to aspects of health and identity.***

***In order to get some background information on your involvement before the interviews (and to place you in an appropriate discussion group), it would be helpful if you could complete this information and consent form.***

**What is your name?.....**

**How old are you?.....**

**For how long have you been exercising?.....**

**How often do you exercise?.....**

**Are you a member of a gym?.....**

**What is your favoured mode(s) of exercise?.....**

**Do you buy any fitness and health publications?.....**

**What is your height and weight?.....cm / .....kg**

**Would you call yourself overweight?.....**

**Do you have any children?.....**

**Are you working at present?.....**

**When are you available for interview?**

**Over the next few weeks I will contact you to find out when you are available to be interviewed. So as to help in this task, would you**



give an indication of the days and times that you are likely to be free to meet up?

	CIRCLE		CIRCLE
Monday.....	YES....NO....	IF YES, WHAT TIME....	AM....PM....
Tuesday.....	YES....NO....	IF YES, WHAT TIME....	AM....PM....
Wednesday	YES....NO....	IF YES, WHAT TIME....	AM....PM....
Thursday...	YES....NO....	IF YES, WHAT TIME....	AM....PM....
Friday.....	YES....NO....	IF YES, WHAT TIME....	AM....PM....

Would you be willing to meet up at the weekend, if need be?

.....  
*For our records, could you confirm your contact details:*

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
TELEPHONE.....  
E-MAIL.....

Please note: All information on this form is **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**. The interview material could be used in academic publications. If so, your real name will not be used so as to protect your identity. The aim of this project is to give you, as an exerciser, a voice within the academic arena. If you agree to this, please sign underneath.

.....(signature)

Thank-you for completing this form (please return it using the enclosed S.A.E. to S. Gaule, Research Institute for Sport & Exercise Science, Trueman Street, Liverpool, L3 2ET).



**Body culture, health and identity project**  
**Information and consent form**  
**Clubbing**

***This research project will be exploring young peoples' relationships with clubbing, to see what meaning it holds. This part of the project will be divided into individual and focus group interviews, which will be conducted at a mutually convenient time and date, over the next couple of months. The interviews will be informal in nature with no set schedule, but will likely cover areas such as the actual club experience, issues to do with your body and more generally, consider the role of clubbing in relation to aspects of health and identity.***

***In order to get some background information on your involvement before the interviews (and to place you in an appropriate discussion group), it would be helpful if you could complete this information and consent form.***

**What is your name?.....**

**How old are you?.....**

**For how long have you been clubbing?.....**

**How often do you go clubbing?.....**

**Do you take recreational drugs (e.g. ecstasy, speed, cocaine, alcohol) when you go out?.....**

**Do you buy any dance culture publications?.....**

**What is your height and weight?.....cm / .....kg**

**Would you call yourself overweight?.....**

**Do you have any children?.....**

**Are you working at present?.....**



**When are you available for interview?**

**Over the next few weeks I will contact you to find out when you are available to be interviewed. So as to help in this task, would you give an indication of the days and times that you are likely to be free to meet up?**

	<b>CIRCLE</b>		<b>CIRCLE</b>
<b>Monday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Tuesday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Wednesday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Thursday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Friday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>

**Would you be willing to meet up at the weekend, if need be?**

.....

***For our records, could you conform your contact details:***

**NAME.....**

**ADDRESS.....**

.....

.....

.....

**TELEPHONE.....**

**E-MAIL.....**

**Please note: All information on this form is STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. The interview material could be used in academic publications. If so, your real name will not be used so as to protect your identity. The aim of this project is to give you, as an exerciser, a voice within the academic arena. If you agree to this, please sign underneath.**

.....**(signature)**

Thank-you for completing this form (please return it using the enclosed S.A.E. to S. Gaule, Research Institute for Sport & Exercise Science, Trueman Street, Liverpool, L3 2ET).



**Body culture, health and identity project**

**Information and consent form**

**Clubbing and Exercising**

***This research project will be exploring young peoples' relationships with clubbing and exercising, to see what meaning they hold. This part of the project will be divided into individual and focus group interviews, which will be conducted at a mutually convenient time and date, over the next couple of months. The interviews will be informal in nature with no set schedule, but will likely cover areas such as the actual clubbing and exercising experiences, issues to do with your body and more generally, consider the role of clubbing and exercising in relation to aspects of health and identity. In order to get some background information on your involvement before the interviews (and to place you in an appropriate discussion group), it would be helpful if you could complete this information and consent form.***

**What is your name?.....**

**How old are you?.....**

**For how long have you been clubbing and exercising?.....&.....**

**How often do you go out to a club?.....**

**and what about exercise?.....**

**Do you take recreational drugs (e.g. ecstasy, speed, cocaine, alcohol) when you go out?.....**

**Do you buy any dance or/& fitness culture publications?.....&.....**

**Are you a member of a gym?.....**

**What is your height and weight?.....cm / .....kg**

**Would you call yourself overweight?.....**

**Do you have any children?.....**

**Are you working at present?.....**



**When are you available for interview?**

**Over the next few weeks I will contact you to find out when you are available to be interviewed. So as to help in this task, would you give an indication of the days and times that you are likely to be free to meet up?**

	<b>CIRCLE</b>		<b>CIRCLE</b>
<b>Monday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Tuesday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Thursday...</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>
<b>Friday.....</b>	<b>YES....NO....</b>	<b>IF YES, WHAT TIME....</b>	<b>AM....PM....</b>

**Would you be willing to meet up at the weekend, if need be?**

.....

***For our records, could you confirm your contact details:***

**NAME.....**

**ADDRESS.....**

.....  
.....  
.....

**TELEPHONE.....**

**E-MAIL.....**

**Please note: All information on this form is STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. The interview material could be used in academic publications. If so, your real name will not be used so as to protect your identity. The aim of this project is to give you, as an exerciser, a voice within the academic arena. If you agree to this, please sign underneath.**

.....**(signature)**

Thank-you for completing this form (please return it using the enclosed S.A.E. to S. Gaule, Research Institute for Sport & Exercise Science, Trueman Street, Liverpool, L3 2ET).