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Strong is the New Slim:

A Study of the Body and Gender Amongst Female Free Weights Users

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and I have read and fully understood the University of Stirling's research postgraduate regulations. The thesis has not been published nor been presented to another examination board.

thesis as well as the fun I have had over the past six years at University. Finally, to the person who has stayed by side at every point over the past two years, to my best friend and supportive other half Carolyn Reid your patience, humour and love throughout this entire process is what has got me through smiling.

Abstract

This research explored the importance of the ideal female body and gender stereotypes amongst a group of female free weights users in a fitness facility in Scotland. Utilising principles of ethnography, information was initially gathered through working as a participant-as-observer to identify different female free weights users within the facility. From this, as well as using a gatekeeper and snowball sampling, twenty women took part in one-to-one interviews. Different groups of women were interviewed including: those training in the free weights areas to aid their sporting performance, for health or aesthetic reasons and those preparing for physique competitions. Interviews focused on the women's use of the free weights areas, perceptions of their own bodies and their opinions on the ideal female body as well as their interpretations of the concepts femininity, masculinity and muscularity. The unique narrative of each woman was critically analysed with reference to social construction feminism. Whilst interviews were the main data collection technique for this research, participant observation and informal conversations within the free weights areas also informed the findings of this study. The motivations behind women taking part in weight training are presented. Interviewees' definitions of the ideal female body are explored and the significance of this body is discussed. Factors influencing the women's definitions of the ideal body are also examined. The impact of social media on participants' use of the free weights areas is analysed. The women's perceptions of the terms masculinity, femininity and muscularity are considered alongside how these perceptions affected their training within the free weights areas.

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Introduction

Weight training has historically been viewed as a masculine activity because of its association with strength and muscularity. It is currently an activity growing in popularity amongst females, reflected by increased attention in the mainstream media. In a recent *Times Magazine* article, celebrity personal trainer Lacey Stone was credited with reshaping the ideal female body through weight training. Her arms were described as "aspirational" as they were "lean and toned and tanned but not too bulky. Tight triceps. Perfectly curved biceps, a look lusted after by many but sported by few" (Day, 2016, p. 24). The article communicated the growing popularity of a more muscular look amongst some females. The piece continued by urging the reader to, "Lift weights. The heavier the better" (Day, 2016, p. 24). Similarly, *The Daily Mail* presented an online article entitled, "Women who lift weights now seen as attractive by men – and fitness fanatics Cameron Diaz and Millie Mackintosh are leading the athletic trend" (London, 2014); whilst *Women's Fitness Magazine* led with, "Weight training is the perfect way to boost your metabolism and torch fat, so it's no wonder strong is the new slim" (Khouv, 2014). This increased attention can also be found on social media. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are spaces where information regarding the body, health and fitness can be shared (Tiggerman and Zaccarado, 2015).

The focus of women's participation in physical activity and its relationship with the female body has not only been apparent in the media but also within academic research (Tate, 1999; Bunsell, 2013; Hargreaves, 1994). Previous research has highlighted that historically, athletic and muscular female forms were not seen as desirable because in achieving them, women transgressed the social norms of femininity (Bunsell, 2013; Douglas, 1966; Hargreaves, 1994; Tate, 1999). This is most apparent in, although not exclusive to, research that explores women and weight training, who by their perceived "transgressive behaviour" are seen to be pushing the boundaries of femininity (Bunsell 2013; Heywood, 1998; Tate, 1999).

At this point it is important to articulate that the ideal female body is constructed through discourses present in society (Blood, 2005; Bordo, 2003; Duncan, 1990; Grogan, 1999; Lobar and Martin, 2007; Maguire, 2004). In this research, the 'ideal female body' is the body that is depicted as the most popular or

sought after look amongst females within Western society. As some media sources are now endorsing weight training as an appropriate activity for females, discourses surrounding the dominant perception of the ideal female body may be beginning to change, moving away from skinny and slim (Tate, 1999) towards strong and fit. With this understanding it is interesting to consider how female weight users (also referred to as female weight trainers) actually feel. Do they believe weight training has become more accepted amongst females? Do they believe there is a particular body they must live up to?

For the purpose of this research, it is important to define what is meant by "weight training". Weight training is an activity where a participant uses a variety of equipment, or their own bodyweight, to oppose the force caused by a muscle contraction to build the size and strength of skeletal muscles (Schoenfeld, 2007). Individuals can weight train by using only fixed resistance and cable machines rather than free weights equipment. In doing so, they would not use the free weights areas in the gym facility where this study took place, as these machines are located in a separate area with the cardiovascular equipment (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2). Consequently, individuals using only this type of equipment were not interviewed within this study. Instead, I wished to hear the experiences of women who *were* using the free weights areas. These are spaces that have been documented in previous academic research as dominated by males and are less than welcoming towards female users (Bunsell, 2013; Heywood, 1998). A glossary of key weight training terminology has been provided in Appendix 1.

Weight training is used both to aid fat loss and develop muscle mass - it has the potential to sculpt and mould the body (Tate, 1999; Bunsell, 2013). It was important therefore to review existing literature pertaining to the sociological importance of the body, and more specifically the female body. Scholars in sociology consider the body to be more than just a physical entity (Curry, 1993; Bordo, 2003; Crossley, 2001; Grosz, 1994; Lorber and Martin, 2007; Shilling, 2012 and Synnott, 1993). The body is not only central to a person's health, it is also fundamental to an individual's identity and self-expression and can be altered through make-up, and clothing and as a result of diet and exercise regimes (Curry, 1993; Gidden 1991; Grosz, 1994; Orbach, 2009; Sweetman, 1999; Synott, 1993). Leading the debate of the body as a social construction is work by social construction theorists, which Shilling (2012, p. 75) describes as an "umbrella term

for those views that suggest the body is shaped, constrained, and even invented by society". Throughout this thesis, a social construction feminist view will assist in the discussion of my findings. Fundamentally, this research project discusses how popular discourses within society have shaped the opinions, actions and bodies of the women interviewed.

Previous sociological studies of women and weight training have focused on those who use weight training for aesthetic reasons (Bunsell, 2013; Heywood, 1998; Shea, 2001; Tate, 1999). However, there are individuals who weight train and use free weights areas for other purposes. For instance, weight training has become increasingly important in female athletic performance across a wide range of sports. Swimmers, footballers, golfers and rugby players for instance, regularly use the free weights areas to enhance their athletic performance. Female weightlifters also use free weights areas. For competitive weightlifters, training primarily takes place using free weights to train for two exercises: "the snatch" and "the clean and jerk". These exercises must be performed on a specialised weightlifting platform within the free weights areas. The women included in the study are therefore not limited to those training primarily for aesthetic reasons. I look to gain a broader insight into the diversity of women using the free weights areas.

It is important to recognise that because this research is qualitative in nature, multiple interpretations can be made from the evidence I gathered. The project does not look to generalise women as a whole, rather it is an account of the twenty women who were interviewed within the chosen facility, as well as my own observations and casual conversations within the free weights areas. However, it is critical to note that the aims of the research project, the methods chosen and the interpretations I make from the interviews were affected by: my own experiences and cultural identity (Birch, 1998; Wheaton, 2002); knowledge of social construction feminism (Bordo, 1990, 1993; Lorber and Martin, 2007; Orbach, 2006, 2009); my understanding of paradigms (Sparkes, 1992; Scotland, 2012); qualitative research (Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincol, 2005; Hammersley, 1989; Sparkes, 1992) and ethnography (Alasuutari, 1998; Ferrell, Hamm & Addler, 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Lowe, 1998; Sands, 2002).

Guided by my own experiences and understanding of the academic literature highlighted above, the aim of the research is to explore the importance of the ideal

female body and gender stereotypes amongst female free weights users. To achieve this, the research was developed around five objectives: (i) to identify the motivations behind women taking part in weight training; (ii) to discuss participants' definitions of the ideal female body and to comprehend the significance of this body to the participants; (iii) to discover what influenced the definitions of the ideal female body; (iv) to comprehend the impact of social media on participants' use of the free weights areas and (v) to explore how the women's perceptions of the terms masculinity, femininity and muscularity affected their training within the free weights areas.

Organisation of Thesis

My study draws upon, and aims to contribute to, literature concerning the female body and physical activity. In my effort to answer my research aims and objectives, this thesis is organised into six chapters.

In Chapter 1 I discuss academic literature within the field of sociology and sport sociology regarding the importance of the body, female sport and physical activity, social norms and transgression. I examine the ideal female body promoted by health and fitness industries, one that is slim, fragile and toned (Bordo, 1993; Grogan, 1999; Orbach, 2006, 2009). Following this, I consider how the body has been conceptualised by sociologists, discuss how the body is more than a physical entity and highlight that it is difficult for an individual to live in Western society without defining their gender.

The theory that underpins this study, social construction feminism, is explored. I briefly examine research by early social construction theorists, including Foucault (1975, 1978) and Douglas (1966) and their discussions of power and subordination. I then focus on feminist writers who take a social construction stance when discussing the female body and female behaviours (Bordo, 1993, 2005; Orbach, 2006, 2009; Lorber and Martin, 2007). This leads onto the discussion of social norms and gender stereotypes, how these have influenced the concepts of masculinity and femininity, and how they exert influence within a sporting context. Next, I explore the suggestion within previous literature surrounding women's sport that athletes are often vulnerable to discrimination, including the questioning of sexual orientation (Burroughs, Ashburn and Seebohm, 1995; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Griffin, 1992).

The increasing influence of social media on images of the ideal female body is also discussed. Because of its accessibility, interactivity, and ability to convey information through videos, images and text, social media has the capacity to construct images of the ideal female body (O'Brien, 2013 and Ghaznavi and Taylor, 2015). I consider how the fitness industry has used social media as a platform to convey popular constructions of the ideal female body, and discuss the hashtags #thinspiration and #fitspiration. After reviewing popular images of the ideal female body, I examine transgression, an important discussion throughout this thesis. Female bodybuilding, which has been documented in literature as a transgressive activity, is then examined. I discuss physique competitions, devised to embody popular characteristics of femininity far removed from physiognomies of female bodybuilders. Additionally, I discuss how weight training can be used as a tool to control and sculpt the body into the desired physique.

In Chapter 2 I explain the philosophical assumptions essential in shaping the research and methodological framework used to direct the study. I examine how the interpretive paradigm is best aligned to provide a framework for this research. Following this, I discuss the data collection tools available to qualitative researchers, principles of ethnography and the importance of being reflective and remaining somewhat detached from a research project. I outline the reasons I chose to study female free weights trainers and the timeline of events that took place to allow me to gather my findings. I also discuss the main data collection tool, interviews, and describe how my work was also informed by casual conversations with interviewees and my observations as a participant-as-observer. Next, I explain how I recruited participants for this project, including utilising principles of participant-as-observer, a gatekeeper and snowball sampling. I describe the three steps of thematic analysis used during this research: open coding, axial coding and selective coding, and also my use of the computer software NVivo. Finally, I reflect on ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter 3 is the first of three chapters where I present my research findings. I discuss the layout of the gym to help contextualise participants' comments across my findings chapters. Following this I describe the women's initial experiences of, and reasons for, using the weights areas including: personal training sessions, to develop strength for participation in another sport, through gaining professional qualifications, with a friend or joining a group such as weightlifting or CrossFit. I

discuss the dominance of men in the free weights areas and describe how the majority of women trained with other women to counter this dominance.

I move onto discuss how a small number of women described feeling judged by other women because of their strength and muscularity, in both the free weights areas and the main section of the gym. I then explore the motivations behind why the women used the weights areas. Interestingly, there was never just one reason for this; reasons ranged from aiding sporting performance and enjoying feeling strong to weight training being a part of their identity. Another motivation discussed by the women was to experience empowerment, which happened when they felt in control of their bodies.

I begin Chapter 4 by discussing the women's desires to be slim and toned. I consider how this is not a simple debate and is dependent upon the women's interpretations of these terms. I portray the image of the ideal female body which emerged from the research - that of a slim, large-breasted woman with a toned upper body and rounded glutes. I argue that the interviewees saw this look amongst celebrity figures and attempted to embody these particular characteristics, although this wasn't a universal act - a number of the women realised this image was unrealistic for them.

I continue by describing what femininity and masculinity meant to the interviewees and suggest that some traditional discourses regarding what it means to be masculine and what it means to be feminine still remain. The majority of women upheld popular definitions of femininity such as wearing make-up or a dress, being attractive for a boyfriend and not being too muscular or strong. However, a small number of women discussed how they viewed femininity as a concept that can now be associated with strength and muscularity. I then explore the increase in popularity of the athletic female body and how this seemed to be influenced by athletic female role models.

Within this chapter I also discuss physique and bodybuilding competitions. During this discussion I consider how female bodybuilders were ostracised amongst the interviewees; none of whom wanted to become "that muscular". I also discuss how interviewees worried about, or had experienced, having their sexual orientation questioned or faced discriminatory comments due to their muscularity. Finally, I discuss obsession and recount how a small number of the women took part in

obsessive and dangerous behaviours in their attempts to replicate their versions of the ideal female body.

Throughout all of the women's interviews, social media came across as one of the biggest influences of their weight training regimes. In Chapter 5 I discuss the accessibility of social media and how it was constantly available to participants. I consider #fitspiration and how this influenced the way interviewees perceived the ideal female body. Following this, I explore the negative impact of social media including the sexualisation of weight trainers on social media and how these images often caused the women in the study anxiety about their own bodies. I then discuss social media's ability to provide a landscape for bullying and give an example of how one of the participants felt like they were victimised on social media. Finally, I explore how the women believed teenage girls had been influenced by trends such as #fitspiration on social media.

In Chapter 6, I summarise the key findings of this research in relation to my aim and objectives. I draw conclusions and, as a feminist researcher looking to change gender inequality, make several practical recommendations based on my conclusions. These include: running female only free weights classes, providing the same sporting opportunities for boys and girls at a young age and offering lessons to young people about healthy body image.

Chapter 1
The Social Construction of the Body and Gender

1.1 Introduction

Weight training is becoming an increasingly popular activity amongst women (Tate, 1999). With the development of commercial gyms, strength and conditioning opportunities for athletes and health benefits being acknowledged within scientific research, there is greater scope for weight training to become a part of an individual's workout routine. Previously, academic research has explored the realms of female bodybuilding (Bunsell, 2013; Heywood, 1998) and females who weight train for aesthetic reasons (Tate, 1999). This will be discussed within the following chapter. This chapter will also review the literature surrounding: the fitness industry, the body, gender stereotypes (masculinity and femininity), social norms, women's participation in physical activity and sport, as well as control and obsessive behaviour.

1.2 The Fitness Industry

Within Western society there is a great emphasise on having a physically healthy body. This is reinforced through the popular media, government policies and the scientific community who suggest that individuals should take responsibility for their physical health (Mansfield, 2005). How to tackle being overweight is a prominent feature on the National Health Service's (NHS) website home page, where illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes are linked to being overweight or obese (NHS, 2016). There is also a financial incentive for the government to encourage the population to stay at a healthy bodyweight. Obesity related health issues in England alone cost the NHS an estimated £479.3 million in 1998, which grew to £4.2 billion by 2007 (National Office Audit, 2001; Butland *et al.* 2007). The health and fitness industry are able to use these concerns to sell gym memberships, weight loss plans and dietary supplements (Orbach, 2009). In 2013, over 4.4 million adults in the United Kingdom were members of a gym or leisure centre, allowing them to take part in cardiovascular activities, resistance training and fitness classes (Keogh, 2014).

Within this research project it is important to consider that health within Western society has been closely related to a person's physical appearance

(Featherstone, 1991, Shilling, 2012). Research suggests that health and fitness businesses entice males by marketing mass muscle-gaining products to achieve the perfectly chiselled masculine body; one that is strong, athletic and muscular (Orbach, 2009). In contrast, females are offered fat burning or protein products aimed specifically at achieving the ideal female body (Orbach, 2009). This body includes being slender, without excess body fat, looking somewhat fragile, and having soft, toned muscles (Bordo, 1993; Grogan, 1999; Orbach, 2006, 2009). Evidence of the different marketing strategies used to target men and women can be found in health and fitness magazines. *Men's Health* magazine was launched in 1995 and was joined by *Women's Health* in 2012. In order to promote *Women's Health* as a new publication, *Men's Health* described it as providing women with:

> the best in health, beauty, fashion, weight loss, fitness, nutrition, celebrity, love and sex, all wrapped up in one super glossy lifestyle title (Men's Health, 2012).

Whereas *Men's Health* described itself as:

> the best men's lifestyle website and magazine in the world, with workouts, high protein recipes, an exercise database – plus health, style and sex tips (Men's Health, 2016).

The gendered discourse evident in these magazines is sustained on their related websites. The workout sections of the corresponding websites market exercise differently to men and women (Appendix 2). For instance, *Women's Health* focuses on celebrity figures; nowhere in the workout section are muscle growth or muscle development mentioned. *Men's Health* also focuses on celebrities, but the main emphasis of the page is how to develop specific muscle groups, for example the core, chest and back. This is important in regards to this research. If some popular media sources are still promoting free weights use as a mainly masculine appropriate activity, what then are the motivations behind females training in these areas? This question forms a key objective in this research.

1.3 The Importance of the Body

From reviewing research on the sociological importance of the body, four significant issues emerge in terms of how the body is conceptualised. Firstly, scholars in sociology consider the body as more than just a physical entity (Bordo,

2003; Butler; 1990, 1993, 2004; Crossley, 2001; Grosz, 1994; Shilling, 2012; Synnott, 1993). Shilling argues that the focus of research regarding the body cannot be left solely to academic disciplines outside of sociology. Secondly, many sociologists conclude that an individual's body must be gendered (Bordo, 2003; Duncan, 1990; Grogan, 1999; Lorber and Martin, 2007). Lorber and Martin (2007, p. 230) suggest:

> a gender-neutral or androgynous or "unisex" body is anathema in a world in which people must know quickly and precisely where to place others they encounter for the first time or in brief, face-to-face interactions. How you look to the other person (masculine or feminine) is tied to who you are (woman or man).

Thirdly, the body is seen as a means of expressing identity through adornments such as tattoos, make-up, and clothing and as a result of diet, exercise and health regimes (Curry, 1993; Gidden 1991; Grosz, 1994; Orbach, 2009; Sweetman, 1999; Synott, 1993). Fourthly, the body is viewed as "a project" - constantly worked on in an attempt to achieve perfection, or to change an image (Bunsell, 2013; Featherstone, 1991; Grosz, 1994; Orbach, 2009; Shilling, 2012; Sweetman, 1993; Turner, 1996).

The ideal female body is an image endorsed by western fashion, health, fitness and media industries and depicts a particular appearance: little body fat, tight and toned muscles and a youthful face (Grogan, 1999; Mansfield, 2005; Orbach 2009). A person can either seek to conform to this ideal or transgress from it through how they attempt to represent their body (Bordo, 2003; Featherstone *et al.* 1991; Synnott, 1993). Bordo (2003, p.165-166) suggests that our bodies are powerfully symbolic; they are, "trained, shaped and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity." Featherstone *et al.* advise that the closer a woman's body is to the most popular or ideal female body within a society, the more it is valued within that society. Interestingly, an individual's understanding of what it means to be attractive within a society is learned from a young age (Grogan 1999). Those who are considered to be attractive are also perceived to be healthier, more sociable, and intelligent and are observed to receive greater privileges within society (Feingold, 1992; Jackson *et al.* 1995; Orbach, 2009; Wilson and Eckel, 2006). This discussion of the ideal female body and attractiveness is important within the current project and forms one of the key

research objectives; to discuss participants' definitions of the ideal female body and to comprehend the significance of this body to the participants.

1.4 The Body as a Social Construction

In the realm of sociology, numerous theories exist relating to power, domination and subordination. Social construction theory is a way in which power, domination and subordination can be deliberated and it has readily been applied to discussions on the body. Social construction theorists are united in the understanding that the body cannot be viewed uniquely as a biological entity, and that the body is determined by society. In this section I outline popular views of significant social construction theorists, focus on the work of feminists who employ a social construction stance and discuss how social construction feminism underpins this research project.

The body is conceptualised by social construction theorists in various ways. Shilling (2012) believes the major theorists of the body as a social construction to be: Douglas (1966, 1970), Foucault (1975, 1978), Goffman (1963, 1969, 1983), Turner (1984) and Frank (1991). British anthropologist, Mary Douglas, argues that a person's thinking or reasoning is based on how a society previously reacted to a situation; a person's answer is only deemed "right" if it agrees with previous precedents (Douglas, 1986). Interpreting work by Michel Foucault it can be suggested that within society individuals are not the self-directed, free moving bodies that they think they are, but are constructed by social and cultural forces and controlled by strict social powers even when they believe their actions are free. Foucault (1978) describes historical forms of torture that were perceived as suitable means to control a society. Even though this type of torture belongs to what we *today* would consider as an uncivilised past, Foucault argues that forms of control, even if nowadays less extreme, are still evident in modern society. This includes invisible yet extremely powerful forces, such as social norms.

Foucault's work led many social construction theorists to conceptualise the body as a social process. This includes the understanding that views regarding the body come from the social and cultural surroundings which individuals are subject to. A social construction perspective suggests that a person's identity derives from a set of social discourses within which they are socialised (Burr, 2003 and Gergen, 2011). Foucault does not often mention women or gender in his work however, his

writings about the body and its relationship with power and sexuality have inspired numerous feminist researchers.

Extrapolating from the understanding that the body is socially constructed, a number of feminist theorists have taken a social construction approach when discussing the female body and female actions (Bordo, 2003, 2005; Orbach, 2006, 2009; Butler, 1993; Lorber and Martin, 2007; Lorber and Moore, 2002). However, even amongst social construction feminists the length to which women are active agents in their own oppression in debated (Blood, 2005). Feminist writer Susie Orbach has made significant contributions to arguments regarding the social construction of the female body and women's behaviours. Orbach views women as "victims of patriarchal desires" (Orbach, 1986, cited in Blood, 2005 p. 47). In her social and political analyses of women's experiences of their bodies, she argues that the way women experience their bodies, as well as their opinions on food, eating habits and perception of shape and size, are a product of a society that oppresses women. Orbach suggests that women often fail to meet the standards of femininity imposed by Western society, but the notion that the ideal body is slender, toned, perfumed and free of excess body hair, may leave women feeling dissatisfied with the way they look. The social construction feminist view that the body is the product of society, rather than just a biological entity, means that the body can be viewed as a site of struggle and oppression for women, who are mainly victims of male dominance (Lorber and Martin, 2007; Orbach, 2006). However, Foucault (1978) suggests that power and dominance is something that everyone within a society conforms to; in regards to gender this could be interpreted as suggesting that women are *not* powerless but conform to dominant social ideals, which is why men *are* dominant. Therefore, feminists such as Bordo (1993) suggest that women should be viewed as active instruments who engage in social practices that lead to oppressive ideologies of women.

A social construction feminist lens has been adopted throughout this study. By this, I do not underestimate the body as a biological entity, but explore how women who weight train construct their bodies based on social influences. Although weight training has previously been viewed as a masculine activity, it is growing in popularity amongst women. This raises a number of important questions. Has the construction of the ideal female body changed? Are some women beginning to believe in their own strength and power and using weight

training to challenge typical stereotypes of femininity or are the weight trainers' behaviours still conforming to dominant stereotypes of female fragility? Answers to these questions will be explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

1.5 Social Norms, Gender, Masculinity and Femininity

Social norms are crucial in guiding behaviour within a society. In academic research, this is defined as behaviour considered acceptable within a social situation (Andersen and Taylor, 2008; Cialdini and Trost, 1998; Hechter and Opp, 2001; Mahalik *et al.* 2005). As Hechter and Opp (2001, p. xi) suggest, "Norms are a cultural phenomena that prescribe and proscribe behaviour in specific circumstances." This means that social norms may be accountable for, at least in part, shaping an individual's behaviour within the social world. When the way an individual's body is constructed opposes social norms, for example weight or shape, the individual may be judged for a lack of self-control. Conversely, a person who conforms to society's ideals of the body is respected, celebrated and used as a standard that others should aspire to (Lorber and Martin, 2007 and Orbach, 2006, 2009). Social norms, in regards to the body, are also highly gendered, encompassing ideas of what it means to be feminine or masculine. In this study I will refer to the social norms regarding masculinity and femininity as gender stereotypes.

A fundamental point to consider before discussing gender stereotypes is the definition of sex and gender. A person's sex is determined due to biological factors such as: sex organs, hormones and chromosomes (Mikkola, 2016). Gender is generally assigned for a person according to their physical sex. However, gender refers to the behaviours, activities, roles and attributes that have been socially constructed to label an individual as a man or as a woman (Caudwell, 1999; Lorber and Martin, 2007; Orbach 2006). In Western society, gender is imperative to a person's identity. Characteristics such as strength, aggression and muscularity are viewed as masculine whilst fragility, sensitivity and innocence are perceived as feminine (Bordo 1990; Duncan 1990; Lorber and Martin 2007; Shilling, 2012). A gender-neutral body is difficult to negotiate, if at all possible, in a society where individuals must place those they meet within a specific category (Lorber and Martin, 2007).

In considering females' use of free weights training, it is important to reflect on former social norms and gender stereotypes. Previously, female weight training

could be interpreted as a form of agency due to that expectation that males are strong and have muscular physiques, whilst females were viewed as fragile (Lorber and Martin, 2007). A fundamental understanding in sociology is that social norms constrain an individual from doing a specific action or looking a certain way, yet can also enable certain forms of agency (Blood, 2005). Agency is described as an individual acting of their own free will. This independent act may go against the norm (Barker, 2005); something that female weight trainers have previously been considered to do (Tate, 1999).

Considering social norms further, the concept of hegemony must be discussed. Hegemony is a lived ideology; a coherent system of ideas, values, beliefs and practices that are learned, sustained and reproduced through everyday experiences (Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves and McDonald, 2002). The concept of hegemony was developed by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci developed the concept to "explain how a dominant group or class establishes political and cultural leadership and control" (Hargreaves and McDonald, 2002, p. 49). Imperative to this is the understanding that hegemony is a process that requires "the winning of consent from the subordinate groups" (Hargreaves and McDonald, 2002, p.50). In relation to gender, if males are regarded as the superior group in society, it can be suggested that both males and females conform to behaviours that give men the opportunity to be dominant.

After considering hegemony, exploring debates around masculinity and femininity is a natural progression. The concept of hegemonic masculinity was initially developed through reports written about social inequality in an Australian high school (Kessler *et al*. 1982). The concept was developed by Connell (1982, 1983) due to debates considering men's bodies, how they experience masculinity and their role in side-lining females and other groups of men. Hegemonic masculinity is a normative ideology that leads to male dominance within society as well as the subordination of women (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). For a man to embody hegemonic masculine characteristics, they have to show: aggression, courageousness, competitiveness and risk taking, as well as control any signs of weakness (Donaldson, 1993; Kaufman, 1995, Thompson, 1991). Men are encouraged to internalise these characteristics into their own behaviour.

Hegemonic masculinity also encompasses the idea that there is a hierarchy amongst males depending on their race, class, sexual orientation and appearance.

This leads to the subordination of groups of males, for example gay or black men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). To demonstrate hegemonic masculinity, males must subscribe to a set of physical and emotional traits that promote dominance such as aggression, strength and muscularity. Equally although the understanding of femininity and masculinity is constantly shifting the structure of gender, and women's subordination to men, remains consistent (Armato, 2013).

If hegemonic masculinity defines characteristics that are perceived to be elite or dominant characteristics of masculinity, what are the characteristics that are perceived to be ideally feminine? Work by Schippers (2007) suggests that to give men unique access to masculine characteristics, emotional and physical ideal feminine characteristics are constructed for females to adhere to, which include having a fragile, soft and caring nature as well as being toned but not muscular, fit but not extremely strong (Bunsell, 2013; Lorber and Martin, 2007). As Lorber and Martin (2007) articulate:

> Women are expected to be nurturant and emotionally giving, willing to subordinate their desires to please men and their interests and to take care of children. Therefore, women's bodies should be yielding and sexually appealing to men when they are young and plumply maternal when they are older.

Interestingly, Connell (1987) concludes that no femininities can be viewed as hegemonic, as femininities are constructed to be subordinate to masculinities. As strength, authority, power and aggression are seen as characteristics that distinguish the difference between males and females, these characteristics need to remain inaccessible to women. Idealised feminine characteristics also imply that if females deviate from expectations, they can be ostracised for being different. Deviances might include: being in a same-sex relationship, showing hostility, physical strength or aggression. If women possess masculine characteristics, they are thought to be challenging male dominance and are often stigmatised (Schippers, 2007). How then, do social norms and gender stereotypes exert their influence within a sporting context?

1.6 Norms and Stereotypes Within Sport and Physical Activity

In the domain of sport sociology, many sports are associated with maleness and masculinity (Dunning and Maguire, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Harris, 2002;

Hartley, 2001; Maguire 2004; Messner and Sabo, 1990). This involves sport being seen as a site for the assertion of perceived masculine attributes and behaviours (Harris, 2002). The athletic male body is the prototype of strength, physicality, power, and superiority; in contrast the female athletic body can be seen as incapable by the creation of specific rules across a range of sports to make them more 'appropriate' for females (Burke, 2010). As Lorber and Martin (2007) suggest, in many sports, the rules or events for men and women are different. For example, in North American women's ice hockey, Weaving and Roberts (2012) argue that women are limited by not being able to take part in body checking, a type of tackle which *is* allowed in men's ice hockey. Because of this rule, women who take part in ice hockey are not able to participate fully in the physicality of the game, meaning they cannot completely "flourish as male players do" (Weaving and Roberts, 2012, p. 470).

Research suggests that physical movement is also a way to differentiate between men and women (Hartley, 2001; Young, 1980) Young (1980) explains that women often do basic movements differently from men. Her research analysed the way both men and women utilised their bodies in physical tasks. In a throwing action, she explains how girls normally learn to use only their arm rather than putting their whole body behind the movement like boys do, which is mechanically more effective. In turn they learn, or at least observe, that using their body in a certain way is seen as unfeminine. Taking a Foucauldian theoretical perspective, Young suggests that girls are disciplined from an early age by a constant stream of discouragement and expectation, including being unable to utilise their body in the same way as boys. Additionally, Young argues that girls often take part in sedentary activities whereas boys take part in activities that develop physicality. Girls therefore spend less time practising physical skills such as running, catching and throwing, which means they are less likely to develop in these physical skills. Young's research supports the notion that girls within Western society learn how (or how not) to use their bodies or occupy a physical space. Hartley (2001) suggests that females are taught to take up less space than males through their actions and their physical size. Of course, there are exceptions to this understanding, which I discuss in further detail when considering female bodybuilders in Section 1.11.

Young's work surmises that girls and women generally underestimate the capability of their bodies; often limiting themselves by believing their bodies

cannot achieve the same as boys and men. However, this research may now be out-dated as girls and women, especially in Western Society, are encouraged to take part in physical activity. In the UK, for example, schemes such as "Getting Girls Active" and "Fit for Girls" aim to get young girls more actively involved in physical activity and sport, through working with school PE teachers to create spaces where young females feel comfortable taking part in activities that were once perceived to be unfeminine (TOP Foundation, 2014; Youth Sport Trust, 2016).

Female only environments, as a place for women to physically test themselves, has also been reviewed in research. McDermott (2004) found that women participating in a female only canoeing expedition felt more comfortable taking on physical and difficult tasks than in a mixed gender setting. On the trip, the women spoke in ways that revealed their sense of being empowered as they pushed their bodies in a number of physical tasks that they would have usually let men do. These included: carrying heavy packs, route navigation and taking the lead steering and driving the canoe on the water, resulting in the women feeling physically stronger and more confident compared to when males were present. Alongside other females the women felt less need to prove themselves and were more likely to have the confidence to try new physical tasks. McDermott summarises that providing shared opportunities for women to explore their physicality, allowed them to challenge dominant gender constructions. This is an important consideration for this research. Free weights areas are occupied by both males and females. Would females feel more comfortable to train in the areas if there were no males present? Would they do anything differently? These issues are discussed in Chapters 3 and 6.

1.7 Sexuality and the Athletic Body

Research suggests that female athletes are vulnerable to stigmatisation (Cahn, 1993; Griffin, 1992; Lenskyj, 1991). Of particular note is the way in which athletic prowess and a muscular physique may lead to assumptions concerning sexual orientation (Cox and Thompson, 2000; Griffin, 1992). Burroughs, Ashburn and Seebohm (1995, p. 267) suggest that a number of women's sports have gone to great measures to emphasise "heterosexual femininity", or to promote characteristics of the ideal female body, in an attempt to rid female sport of the 'negative' perception of homosexuality. In their study of Australian women's

cricket, Burroughs, Ashburn and Seebohm (1995) found that players were expected, by Australian Women Cricket Council, to wear skirts and dresses to emphasise their heterosexual femininity and eliminate stereotypes of homosexuality in the sport. However, this act, encouraged through regulations of Australian Women's Cricket Council, must be viewed critically. To wear a skirt does not make a female heterosexual, nor does avoiding wearing a skirt make her homosexual. However, the very fact that this has arisen in Australian women's cricket illustrates how this stereotype was sustained within society. A similar issue has arisen surrounding women's participation in football. Historically, football has been viewed as a masculine sport (Harris, 2005). This perception has contributed to associating female football players as masculine or as lesbians. Harris found that female footballers were often embarrassed or uncomfortable with this stereotype, leading some to almost quit playing football.

A female who possesses traits such as strength and muscularity, is often associated with being a "butch" or "mannish" lesbian (Caudwell, 1999; Walker *et al*. 2012). It is rare that the "femme" lesbian, who displays characteristics of a typically feminine heterosexual woman, is considered as her lesbianism can be ignored or easily covered up (Creed, 1999). Interestingly, female athletes who have short hair and muscular bodies are deemed to break the norms of femininity and are subject to having their sexuality challenged (Cox and Thompson, 2000).Women who take part in sports perceived as masculine, such as football, boxing and rugby, frequently worry about being stereotyped as butch or mannish, often choosing to dress a certain way in their daily lives so as not be labelled butch (Caudwell, 1999; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Hargreaves, 1997; Harris, 2002; Fasting and Shelia, 1997; Stubbs, 2013).

Bodybuilding is another sport whereby participating female athletes often worry about their sexual orientation being questioned. This is due to the vast amount of muscle mass that participants must develop to be successful in competitive bodybuilding (Bunsell, 2013). Sharp (1997) suggests that women begin to worry about their sexual identity being questioned when they do not conform to the behaviour and appearance that is expected of them within the social sphere they inhabit. Female bodybuilders are vulnerable to these labels as they disrupt social norms by training in environments that have previously been dominated by males as well as embody a muscular physique (Bunsell, 2013). Bunsell found that to

combat this, many of the bodybuilders tried to 'feminise' their appearance through their gym clothing choice, for example choosing tights that emphasised their hips. These examples show the difficulties females face in trying to escape the dominant ideals of what it means to be a woman, for example, to be distinctively *different* from men and is something that I explored with the female weight users, at the fitness facility.

1.8 The Power of Social Media

Social media websites are a powerful tool in the twenty-first century. They are used to communicate information such as images, videos and written text, between organisations and their consumers as well as within and between communities (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre, 2011). Information can be passed via direct messages on individual social media sites or through networking tools such as "hash tagging". Hash tagging information on a social media site, by adding the # symbol before a word or a phrase, allows users to hyperlink to all of the other content on that site with the same hash tag.

Interestingly, certain social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are being used to raise awareness of women's sport and fitness given the limited attention paid to women in the mainstream media. Research shows that women's sport receives less coverage than men's sport in the mainstream media (Fink and Kensicki, 2002; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). What impact has this had on women's sport and fitness coverage on social media? Academic research suggests that social media and online blogging give those marginalised by the mainstream media, for example female athletes, a space to tell their stories, share information and create a community of followers (Eltantawy & Wiest 2011). Hambrick *et al.* (2010) found that some athletes used the social media site Twitter, a micro-blogging platform, to break their own news before the mainstream media did. Such acts increase the significance and impact of social media. Importantly for this research project, social media has given females a platform to show off their bodies.

The popularity of being thin or skinny, referred to as "thinspiration" on social media websites such as Twitter, Instagram, Pintrest and Tumblr, has grown through the use of the hash tag #thinspiration (Ghaznavi and Taylor, 2015). The concept involves promoting weight loss and glorifying disorders such as anorexia and

bulimia (Lewis and Arbuthnott, 2012). Media content related to #thinspiration are images and videos promoting the thin or slender ideal; text often accompanies these images that is intended to encourage extreme weight-loss (O'Brien, 2013). Although this phenomenon is not exclusive to females, Ghaznavi and Taylor suggest that the pictures associated with the hash tag are predominantly of females. From reviewing literature surrounding the popularity of different body shapes, I argue that the health and fitness industry has constructed "fat" as a dirty, ugly word (Braziel and LeBesco, 2001; Hartley, 2001).

The thin female body has not been the only image of the ideal female body. In fact, research by various sport sociologists suggests that perceptions of the ideal female body within a society varies over time (Cole, 2002; Maguire 1993, 2004). Different popular images of the ideal female body have included; the wide hipped, large-busted Gibson Girl in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; the glamorisation of Hollywood actresses such as Marilyn Monroe in the mid twentieth century and the rise in popularity of the slender body through models such as Kate Moss in the late twentieth, early twenty-first century (Patterson, 2005; Spitzer, Henderson, and Zivian, 1999; Watts, 2003). Until recently, the athletic or more muscular female body has never dominated popular culture.

Fitspiration, or #fitspiration is a social media movement that involves focusing on encouraging weight loss and body management through exercise and healthy eating (O'Brien, 2013). Rather than focusing on a thin body, the emphasis of #fitspiration is the image of 'fitness'; including the visual display of abdominal muscles and toned arms whilst still embodying limited excess body fat. To demonstrate how widely fitspiration is used on Instagram, Tiggerman and Zaccarado (2015) completed a search of the hashtag in 2015 and found that 3.3 million images contained #fitspiration; the majority of which were found to be of females. Previous research such as work by O'Brien (2013) and Tiggerman and Zaccarado (2015) have analysed the content from #fitspiration images and have found an increase in popularity of the slim body with toned muscles. To further research on the influence of social media, I explore whether social media movements actually influence those consuming the posts. In my research, I attempt to find out if social media influences female free weights users' use of the free weights areas.

1.9 Transgressive Femininity

In her book "The Secondary Sex", theorist Simone Beauvoir (1949) argues that throughout history women have been regarded as the "other". She suggests that within Western society males have been constructed as the main subject, which leads to the oppression of women. In this early feminist work, Beauvoir comments that it is not due to genetics that women are regarded as subordinate to men, it is due to men believing that they have a higher power. This understanding is the basis of a number of feminist researchers using social construction to discuss women's oppression (Lorber and Martin, 2007; Orbach, 2006, 2009). Beauvoir comments that this dominance, of men having more power than women, can be changed by educating both young males and females that they are born as equals. Beauvoir's suggestion that the standards, set by men, that favour elite or prestige men (for example, heterosexual, white males) should be overturned is transgression. Transgression refers to the idea of acting against a law, rule or a set standard, for example social norms; from this it can be reasoned that all feminism, to some extent, could be regarded as a transgression as it challenges normative masculine standards.

Transgression is also described as crossing boundaries and involves leaving the comfort of what is accepted within a given society as a norm, for example masculine dominance, and seeking something that makes an individual different within those expected norms (Cresswell, 1996; Beauvoir, 1949; Douglas, 1966). Some sociologists argue that many women are seen to collaborate in their own subjugation because they are reasonably comfortable where they are within society and are afraid to cross normative boundaries (Cresswell, 1996; Beauvoir, 1949; Douglas, 1966). Extrapolating from this McKay (2006) focuses on "the feminine" being broken into two broad categories: conformity or transgression. She suggests that females learn how they are meant to look within their society; whether they accept or reject this ideal is up to them. Those women who exhibit transgressive behaviour tend to seek alternative ways of being feminine rather than adhering to popular definitions of femininity. Butler (2004) suggests that those who have the ability to resist and re-construct these norms are the individuals who have the ability to create new norms within society.

The sociological discussion of transgression can be related to free weights training. Tate (1999, p. 35-36) highlights two different goals that women, who go

to the gym look to achieve, when physically sculpting their bodies. The first goal is a desire to be "super-model thin" Which Tate refers to as "debodied". The second, is a desire to gain muscle and get stronger which is termed as "bodied". Feminist researchers suggest that females who have the drive and motivation to tare away from believing in the limitations of the female body, have the ability to reshape the perception of female physicality as well as test the boundaries of their own physicality (Young, 1980 and McDermott, 1996, 2004). If research suggests that characteristics of femininity do not include muscularity, strength or size (Benson, 1997; Bordo, 1993; Grogan, 1999; Orbach, 2006, 2009) then those women who have the desire to be strong and muscular appear to be testing the boundaries of femininity (Tate, 1999). It is therefore important to consider how female free weights users see their own use of the free weights areas. This will be explored in the research and the findings will be discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

1.10 Female Bodybuilders, Physique Competitors and Weight trainers

Female bodybuilding and female physique competition is a branch of competitive bodybuilding. Through resistance training, dieting, and at times drug use, bodybuilders and physique competitors are able to manipulate their bodies for competition (Bunsell, 2013). There are a number of different federations within bodybuilding and physique competitions and participants must conform to the rules and guidelines of the particular federation they compete within. British federations include: British Natural Bodybuilding Foundation (BNBF), Natural Physique Association (NPA), United Kingdom Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation (UKBFF), United Kingdom Drug Free Bodybuilding Association (UKDFBA) and Pure Elite. Categories within these different federations include: bikini, fitness and figure (known collectively as physique competitions) and bodybuilding. Each category has a different set of physical characteristics that competitors look to achieve. For example, the bikini category in the UKBFF competition is aimed at women who shape their bodies by eating healthily and keeping fit. Sizeable muscle definition would be negatively marked, but poise, a slender body and body tone are considered essential. Balance of the upper and lower body is important, as is make-up and a competitor's hairstyle. All of these elements are considered during the judging of a competitor's body. (UKBFF, 2016).

An emerging body of research has examined female athletes' conformity or transgression in relation to sport and physical activity. In this context, female bodybuilding and weight training for aesthetic purposes, have featured in previous research which has focused on the perceived transgressive element of these activities (Bunsell, 2013; Hall, 1996; Tate, 1999). However, Bunsell (2013) explores how female weight trainers, specifically bodybuilders, can create their own 'safe' environment within weight training areas; in this space they felt unrestricted by the gaze of those not within the sphere of bodybuilding, for example, females did not *feel* like they were transgressing the norms of femininity in these spaces and pushed their bodies to their physical limits. Whilst this was true within the free weights environment, outside of this secure environment, their transgression remained apparent, meaning female bodybuilders are still viewed to challenge social norms within society (Bunsell, 2013).

Academic research has also focused on females' physical presence, including how females learn to take up limited space, for example by being physically smaller or sitting still with crossed legs (Hartley, 2001; Orbach, 2009). In contrast to this, successful female bodybuilders (not bikini or fitness competitors) are women who *do* develop a sizeable amount of muscle mass; successful athletes are those who reconstruct the soft female body (Hartley, 2001). Bunsell (2013) suggests that female bodybuilders have an on-going dilemma. To be successful within the sport is to be deviant within society. Some may find this empowering whereas others can find this a challenge. Either way, female bodybuilders through their strength, power and muscle mass, challenge the norms of female fragility (Bunsell, 2013).

It is important to note that even within the bodybuilding category, competitors still have to emphasise their femininity; for example, by wearing make-up and styling their hair (Mansfield and McGinn, 1993). Tate (1999) suggests that even though female bodybuilding is viewed, in some ways, to challenge social norms, it is still subject to being controlled because the competitors must conform to some form of femininity. This shows that even in a sport that challenges the social norms of femininity, some conformity towards Western society's social norms and gender stereotypes are expected.

Interestingly in regards to muscularity, female weight users within Tate's (1999) study had some concerns about becoming too muscular. These worries, were managed by focusing on the opinions of those who weight trained, rather than those

who did not. Tate also found it was the appreciation of their own bodies that motivated the women to train, not the opinions of individuals with no experience of the free weights areas. Tate recognised that the female weight trainers dealt with society's pressures of how they were expected to look by constructing a different view of dominant social norms and gender stereotypes. The weight trainers believed a combination of muscularity and standards of femininity such as wearing dresses or off the shoulder pieces of clothing to show they worked on their bodies and didn't have "flabby" arms or shoulders, made them sexy and feminine (Tate, 1999, p. 48). It could be suggested that the women within Tate's study looked to renegotiate social norms within society as they had different perceptions of the ideal female body compared to societal norms: namely the place for muscularity within a feminine body. This became a central discussion with the weight trainers in my study and will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.11 Control and Obsession: Exercise, Diet and Pain

There are many ways in which a person can control their body. Examples include: physical activity, dieting, and personal care such as hair and make-up (Bordo, 1990; Curry, 1993; Gidden 1991; Grosz, 1994; Orbach, 2009; Sweetman, 1999; Synott, 1993). Anorexia and bodybuilding are two different ways an individual can control their body shape and size. Bordo (1990) suggests there is continuity between the ways in which bodybuilders and anorexia sufferers comment on their bodies, even though the two end goals and the processes by which they achieve these goals, are different. Both relate to their bodies as entities that can be changed through a desire to transform the way they look.

Women going to the gym to shape and tone their bodies has been a mainstream phenomenon since the 1970s (Hargreaves 1994). Exercise and diet are known to help individuals control the shape of their bodies, to some extent. Additionally, exercise and diet are ways that a person can mark their body with social and cultural messages, which are then interpreted by the rest of society (Lorber and Martin, 2007). This may include manipulating exercise and dietary habits to be thin, muscular or toned. In her study of female weight trainers, Tate suggests that one of the motivations for the women to train was to feel, "in control of their bodies, nature, appetites, femininities and lives" (Tate, 1999, p. 37).

When considering control of the body, it is also important to understand the concept of the pain principle. Within sport and physical activity, the pain principle acknowledges that without pain there will be no gain or benefit; sacrifices must be made to achieve sporting success (Sabo, 1986, 2009). This discourse demonstrates masculine strength and power; the pain principle is perceived to be something that is generally related to males (Messner, 1990; Sabo, 1986). Interestingly however, Tate (1999) found that women responded well to pain. They believed that pain gave them an element of control - if they managed to push through pain barriers whilst training then they felt in control of their bodies. One participant commented, "the pleasure of the burn is being in control of your body and mind and the pleasure you get from looking at the product of the burn, your body" (Tate, 1999, p. 38). Pain was enjoyable to the participant as it symbolised working hard and pushing her body to its limit. This led to feeling a sense of control, as even though pain was felt, the participant still had the strength and desire to continue training.

It could however be argued that women who compete in sport or physical activity say they value pain because they have internalised the privileged characteristics of masculinity, such as strength, the ability to endure pain and resilience. This could lead women to suppress characteristics associated with being feminine, such as vulnerability, weakness and fragility. This concept is important within the current study. How comfortable were interviewees to push their bodies to the physical limit? Did they do this and if so what were their motivations for doing it? This is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

1.12 Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the significant literature surrounding the importance of the body, social construction feminism, social norms and hegemony, gender stereotypes and female participation in sport and physical activity. The key topics to emerge from the literature were used to inform the development of the data collection and analysis process. Four key points emerged from the literature: (i) the body is viewed by social construction feminists as an entity that is controlled by norms within society; (ii) the body can be used to convey a person's identity and those who transgress the accepted social norm are often judged negatively in terms that reflect the ambient heteronormativity of the field of sport within which these activities are practised; (iii) weight training has predominantly been viewed as an

activity appropriate for men, however the popularity of women using the activity as a way to control their bodies has grown; (iv) social media is a source of information which can portray popular discourses within society, for example #fitspiration. These key points helped shape the aim and objectives of this project.

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Within social science, fundamental principles of philosophy are widely debated. A researcher's philosophical assumptions are essential in shaping the research process and the knowledge that is developed within a study. Therefore, before conducting research in the field of sport sociology, philosophical assumptions must be reflected upon. To explain why I chose certain data collection techniques, I first discuss the literature surrounding epistemology, ontology and methodology and how my research was informed by these philosophical assumptions. Within this chapter I therefore consider the key assumptions of the paradigm debate and examine in more detail how the interpretive paradigm is best aligned to provide a framework for this study. I review qualitative research, principles of ethnography, data collection techniques, my personal background and ethical considerations.

2.2 Research paradigms

A paradigm is a basic belief system that can neither be proven or disproven. Paradigms guide the way a community of researchers deal with a research problem and are the underlying assumptions in which the research is based (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Mack, 2010; Schulman, 1986; Scotland, 2012). Literature identifies five key components of a research paradigm: ontology, epistemology, methodology, research interests and methods (Scotland, 2012; Sparkes, 1992). Sparkes (1992, p. 14) argues that researchers cannot begin a research project "as an empty vessel or as blank slates that data imprints itself upon." Fundamentally, ontological assumptions affect an individual's epistemological position, which impacts a researcher's alignment with a methodological approach, in turn influencing their choice of data collection techniques and data analysis processes. Within social science, different research paradigms have been identified for example: positivist, interpretive and critical, however authors name and define paradigms differently (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Mack, 2010; Scotland, 2012; Sparkes, 1992). Although detailed discussion of each paradigm within social science research is beyond the scope of this project, as a

developing researcher I acknowledge the existence of different research paradigms. My own research has developed from the interpretive tradition, therefore in this section I explore the key features of this approach. Before discussing these, I consider the definitions of ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods and research interests.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions are fundamental components of a research paradigm. Scotland (2012, p. 9) suggests that ontological assumptions are:

> concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words what is. Researchers need to take a position regarding their perceptions of how things really are and how things really work.

The key point here is whether the researcher believes that the social world exists as an objective external reality or whether social reality is a product of social consciousness. Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Scotland (2012, p. 9) articulates: "Epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words what it means to know." Each paradigm is grounded in its own epistemological and ontological assumptions. The positivist and interpretive paradigms essentially comprise of contradictory ontological and epistemological assumptions. Consequently, those researchers who align with these different paradigms have conflicting assumptions about knowledge and reality. Such assumptions underpin any research approach and are mirrored in the chosen methodological approach and methods used (Scotland, 2012; Sparkes, 1992).

Methodology is articulated as the strategy that underpins the selection and practice of methods (Crotty, 1999 cited in Scotland, 2012, p. 9). Importantly, methodology commands how a research problem will be solved and dictates the what, why and how of data collection (Aliyu, 2014; Scotland, 2012). Methods are the techniques applied to assemble and analyse data. (Aliyu, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Scotland, 2012). Research interests are the fundamental reasons behind *why* the research is taking place; for example, to prove or disprove a hypothesis, or to explore and understand a particular phenomenon.

The interpretive paradigm is built on fundamental premises that contrast with those of positivism. Specifically, the interpretive paradigm is grounded in an internal idealist ontology that emphasises relativism, a subjectivist epistemology

and has favoured an ideographic methodology (Sparkes, 1992). In the interpretive paradigm, ontology is premised on an internal-idealist and relativist understanding of the nature of existence. However, it should be recognised that, as individuals, we do not exist in isolation but live within a complex socio/economic/political world, within which our individual experiences are shaped. Nevertheless, it could be argued that personal reality is subjective and can differ between individuals, who interpret and make their own sense of situations and events, meaning there can be several interpretations of one incident. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Mack, 2010; Scotland, 2012). Scotland (2012, p. 11) argues, "Reality is individually constructed; there are as many realities as individuals." In terms of epistemology, a subjectivist approach is adopted; the world does not exist freely from our knowledge of it (Grix, 2010). In other words, meaning is not something that is discovered, it is something that has been constructed by members of society.

Methodological approaches aligned with the interpretive paradigm prefer an ideographic approach. An ideographic approach is "based on the view that to understand the social world we need to gain fundamental knowledge of the subject under investigation" (Sparkes, 1992, p.14). This approach involves the analysis of the subjective accounts of the participants within a research project. An example of this would be ethnography, which involves the study of a particular group over a period of time (Sands, 2002; Scotland, 2012; Sparkes, 1992). Interpretive methods explore the actions, behaviours and opinions of participants. Methods might include focus groups, interviews and participant observation and results in qualitative data (Scotland, 2012; Smith, 2010).

Significantly, as a researcher, I position myself within the parameters of a subjectivist, (also known as constructivist) epistemological discourse. In regards to reality, my emphasis is based on the understanding that reality is socially constructed and is unique to each individual. I understand there to be multiple realities and that participants will describe or discuss their own unique experiences of their use of the free weights areas. Fundamentally to me, the social world and peoples' opinions, relationships and anxieties need to be discussed, understood and appreciated as unique. However, when defining features of the interpretive paradigm I am aware that these descriptions are of an ideal type, and whilst this might be useful for the purpose of academic description, in the practice of research there can be overlap. As Mansfield (2005, p. 290) suggests "Feminists are

committed to changing gender inequality on the basis of theoretical knowledge gained." Therefore, as this study is informed by social construction feminism, discussion will be critical and within Chapter 6 I give practical recommendations that became apparent from the research findings.

The validity of research undertaken in the interpretive tradition is often questioned because of the subjective nature of the approach, meaning the research has the potential to be biased (Brown, 1988; Smith, 1989; Sparkes, 1992; Reason & Rowan, 1981). These perceived limitations are countered by those whose work sits within the interpretive tradition. In interpretive research the researcher is used as an instrument to gather information. Researchers not only observe but also take part in the daily activities and lives of the individuals being studied, as well as interpret and analyse the information gathered. Brown (1988, cited in Sparkes 1992, p. 30) argues that this can question the validity of a study because the truth can become hidden by the researcher's subjectivity. However, Reason and Rowan (1981, cited in Sparkes 1992, p. 30) argue that the validity of interpretative research stems from the skills of the researcher and how these are applied within the research project, for example; how coherently the research findings are concluded and how differing viewpoints are acknowledged (Heron, 1988; Mack, 2010; Scotland, 2012; Smith, 2010). It is therefore the job of the researcher to: understand and interpret a social phenomenon, understand a phenomenon from an individual's perspective, investigate interaction amongst individuals or investigate the historical and cultural contexts which participants inhabit (Creswell, 2009).

To summarise, the philosophical assumptions that guided the design and application of this project are aligned within the interpretive tradition. It is ideographic and calls upon principles of ethnography. As my research aims to explore the importance of the ideal female body and gender stereotypes amongst female free weights users, in this project I intend to understand *what* is happening amongst free weights trainers, for example what are their motivations and what are their visions of the ideal female body? I also want to understand *how*, for example, how did the interviewees feel whilst training in a male dominated environment? Finally, research based within the interpretive tradition looks to articulate how conscious and unconscious feelings have come to be. For example, by exploring factors which have influenced participants' opinions on the ideal female body.

2.3 Qualitative Approach, Ethnography and Remaining Detached

The aim of this project is not to generalise women, but to look at how women within the research group felt about the specific topics discussed. My research seeks to explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants. As my epistemological, ontological, methodological assumptions and research interests aligned most closely with the interpretive paradigm, I explored qualitative approaches to find the most appropriate data collection techniques.

The aim of qualitative research is to describe and understand a phenomenon, including the context, participants, activities and processes. Qualitative research examines why things happen and is most popular within, but not exclusive to, social science research (Borg, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hammersley, 1989; Nuijten, 2011; Richards, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The different data collection methods used in qualitative research gives a researcher an insight into their lives and routines. Qualitative research involves the collection of data through several different techniques, including: case studies, interviews, observations, focus groups, personal experiences and life stories. Researchers investigate the point of view of the subjects, with the understanding that the social world is a dynamic reality that cannot be reduced to variables and linear relationships (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 1999 and Sparkes, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Sparkes (1992) notes that there are those who question narratives of the self and ethnographies as acceptable ways to further knowledge in a subject area. However, Richardson (1990) explains that storied research such as life histories, in-depth interviews, participant observations and case studies, through the skill of the author can articulate a narrative that gives understanding to social life. These narratives can critically illustrate the social world and should be appreciated in their own right.

Many scholars have outlined the merits of ethnography within qualitative research (Alasuutari, 1998; Ferrell *et al.* 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Lowe, 1998). Lowe (1998, p. 670) describes the value of ethnographic research due to, "its ability to offer rich and detailed knowledge of a groups' distinctive way of life". Ethnography aims to give a detailed view of a groups' perceptions, behaviours and interactions through participant observations and interviews (Reeves *et al.* 2008). Ferrell *et al.* (1998) suggest that researchers who involve themselves in participant observation whilst immersing themselves in the lives of participants,

can, through shared experience, give a real life view of the subjects' lives. Ethnography allows for the documentation of reality through the multiple perspectives of different participants, allowing a researcher to understand the way people think and why they act in different ways (Sparkes, 1992). Additionally, researchers who use multiple techniques such as observations, casual conversations and interviews, build trust with participants and obtain a diverse picture of their interactions in the social world they inhabit (Krane and Baird, 2005; Sands, 2002).

Observing participants and engaging those individuals in informal conversations is the first step for an ethnographic researcher (Sands, 2002). Observations can be recorded through field notes, audio or video files. In this project I adopted principles of ethnography, more specifically principles of participant-as-observer whereby I involved myself in the women's activities but did not necessarily share their values or goals. Primarily, I used my presence amongst the free weight users to recruit participants for the research project. In qualitative studies, determining the researcher's role during observational research is extremely important and requires careful consideration. Such approaches range from non-participant through to complete participant (Smith, 2010).

Throughout this project I adopted several roles at different stages of the research. As I was a member of the facility for four years prior to commencing the research, I believe I started from the position of a complete participant in the female free weights community because I was totally immersed as a free weights user. Being immersed in the participants' lives at this early stage was advantageous as I established myself as a female free weights user at the facility. I reflected upon principles of ethnography and employed these in order to establish a presence in the weight training areas, which I used to develop contacts for one-to-one interviews. However, when planning the data collection and interview processes, remaining too involved in participants' lives can hinder the analysis and interpretation of information (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Sands, 2002; Smith, 2010). Once ethics approval was received, my role changed to that of a participant-as-observer. For the duration of the research, I worked to establish a distance between myself and the participants which allowed me to remain reflective and analytical. This included not becoming involved in the interviewees' lives, problems or relationships. I was not an 'insider' of any particular group in the free weights area. For example, I wasn't a part of the group of weightlifters who used

the facility at the same time to train together, nor was I part of the group of women preparing for a physique competition. However, by implementing my own training programme in the areas, training alongside potential interviewees and openly chatting about my own and their training, I remained in touch with them. This meant when it came to more formal interviews, the women were more likely to speak freely to me.

This process differs slightly from the usual ethnographic approach, where the researcher tends to start in a more detached role and transitions into the role of participant-as-observer or complete participant; the challenge of having to detach themselves from the project then ensues. I began as a complete participant then went through the detachment process, allowing me to be reflective throughout the study. Additionally, it is important to consider when researchers adopt principles of ethnography, in order to avoid bias, they must engage with what sociologists call "reflexivity", a process that validates qualitative research (Abbott *et al.* 2005; Cook & Fonow, 1986; Cutcliffe & Mckenna, 2002, Hargreaves, 2000; Kingdon, 2005; Letherby, 2002; Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). Reflexivity involves the researcher constantly being aware of how their own values, actions, opinions and perceptions may influence the research findings. The opinions and beliefs of the participants must be communicated and represented, rather than the researcher's own perspective tarnishing the information collected. This awareness must take place across the research, from developing research aims through to drawing conclusions. It is important to exercise a certain amount of methodological and theoretical detachment as well as constant critical self-reflection; being too involved can devalue the information collected whilst being too detached can result in superficial findings that lack the critical analyses required in representing the complexities of social inequalities (Abbott *et al.* 2005; Hargreaves, 2000; Letherby, 2002; Maguire and Young, 2002, Mansfield, 2005, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Calling on Mansfield's (2005, p.136) experience in her study of female gym users she suggests that "feminists could use their feminist involvements as a source of motivation and 'insider' knowledge, while, at the same time, striving to maximise their detachment". Interestingly, I found being a female advantageous, as potential participants seemed happy to discuss a variety of subjects with me concerning not only training and nutrition but also personal issues such as boyfriends, partners and unwanted body fat. Additionally, during this research, I found participants would

try to draw out and discuss my opinions about the ideal female body and gender stereotypes whilst training. I reflected on principles of ethnographic practice when this happened to make sure any answer I gave within an informal discussion, did not influence the participants' opinions about the research topics. As a researcher I was aware of the position of power I could potentially have over my participant's discussions.

2.4 Developing the Research Project and Research Timeline

My decision to research female free weights trainers arose through my personal involvement in sport and fitness as well as my academic interest in the female body. As a competitive football player, I took part in weekly strength and conditioning sessions with my teammates. I enjoyed weight training so much that I completed additional sessions on my own, beyond those required for football training. Over a two-year period, I became more confident in the free weights areas, began to use the areas independently without a coach and started to programme my own training regime. Because of my enjoyment, I became a qualified gym instructor (in February 2014) and a personal trainer (in June 2014) and developed a passion for writing health and fitness programmes for others. I subsequently interviewed for a Graduate Fitness Officer position, in summer 2014, which gave me the opportunity to work within a fitness facility and embark on a postgraduate research degree at the same time.

Through my role as a Fitness Officer working with clients on a one-to-one basis, I became increasingly aware that many women who were new to the gym engaged in exercise to lose weight and tone their muscles but were nervous about becoming too muscular. Working more closely with women who wanted to train in the free weights areas, I found that they did so for a variety of reasons. For instance, while many women sought to improve muscle tone and lose weight, some were specifically training for events such as weightlifting or powerlifting. For others their use of free weights accompanied their training for another sport, or was undertaken to maintain general health and wellbeing. I became interested in understanding what motivated females to take part in free weights training and also their worries about becoming too muscular. These initial observations as a Fitness Officer helped to direct my subsequent research.

Choosing which fitness facility to undertake the research in was important, as good access to the facility and ensuring a sufficient number of participants were available for the study was paramount. It was vital, therefore, to choose a facility that had an extensive free weights area so the chances of encountering a variety of female free weights users were higher. The fitness facility I chose was the one that I trained in for four years and where I was employed as a Fitness Officer. This choice offered three clear advantages. Firstly, the gym had two large free weights areas that were separate from the rest of the gym (discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2). Secondly, I trained at the facility and used the weights areas four to five times a week. This meant I had already established friendly relationships with some of the female free weights users and knew that a substantial number of women used the free weights areas on a regular basis. Thirdly, through my role as a Fitness Officer, I was often on the gym floor talking to members about their training regimes. Female free weights users frequently engaged in discussions with me regarding their training programmes because of my experience as a Fitness Officer and as a passionate free weights user. I did consider there may be limitations in choosing the fitness facility that I worked in. For example, participants might not open up to me about any problems they encountered as free weights users because I was a member of staff, however this did not seem to be a problem as I was a well-known face in the free weights areas.

In September 2014 I began my role as a Fitness Officer at the fitness facility used within the study. Six months into my postgraduate study and work as a Fitness Officer, I had developed, through my review of literature, my experience as a Fitness Officer and my own free weights training, a clear focus for my research and sought formal ethics approval for the project, which was confirmed in May 2015. With ethics approval in place I commenced the formal data collection phase of my work in June 2015, following principles of a participant-as-observer such as recording my observations of potential participants when working and training, or engaging in casual conversations with potential interviewees. This then gave me the opportunity to ask females who regularly used free weights to take part in my main data collection technique, interviews. The twenty one-to-one interviews with the female free weights users and my interpretations of these make up the majority of the discussions in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Although my presence as a participant-as-observer in the weights areas was primarily to make contact with female free

weights users. During this phase of the study I also made a number of observations and recorded these in a field notebook, some of which informed my discussions in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. These observations also helped shape the focus of the study and helped identify topics to explore in the interviews. Additionally, casual conversations with participants before or after their interviews often occurred in the free weights areas, after asking participants for consent to use these conversations, a small number of which were used to inform my findings, these will be clearly identified in the subsequent chapters. Importantly, although the formal period of data collected from interviews was completed in January 2016, my contract as a Fitness Officer and my use of the facility for my personal training continued until the end of August 2016. The study was informed by my own experiences in the fitness facility before June 2015 and after January 2016.

2.5 Recruiting Participants

To recruit participants for the main data collection method, interviews, I used three different techniques: principles of a participant-as-observer, a gatekeeper and snowball sampling. Three of the women within the study were recruited through a gatekeeper, six were recruited through snowball sampling, whilst the remaining eleven were recruited after I observed them within the free weights areas and subsequently asked them to take part in a formal interview. Although I did consider how ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and other demographics might affect the research, I did not select women based on any such social demographic. My research focused on women who trained in the chosen fitness facility rather than women within the same social demographic.

Initially my observations of the free weights users were subconscious. I did not realise I was observing different women's use of the areas, for ease I will refer to this stage as informal networking. I was a known face for fellow females to talk to. During my work as a Fitness Officer and through my own training within the free weights areas, I was able to establish that the female users would talk to me about their training and their use of the areas whether I was wearing my work uniform or not. During this informal networking I realised that utilising principles of a participant-as-observer would help me further establish a role within the free weights community and give me a better opportunity to ask women to take part in

one-to-one interviews. I therefore sought ethics approval to further develop my role as participant-as-observer.

Utilising principles of participant-as-observer I was able to observe women's use of the area and recruit a variety of participants. By talking to potential participants about why they trained within the free weights areas, I was able to recruit women who took part in weight training for a variety of reasons. I used a field notebook to record my observations throughout this time, an example of which can be found in Appendix 3. I chose to use a notebook, as it was easy and inconspicuous to carry around, indeed many individuals routinely carry a notebook to record their training programme. Additionally, my role as a researcher was not hidden. If the women found out that I was a student and asked me about my studies, I told them about the project. All eleven women who were recruited via my observations were told about the project before I formally asked them to take part in the interviews.

In this research, three women were recruited through a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers have a recognised role within a group, or particular knowledge of individuals within a group, and are able to encourage individuals from that group to take part in a research project (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Ritchie *et al.* 2003). Gatekeepers for research in a sports setting are often, but not exclusively, coaches or athletes with a leadership role in their community (Sands, 2002). In this research project, Lola, a weightlifter, was able to act as a gatekeeper to a group of weightlifters I had observed within the areas. I got to know Lola initially through my own free weights training. When I commenced my role as a Fitness Officer in September 2014, I got to know her in a different context, as she also worked at the sports facility. After a couple of months, I told her about my research project and my intention to interview female free weights users. After agreeing to take part herself, she then introduced me to three female weightlifters from the group that she often trained with. Lola was a supportive and helpful figure within the group of female weightlifters because of her experience as a strength and conditioning coach at the facility. She often wrote the women programmes to assist with their weightlifting and help them achieve particular goals. Lola was an influential figure amongst the women and because of this I believe they were more willing to take part in my project.

A further six participants were accessed via the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is defined as one participant identifying another potential participant to the researcher, who they believe would be suitable for the project (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). This allowed me to access individuals I had not previously observed or thought to ask. I contacted these six women either by meeting them in the gym, by telephone or email to ensure they would be comfortable taking part in the project.

It is important to acknowledge that during my time as a participant-as-observer, I observed the majority of women who used the free weights areas in the chosen facility. However, not all of these women subsequently became part of the group of women I interviewed. For example, three women who I observed and talked to about their training on a regular basis were unable to take part in the study due to work or other commitments. Additionally, I did not select participants based on any social demographic such as ethnicity, age, nationality or sexual orientation. Reflecting the profile of the majority of female free weights users at this facility, study participants were white, abled-bodied, aged between twenty and thirty-four and were British, Scottish, American, Norwegian or Italian. Therefore, a limitation of this study is that it does not represent a wide range of ethnicities, ages or nationalities. A recommendation for future research is therefore to include a more diverse group of participants.

2.6 Interviews and Transcription

There are a number of different data collection techniques within qualitative research such as: interviews, observations, focus groups, visual or textual analysis and personal experiences. The appropriateness of using interviews in research is outlined by Hennink *et al.* (2010), Legard *et al.* (2003), Rubin and Rubin (1995) and Smith (2010). Interviews allow the researcher to explore a social phenomenon by asking questions about a person's life and using their discussions to offer a picture of their behaviours, opinions and emotions (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Smith, 2010). Interviews exist along a continuum, from structured to unstructured (Mansfield, 2005, Smith 2010). These interviews along this continuum are conducted differently and collect different information (Britten, 1995; Frontana & Fey, 1998; Mansfield, 2005; Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002; Sands, 2002; Smith, 2010). Interviews that are more structured in nature are underpinned by

epistemological assumptions closer to the positivist paradigm whereas semi-structured and unstructured interviews are used by those whose work is aligned with the philosophical assumptions of the interpretive paradigm (Mansfield, 2005). Semi-structured interviews follow a pre-determined script whilst giving the interviewee a degree of flexibility to discuss other issues, so unexpected themes may emerge (Ennis & Chen, 2012; Smith, 2010). Unstructured interviews are flexible in nature and allow the researcher to use, for example, a checklist to guide the interview (Smith, 2010). In both semi-structured and unstructured interviews, it is the job of the researcher to probe participants' answers, encouraging expansion or clarification where appropriate. For my research, a semi-structured approach was chosen. I had a script outlining the topic areas I wanted to discuss, which ensured no important topic areas were missed, however I was able to deviate from the script when appropriate and broach different topics areas.

An important part of the interview planning process was conducting pilot interviews. Pilot interviews allow a researcher to assess the design of the script, identify any weaknesses or lack of clarity, and make alterations before the first formal interview (Kyale, 2007). I asked two females who had limited experience in the free weights areas through training for another sport to be interviewed for my pilot; neither woman described herself as a 'free weights user'. These pilot interviews gave me the opportunity to trial my planned interview script. After the two pilot interviews I wrote reflectively on the experience, identifying what I needed to change for my first participant interview. In particular, I noted my dialogue at the start was too long making the interview seem a little formal. One of the pilot interviewees actually suggested that she would have been more comfortable discussing sensitive or personal experiences if it had felt less like an interview for a research project and more like a casual conversation. Consequently, I made my introduction less formal and my style more conversational, in the hope interviewees would relax and be more likely to discuss sensitive issues, in turn leading to a more insightful account of their experiences. I also found giving the interviewee an information sheet to read at the start of the interview took up a lot of time and made them feel rushed. I therefore sent interviewees the information sheet in advance of the interview to avoid this. It also gave them time to reflect on the key topic areas outlined in the information sheet, which I felt might lead to a more insightful and honest account of their experiences.

After reflecting on the pilot interviews and making the changes outlined above, I began to undertake the formal interview phase of the study. In total twenty women agreed to take part in these interviews. Appendix 4 summarises background information about each interviewee, and provides the date and location of each interview. The information sheet explaining different aspects of the study given to each interviewee can be found in Appendix 5. The consent form completed by each interviewee confirming they were aged eighteen or over, that they understood the nature and purpose of the research and their right to anonymity and other details such as nationality and ethnicity can be found in Appendix 6.

The participants were formally interviewed once during the data collection period. Interviews lasted between thirty-six minutes and one hour eighteen minutes, and averaged at fifty-three minutes. I recorded all interviews on a digital voice recorder and uploaded the files to my personal laptop before deleting them from the voice recorder. Files were password protected to enhance security and protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and uploaded the transcripts to the data analysis software NVivo.

The interview script (Appendix 7) gave structure to the interviews and included nine key topics: sporting background, current training regime, the free weights environment at the gym, the ideal female body, control of the body and obsession, competition, challenging social norms, social occasions and influences. These topic choices arose from my engagement with academic literature on the female body, social norms, women's involvement in certain physical activities, the media and social media, as discussed in Chapter 1. The interview script was also influenced by past conversations with female free weights users and my own use of the free weights areas. Importantly, the script was used as a prompt to guide discussions rather than to provide a regimented structure. However, by way of a consistent thread, all interviews began with a discussion of the participant's background in physical activity and sport to get the conversation flowing in a topic area they were comfortable discussing. The questions were open-ended, which allowed the participants to explain their opinions as well as provide examples of past experiences (Berg and Latin, 2008).

At the end of the interviews the participants were shown seven different images of women with different body shapes. The images were used to stimulate participants' opinions of various body shapes and sizes and how they related these

to the ideal female body and gender stereotypes. A profile of the images used, and an account of why each one was chosen is included in Appendix 8. Importantly, in daily life, audiences consume and interpret media to create meaning within their social world (Fingerson, 1999). Researchers have examined how audiences of media, including images, are not passive to what they see but construct their own interpretations (McRobbie, 1991; MacBeth, 1996; Fingerson, 1999). As part of the interview, each participant was asked to describe and discuss the various women's bodies, for example their muscular definition. Using images in an interview is known as "reception analysis" and is often applied in qualitative research to allow researchers an insight into the interpretations of the participants' initial understanding of an image (Fingerson, 1999; Granello, 1997; Jensen, 1991).

I considered the transcription process prior to commencing my interviews. As Hutchby & Wooffitt (2008) suggest, I decided to type my own transcripts, as this was an effective way to familiarise myself with each woman's narrative. I transcribed each interview as soon as possible afterwards to keep it fresh in my thoughts. A sample from a transcript can be found in Appendix 9. Transcribing the interviews during data collection allowed me to reflect on my role as the interviewer and what I could continually do to improve. It also gave me an opportunity to begin to reflect on the common themes emerging from the interviews, which is considered good research practice (Davidson, 2009). Throughout Chapter 3, 4 and 5 quotations are generally presented verbatim, except in instances where in order to preserve syntax, slight amendments have been made without altering the meaning.

At the start of each interview I explained to the participants that I would transcribe the interview and that they could review this transcript. Lola and Beatrice both asked to review their transcripts for their own personal reflection and came to me afterwards to discuss what they had read. Their comments were noted in my field notebook. I did not show the interviewees my conclusions, but when Beatrice discussed her transcript with me we did explore her opinion on the topic of muscularity and sexuality and this led to an insightful discussion. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) refer to this technique as "triangulation of sources" which involves verifying and gathering additional data at different points and is commonly used in social science research. In addition, after their interviews some participants sought me out when they were training within the facility for informal chats regarding the topic areas, which I noted in my field notebook.

At the beginning of each formal interview I asked for their consent that any further conversations I had with them, outside of the interview, could be used within the thesis. All of the women agreed to this and I additionally informed them if any of their informal conversations were used. Furthermore, following the interviews, I also received a number of private Facebook messages from Penny when she read or saw something on social media that made her think of my research. This included photos from social media sites such as Instagram, shown in Appendix 10, and is discussed in Chapter 5. Penny agreed that I could use these comments in my findings.

2.7 Analysis

Data analysis within qualitative research is an important process in exploring a particular phenomenon. The data analysis process I used for this project was thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013; Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2009; Glaser & Srauss, 1990). After transcribing the interviews, I read and re-read the transcripts to familiarise myself with the data, however I also used the computer software programme "NVivo for Mac 10" in the analysis process. The goal of NVivo is to support sources, such as interview transcripts, with commentary and gives the researcher the opportunity to analyse and evolve detailed discussions of participant narratives (Richards, 1999). My use of NVivo for the current research project was extremely valuable. The software allowed me to keep my analysis in one place and could constantly be adapted. The software helped me create a true picture of the phenomena that was being studied.

The initial step towards data analysis included reading through the data to identify general themes that could be used for further analysis. This is called "open coding" and is a technique that comes from the principle of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 12). Open coding entails going through interview transcripts and field notes line by line to break the text into initial categories or themes (Myers, 2013). This was done using NVivo by highlighting specific parts of the transcript and categorising it into what NVivo calls a "node".

The second part of the analysis involved making connection between categories. In qualitative research this is known as "axial coding" (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 13). Axial coding involves relating codes (or nodes in NVivo) to each other. A code can be located at the centre of a network and it is the researcher's

task to identify how this code relates to other codes that have come out of the analysis (Böhm, 2004). This involves giving context to the phenomenon being studied and understanding the themes that give meaning to this phenomenon. The final stage of coding is known as "selective coding". This is defined as the phase that allows the researcher to create a narrative or grounded theory from the network of codes found (Böhem, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

2.8 Ethical Considerations

This research project was conducted with due consideration of the ethical standards associated with research in the social sciences. British Sociological Association Guidelines (2002) were drawn upon to ensure the physical, social and psychological well-being of participants. The responsibility for safeguarding participants falls on the researcher, guided by national laws and administrative regulations, for example: The Data Protection Act (1988) and The Scottish Commission for Human Rights Act (2006). The researcher must be concerned with protecting the rights of those within the study as well as their interests, sensitivities and privacy. Any personal information concerning participants was kept confidential, for example audio recordings were kept in a password-protected file on my personal computer; pseudonyms were used throughout to protect anonymity; consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet in my office at the fitness facility. Both audio recordings and consent forms will be deleted or destroyed after the satisfactory completion of this Master of Philosophy degree.

I also received ethics approval from the University of Stirling School of Sports Ethics Committee. This was granted after the sports facility's manager verbally agreed that I could complete the study at the chosen fitness facility. Additionally, it was important to consider that issues surrounding the body and body image can be sensitive. Individuals negatively affected by body image may struggle to reconcile what they think their ideal body should be and how they actually look (Grogan, 2008). As a researcher, it was important to deal with any such issues sensitively and confidentially, and to ensure the participant was aware that they could terminate the interview at any point.

2.9 Summary

Within this chapter I have outlined the paradigm debate that is fundamental to research within the field of sport sociology and the wider social sciences. My philosophical assumptions aligned with the interpretive paradigm and this was discussed in detail. The methodological approach used was ideographic and principles of ethnography were draw upon, as I became a participant-as-observer to seek interviewees for the project. The approach developed was considered to be the most efficient and effective within the limitations and requirements of producing this Master of Philosophy thesis. Even though I used interviews as the main data collection technique, my observations in the weights areas, casual conversations and private social media messages with the interviewees after their interviews were also drawn upon in my findings. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts with the computer software NVivo. Consideration was given to ethical practices to protect the women's interests, sensitivities and privacy.

Chapter 3 - The Environment, Motivation and Empowerment

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I start to discuss my research findings and begin answering two of my research objectives: identifying the motivations behind women taking part in weight training and to explore how the women's perceptions of the terms masculinity, femininity and muscularity affected their training within the free weights areas. Also within this chapter I explore how the females who participated in the study reacted to the physical environment of the gym, and more specifically the free weights areas. Previous research has suggested that weights areas are spaces that have predominantly been dominated by males (Bunsell, 2013; Heywood, 1998; Tate, 1999). However, as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, weight training is becoming more popular amongst some females. Therefore, in this chapter I consider how the interviewees experienced this environment. Did the women feel like their presence was accepted or did they feel like their use of the area was an act of transgression?

3.2 Gym Layout

The sports facility where the research took place has a gym, swimming pool, dance studio, sports hall, indoor cycling studio, tennis courts and squash courts. The gym is divided into three main training areas. The images in Figures 3.1 to 3.4 are presented here to help the reader contextualise my findings. When entering the gym, the first area members come into houses cardiovascular machines (Figure 3.1). The primary purpose of this area is aerobic fitness and weight loss. The equipment available includes: treadmills, stationary bikes, rowing machines, cross-trainers, hill-climbers, adaptive motion trainers and hand bikes. This section of the gym also houses fixed resistance and cable machines for strength training (Figure 3.2). Free space is also provided, giving members the opportunity to choose their own activity.

Figure 3.1: The entrance to the gym and the machines in this area.
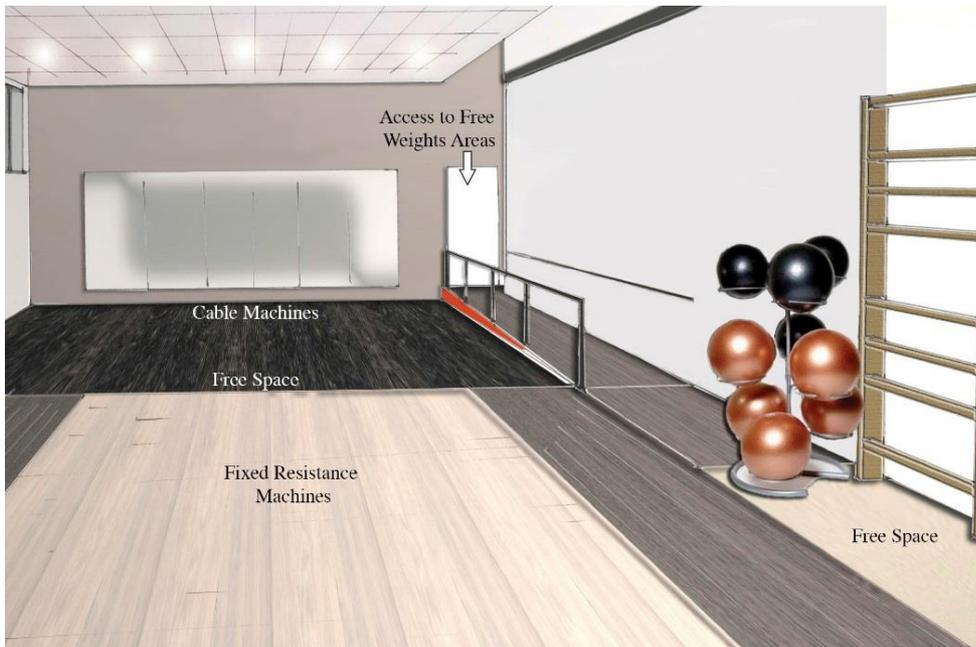
Figure 3.2: The main section of the gym leading into the free weights areas

The second area in the gym, the upstairs free weights area, (Figure 3.3) was the more popular of the two free weights areas amongst participants and houses five lifting platforms, dumbbells ranging from one to sixty kilograms, cable machines and free space.
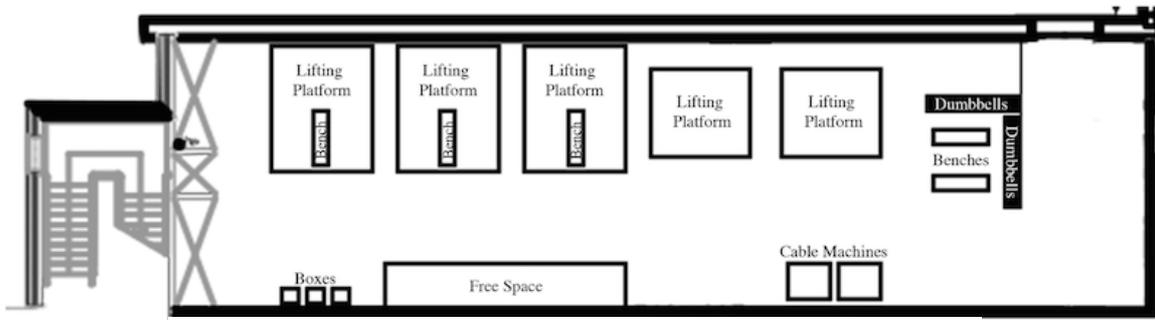
Figure 3.3: The upstairs free weights area layout

The third and final, area in the gym is the downstairs free weights area (Figure 3.4). The equipment here is older than that in the upstairs free weights area. There are four lifting platforms and a large dumbbell area with weights also ranging from one to sixty kilograms. There are two benches that can be used specifically for an exercise known as the barbell bench press, as well as a squat rack and a pull up bar; this equipment is beginning to rust. The weighted plates are metal rather than the newer rubber plates used in upstairs free weights area.
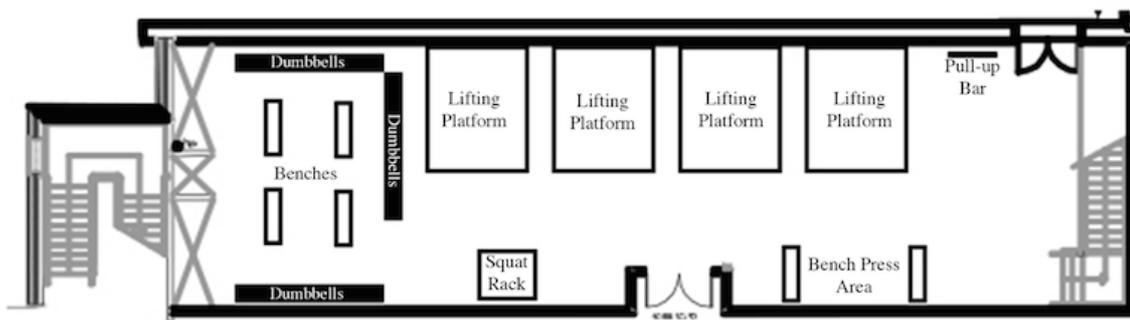
Figure 3.4: The downstairs free weights area layout

3.3 First Experiences in the Free Weights Areas

To explore the importance of the ideal female body and gender stereotypes amongst female free weights users, I wanted to learn more about participants' first experiences in the free weights areas and discover what initially led them to this type of training. It was obvious when reviewing each of the interview transcripts that none of the women in this study spontaneously decided they would give weight training a try; there was always something that sparked their interest, for example being told weight training would be beneficial for losing body fat, or they happened upon this type of training through participation in other sports. When asked about entering the free weights areas for the first time, all the women talked about how they found the experience uncomfortable. This did not matter whether they were

with an experienced friend, taking part in sport specific coached sessions or with a personal trainer. Their trepidation was articulated through their lack of confidence to go in alone. Three of the women were introduced to weight training through male personal trainers. Natalie, Katie and Janine all mentioned the importance of their male personal trainers in making them feel more at ease within the areas:

> I would not go in there by myself, he had to be there the whole time… and then it got to the stage where he didn't have to be with me the whole time, but he had to be with me and make sure everything was set up (Natalie).

> I just kinda went in and because I was with him I felt okay (Katie).

> He took me through everything… I'd say the first few weeks I was just kind of like, "ah, I don't know what I am doing" (Janine).

None of the women first experienced the free weights areas with a female coach or personal trainer; a male trainer, coach, partner or friend always acted as a gatekeeper to their first training session. After interviewing Natalie, she approached me whilst she was training and I was on shift, to explain that she believed that males generally knew more about lifting weights than females, therefore she would only trust males with writing her gym programme. Natalie relied on males due to believing that they had a superior knowledge of weight training, for example correct lifting technique, setting up the area and how many sets and repetitions of an exercise to perform. Interestingly, four of the women: Lucy, Penny, Catriona and Ellie were introduced to the free weights areas by a male friend. They felt more comfortable because an experienced male weights user was with them. Being shown how to use the areas by a man seemed to give the women a sense that their own presence was more acceptable. As social construction feminists Lorber and Martin (2007, p.255) suggest:

> Western societies expect men to be aggressive initiators of action and protectors of women and children; therefore, men's bodies should be muscular and strong. Women are expected to be nurturant and emotionally giving

The women within the study perceived men to be strong, muscular and have the knowledge to build superior bodies. Therefore, if they had the support of a man who trained within the area, then they did not feel so out of place. This shows that

the perception of male superiority within the weights areas still exists - it took a man, for the majority of women, to give them their support and guidance in how to use the areas effectively. After this the women used the areas more comfortably. They had gained approval from someone they felt had the authority to give approval and their transitions into using the areas were made easier as they felt safer, calmer and more knowledgeable. However, their need for approval supports the view of a hierarchy within the weights area; men remain dominant.

Seven women were introduced to the free weights areas through sport specific strength and conditioning sessions: Lisa and Tracey through rugby, Lola through handball, Sally through swimming and Jamie, Alex and Beatrice through football. The three football players described their strength and conditioning sessions, led by a male coach in the upstairs area. Interestingly, being part of a group of other females who were also beginners helped the women engage with the programme. Jamie commented:

> I didn't feel as uncomfortable around other females working out… I prefer working out in the back area when it's like locked off and there's just female footballers around me… it's also less busy upstairs and having a closed environment where people aren't just walking in and out… it's a lot more comfortable for me (Jamie).

Three women, Mattie, Dora and Katharine, started using the free weights areas through joining either a CrossFit or Weightlifting group. Additionally, both Mary-Kate and Stephanie discussed how they became confident in the free weights areas through being taught how to use the areas safely in a CYQ Level Two Gym Instructor course. During this qualification, the upstairs area was specifically booked out for the candidates to practice their technique for different lifts. Cathy discussed becoming competent at learning different free weights exercises at high intensity exercise classes, such as Les Mills BODYPUMP™. The class is described as, "An original barbell class. Using light to moderate weights with lots of repetitions." (Les Mills, 2016, para. 2). The group class gave Cathy the confidence to go into the free weights areas and attempt the techniques she had learned in a fitness studio.

These were the different ways in which the women got into weight training. Interestingly, all of the women found their initial experiences within the areas intimidating, partially because of the positioning of the weights areas within the

gym. Both free weight areas are at the back of the gym: the "upstairs area", through a barrier and the "downstairs area", down a set of stairs. The downstairs area is always available for members during opening hours. However, external companies often book the upstairs area in order to provide strength and conditioning support to elite athletes, so it is often unavailable to members. This frustrated the majority of the women within the study, who regarded it as their preferred training area. They cited the newness of the equipment, its light and airy environment and it being less crowded as reasons for their preference. In contrast, the downstairs area was seen as busy, noisy, dark and dominated by males. Especially when new to weight training, the women found it extremely daunting to enter the downstairs weights area. Ellie, Janine and Mary-Kate all referred to the downstairs area as "a dungeon". Penny recalled a conversation she had with one of her female friends:

> I have friends who call the downstairs gym "the scary bit" …one of them came in and was like, "Penny, Penny, I went to the scary place yesterday!" and I was like "where did you go?" and they were like "the [downstairs] gym" (Penny, 5).

The important point here is that the downstairs area can only be entered by one staircase. The majority of the women discussed how they initially found the walk to the downstairs area "daunting". The area can only clearly be viewed by walking down the stairs right into the area. A number of the women discussed how they could not just "peak in" and "take a look"; this made many of the women anxious when first experiencing the downstairs area.

3.4 A Male Dominated Environment

Free weight areas are spaces that have conventionally been viewed as dominated by men (Bunsell, 2013; Heywood, 1998; Tate, 1999). Almost all of the women within the study commented on the free weights areas at the facility being predominantly used by men and many of the women reinforced this through their belief that men are more competent as trainers. For the majority, this caused them some form of anxiety or put them off training within these areas:

> maybe not every girl, but most girls… have the sort of fear going into an area where they are maybe not comfortable or there is a lot of stigma attached to boys and lifting big heavy weights (Mary-Kate).

Katherine spoke about how she found the walk to the free weights areas intimidating:

> I'll go down and there are very few women. I think they feel very intimidated. It is predominantly men. For me I have gotten used to it. It did sort of frighten me initially. It is a huge thing to be a female and step down and I think that is because you are sort of maybe being judged (Katharine).

Jamie and Beatrice talked about feeling awkward amongst experienced males:

> it is such a male dominated place that it naturally becomes like that and like you can tell… If you are not the most experienced person within the room you can feel a bit more awkward when everyone else is far more experienced than you (Jamie).

> I wanted to be stronger but having like all the big guys all about you knowing exactly what they were doing and going in there and not being totally confident in what you should be doing, I had a bit of an issue with (Beatrice).

These feelings of anxiety resonate with findings in previous research on the presence of men within the free weights areas (Bunsell 2013; Tate 1999; Heywood 1998). The interviewees still felt inferior in these areas because they did not feel either strong enough, experienced enough or, in some cases, muscular enough to use these spaces.

There are no rules that stop women from going into the free weights areas, however a clear division between men and women can be observed. During peak hours between five and eight in the evening, the downstairs area was often noisier and warmer than usual, due to the number of bodies within the area. During these times I observed, in my own training or when on shift, that I was often the only woman in the area. Most of the women interviewed articulated that they preferred to train in the upstairs and downstairs suites when they were quieter and stipulated that at peak times the areas were often taken over by men. Similarly, Bunsell's (2013) research with female bodybuilders found that crowding and noise can put females off entering an area that is still generally viewed as a masculine domain. This can lead to females avoiding the area and being put off taking part in weight training. However, if females avoid entering or using the free weights area then male dominance within the area is protected.

One of the ways the females in this study countered the male dominance in

the weights areas was to train with other women. Training with other females appeared to make the women feel less conspicuous; they did not feel like they were contesting a masculine domain on their own. As discussed the women's first experiences in the areas were mostly with males, however, once they got used to the areas the majority of interviewees preferred to train alongside females. Dora, Ellie, Lola, Tracey and Katie all commented on their enjoyment of seeing more women training within the areas and that this increased their confidence. The more women they saw in the areas, the less they felt like their own presence was an act of transgression. When the football players, Alex, Beatrice and Jamie, trained in their exclusively female session, they felt like they had a community of support surrounding them with other women in similar positions. They were happy to challenge themselves with new physical tasks, such as squatting, deadlifting and bench pressing, without feeling like they were going to embarrass themselves in front of males who they believed were much stronger than them. Jamie commented:

> I don't know whether that's because men are naturally seen as more proficient in the gym than women and that's what I am perceiving. I didn't feel as uncomfortable around other females working out… I prefer working out in the back area when it's like locked off and there's just female footballers around me (Jamie).

There is a connection here with the work of McDermott (2004) who suggests that females engage more fully in physical tasks, and feel more confident, when surrounded by other women. Similarly, within this research I found that a female only environment generally gave the women more confidence to try different lifts without feeling judged by men who trained at the facility.

Training alongside a specific training partner or buddy was another way women felt more at ease in their surroundings. An article in the *Daily Telegraph* (Laidler, 2013) articulates five benefits of training with a partner, including: encouragement to train, improved technique, for safety, having someone to celebrate success with and be healthily competitive against. Interestingly, research has found that men often come to the gym and train in pairs or small groups; encouraging each other through loud and aggressive comments that urge their partners to assert strength, power and aggression (Bunsell, 2013). In fact, when observing the women's use of the areas I often couldn't help but observe men within the areas training alongside their partners, aggressively pushing each other to lift

heavier or train harder. I overheard males shout phrases such as "come on champ", "never stop' and "you are the champion" as they attempted to push their training partner to their physical limits. Interestingly, interviewees believed that a training partner was helpful as part of their training routine, but the evidence gathered suggests that this group of women did not use training partners in the same way as men. In contrast, the women's training partners in this study were a means of support, someone to check on their form and to assist by "spotting" when lifting heavier weights. However, the women did also enjoy friendly competition against their training partner; if their partner was lifting a heavier weight, the women were encouraged to increase their own weight. Even the women who trained alone, Lisa, Natalie and Cathy, recognised the benefits of training with someone else but were unable to attend sessions at the same time as their desired training partner.

It was clear the majority of women liked to train with other females due to feeling like they had a similar level of ability in the free weights areas:

> working out with a male who is significantly stronger than me… it's quite hard to be motivated because you know that you are not going to be at their level any time soon, whereas if you are working out with another female who is more at your level it's quite easy to move, to progress together (Jamie).

> you know we just try and step it up each week or every couple of weeks we try and step it up and get better at it (Stephanie).

This echoes McDermott's (2004) finding that when women support each other in physical tasks, they were more likely to push themselves harder and try new things. However contrary to this, Natalie, Catriona and Katie discussed how sometimes they found training with males could be beneficial. Katie, a physique competitor, commented:

> it does motivate me and I do think sometimes they… are more aggressive with it whereas I think we can kinda, like sometimes girls can step back a wee bit and are a wee bit more relaxed with it. So sometimes like when I am in [competition] prep, they're driven and it's getting it done and there's a bit of testosterone (Katie).

The males Katie referred to were bodybuilders who trained in the areas most days. Here work by Saltman (2003) is useful as he discusses that male bodybuilders are

aggressive, make a lot of noise through yells and grunts, believe that superiority lies in having bigger muscles and lifting heavier weights gives them a heroic status. Interestingly, as one of the bodybuilders was Katie's boyfriend, she was accepted to train and push herself alongside him and his training partner; giving her the opportunity to train in a way deemed acceptable for males. She trained alongside males in a male domain, therefore felt she had a greater opportunity to work harder. Once again this shows that males can act as gatekeepers for women within the areas and their acceptance of Katie's presence gave her a 'greater' opportunity to train harder.

Katie, Catriona and Natalie were the only women interviewed who said they enjoyed training with males. Many of the other females within the study discussed not pushing themselves as hard due to being embarrassed or intimidated to do so in front of males. For instance, Beatrice explained:

> I don't want to be lifting tiny weights but at the same time if I'm lifting huge weights, I'm gonna get, well I used to be like if I'm lifting huge weights the guys are like "what the fuck is she doing" sort of thing (Beatrice).

Cathy offered a similar view:

> if I'm lifting heavier than the males next to me and they're looking at you and they kinda, they give you the funny eyes that say "oh my god I can't believe you are lifting that", so then I sometimes don't (Cathy).

Research shows that women can find learning a new physical skill or set of skills more daunting when in a mixed gender environment (Nolan and Priest, 1993). Beatrice and Cathy's comments, as well as a number of the other women's discussions, suggest that males within the free weights area have affected their confidence. Their worries about exhibiting too much strength, a masculine quality, shows that their use of the area could be shaped by their perceptions of what it means to be feminine and what it means to be masculine and they were somewhat aware of transgressing the boundary between the genders in a heteronormative context. I suggest, in these cases, that their embarrassment of not wanting to be viewed as too strong restricted how far they believed they could acceptably push themselves in the free weights areas. From a Foucauldian theoretical perspective I argue that at times the women were active agents in their own oppression. They

often conformed to the dominant social ideal that men are stronger than women. Unintentionally these women, as Bordo (1993) suggests, engage in social practices that lead to their own oppression. They were uncomfortable in exhibiting their physical capability and therefore conformed to dominant ideals of women being weaker than men. To explain this, when they started lifting heavy weights, they became self-conscious because they had to fully engage their bodies. When lifting a heavier weight, it is important to consider that the correct muscles must be engaged to complete the movement properly. To give an example, when completing an exercise like a squat, even though the exercise predominantly works the lower body, an individual's core must remain tight to stay upright. Their lower back cannot collapse, their shoulders must remain in a locked out position and their head must be kept upright - the whole body must be engaged for this movement. This means females have to learn to fully engage their bodies to competently execute the movement and begin to lift heavier weights, thereby breaking the stereotypical view that females are fragile and transgressing the definitive boundary of difference between men and women. However, it is important to note that Beatrice and Cathy did discuss pushing themselves harder in the weights areas once they became more familiar with their surroundings.

Some of the women interviewed commented on how males were often very welcoming, kind and helpful within the areas. However, Lisa, a rugby player who had been using the free weights areas for two years, explained a situation where she felt patronised by a man who critiqued her squat technique; she believed the man only approached her because she was woman. I observed similar examples of such behaviour whilst working as a Fitness Officer. During evening shifts I cleared away weights left on the floor. On eight occasions, between June 2015 and January 2016, I received offers of help with this task, always from men. However, on three of these occasions I was told not to pick up certain weights because they were too heavy for me, even if they were weights I could easily manage. Drawing on work by Bunsell (2013), Glick and Fiske (2000), Goffman (1979) and Hargreaves (1994), I would interpret this behaviour as a chivalrous act. Even if it was sincere and genuine offer of help, it reinforces traditional gender stereotypes such as female fragility and helps maintain gender differences amongst men and women. This type of behaviour emphasises gender inequalities, such as females not being strong enough or having the same knowledge of lifting techniques, and can be viewed as

patronising. Bunsell (2013, p. 108) suggests, "chivalrous acts in the gym encourage intimate dyadic dependencies between the genders which inform compulsory heterosexuality and retain sex segregation". This helps maintain the view that women are subordinate to males, less skilled or knowledgeable within the field of weight training.

Chivalrous acts were not the only way in which the behaviour of men contributed to women having a negative experience in the free weights areas. Beatrice recalled an occasion when a male attempted to take the weights she was training with:

> you wouldn't be doing that if I was twice the size of you but it's purely because I'm a female and you think that you should be lifting that weight and that you are gonna take it… having no respect of what you are doing and in actual fact you are doing the exact same as them but because they are bigger and they will feel like they will put the weights to better use (Beatrice).

These kinds of behaviours left Beatrice and a small number of other women feeling vulnerable and undermined when using the area. Males were seen to "hog" the area as well as its equipment (Jamie, Lisa, Mary-Kate) leaving the women feeling like they did not belong there; this supports findings by Bunsell (2013). Additionally, the same women communicated that they often felt the need to get out of male trainers' way and take up less space in the areas. Previous research has suggested that occupying space and exerting physical presence are masculine qualities (Connell, 1983) whereas females often limit the amount of space that they occupy (Hartley, 2001). The women's narratives of their experiences in the free weights areas supported this.

Amongst some of the women within the study there did seem to be a need to impress the men training alongside them. Lola described a situation, which left her feeling proud, when a male free weights user discussed her use of the area:

> I just walked in and made myself familiar and I spoke to every single one of them [the men] and that's what one of the oldies came up to me and said maybe a month ago: "10 years like, there are all these girls coming down and training in the gym now, for the changes that is happening, that are happening in sport over the last couple of years and none of them know you were the first. You were the first girl to come down and speak to us" … I've always tried to bring more girls in. I can't take much credit for it but it's nice to hear they actually, that the

boys recognise it and they are so glad that some of the girls actually came down. I said to girls if they notice you it's a compliment (Lola).

Lola's comment shows that the male user was happy about the number of females now using the free weight areas, possibly marking a new era of men and women sharing this part of the facility. However, Lola's comment that she regarded the male gaze as a compliment might also be interpreted differently. It could indicate that she still felt the need to impress males within the area and encourage other women to do so as well. Here I call upon work by Roth and Basow (2004), who state that when women participate in physically empowering sports and activities it gives them confidence in their own strength and physicality. However, for almost half of the women within my study, during this supposedly liberating experience they were still conforming to, and looking for, the acceptance of men. Even though female gym members had every right to use the free weights areas, there was still an obvious gender divide in the use of these spaces.

3.5 The Female Gaze

There is a common discourse within online media that suggests women often judge other women in relation to their clothes, make-up, actions and body shape. Headlines from online blogging articles demonstrate this: "Why women judge other women more than men" (Picicci, 2015); "Do you judge other women's bodies?" (Charron, 2013); "Women should stop judging other women, focus on what matters" (Kuklinski, 2013). Interestingly, my interviewees commented on feeling judged by other women. Whilst the gaze of men often made the women feel embarrassed or less confident in regards to their training within the free weights areas, the gaze of other women affected the participants negatively as well. Catriona, Penny and Lola all commented on feeling judged by other women. Lola recalled a time when one of the men she knew well overheard two women in the downstairs free weight area discussing that they thought Lola's strength as well as the aggressive noises she made when weightlifting were "scary". This upset Lola as her passion was to get more women to train in the free weights areas. As a weightlifter, Lola undertakes different lifts that demonstrate power and strength and can develop muscularity, characteristics historically seen as masculine (Connell, 1983; Forbes *et al.* 2004). Lola explained that she knew she was more muscular

than the "average woman" and that the strength she exhibited when taking part in weightlifting differs from the typical norms of what it means to be feminine. Actions that go against socially constructed norms of femininity may be seen as a rebellion and those who aren't familiar with these actions find them difficult to understand (Bunsell, 2013; Lorber and Martin, 2007; Orbach, 2006). I suggest this is why other females were uncomfortable with Lola's use of the weights areas - they were not used to seeing a female exert such strength, aggression and power.

The perceived judgemental gaze from other females was something that some of the women in my study said they noticed more when in the main section of the gym. For instance, Katie, Penny and Tracey commented that they felt they were being judged by other women on cardiovascular machines when they were using the fixed resistance machines in the main gym area. Tracey explained:

> you get the stereotypical girls on the cross trainers, only do cardio… you see them looking at you, you kind of get the feeling that you are getting dirty looks from them just because you are different (Tracey).

Katie too commented on this:

> and you do see everyone in cardio just randomly glancing at you. I feel a wee bit more self-conscious up there now… I hope no one's thinking that I am crazy because I do pull some horrible faces when I'm training (Katie).

Cardiovascular machines are used by men and women, but are most popular amongst women (Bunsell 2013). Regular use helps to: build aerobic fitness (the capability of the heart and lungs), lose body fat and burn calories. Since the 1990s a popular image of the feminine body has involved being slender and having a narrow hipped frame and small breasts (Bartky, 1990). To follow this trend women have tried to replicate the body shapes of super models such as Kate Moss (Tate, 1999) and regular use of cardiovascular machines has helped many to achieve this goal (Bunsell, 2013). When I probed Tracey further about what she meant by "stereotypical girls" she commented:

> They just seem so wrapped up in getting that little body whereas I am looking to shape and control how I look (Tracey).

It is impossible to know if the females Tracey noticed were actually giving her judgemental glares. The point to be made here is that Tracey, and some of the other

interviewees, perceived that female weight training was deemed to be less acceptable than using cardiovascular machines. Despite this, they did not shy away from the activity. In fact, Mattie, Katie and Tracey said when they felt other females were judging them, they trained harder in an attempt to show they did not care; they were happy with the activity they had chosen to take part in. They believed they had found an activity that helped them take more "control" over their body than what cardiovascular training alone could achieve.

3.6 Motivation to Weight Train

There was seldom a single reason why the women in this study were motivated to train within the free weights areas. Their motivations were often complex and not explained by one purpose, each interviewee spoke of a variety of reasons to weight train. Nevertheless, analysing the interviews revealed some common motivations, and will be discussed in this section.

The use of weight training in strength and conditioning programmes is now common practice amongst elite athletes, in order to improve strength and power (McGuigan *et al*. 2012). The magnitude of how these qualities affect sporting performance differs between sports, however their benefits have been well documented in sport science research (McGuigan *et al*. 2012). Interviewees, in this study, who became involved in weight training through another sport, such as football, swimming or rugby, did so to improve their sporting performance. Lola, a strength and conditioning coach, believed this emphasis on weight training was essential for elite and amateur sporting success. However, it was clear that each of the athletes found a love for weight training as an activity in its own right, not just as a means to enhance their sporting performance. The women enjoyed feeling stronger each week and found they could turn each session into a competition with themselves, or friendly competition against their teammates or training partners (Alex; Beatrice; Jamie; Lisa; Sally; Tracey).

Another motivation to train in the free weights areas was to experience a sense of control. The majority of the women explained that weight training allowed them to escape from their usual lives and daily problems. They were in control of the weights they lifted and the areas of the body they worked on. They could be competitive and feel strong and powerful, something that a small

number of the women did not experience within their day to day lives. Lucy commented:

> I had some severe intolerances which I didn't know about which causes rapid weight gain. I ended up at about twelve stone which isn't ridiculously heavy but to me it was… it was probably quite vain that I wanted to look good but it was something I could maybe control that is a lot of what it's down to. I control when I train, how I train, who I train with, how I look… I think it becomes that way but certainly for me when I first started training it was about having something I could control and get away from everything else (Lucy).

Lola described how she used weights and cardiovascular training as a form of control after she put on weight from taking the contraceptive pill:

> I wasn't very healthy so within [a month of] coming off of it I lost five kilos but I had to train ten kilos off so it got a little bit crazy… I trained alternating between weights in the evenings and spinning or intervals and that became my life (Lola).

I believe that when some interviewees felt out of control of the circumstances they found themselves in, they attempted to manipulate their bodies in a bid to bring some form of control back over their lives. Ellie, Lucy, Katharine and Lola all used their exercise regimes to feel in control of one aspect of their lives, their bodies. This in turn helped them feel stronger and more in control of their circumstances outside of the gym. This finding wasn't unique to the current study and has been discussed in previous literature that focuses on the sociological importance of the body. For example, Bunsell (2013) discussed how weight training has been used as a form of control over the body by female bodybuilders, leading to a sense of control of their day-to-day lives. Tate (1999) also recognised that female weight trainers investing time and effort into their bodies gave them a way to express the way they wished to look. For others, weight training became a part of their identity. Mattie commented:

> I need a purpose in my life… in a normal environment at work, I feel like I don't fit in. I feel like if I am out and about in public shopping, I feel like I don't fit in with people… I don't know if it's my psychological weird thing that's wrong with me but I feel like if I come to the gym I fit in and this is where I feel comfortable and this is where I can be me (Mattie).

As a weightlifter, Mattie's training was highly structured around developing the strength required to perform specific lifts at weightlifting meets. Reflecting on work by Shilling (2008, p. 13) who suggests that, "habits lie at the very base of our sense of self", it is not surprising that Mattie felt like she had more of a purpose and an increased belief in her own self-worth because of her routine as a weightlifter. Mattie not only had to plan her training sessions in immense detail but also had to be vigilant about the food she ate in order to fit within a specific competitive weight category. This structured programme of training and diet can be compared to that of bodybuilders, who must also train and diet diligently in preparation for competitions. Bunsell (2013) argues that the structured lifestyle of a female bodybuilder results in a more straightforward existence as their lives revolve around their training and eating regime. For Mattie as a weightlifter, her daily training became a part of her everyday routine. It gave her different goals to aim for and filled her life with purpose and meaning; without this, she described her life as "boring". Ellie and Lucy also discussed how their weight training, as well as their dietary regimes, gave them some form of identity due to the structured plan they followed each week.

Contrary to this feeling of purpose, it is important to acknowledge that habits can also be restricting by preventing a person from trying something different or doing something differently (Shilling, 2008). A minority of the women commented on their need to train and eat 'healthily' every day, for example eat foods that are nutritious and high in protein. If their routine differed, for example having an 'unhealthy' meal or missing a training session, then it could result in negative feelings about themselves. Although weight training can be liberating for women, from discussions with the interviewees I conclude that being too rigid with training and diet can lead to negative experiences, such as a difficulty to balance training alongside a social life. At times the women's training became too rigid and made them begin to resent coming to the gym or eating healthily.

Another important motivation that was discussed by the interviewees was the supportive nature of the weight training community. Having like-minded people around them was cited as a motivating factor by the majority of participants including: those who went to the gym to shape and change their bodies for aesthetic reasons, those who were part of a weightlifting or CrossFit group and those who

took part in sport specific strength and conditioning sessions. Interviewees commented:

> As the people around you change and you know if you surround yourself with people who are in a certain shape then you will always want to conform with the group that you are in. Nobody wants to be the smallest fish in the pond. You will always try and rise with what you surround yourself with and that's what they say as well, you're the average of the five people you surround yourself with the most and I think that's very true… They might have a different ending, they might have a different start but everybody in here I feel appreciates what you are trying to do (Ellie).

> whole community sort of like having people to train with and being in that group (Dora).

> I met a group of people who've been showing me you can definitely develop different parts of your body and… focus on your strength…
> So that definitely influenced me a lot (Jamie).

It is important to consider how a person's identity is shaped by the individuals they are surrounded by. Merleau-Ponty (1962) discusses how an individual's identity evolves considerably because of the interactions they have with others around them, and articulates that people can only understand their own self in relation to how others around them view their actions and appearance. The women who participated in Tate's (1999) study decided whose opinions were important to them when shaping their ideal body, choosing to listen to those who appreciated their efforts as weight trainers. This was observed to some extent within the current study. The women made friends with other women, and men, within the weight training community and began to listen to their opinions. To explain this two points are important. Firstly, even though initially the free weights areas seemed daunting and intimidating, almost all of the women commented that they became less intimidated by the environment once they became more experienced and got to know others using the free weight areas. Once they were comfortable in their surroundings, excited by their goals and found others who were embarking on similar journeys, there would be times when the women did not feel as though they were transgressing from the norms of femininity at all:

> We are surrounded by it but I do think maybe in other gyms there still are people that would think that it's not right what we are doing and

women shouldn't train and stuff like that. We are fine though as more and more females here are doing it. I would feel less normal if I didn't train (Katie).

now perhaps because of my experience level coupled with the fact that I know actually some of those guys and there are a lot more women now who train. I feel completely at ease (Ellie).

This comfort and feeling of acceptance was because Katie and Ellie felt like they were within a supportive community and had a group of friends where the majority of them *did* weight train. Within this community strength was appreciated rather than scorned.

However, the second point to note here is that comments made by individuals outside of the weight training community did, to some extent, affect the majority of women. Dora explained how this discomfort depended on which group of friends she spent time with:

it depends for me what group of friends I'm around and how comfortable I feel… I know maybe one group of friends I kind of feel "oh my shoulders do look huge" … but then again if I'm with another group of friends, you know, I feel completely fine. You know I feel like I fit in (Dora).

The majority of women were able to pick out whose comments really mattered to them in relation to their weight training; namely those of other weight trainers. However, outside of this supportive environment, comments from other friends and family members did, at times, affect the women meaning they were never completely comfortable with the muscles they embodied.

Another motivation to weight train included attempting to look after their physical health. A minority of those interviewed cited health reasons as a motivation to weight train regularly. Research into the benefits of regular strength training for middle-aged and older members of society show a reduced risk of osteoporosis, cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes (Menkes *et al*. 1993; Hare *et al*. 1999; Koffler *et al*. 1992; Miller et. 1994). Stephanie and Janine both cited these benefits as an incentive to take part in strength training. Additionally, Jamie used weight training as an injury prevention and rehabilitation tool, to help her recover from an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury that happened during a competitive football game. However very few of the women discussed the health

benefits of weight training as a motivation. This may not be surprising as Mansfield (2005, p.182) suggests that:

> commercial messages are founded on the assumption that it is what you look like, rather than what and how your body performs that counts in terms of female attractiveness.

Katie, Cathy and Tracey cited a different 'health' benefit of weight training; they trained to change their lifestyles for the better. Previously, their way of life included excessive binge drinking and unhealthy eating. However, the more involved they became in weight training, the more they realised they were not fuelling or treating their bodies appropriately. To combat this, they didn't go clubbing as often and modified their drinking habits and diets to enhance their performance in the weights areas and help shape their bodies to how they desired them to be.

Some of the women's motivation to weight train was because of their motivation to take part in physique competitions. With this came a dedication to a structured diet, calorie counting, weighing food and a rigid training plan. At the time of the interview, Katie had competed in three physique competitions and was in preparation for her final competition of the season, whilst Cathy was in the initial "bulking" preparation stage for her first competition. Depending on which category they compete in, physique competitors must ingest a surplus of protein-rich foods to allow protein synthesis to occur and muscles to grow. However, after this initial muscle building process, competitors are required to look lean on stage; body fat must be low. To achieve this look, competitors undergo a calorie-restricted (deficit) diet whilst training two or three times a day right before the competition (Bunsell, 2013). Cathy was attempting to compete in the figure category that looked for greater muscle growth than the bikini category (described in Appendix 1). Katie, however, had competed in both the fitness and bikini categories, both of which required slightly less muscle mass than the figure category. As with the bodybuilders in Bunsell's study, because Cathy was in the muscle building or bulking stage of her preparations she was conscious of people thinking she was fat or big. Cathy worried people would see her body shape and think she was being lazy with her diet and training, whereas in actual fact she suggested that this was the hardest she had trained and the most food she had ever tried to force herself to eat to allow for muscle growth. There was nothing lazy about Cathy's preparations,

but she worried people who did not understand the process would judge her negatively. Despite these concerns, Cathy remained motivated to complete her competition preparations and take part in the competition, she wanted to prove that she had the willpower and dedication to stick to her nutrition and training plans.

Cathy and Katie discussed how it was extremely important to be strict with their diets when they were preparing for a competition. Both women's dietary preparations for their competitions were assisted by a mobile phone application (app) called "MyFitnessPal", used at some point by the majority of the women in this study. The main purpose of the app is to promote fitness and weight loss via dieting and exercise tracking (Millington, 2014). MyFitnessPal allows not only calories but also protein, carbohydrate and fat to be tracked (MyFitnessPal, 2016). Tracking calorie consumption and exercise levels would seem to be a sensible and healthy activity, yet weight trainers' diets can become extremely strict. Tate (1999, p. 43) suggests that a female weight trainer's relationship with food can become "one in which food does not necessarily need to be enjoyable". Their relationship with food can become extremely structured, with individuals refusing dinner with friends or partners because they are counting their calories so closely. Lola discussed her worry of tracking calories again, because she had become too obsessed with it when she was younger. She worried this obsessive behaviour would sneak back into her routine and ruin her social life, as it had done previously.

During her bulking up phase, Cathy explained she would often eat when she was not hungry, forcing down food to assist some form of muscular development. When asked whether they thought preparing for a competition was healthy, both Katie and Cathy replied "no". They both knew the dangers of competition preparation and the extremes they had to put their bodies through. Up to twelve to fifteen weeks before a competition competitors will often follow a calorie restricted diet while exercising every day. Despite this, Cathy remained extremely motivated to take part in her first competition, regardless of the impact on her body. Cathy wanted to prove she could do something "different" and "important" with her life. Katie said she enjoyed the "buzz" when she was onstage in front of a crowd and judges so no matter how hard the preparation was, that feeling made the hard work worthwhile. From the two women's discussions surrounding diet and exercise, I would suggest they have gone from one unhealthy extreme, of binge drinking, eating fast food and not exercising, straight to another extreme that can also be

considered unhealthy. This includes a calorie restricted diet, exercising while fatigued or eating when not hungry to assist the muscle building process. It is however, important to note that not all of the weight trainers interviewed went to such measures to control their body shape. For example, Katharine commented that she loved food too much to constantly track it and Beatrice explained she believed this type of behaviour to be unhealthy.

3.7 Empowerment

Weight training can be viewed as an empowering activity for many of the women in the study. Empowerment was felt when the women lifted weights heavier than they believed was previously possible for them, when they saw their body changing and developing based on their goals and when they felt in control of their own health and wellbeing. The understanding that weight training could be used as a way to control her physical strength, leaving her feeling empowered, was stated very powerfully by Ellie. This wasn't about weight loss, controlling diet or injury prevention. What motivated Ellie above anything, was her ability to feel like she was controlling her body after suffering from a stroke in 2014:

> I am achieving and I think that has to go back to my health issue that I had. It was very much a challenge of I came out of hospital and I couldn't walk for twenty minutes without having pain in my legs the next day. I had, my muscle had completely wasted and for me it was a challenge as soon as I got back to weights within three weeks of coming out of hospital and within, I would say three weeks of starting free weights I could squat over my body weight. So for me that was a huge motivation, almost like, it was almost proving to yourself who you are. Proving what you can achieve (Ellie).

Only six weeks after her stroke Ellie was consistently training five to six times a week with weights as a way to feel she was in control of her strength and physical health. Because she was unable to walk six weeks earlier, she was able to prove her strength by getting back into the weights areas and train harder than she ever had before. I would view this as an empowering experience for Ellie. From feeling out of control and powerless, through weight training Ellie could express herself how she wanted to be seen, as a strong woman.

Interestingly, all of the women began to enjoy weight training once they felt they were making progress. As their strength improved and their body shape changed their enjoyment for the activity increased:

> I think every girl at one stage in their life aspires to be this skinny, you know that word skinny… that's kind of all you hear, all you see, well it was when I was younger anyway. Kind of mid early teens. I think when I kind of got more into the CrossFit that's when I started to realise well actually you know being skinny is not necessarily, that's not what I want. I want to be strong and I want to be healthy (Dora).

I argue that this statement shows a more sophisticated attitude to training than a desire to be "skinny". Goals can be set when lifting weights and strength can be measured. For example, an individual might aim to squat sixty kilograms for five repetitions. A training programme can then be designed to allow an individual to successfully reach this goal. In contrast, the goal "to be skinny" is harder to measure. Weight and inches around the waist lost can be recorded, but the aim to be skinny is so subjective, that individuals may *never* feel satisfied with their body or their efforts in the gym. In fact, not being able to define how slim a person should be led to a number of interviewees feeling like they were "too fat" (Beatrice, Cathy, Katharine, Lola, Mattie, Natalie and Penny). From my understanding of empowerment (Bunsell, 2013; Hesse-Biber, 1996; McDermott, 2004; Roth and Basow, 2004; Tate, 1999) I suggest that any weight training goal that leads women to feel self-conscious or negative in regards to their training, stops weight training from being an empowering activity. However, when strength is the main goal (as Dora proposes) I believe women are rejecting traditional feminine characteristics such as fragility or being small (Bordo, 1990), which could result in a potentially empowering experience. As Hesse-Biber (1996, p. 127) states:

> bodily empowerment lies in women's abilities to forge an identity that is not bound by traditional definitions of what it "means to be feminine" and to work for a new femininity.

The majority of women in this study said they found weight training empowering because they pushed themselves to lift a weight they would have never have believed possible and experienced "control" over their bodies.

Female empowerment can be viewed as a process enabling women to define and change their belief in their own capabilities, previously restricted by a constant

comparison to men (Mosedale, 2005). This was articulated by the participants in the current study through their discussions of increased confidence from improving their strength. A small number of the women felt more independent in their daily lives and no longer needed men, for example, to pick up heavy objects for them. Dora, Beatrice and Mattie all related this strength to an understanding that women are no longer constrained to stay at home and look after children but can have successful lives and careers too. Dora commented:

> We can do this, exact the same as what men can do. There's no reason why we can't. We can be strong… we can be confident… we can have this knowledge in this area as well as men and there's no reason why not... it's just like when you're maybe working up towards a [personal best] when you finally hit something like you just feel it sounds so cliché but it is that feeling of empowerment, like you feel so good about yourself and… it just makes you feel good (Dora).

Dora, as a weightlifter, discussed how she found beating a personal best within the gym on different lifts an empowering experience. These personal bests were for exercises that require full body movements such as: squatting, benching and deadlifting. Bunsell (2013) suggests that these activities and others which weight trainers must undertake when training such as: loading a barbell with heavy weights and getting calloused hands are not actions that are considered feminine. Females who train in the free weights areas are negotiating a previously male dominated domain. Similarly, almost all of the women embodied the notion of "no pain, no gain" a belief within sport and physical activity formerly seen as an experience appropriate for men (Sabo, 1986). All but one of the females interviewed in this study described the pleasure of pushing their bodies to the limit and experiencing increased bodily control, a phenomenon also observed by Tate (1999). Pushing the body to the limit included training hard enough to feel a pain or burn during a training session, or experiencing muscle soreness the next day. This idea of control, the belief that without pain there won't be any change in the body, allows women to expand the capabilities of the female body (Tate, 1999). The "no pain, no gain" refrain has previously been considered masculine territory, however women who embody this notion and train within the weights area have the opportunity to reconstruct and challenge the boundaries of femininity.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter I explored the women's initial experiences in the free weights areas, all of which were daunting. The majority of women were initiated into the areas by a male coach, friend, personal trainer or partner. The free weights areas were described as dominated by males, however most of the interviewees believed the activity was becoming more popular amongst females. Through my own observations, as well as analysing the interviews with each woman, it became apparent that within this group, weight training is no longer an activity exclusively for men. At times, when I was looking to recruit participants, I would observe the women's use of the area. During quieter times it was common to see an equal split of men and women using the free weights areas. However, during busier periods there were fewer women than men, and the majority of women discussed their anxiety to train within the areas during these busy times. The capacity of the downstairs free weights area is approximately thirty people and often when the area was at full capacity, there were no females training.

The majority of interviewees commented on how intimidating the areas were when they first started weight training, citing: loud noises, groups of men and feeling judged when using equipment that a man was also wishing to use, as reasons for this; showing that weights areas still seem to be monopolised by men. Some of the women felt undermined by men whilst training in the areas, which affected their confidence. One of the ways the interviewees countered the male dominance in the gym was to train with other women. The interviewees never felt completely comfortable with themselves in the free weights areas as they always felt somewhat inferior to males. A small number of the women even discussed how they would not push themselves to their full capabilities due to being embarrassed to fully engage in the activity. However, it can be concluded that almost all of the women became *more* comfortable within the free weights areas over time.

The women who trained in the free weights areas were, to some extent, transgressing the norms of what it meant to be feminine. However, to the women in the study, their use of the areas only felt like transgression when they were not used to the activity, their surroundings or the people within it. Also they felt like they were transgressing norms of femininity when they were with friends who did not weight train. However, once the women became more comfortable with their

abilities and made friends within the areas, their use of free weights areas felt less like transgression and more like normality.

There were a number of different motivations behind why females trained in the free weight areas and there was never a single reason that motivated the participants. Despite this, common motivations emerged including: to support performance in another sport, to experience escapism and control, to maintain health and enjoyment of being part of a community with shared aims. More detailed analyses of the aesthetic pressures behind the women's motivations to train in the weights areas are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4
The Ideal Female Body?

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I continue to discuss my research findings, concentrating on three of my research objectives: to discuss participants' definitions of the ideal female body and to comprehend the significance of this body to the participants; to understand what influenced the definitions of the ideal female body; to explore how the women's perceptions of the terms masculinity, femininity and muscularity affected their training within the free weights areas. These issues were discussed in the women's interviews and in this chapter I draw out and examine the key themes to emerge from the information the women shared with me. Whilst I focus on the objectives above, I also touch upon my first research objective; to identify the motivations behind women taking part in weight training. Interestingly, although the body that each woman strived for and the female body they believed was the most popular within society were sometimes the same, often the two differed because of the interviewees' training goals, participation in sport, and their knowledge of how healthy it was for them to become very lean. Additionally, although I interviewed different groups of female free weighs users, for example: weightlifters, physique competitors and other sportswomen, their ideas about the ideal female body were not standardised within each group. For instance, the women who competed in physique competitions were required to sculpt a rounder bum to meet competition expectations but were not alone in finding a rounder bum attractive. Mattie, one of the weightlifters, also discussed her wish to sculpt rounder glutes, as did Natalie and Janine who primarily trained for their own personal enjoyment rather than for physique competitions. Those women who predominantly took part in weight training to support another sport, discussed their wish to be stronger for this purpose. However, the body shape these women aimed for was not homogenous; how defined they wanted their upper bodies to be, and how lean they wanted to look, varied amongst each of the sports competitors. This might be explained by considering that although the women initially took part in weight training for one reason, this never ended up being their *only* motivation for training - the women were not defined by their initial reasons to train within the free weights areas.

4.2 A Slim and Toned Body

As discussed in Chapter 1, over the last four decades research in sociology has examined the body as a social construction. Particular attention has been paid to representations of the ideal female body, characterised as: slender, soft yet toned and with little body fat (Benson, 1997; Bordo, 1993; Duncan, 1994; Dworkin, 2001; Grogan, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Orbach, 1996, 2009). This construction has been encouraged by popular Western media including female magazines, health and fitness publications and television (Mansfield, 2005). Similarly, almost all of the women in this study felt that being lean, slim or slender was a quality that characterised feminine beauty. Chernin (1983) describes women's obsession with achieving a slender body as the "tyranny of slenderness"; a tyranny many Western women face. Slenderness was discussed by all of the females interviewed; however how much this ideal affected them differed.

Almost all of the females acknowledged that aiming for a slender body felt somewhat compulsory and to deviate from this course would negatively affect how others viewed them. Through analysing the women's narratives, I would suggest that the women in this study learnt how females are expected to look, which included being toned and slender. From reviewing work by Bordo (1993), I would concur that this anxiety comes from the discourse that fat is ugly, unhealthy and demonised by the majority of popular media: television, advertisements, newspapers and fashion magazines. Interviewees commented:

> I sometimes look at sort of pictures from before I've even, before I started going into free weights and I think "oh I wish I looked like that again, where it was just skinny". I guess it's kind of what I am used to seeing in like the media (Catriona).

> yeah just like a little bit less muscle then what I am now. But like really lean, lean like in magazines and stuff (Sally).

These statements show how the women wanted to be lean, slim or skinny. Both Sally and Catriona discussed a longing to have less muscle mass than they had at the time of interview, which could potentially be a contradiction to their use of free weights. Throughout her interview, Catriona stipulated that she was "extremely uncomfortable" about developing muscles and often stated that being "lean" and "toned" was what mattered to her. Similarly, Dworkin (2001) found that both female gym users who did not weight train and those who did, were scared of

gaining weight either through fat or muscle mass. She argued that the females believed if they became too muscular, in comparison to the social norm, they would be judged as masculine. The women in her study defined the ideal female body as not having excess fat or being too muscular, however an "athletic" looking body was often desired. A number of women in my study described other women with a slender, toned appearance that had obviously been worked on, in the gym, as having the ideal female body. They were regarded as beautiful and were idolised by many of the interviewees.

However, it is essential to appreciate that not all of the women in this study were motivated by the ideal female body of being "slim" and "toned". Cathy, who worked as a personal trainer in another facility and was an inspiring physique competitor, believed many females had a lack of knowledge about the concept of being "toned" and wanting to remain "skinny":

> being a girl and training women it's always weight loss and tone. Oh my goodness see that word "tone" it's like you want to paint a wall what? No you don't, you want to sculpt your muscles maybe... they all want to tone and they all want to get skinny and I, the thing I find even again looking at classes…. A lot of people who do BODYPUMP™ classes because it is lifting weights come after twelve weeks and say "I've got too much definition, I'm bulking up, I'm getting bigger and I don't want to get bigger… I want to get smaller" and it's actually trying to explain to them that you are not getting bigger. You're losing fat and you are developing lean muscle but to them that's getting bigger and there's just this kind of I suppose broad education about it (Cathy).

Cathy's comments reveal her belief that those with less experience of lifting weights or with little knowledge of how to develop muscle mass, jump to the conclusion that they are becoming bulky. However, as Cathy discusses, the process of building muscle mass is complex. Importantly, individuals must follow a food plan where they are eating a surplus of calories, as well as consume enough protein to facilitate muscle growth (Hayes and Cribb, 2008; Phillips and Van Loon, 2011; Stark, Lukaszuk and Prawitz, 2012). Building muscle mass is a difficult process and takes hard work and dedication to achieve. If as Cathy suggests, knowledge of how to build muscle mass is uncommon amongst females inside and outside of the weight training environment, this may lead to misconceptions regarding muscle growth, for example that weight training can make a person muscly or bulky after a few weeks. Penny, a powerlifter, also did not want to be "skinny". Indeed, she

actually begrudged getting any leaner as she believed her ability as a powerlifter would suffer, and that she would not be able to lift such heavy weights. Despite this, Penny discussed feeling anxious that she was not slim enough to be perceived as attractive within society; she showed conflicting feelings about her body size and shape.

Although ideally they wished to be slimmer, both Lola and Katharine (weightlifters) were relatively happy about their body shapes. Neither of them wished to go on drastic diets, which Lola had done as a teenager; they enjoyed food, training and feeling energised throughout the day. They reflected that, with age, they had gathered a more mature understanding that possessing the ideal female body as portrayed by the media was unachievable. Lola commented:

> I've quite recently had to accept that I am not getting any younger. I have shapes, I have shape as a woman and I need to be proud of that. I am proud of my body (Lola).

This pride, Lola described, came from understanding that slim, toned female bodies in magazines and advertising campaigns, were unachievable not just for her, but also for the majority of women with society. Lola reflected on the photo editing process that takes place to manipulate photos of the models' bodies before they are used in advertising campaigns or on the front of magazine covers. This highlights the potential influence of popular media in the construction of the ideal female body. Katharine and Lola became much happier with the way they looked by understanding that this construction was unrealistic. This was not however, something that the majority of women within the study expressed. Being slim was important to them, and this message was reinforced through the popular media.

4.3 Celebrity Figures and Popular Culture

The influence of popular culture, and in particular the profile of celebrity figures, in shaping perceptions of the female body was an important theme to emerge from the interviews. The slender and toned body was significant to most of the interviewees, however, there were other physical characteristics that also defined their ideal female body. These included: large and firm breasts, rounded glutes, defined abdominal muscles and a small waist. The women's perceptions of the ideal female body appeared to be strongly influenced by popular celebrities such

as the Kardashian sisters, and Rihanna, physique competitors (discussed in greater detail in Section 4.6 and in Chapter 5), and famous athletes such as Jessica Ennis (discussed in Section 4.5). Such women occupy spaces in popular culture including: television, magazines, online news sites, newspapers and social media. These women strongly influenced the interviewees' constructions of the ideal female body.

When I discussed the notion of an ideal female body with the interviewees, a number of them referenced the Kardashian sisters as having the type of bodies that society views as ideal. Kim, Kourtney and Khloé and their half-sisters Kendall and Kylie achieved celebrity status through an American reality television show named "Keeping up with the Kardashians". Katie for example explained:

> I think years ago even when I was younger it was really skinny people like Kate Moss and stuff that were just like naturally really, really really slim and I think that was everyone's aim was to get slim, so let's not eat. But I think now like the Kardashians and all that are coming out it's a lot more curved based and obviously people are finding this out through sports and that's through training (Katie).

Physical characteristics, such as having a slim waist and curved features (for example a large, defined bum and large breasts) have been popularised by figures such as the Kardashian sisters. However, although the women I interviewed were aware of the female celebrities who occupy popular culture, some were quite circumspect about the ways in which these bodies were achieved. This gives power to the question of whether there really is an ideal female body. For example, Penny reflected:

> I think big boobs as well but yet a small waist. How can you drop your body fat but still, like it just doesn't make sense… if you look at, I hate to say it but the Kardashians, where they have massive bums but then their thighs are really small. Like that's not possible… I would say unrealistic because I don't know, I think some people naturally do look like that, but the majority of people don't (Penny).

Soriano (2013) suggests the Kardashian sisters have become the latest embodiment of the ideal female body, rather than figures like Kate Moss. Their television programme focuses on how achieving and maintaining the ideal body is extremely important to the sisters. Soriano highlights that cardiovascular activity, weight training, and diet are not the only methods used by the Kardashians to construct

their bodies into their ideal form; including a shaping treatment called VelaShape®. After reviewing VelaShape®'s website, I found out that it is a body-contouring treatment that markets its ability to slim the body by reducing cellulite, allowing the individual to, "safely achieve a toned, contoured and well-shaped body" (VelvaShape®, 2016). Another way the Kardashians obtained the 'perfect' figure was through the use of a corset waist trainer. Corsets were popular in the Victorian era amongst middle class women, yet by 1910 younger women began to reject these pieces of clothing due to their restrictive nature (Fields, 1999). However, now in the twenty-first century, Khole, Kylie and Kim all have pictures on their social media sites wearing waist training corsets. However, these types of devices can have a negative impact on women's health. When the corsets are worn, airflow is reduced by up to twenty-nine percent (Gan, 1998). Faries and Bartholomew (2015) found that using devices like waist trainers to conceal body fat can cause self-esteem issues and leave women feeling shameful of their bodies.

Understanding that popular celebrities may use a number of methods to sculpt their bodies, which could be perceived as unhealthy, is important. This allows women to acknowledge that such bodies might not be achieved solely through diet and exercise. Lola explained that if women do not realise that this ideal female body is constructed by figures that have been made up for the television cameras or edited in advertising campaigns, it could result in women feeling anxious or ashamed of their own bodies; this anxiety was observed during a number of the interviews.

4.4 Femininity, Masculinity and Muscularity

In popular everyday parlance, femininity is often understood in ways that are consistent with that of a standard dictionary. The Oxford Dictionary describes femininity as, "The quality of being female; womanliness. She celebrates her femininity by wearing make-up and high heels" (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology describes femininity as:

> A summary term, contrasted with masculinity, for the distinctive ways of acting and feeling on the part of women. Precisely what characteristics are listed varies, though passivity, dependence, and weakness are usually mentioned. (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2016).

These two definitions demonstrate the discourse of what femininity means in everyday society. However, the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology provides the basis for the definition in sociological scholarship. Within academia, femininity has been described as qualities that both girls and women are expected to endorse including: being caring, fragile, not showing emotions such as anger, or aggression and exemplifying a body that conforms to the standards of female beauty (Bartky, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Duncan 1990; Lorber and Martin 2007). However critical feminist scholarship is challenging these assumptions (Bordo, 1993; Hargreaves, 2000; Orbach, 2006, 2009).

Certain authors writing about the body, masculinity, femininity, sport and physical activity have suggested that sport and physical activity can be a space for the renegotiation of the construction of femininity (Birell, 2002; Bunsell, 2013; Hargreaves, 2000 and Theberge, 2002). Findings within the current study suggest there were conflicting views of what femininity meant to the interviewees. Some views challenged the traditional norms of femininity concerning areas such as women's dress, the way they should act and the way they should sculpt their bodies. For example, Jamie said:

> we are creating are own bodies so it is nice to be able to redefine what it is I am creating my body to be. Not based on what society tells me it should be but based on what I want it to be (Jamie).

However most other views reinforced more traditional views of femininity, such as:

> I don't know where it's kind of came from but you just think of like a woman who likes flowers and stuff like that (Catriona).

> Girls, make-up, dresses, eh good hair, takes care of themselves (Janine).

> not muscular at all, just like, tall, skinny… when I think of femininity I think of like this girl dressed in like these really nice girly clothes and really nice make-up and handbags and stuff (Sally).

A small number of participants held views of femininity that perceived a woman's role in terms of bearing and raising children, supporting bread-winning husbands and remaining sexually appealing. Beatrice explained how these more

traditional views of masculinity and femininity affected her perspective on femininity today:

> Women wouldn't go to war, they wouldn't be that strong, there wasn't that strong image of a women there. They were caretakers, the ones that take care of the kids. They are not the ones that go out and like fight for money or do any hard work. I think that's just the historical view of women… I'm guessing just from the fact that an ideal woman within society is like this slim, delicate, elegant thing whereas I mean watching a girl try and chest press 20 kilos is not the most elegant thing in the world so you don't really fit into that stereotype (Beatrice).

This more traditional view of femininity did not stop Beatrice from taking part in weight training, but it did affect her confidence initially. Portraying strength, aggression and lifting heavy weights within the free weights area was something almost all of the women at first found either "scary" or "embarrassing". Eventually the activity became more important to them than feeling embarrassed about exhibiting qualities that have been traditionally viewed as masculine, such as aggression and strength (Sheard & Dunning, 1973).

Katie described how she believed being feminine had moved away from more traditional ideas:

> it's becoming more of a positive strong word rather then it being like classy and quiet and ironing and housemaid and stuff like that (Katie).

Only Katie and Dora associated the word femininity with being strong, whereas all of the other women associated strength with masculinity. It is important to note that for many of the interviewees, idealised characteristics of femininity overlapped with their concept of the ideal female body. To the majority of women, femininity involved some of the following: having a slim body; rounder glutes; larger breasts; wearing jewellery; being "girly"; obviously spending time doing their hair; wearing make-up; wearing tight clothes, skirts or dresses and being considered attractive by males:

> But I think femininity is just girly, like, taking some effort to look good, going out with your boyfriend (Mattie).

> I think the easiest way to describe it is almost in a sexual way so how males would perceive you as attractive (Lucy).

Both Mattie and Lucy's comments support the assertion by Lorber & Martin (2007) that attractiveness to males is important for some women to feel feminine. Lorber (1994) articulates that women who exhibit physical strength are more likely to be viewed as unfeminine, consequently becoming less attractive to men. This idea, that a certain level of strength makes females less attractive to some males or makes them feel unfeminine, could explain why a small number of participants, Katharine, Lucy, Lola and Mattie, acted in a particular way in the weights room; these acts made the women feel more feminine. Katharine explained:

> you'll see me wearing pink and it's not so much a pressure but it's sort of like making a point. It's like I am still female…yeah maybe like I'm still a girl. Like I will come in sometimes and I'll have my nails painted. Not purely just to come in and weightlift but if someone's like "oh you are lifting a really heavy weight" and I'll be like "look at these painted nails!" Or I'll maybe say something to you know jokingly to remind people that I am still a girl (Katharine).

Katharine, a weightlifter, felt the need to make a point about her femininity when she lifted a really heavy weight. During this activity, traditionally viewed as appropriate for men, it was important for Katharine to feel 'feminine'. She gave a number of examples of how she felt she achieved this; through wearing pink or purple clothing, showing off her brightly painted nails, carrying her equipment in a pink bag or making comments like "I am still a girl". Interestingly, those who took part in the sport of weightlifting acknowledged they were challenging popular notions of femininity such as female fragility. Mattie, Lola and Katharine struggled to embrace this and attempted to promote their femininity in other ways, as described above. This finding is not surprising as there is a pressure within society that dictates the way a woman should move, behave and sculpt her body. Mansfield (2005, p. 184) states:

> The exercise behaviours of gym fitness users, and the appearance of their bodies are the foundation for defining femininity and masculinity.

Therefore, as the weightlifters, Mattie, Lola and Katharine, were taking part in an activity which has traditionally been viewed as masculine in a weights area that is still dominated by males, consequently, they felt the need to exert their femininity in other ways. Dora, on the other hand, embraced the action of reconstructing

traditional beliefs of what it meant to be feminine. Dora commented on her enjoyment of showing that femininity now encompasses being strong and powerful.

Another finding, in regards to femininity, was that many of the women interviewed linked femininity with sexuality and the attractiveness of particular body parts, for example having firm but evident breasts or rounded glutes. A woman's breasts are associated with desirability, femininity, sexuality and motherhood (Levin, 2006). Mattie discussed the loss of breast tissue that can often be observed in women who diet for physique competitions:

> I know for a fact if I looked like that I would get dumped. Because I don't have a chest as big as it is then if I totally lost everything then yeah I would probably, I know like in competition you look different to off season or coming off you would be a lot more fuller and stuff but I would not want to look like that because I would probably lose my boyfriend… he even said if I wanted to do this then he would pay for my boob operation…. it was him who actually said if you wanted to do physique or look better you should probably get a bigger bum and that's why I went to [a personal trainer] initially to try and change my body because I want, I thought my bum wasn't nice enough or full enough (Mattie).

Here Mattie described an obvious insecurity about losing sexual appeal. Walton & Potvin (2009) conclude that often popular media portray women with larger breasts as sexual objects to fulfil the pleasures of heterosexual men. Mattie's comments show the lengths she would take to ensure she remained attractive and desirable to her boyfriend, including maintaining breast size and also paying a personal trainer to help her shape her glutes. These actions, to remain attractive to her male partner, show that she has normalised changing her looks to please him. Mattie did not question changing her body to gratify her boyfriend; it is something she accepted without argument. After my discussions with Mattie, I would suggest that her boyfriend had an ideal image in his mind, of how she should look, derived from the popular media or social media. To support this conclusion, I look to work by Walton and Potvin (2009, p. 7) who argue that the popular media has taught both boys and men that women are "passive sexual objects whose value is measured by the praise and attention acquired from boys and men." Mattie's boyfriend wanted her to look a certain way and she took a number of measures to achieve this. Mattie was not the only female to do this. Natalie, Katie and Lucy also discussed changing their

body shape to be more desirable to their boyfriend or a man they were looking to impress.

4.5 The Female Athlete

Over the past three centuries there has been a rise in the popularity of the female athletic body; slim and somewhat muscular (Geissler, 2012; Heywood, 2000, 2007). The discussion of the athletic body becoming a popular image amongst women is important, as historically female sports have been denied the same development as male sports. This lack of development can be attributed to a number of factors, including popular misconceptions about women's sporting ability, less mainstream media attention and less money invested in women's sport in comparison to men's (Geissler, 2012; Théberge, 1991). Popular misconceptions which have contributed to this inequality, which are a carryover from Victorian ideology, include: the belief that females do not possess the physical ability or competitive nature required to take part in competitive sport, that competitive and contact sports have the ability to masculinise a woman's appearance or harm their reproductive system, and that women's participation in certain sports can result in homosexuality (Geissler, 2012). Despite this, Geissler (2012, p. 50) argues that second wave feminists, originating in the early 1960s in the United States, suggested that females' success and physical ability in sport could be, "used as a tool of female empowerment". This involved women believing in their own ability rather than their subordination to men, and in turn the media began to promote sport as an empowering activity for women. An example of this was given by Sabo (1976, p.4 cited in Geissler, 2012, p.52) of Diana Nya, a marathon swimmer. In an interview with Vogue magazine Nya commented:

> I truly believe that through sweat and strain come the stamina and endurance, not only bodily but mentally that builds confidence.

Interestingly, most of the interviewees discussed how feeling stronger and looking athletic was important to them. The women in this study looked to a number of different athletic role models and hoped to shape their bodies to appear similar to these athletes. The likes of Jessica Ennis-Hill (heptathlete), Alex Morgan (football player), Dana Linn Bailey (physique competitor), Lucy Sewell (popular personal trainer) and Serena Williams (tennis player) were all mentioned. It was

evident that the interviewees believed there had been a shift in acceptability towards a more athletic, muscular frame. Beatrice rationalised this:

> I think stereotypically I would relate [muscles] to being masculine but over the last probably year of my life I think being put into environments where people are more competitive athletes so especially like seeing the swimmers [in the gym], the female swimmers and like taking more interest in the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games and stuff and like Jessica Ennis who's got the best six-pack I've ever seen in my life so I think my opinions have started to shift from like I see muscles in an athlete. I don't see it as a male or a female (Beatrice).

Beatrice's comment shows that what it means to be masculine or what it means to be feminine is constructed and is open to change - individuals within a society learn the accepted views of what it means to be masculine and what it means to be feminine; therefore, their opinions are shaped accordingly. However, it is not surprising that through regular exposure to a female athlete like Jessica Ennis-Hill, who gained popularity as the London 2012 Olympic Games poster girl and competes in outfits which display her muscular frame, that Beatrice's views on female muscularity began to change; muscularity to her became more acceptable due to the look being endorsed by a popular female athlete. With this finding I support the arguments articulated by Bordo (1993), Lorber and Martin (2007) and Orbach (2009) that a women's body is molded by the culture they are exposed to. Beatrice's acceptance of an athletic female body was due to the individuals she was surrounded by, as well as what she viewed in the media.

To help strengthen this argument I turn to Lola's discussion of female athletes. Lola made a similar suggestion to Beatrice, regarding the influence of female athletes after I showed her a picture of Serena Williams (Appendix, 8, Picture 6). She concluded that female athletes increase the acceptability of female muscularity due to the demands of elite sport:

> she is making [muscles] more acceptable, that's where the game is going, that is where the sport is taking you and the amount of power and aggression that goes into a shot like that is outstanding (Lola).

As a strength and conditioning coach, Lola explained that elite female athletes need to become more muscular and increase their strength to experience sporting success. This means female athletes must take part in weight training and use the

free weights areas to develop their strength and muscular endurance. Therefore, as the number of elite female athletes increase across a range of sports, so does the number of free weights users, which in turn begins to renegotiate feminine behaviours as well as how these women sculpt their bodies. However, in opposition to this, Krane *et al.* (2004, p. 322) suggests that such beliefs as these should be viewed cautiously. Even with the emergence of weight training as a tool to aid athletes' sporting development, in their study they found that female athletes who competed at NCAA Division I University level sport viewed themselves as different from what they believed "normal girls" should look like. "Normal girls" were non-athletic looking females, who those in the study believed were more feminine in appearance than themselves. This led the athletes to desire *less* athletic and muscular bodies.

Nevertheless, the findings from this study showed that certain female athletes were viewed as positive role models to the interviewees and made them feel that striving towards a more muscular athletic frame was acceptable for a woman. This wasn't about being transgressive; in fact, because many female athletes are now quite muscular, for most of the interviewees this muscular look had become the norm. However, there was a group of athletes that the women wanted to distance themselves from, female bodybuilders.

4.6 Physique Competitions, Female Bodybuilding and Drug Use

Females participating in competitions where they are judged based on their physique has grown over the last ten years (Bunsell, 2013; Hunter, 2013). Female bodybuilding used to be the only category women could compete in, however several categories have been created since. Hunter (2013, p.4) describes these different categories as "a continuum between the feminine ideal and the outermost reaches of female masculinity". These range from the toned bikini category to the extremely muscular bodybuilding category. As Bordo (1990) argues, being slim or thin is now only a part of depicting the ideal female body; suggesting that along with being slim, women need to be somewhat muscular and athletic. What became clear when considering Bordo's argument, along with my findings, was that the women had to contend with remaining somewhat soft and slim yet athletic and muscular, characteristics I would argue are contradictory. This again lends to the power of the question: is there really an 'ideal' female body?

The popularity of a more muscular "athletic" look was discussed by almost all of the females within this study. Unpicking what was meant by an "athletic" look revealed a "slim" body with a rounded, well developed "bum" and "toned" arms. Katie, Sally, Cathy, Tracey, Lucy, Catriona, Mattie and Ellie all thought these characteristics constituted the ideal female form, which they looked to embody. All of these women had either competed or had, at one point, considered competing in a physique competition. A small number of them were intent on developing their abdominal muscles to achieve a "six-pack", whereas the majority were content with a flat, "toned stomach". Most of the other women in the study discussed how they felt this "athletic" look was ideal, however they did not necessarily try to achieve this look themselves. The reasons they gave for this included: the demands of their particular sport, feeling unmotivated as they believed this look was unachievable, as well as concerns about health implications. How then, does this "athletic" look relate to physique competitors and bodybuilders?

Female athletes competing in bikini, fitness, figure (collectively known as physique competitions) or bodybuilding competitions each adhere to a prescribed physique (described fully in Appendix 1). However, it is important to note that these categories are often open to interpretation, depending upon the judges who are officiating and what federation the athlete is competing within. Bunsell (2013) states that physique categories expect competitors to have far less muscle mass and a little more body fat than bodybuilders. Lucy commented on the popularity of the "bottom-heavy" look arising from physique competitions:

> there is a bit of a tendency for a bottom-heavy look… larger glutes, hamstrings whatever. I think that's very popular just now and it's showing in fitness as well. That's what the WBFF like... UKBFF as well, everyone likes big glutes and I think just in general everyone just wants to be fairly lean (Lucy).

The increased popularity of physique competitions has, to some extent, resulted in the decline of female bodybuilding (Bunsell, 2013). The physique categories, especially bikini and fitness, are closer to the social norms of the ideal female body and require a toned, soft look. Bunsell argues that the growth of physique competitions could be attributed to the marketability of competitors. Fitness and bikini competitions move away from the hard, harsh look of female bodybuilding; a look that none of the women in the current study aspired to. All of

the participants said they did not want to look, "too big", "chunky", "bulky" or "overly muscular". Even those participants who suggested their ideal body incorporated muscularity discussed how some women, for example female bodybuilders, can look "too muscular". Jamie reflected:

> I think there would be a threshold where if I like, I thought to myself I was getting too muscular I would cut back… I don't think I would want to be that muscular (Jamie).

Jamie was not alone in this opinion. What was deemed "too muscular" was a unique understanding for each participant, however when shown an image of a female bodybuilder (Appendix 8, Picture 2), all of the women said they would not want to become "that muscular". Interestingly, the women in the study did not want to be associated with female bodybuilders, in that they did not want people to believe because they trained in the weights areas, they wanted to develop disproportionate muscle mass. Lola suggested female bodybuilders "scare" women who don't understand the process of building muscle, whereby they believe as soon as they start lifting weights they will build large amounts of muscle mass, which in turn puts women off using the weights areas.

A prevalent discourse that has been constructed within society is that females are biologically unable to match the athletic build, or performance, of males without the use of performance-enhancing drugs (Geissler, 2012). This understanding creates a boundary for how muscular a female can become before she is considered to defy the social norms of femininity. In this study, those who stepped beyond these boundaries were regarded as "deviant" or "unnatural". For example, when shown the image of the female bodybuilder (Appendix 8, Picture 2) almost all of the women thought she had used anabolic steroids. A small number of participants, Mattie (a weightlifter), Sally (a swimmer) and Jamie (a footballer) expressed their belief that the female bodybuilder would be unable to fulfil a role of motherhood. For example:

> I think she's pumped with steroids. I think it's totally taking the mark too far. It's too much… not just because she's pumped with steroids… far too lean and she probably couldn't have a baby (Mattie).

> I just think it looks like a guy if you just cut the head off and the only thing that I like about that picture is how hard she's worked to get like

that, I think that's a good thing but I think looking like that is just not good. Could she have a child? She's probably too lean (Sally).

The use of performance enhancing drugs is popular within the bodybuilding community (Bunsell, 2013; Grogan *et al*. 2006, Heywood, 1998). Bunsell (2013, p. 87) found that male bodybuilders who took steroids could boast of their use almost "as a badge of honour" whereas female bodybuilders were less likely to discuss their use of steroids. Both males and females believed that if men injected testosterone-mimicking steroids they were strengthening their natural hormones, whereas females were putting something unnatural into their bodies (Bunsell, 2013). However, this is a misconception as females *do* have testosterone within their bodies, although at a much lower level (Baucom *et al.* 1985).

In this discussion it is important to consider the role of testosterone in regards to transgender males wishing to undergo hormone replacement therapy. In this therapy, testosterone is introduced so a transgender male can begin their physical transition (Israel *et al*. 1997). Although injecting testosterone is an important part of the transition process, simply injecting it alone will not change a biologically female body into a biologically male body. It will, however, help to: increase muscle mass and bone density, stimulate the growth of body hair and deepen the voice, characteristics associated with masculinity (Israel *et al.* 1997). Perhaps because of these physiological changes associated with testosterone, it was not surprising that the interviewees expressed opposition to the look of women who they perceived to be using steroids.

None of the participants wanted to take part in bodybuilding or be associated with anabolic steroid use, describing female bodybuilders' muscularity as, "unnatural", "disgusting" and "too far". The history and the use of drugs in sport, and more specifically bodybuilding, is beyond the scope of the current study, however it is important to note that there is an understanding within the sport of bodybuilding, that the use of anabolic steroids is commonplace. Grogan *et al.* (2006) comment that bodybuilding is one of the few unique sports in which the majority of competitors *do* acknowledge taking steroids as part of their preparation for a competition. Because this is so ingrained within bodybuilding, natural or drug free competitions have been set up for competitors who decide not to take steroids. So, if 'natural' equates to 'drug free', then bodybuilding could be viewed as

'unnatural'. This seemed to be one of the reasons why the interviewees were against what they deemed, "overly" muscular bodies, as the processes required to obtain such a body were seen as unnatural.

None of the interviewees could understand why female bodybuilders wanted to deviate from the characteristics of femininity in the way they did. In fact, the women were quite fixed in their perceptions of how muscular a women's body should be. Comments included:

> I think that's disgusting. She looks like a guy, cut the head off it looks like a guy in a bikini. I think that's awful… I assume she must have had to take something to get like that so either way it's not healthy (Natalie).

> it just doesn't look natural. It just looks like everything's exaggerated. I don't think you can naturally get to that point especially as a female (Beatrice).

> it's just too much. See when you are touching on the femininity kind of thing. I just think it's not attractive. She must be absolutely demented, her training, eating, that's obviously her lifestyle (Mary-Kate).

When reflecting on why the participants so obviously attempted to dissociate themselves from female bodybuilders it is important to consider the health impacts of using anabolic steroids. Steroids can cause high blood pressure, increase the chances of suffering from a stroke, heart attack or liver failure (FRANK, 2016). In fact, the majority of women who mentioned steroid use knew it was an unhealthy practice. Additionally, it is also important to consider the sporting backgrounds of the women. Lisa, Sally, Jamie, Alex and Beatrice all took part in competitive sport outside of the gym, including: swimming, rugby and football. Dora, Lola, Mattie and Katharine all took part in competitive weightlifting and Penny was a powerlifter. In all of these sports, anabolic steroids are banned substances, and to use them might potentially result in being banned from the sport if caught by a positive test result. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that these women articulated strongly negative opinions about muscular women who they believed were using steroids.

It is interesting to note that a small number of women (Jamie, Lisa, Natalie and Katharine) also suggested that they found male bodybuilding too extreme, the relevance of this, to the current study, is that distaste for extreme muscle growth

may not be down to gender at all, but again due the perceived drug use and deviance in bodybuilding. Lisa commented:

> I think she's been taking lots of steroids… I wouldn't say that's healthy but I would also say that for a man (Lisa).

This shows that although bodybuilding deviates from the social norms and gender stereotypes of femininity, it also deviates in some ways from the norms of masculinity. Rubinstein (2003, p. 1) describes bodybuilding as a subculture that "exploits grandiosity and excess. Not only are the bodies in this world large, but also even descriptions of them are extravagant." Bodybuilding is an endeavour that aims to increase the muscle size and symmetry of the human body. However, it is practised to such extremes through training, supplements and nutrition, to construct the desired body to win a competition (Bjørnestad, Kandal & Anderssen, 2014). If this type of body was too muscular for what a small number of the females believed to be desirable for a male, then their intolerance for a female bodybuilder is unsurprising. Even though the majority of the women in this study wanted to gain muscle size, they did so with caution for fear of being labelled abnormal.

4.7 The Consequences of Being Muscular

Females who are perceived to be overly muscular often have either their gender or their sexual orientation questioned (Burroughs, Ashburn & Seebohm, 1995; Cahn, 1993; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Griffin, 1992; Lenskyji, 1991). A number of women in the current study discussed having their sexual orientation and gender questioned and believed this was because of their passion as a weights user in a masculine domain. Many of the women believed this was also because they were stronger or more muscular than the average women. Ellie articulated:

> how feminine you look is directly related to, or associated by people to your sexual orientation… it's just a big old pot and it gets all thrown in together. So as soon as people see muscle they associate it with masculinity and probably everything that comes with it. If you are a woman but do something that a man does something is not right with you. You must be gay. (Ellie)

Some of the interviewees worried about having their sexuality questioned due to their use of free weights, or because they had more muscle mass compared to the

constructed social norm for a woman. This did not stop any of the women from using the area, but it did influence how much they chose to develop particular muscles. Additionally, the interviewees who discussed having their sexual orientation questioned found this negative or offensive. Ellie explained that she had stopped training her upper body as regularly, as she felt she was becoming too muscular "for a woman", and was worried that her sexual orientation would be questioned. It was clear to see that the women in my study became worried or self-conscious when they did not conform to expected feminine behaviours and looks within society; slim and toned but not overly muscular. The females who did deviate, felt they risked being described as "butch", which I would interpret as an offensive name for a homosexual woman.

Acceptable levels of muscularity varied between each woman depending on her perception of femininity and masculinity, her background, the sports or physical activities she took part in and what she found attractive. The majority of females struggled with how they wanted their bodies to look compared with how they believed they *should* look to "fit in". Tate (1999, p. 41) suggests that this disparity between how female free weights users want to look and how society expects them to look, is a "tightrope" that they must continually walk to balance levels of femininity and masculinity. The mannish or butch lesbian athlete (discussed in Chapter 1 Section 1.7) has become the "bogey woman" of female sport (Cahn, 1993), a view reinforced by participants of the current study. To be called a lesbian was considered offensive to all of the participants who discussed this topic, and steps were taken to disassociate from this term, for example: by not training certain muscle groups, covering the upper body with long sleeved tops and making sure males within the free weights area knew they identified with being feminine.

Interestingly however, in a follow up discussion with Beatrice, held after reviewing her interview and Beatrice had reviewed her transcript, we discussed homosexuality in relation to muscularity. I documented the findings by taking notes throughout the conversation, which were recorded within my field notebook. Beatrice was in a relationship with a female, but did not identify either as being a lesbian or as being straight. Her view on sexuality was more fluid; she believed she fell in love with a person rather than a gender. Beatrice suggested that she did not associate muscularity with sexual identity. Even though Beatrice worried about being judged because of being in a relationship with a female, she did not believe

that developing muscle mass meant she would be viewed as a "butch lesbian". It was important for Beatrice to retain characteristics of 'femininity', for example when going out for dinner she liked to wear slim fitted dresses. She felt her dress sense and long hair defined her femininity more than her muscularity. She did not want her choice of partner to take away from identifying as a female and she believed choices she made in regards to her hair, clothing and make-up, helped others view her as feminine. This finding supports the work of Connell (1983, 1987) who argues that a person's gender identity, being masculine or feminine, comes through downplaying the physical attributes shared with the opposite gender. Beatrice actively chose to emphasise certain features and downplay others so she could retain her femininity; interestingly muscularity was not one of the features she downplayed.

Another consequence of crossing the constructed boundaries of femininity included discrimination in the work place. Discrimination can come in a number of forms and can either be subtle or thoroughly obvious. However, in any form discrimination can be hurtful to its victims (Roscigno, 2007). Lola, a weightlifter who could lift weights over her bodyweight, described a situation a number of years previously, where she felt discriminated against and that her femininity was questioned. At the time, Lola worked as a part-time member of staff in the fitness facility where the study was conducted. She recounted a confrontational conversation she had with her female line manager, regarding not being allowed to run a female only free weights class:

> I wanted to run it because it was my passion, my drive and they said because I wouldn't attract the right type of women, because I wasn't feminine enough and I guess my reaction wasn't very feminine, if you go by the book, but who says a woman can't be angry and aggressive because I got really angry. I got really hurt and I said "just because I don't wear make-up every day, because I put my hair up because I'm not doing anything with it and I wear tracksuits every day, you don't have any right to not call me feminine". (Lola)

Lola faced the accusation that she was not feminine because her boss believed she lacked feminine qualities, for example not wearing make-up to work. Lola's line manager also suggested there was a "type" of woman that she was looking to recruit onto the free weights programme. When I asked Lola what she believed her manager meant by this after reviewing her interview, she suggested her boss wanted

to recruit more feminine looking women to the class; women who were slim, had longer hair, wore make-up and fashionable, feminine clothing. Lola did not know the reasons why her boss wanted this "type" of women in the weight areas. She could only presume her boss was uncomfortable with women who she believed did not embody stereotypical characteristics of femininity.

Whilst acknowledging there are two sides to every story, and this was only Lola's perspective, the animosity that Lola described is a consequence many females face if they cross the boundaries of acceptable femininity (Bunsell, 2013). It could also be illustrative of the inequality that female free weights users' face by choosing an activity typically viewed as masculine. After Lola's experience, she began conforming to what she had learnt to be feminine. She started wearing more make-up, adding jewellery to her outfit and wearing tighter fitting clothes. Lola continued weightlifting but changed some of her behaviours to bring herself closer to what she believed to be feminine. Heywood (1998) states that females who lift weights challenge male dominance due to embracing physical power. However, rather than fully challenging gender stereotypes, Lola instead changed her behaviour to feel more accepted amongst the colleagues she worked alongside. This shows that the way Lola constructed her body is shaped and constrained through social norms within society and through her interactions with others. I argue as social construction feminists, Lorber and Martin (2007, p. 261) state that "Members of a society construct their bodies in ways that comply with their gender status and accepted notions of masculinity and femininity." This was observed through Lola's actions after the confrontation she had with her boss.

4.8 Obsession

This research looked to explore the importance of the ideal female body amongst female free weights users. It was clear that within the study a small number of women's attitudes towards exercise and diet supports research regarding female obsession with a slender body, irrespective of their own physical limits (Bordo, 1990, 2003; Mansfield, 2005; Orbach, 2009, Woolf, 1991). I would interpret some of the women's behaviour as obsessive and potentially dangerous to their health, for example, training six or seven days a week without a rest, or counting calories so meticulously they would refuse to dine out as their counting would be less accurate. Two very strong accounts of obsessive behaviour were articulated by

Mattie and Lola:

> yeah I would say, like, I still have that side to me where I am still scared to be like chubby or fat. I think that fear is always underlying underneath everything and I think that's why I want to come here every day because in my mind I feel like I need to train, I need to burn fat, in my head I need to burn the calories here (Mattie).

> It's like a ghost; it's a skeleton in my closet that I think not until maybe in the last two years that I've got rid of. It creeps in like a cold draft sometimes is the calorie counting… I got to the freaky stage where I could tell you pretty much what everything contained and not in a healthy way (Lola).

I found Mattie's description of her constant need to come to the gym and "burn off" food surprising. As a weightlifter, competing at a high level, it would be more optimal for her performance to eat to fuel her body rather than concentrating on the desire to burn off food. This I can only presume would leave her feeling lethargic, however, Mattie's aim to shape her body, into what she perceived was the ideal female body; toned and slim with rounded glutes, seemed to motivate her as much as increasing her strength as a weightlifter.

It was maybe not surprising to observe that all of the women interviewed were unhappy if they perceived themselves to be fat. There was a dominant understanding amongst the majority of women that exercise was used as a tool to, "work off" the food they ate rather than using food to fuel their performance in the gym or in another sport. This led a small number of women towards dangerous behaviours. Lola commented that while in her late teens she trained in the gym two to three times a day whilst only eating six hundred to eight hundred calories each day. To put this into context the National Health Service (NHS) guidelines suggest that females, depending on their height, age, weight and activity levels, should intake around two thousand calories per day (NHS, 2016). This number can go up to around three thousand calories for a female athlete (Hargus, 2016), which shows how Lola was not fuelling her body efficiently. Sally described doing something similar in an attempt to keep herself slim while competitively swimming:

> When I was training for swimming I would become like obsessed with the gym. Like going to the gym… I would always stay behind at the end of gym sessions and do extra weights and my coaches were like "no just leave it and calm down" have a rest and I would just be like "no I

want to be leaner, I want to be leaner, I want to be stronger" and you think the more you are going to do I was actually just tiring myself out and I think it can affect you negatively as well. So there is obviously never going to be a limit for how muscular or lean you are going to look. I think it's quite dangerous in that sense because there is never an end point and like I got to the point where I stopped going out with my friends. I stopped going on nights out, I stopped social things just so I could go to the gym and get leaner and leaner (Sally).

Sally and Mattie also explained a time in their lives where they had experienced what they described as "bulimic behaviours"; binging on food followed by self-induced vomiting in an attempt to achieve a leaner body and control their bodyweight. This leaner body became an obsession to both Mattie and Sally and a small number of other women within the study. Similarly to Bordo (1993) I argue that that women's wish to control the body comes from viewing the slim female body in the media and that the women took part in obsessive and unhealthy behaviours as a way to feel in control and powerful over their bodies. Academics such as Brumberg (1998) argue that eating disorders can be blamed entirely on women's desire to be viewed as physically beautiful. However, after listening to the women's narratives and analysing their accounts, I suggest the women also calorie counted, engaged in bulimic behaviours or under ate to feel in control of their bodies. As Bordo (1993, p.68) argues in societies where food is plentiful, the ability to resist eating food gives an individual control over their body as well as a sense of willpower. Indeed, all three women discussed the enjoyment of having a sense of "control" over their bodies.

It is important to recognise that under eating, bulimic behaviours and over training can be difficult to sustain. Lola discussed how she only managed to eat limited calories for a very short period of time. Additionally, Sally discussed feeling "burnt out" after training "too hard". Indeed, Lola discussed having a much healthier attitude towards training and eating when she realised her behaviour had become "extremely unhealthy". Interestingly, Lola believed that females taking part in weight training has become more accepted within society, yet many females are doing so in ways that can be viewed as dangerous. She spoke passionately about pressures within the fitness industry to get toned and lean. She described how she believed women should consider why they are looking to change their physical appearance:

It's changing the mind-set of the majority of us that is the biggest hurdle. We have reached more and more and more but again we are skipping, we are skipping. It's like go and do this, go and do this, instead of someone going "excuse me but why are we doing this?" (Lola)

It is important to note that obsessive behaviours were not synonymous amongst all of the women. The majority of the women commented on understanding the balance between working out, going to work and enjoying a social life where they could go out for dinner and eat what they liked. These women discussed using the gym as a way to control how their bodies looked but not to the point of obsession or harming their health. However, it was interesting to note that all of the women were able to comment on how weight training and calorie counting could become an unhealthy obsession when trying to replicate a version of society's ideal female body; toned and slim, with a defined upper body and rounded glutes.

4.9 Summary

In this chapter I explored the interviewees' definitions of the ideal female body and what influenced these definitions. Almost all of the women felt the ideal female body was slim and toned with a small waist, moderately sized breasts, a defined upper body and rounded glutes. A large number of the women, especially those inspired to weight train for more aesthetic reasons, were motivated by this body. However, not all of the women strove to achieve this look as they believed it to be unrealistic for them. Although overall, the ideal body was defined as toned and slim, interviewees' perspectives differed. For example, each participant had their own definition of what was "too muscular" - some women wanted a "six pack" while others believed this trait was "too masculine". I also examined how significant the ideal female body was to the interviewees and considered the measures they would take to obtain it. Although for some women this included obsessive and at times dangerous behaviours, not all of the women went to such extreme lengths to achieve their 'ideal' look.

Additionally, I explored how the women's perceptions of the terms masculinity, femininity and muscularity affected their training within the free weights areas. Most women felt the ideal female body looked "fit" or "worked on", which in turn was viewed as a popular image of femininity. The acceptability of a

more muscular female body was discussed by all of the females but muscularity was still considered a masculine trait amongst almost all of the women. However, it was unsurprising to find that all of the women strove for some form of muscular development, as weight training is synonymous with building muscle mass and they had chosen to engage with this activity. Supported by the popularity of female athletes, physique competitors and celebrity figures, a more athletic looking female body was the constructed norm amongst the interviewees. Importantly, all of the women believed there was a limit to how muscular a female should look, and they were conscious of exceeding this. This was summarised by Jamie:

> I think being a muscular female is not as taboo as it used to be… however, the girl you want to see on a beach is not a muscular girl with bigger biceps than [a man] (Jamie).

Significantly, the women were not constrained in their development by their abilities, but by being worried that if they pushed themselves too far then they would become unattractively muscular and be seen as abnormal. The women were also constrained by the belief that low body fat was the most aesthetically pleasing body type, and on their journeys to achieve this they ended up feeling self-conscious or insecure. Although the women may be transgressing previous norms of femininity, such as the "skinny" supermodel look, because they perceived a toned, muscular look as ideal, I argue that their use of the areas was *not* transgressive in most cases. Many of the women came to train in the areas to recreate images of a toned, slim woman and by doing so were conforming to a popular trend in society. The findings to this chapter add argument that the women's bodies were constructed due to the culture they were exposed to. Taking a Foucauldian theoretical view the women's behaviours still showed elements of self-oppression. Rather than being motivated by how they wanted to look, the women were still conforming to how they believed they should look within society.

I acknowledge, however, that some of the women's behaviours were acts of transgression. For example, those who powerlifted or weightlifted were renegotiating the expectations of female strength. I did however find it thought provoking that whilst taking part in these transgressive activities, Mattie, Lola and Katharine felt the need to assert their femininity in the weights areas – making it

obvious that even though they were taking part in an activity typically viewed as masculine, they were still feminine.

During the interviews, it became clear that popular media figures influenced the females' definitions of the ideal body through television, magazines and advertising campaigns. However, social media is now so accessible that all the interviewees explained how this was a strong influence on their training in the weights areas and how they viewed the ideal female body, which I discuss next in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5
The Influence of Social Media

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore how social media influenced participants' opinions of the ideal female body and their use of the free weights areas. To achieve this, I focus on the research objectives: to comprehend the impact of social media on participant's use of the free weights areas. However, it is fundamental to articulate that social media influenced the women's motivation to train, their views on the ideal female body, their perceptions of muscularity, femininity and masculinity, and the acceptance of weight training as an appropriate activity for females. Within this chapter I present findings based on my discussions with the interviewees and my interpretations of these discussions in regards to social media, popular trends in social media and the dangers of social media. This chapter is also informed by pictures and comments that an interviewee sent to clarify and back up the opinions she gave on social media during her interview.

5.2 The Accessibility of #fitspiration

Social media is a platform for information sharing and is regarded as, "a category of online discourse where people create content, share, bookmark and network at a prestigious rate" (Asur and Huberman 2010, p. 492). Examples of social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Yik Yak. Social media sites give users the opportunity to share content such as pictures, videos and blogs posts. Mobile phones provide users with opportunities to constantly view social media content whenever they are connected to the internet (Anderson and Wolff, 2010). Because I had read literature concerning the influence social media can have on popular trends regarding the body, I planned to ask the interviewees about their use of social media. However, the majority of women mentioned the impact social media had on their use of the free weights areas and their opinion on the ideal female body *before* I had the opportunity to bring this up in the interview. Lucy commented that she rarely paid attention to television, news sites or newspapers but used social media throughout the day to view the content of those she followed.

It was also evident from the interviews that content shared on social media sites influenced how most of the women believed they should look and what

exercises they should try. This was particularly evident from Catriona's explanation of her use of Instagram:

> when I was first starting to train I started using… Instagram. So, I guess I was following people there and then I was starting to think, "I should do what they are doing" or "aw, I should look like that" or "if I keep training then I will look like that". So I did look to people there (Catriona).

Janice also acknowledged the influence social media had on her training:

> Instagram is so bad. You just follow all these people who you don't even know and then maybe you see them doing an exercise and they've got a good bum and you are like "oh I will try that" … so I suppose it does kind of influence you in that way like the bubble butt… I put that pressure on myself 'coz I do see these people and I would love to look like them… you see them every day (Janice).

Like Catriona and Janice most of the other women who I interviewed acknowledged they too followed fitness models or physique competitors on photo sharing site Instagram.

Importantly for this research project, social media has given females a platform to show off their bodies. On Instagram and Twitter more muscular, toned and athletic looking women can be found using hashtags: #fitspiration, #fitspo, #girlswholift and #girlswithmuscles. These platforms advertise the importance of women who are looking to build stronger, more athletic bodies. The hashtag most discussed in academic literature, popular media, online blogging sites and amongst the women interviewed in this study was #fitspiration. I have therefore focused on it for the remainder of this chapter.

When using social media sites, almost all of the participants commented that they could not escape images of women with a strong frame, toned abdominal muscles, a slender waist, firm but relatively large breasts, rounded glutes and a toned but not overly muscular upper body. This particular female body was advertised on social media as being achieved through healthy eating and weight training. Some of the women endorsing the image, on social media, competed in physique competitions, whereas others were fitness models, personal trainers or women merely wanting to support the look. In this chapter, I refer collectively to such women as "fit girls", the term used by the majority of the interviewees

Fit girls often use hashtags such as #fitspiration to label their images so others can find the content they have posted. Cathy, as an aspiring physique competitor, saw the images of defined hamstrings and glutes and looked to replicate these ideals. I explored with Cathy how she was influenced by physique competitors who endorsed #fitspiration on social media:

> Cathy: I said I had a lot of work to be done, glutes and hamstrings area, because I didn't have really any muscular definition.
>
> Me: What are you comparing that with?
>
> Cathy: Instagram. Everyone else that you look at. I suppose there's these like, previous competitions have set out guidelines and then obviously as soon as they have winners, the winners post their photos and it's kinda a case of following the winners in the federations that you like and trying to compare yourself to those federations, attributes and what their athletes are competing and their standards (Cathy).

Cathy was not alone in viewing different media images then trying to replicate them, this was something that most of the interviewees discussed doing at some point in their lives. For example, Tracey discussed being motivated by images on Instagram of physique competitor Dana Linn Bailey and Mattie regularly checked Instagram pages of women who endorsed weight training as their main form of physical activity. Interviewees constantly viewed the popular image of fit girls because they chose to follow women on social media who endorsed this look, consequently these images became their normalised version of the ideal female body. The majority of women in this study attempted to shape and redefine their bodies to conform to the accepted images of fit and strong females that they viewed on social media. In regards to the human body, as Lorber and Martin (2007, p. 228) point out, this understanding does not "deny the distinctiveness of material bodies, with their different physical shapes, sizes, strengths, and weaknesses" but highlights that societal discourse, communicated through popular and social media, has the ability to influence the way a person uses and wishes to sculpt their body. It is, however, important to note that the fit girl was the socially constructed ideal female body to those interviewed, they consumed the images on social media so often that the look did not seem like transgression but more like the social norm. However, females outside of a weight training environment who do not necessarily follow fit girls on social media, may hold a different vision of the ideal female body.

Viewing the ideal female body as depicted by fit girls on social media led to both positive and negative experiences for the interviewees. Tracey and Katie were the only two women who did not comment on the negative aspects of social media. Both women were relatively comfortable with their body shapes and had set realistic goals concerning how they wanted their bodies to look. They both found sites like Instagram an extremely positive influence on their training, describing how the images motivated them to work harder within the gym. Katie observed:

> Instagram is my favourite thing. I don't have a lot of time for it just now but when I do I watch a lot of girls who can squat like a crazy amount and I'm like "god that's gonna motivate me in the gym today" …looking at others what they can do it kinda pushes me to work harder (Katie).

Katie's comment shows that she is encouraged by the content she consumes, using those she follows as a form of motivation in the gym to work harder to "improve" her own body or strength in the gym. Katie's point resonates with a suggestion by Perloff (2014, p. 373) who describes social media as, "places where lessons are learned, attitudes are formed" adding "body image concerns can be cultivated [on social media]". My findings endorse this and suggest that social media has overtaken other forms of media as the main source of information on body ideals amongst the interviewees. Almost all of the women discussed how social media influenced their opinions on the ideal female body more than any other form of media, because it was constantly accessible. However, I found it mostly influenced participants negatively, by giving them an adverse appreciation of their own bodies.

5.3 The Negative Side of Social Media

Academic research pertaining to females' participation in sport and fitness activities suggests that the coverage of female sport does not focus on women's physical prowess as athletes, but often sexualises or trivialises their athletic performance (Caudwell 2011; Duncan and Hasbrook 1988; Duncan and Messner 2000; Kane and Greendorfer 1994; Lorber and Martin, 2007; Tanner 2011). In contrast, Lorber and Martin (2007) state that male athletes' power, strength and muscularity is constantly endorsed by the media with a sense of pride leaving male athlete's to be constructed as superior to female athletes.

Interestingly, this sexualisation and trivialisation was also apparent on social media. The majority of interviewees discussed how they believed fit girls came across as overly sexualised or trivialised on their social media pages. A prominent theme to emerge in relation to #fitspiration was how these images often portray the dialogue "strong is the new sexy". This moves away from the supermodel-thin body, endorsed by #thinspiration, towards an acceptance of a strong body with sculpted muscles. However, with this acceptance came the recognition that females often sexualise themselves in pictures posted on social media. A small number of participants commented on how women who sexualised themselves through posing in a certain way or dressing provocatively, received more attention from these acts rather than their athletic performance. Penny was annoyed about how some females represented themselves on social media:

> Another thing that annoys me is when you follow like the fitness pages on Instagram and it shows females like doing deadlifts and stuff, I have personally never seen a female deadlifting in underwear and a sports bra. And I've said it to one of my friends and he's [said] "but yeah they're fit." But yeah how many girls have you seen you know; in like nice underwear like "yeah I'm just gonna squat" … No! You know what I mean? …any girls I've seen squatting are wearing a t-shirt and shorts or leggings not …Victoria Secret, you know (Penny).

> [Instagram] just seems like it's… a show for guys… I don't understand why they have to wear bikinis. Why can't they wear [a] sports bra? Surely if it's to do with fitness... why would you not wear sportswear why is it [a] bikini? (Sally)

Analysing Penny and Sally's comments, I argue that many images on social media sites like Instagram, trivialise women's use of the weights areas rather than represent their physical power and strength. The reconstruction of strength, muscles and power being acceptable amongst females is difficult to achieve when women trivialise their own use of the area. To put her comments into context, after Penny's interview she sent me three screenshot images from the social media site Instagram through my personal Facebook account. These pictures can be found in Appendix 10. She agreed that her comments on each of the photos could be used within this study. When describing picture one, she commented sarcastically on the false promotion of female weight training:

This picture has inspired me to wear my heels the next time I train legs, so nice to see realistic standards of female weight trainers. This just undermines everything (Penny, Appendix 10).

After sending picture two, Penny commented:

She is wearing a thong while doing his belt. Probably the most derogatory thing I've seen on Insta for a while (Penny, Appendix 10).

When discussing picture three, she commented:

I swear Instagram is turning into a mild pornographic site. Why can't they just post pictures of their training, hard work, and what numbers they are reaching within the gym rather than focusing on this? (Penny, Appendix 10)

After being directed by Penny, Sally, Beatrice and Mattie I searched for the different Instagram accounts they commented on and became aware of a significant number of images of females weight training whilst wearing only their bra and pants to emphasise features such as their glutes and breasts. Some of these sites I would suggest, through my own observations and discussions with the interviewees, are targeted towards heterosexual males. However, many women within the study believed this was a look they should replicate. As discussed, attached to many images associated with #fitspiration was the slogan, "strong is the new sexy", a potentially problematic discourse. Such sexualised images affected the majority of women within the study. For example, many of the women felt conscious about the clothes they chose to wear when going into the weights areas, questioning whether these were "feminine enough" or made them look "slim enough". Also a small number of women put *less* effort into an activity, for example the weights they lifted were lighter than they could manage, because they were worried about exerting maximum effort, as it could potentially be viewed as unattractive or less feminine. Participants in the study who felt they did not look like the women in these social media images began to doubt the worth and attractiveness of their own bodies. These images made many of the women feel intimidated or embarrassed:

Yeah I think it's kind of intimidating though because on social media you only see the best of people… obviously people post what they are

proud of so it's quite intimidating. It's discouraging 'coz I kind of feel I'm never going to get to that level (Jamie).

If I am not having a good day or I don't feel, I don't feel that my body is the way I want it to be and I see someone [on Instagram] who has in my eyes a nice body I think, oh I wish I was like that. It can make you feel kinda crap (Stephanie).

The majority of women in this study feared they were unable to match up to the body of the fit girl viewed on social media; the girl that is relatively strong, toned and lean with curved glutes and firm breasts. Even though many of the women did not like some of the sexualised images on social media sites, they still felt like they had to conform to the body shape endorsed by fit girls on social media. Krane *et al.* (2001) suggest that images endorsing a thin but toned figure, although less unrealistic than those in fashion magazines, are still unattainable for the majority of women. This was supported in the current study, with some women expressing how hard it was to look like the fit girls on Instagram. For example, Mattie complained that she had to balance a full time job with her training:

[There's a] page on Instagram called "BossFitGirls" and it's like, it's showing women like not really their faces most of the time, like their body shapes and like I've gotten in tears so many times with things popping up on that and then like my boyfriend sending me pictures from this and saying "look at this look at this". I think that's so hard to achieve for someone who works like me all day and can't afford you know that kind of lifestyle where I can buy all the fancy clothes and stuff (Mattie).

Mattie internalised the views of her boyfriend and believed the images on social media represented a superior female body. This left her feeling ashamed of her own body and feeling as though she had to justify why her body did not look like that. This is something women constantly struggle with within Western society (Bordo, 1993; Lorber and Martin, 2007; Orbach 2006, 2009). Almost all of the women were insecure regarding what they believed were their "imperfections". Imperfections included: not being "lean" enough, viewing themselves as "too muscular" and having a "flat bottom" or "small breasts". The women realised they differed from the fit girl on social media which led many of them to resent or want to change their own bodies.

Within this research an important point to consider is that images in the media, or social media, cannot be accepted as a truthful view of reality - the photographer can manipulate an image by changing the camera angle or lighting and by deciding what to include and exclude. Elliot (2003) describes that an image can also be digitally edited to construct a desired outcome. Manipulation through editing occurs throughout the media, for example in fashion magazines and advertising campaigns, whereby flattening stomachs and creating a soft, toned look produces an image of the ideal female body (Elliot, 2003). However, editing can also take place on social media apps Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Effects, known as filters, are a quick way to enhance a photo for example by manipulating colours, exposure of light and changing the focus of an image without professional editing software (Bakhshi, 2015).

Manipulation of images, whether through photography or editing, is something that the majority of participants discussed taking place on social media to construct the image of the fit girl. As Berger (1972, p. 9) suggests, "An image is a sight which has been re-created or reproduced." Many of the women recognised that images of fit girls on social media were either unrealistic, overly edited or not a truthful representation of the female in the photo. However, the images still caused the majority of interviewees' anxiety because they were not able to create, for themselves, the bodies they viewed in the photos. Only three of the women in the study felt that images of fit girls on social media did *not* cause them to change their behaviours. For example, Beatrice, Katharine and Lola all explained that they could view such images with an open mind, without them affecting the way they saw their own bodies as they knew the bodies of fit girls on social media were in some way edited. Katharine talked about physique competitors who put images on social media:

> I completely respect other athletes and I think that it's incredible what they do but social media only shows… the positive side of how people are. It doesn't show on the flip side maybe how they are feeling, it's just purely an image usually it's all sunshine and rainbows… I feel that a lot of… younger people maybe will go to sort of a quick fix diets or something just to lose a few pounds. They will maybe eat less and that really upsets me because you know you need to fuel your body and they want to be like this slimmer version of themselves and they can't truly be happy in themselves when they see all these photoshopped images (Katharine).

Katharine was concerned that fit girl images on social media were dishonest, something that Lola was also extremely passionate about. She believed that fit girls on social media should be more truthful about their journeys to achieve their perfect abs, rounded glutes and slender waists. Lola thought women should also narrate the hardships of their journeys to achieve the bodies in the pictures, in order to be more honest about the process and develop awareness amongst other women:

> Tell the truth of it. It's not a ride on you know a bubble bath. You know it's not a rose petal. There are actually thorns lying there and you know what, it's gonna suck walking over them (Lola).

From the women's comments in the interviews it is critical to acknowledge that many women, within Western society, choose to post images of themselves on social media portraying a fit girl look. What then, are some of the underlying motivations behind such posts on social media? Cathy and Lucy discussed that many women posting such images seek athlete sponsorship from clothing or nutrition companies and look to obtain a greater social media following. Lucy in fact discussed doing this herself. I suggest that because this look seems to be a popular representation of the ideal female body within the fitness industry, endorsing this image helps the women gain more followers and increases their popularity. With increased popularity on social media, comes an increased likelihood of companies within the fitness industry offering sponsorship. Therefore, posting popular representations of the ideal female body on social media may be financially beneficial to those seeking sponsorship. Although women choose to post these photos, to become more popular on social media, fit girls need to endorse themselves in line with what is popular in society; therefore, their 'choices' may be prescribed. To explain this research shows, within western society, those who are viewed as more attractive also receive greater privileges (Feingold, 1992; Jackson *et al.* 1995; Orbach, 2009; Wilson and Eckel, 2006). For women to receive sponsorship from companies within the fitness industry, for example by clothing giants Nike or nutrition experts Optimum Nutrition, they must fit the images required by these companies, whose CEOs are usually male. This supports social construction feminists Lorber and Martin's (2007) argument that men have the social and positional power to construct the image of the ideal female body. I

therefore argue that even though it is a woman's 'choice' to post an image of herself on social media, through my discussions with Cathy and Lucy I would suggest that this 'choice' should be viewed critically as there could be a number of advantages for fit girls to endorse the toned, slimed, rounded glute and firm breasted body on social media.

Why did social media affect a number of the women interviewed to such an extent? To answer this, it is important to consider the differences between social media and other media sources such as television and magazines. I perceive three important features that differentiate social media from other popular media sources. First, social media has an ability to provide a platform through which its users can express themselves (Eveland 2003). Social media gives a voice to anyone who has the technology to create an account something that cannot be done through television, newspapers or magazines. Second, it gives its users the ability to instantaneously interact with each other. Third, images seem much more personal as the majority of them are taken on a personal mobile phone. This can be viewed through the example of Joe Wicks, also known as "The Body Coach" on his social media sites through his hash tag #leanin15. Wicks is referred to as a "British Instagram star" due to his 90-day nutrition and exercise plans which have made him an estimated turnover of £12 million (O'Reilly, 2015). What Wicks does so well is market his products successfully by making them feel relevant to a vast number of people. He does not market his plans and programmes via celebrities, but through previous clients who have seen successful results. These results are impressive and realistic, captivating audiences who believe they can achieve comparable success. Similarly, most fit girl images on Instagram were not of celebrities, but of ordinary women who expressed that it took them a certain number of weeks or months for their bodies to change into toned and sculpted figures; making the images feel more attainable. However, this put an increased pressure on a small number of the participants because they believed these female bodies were easier to replicate than those of celebrities. Mattie commented:

> But they make the girls seem like they are just normal… every girl if they are looking at that then it just could probably send them totally down the wrong path and it can lead to like depression and eating disorders and that sort of thing which I have had in the past before and I think this would only make it worse (Mattie).

And then I follow like a lot of stuff on Instagram and Twitter like bodybuilding pages and fitness pages and I see these girls on these pages and I'm like "oh my god I have to look like that and train more because everyone likes that" (Sally).

The movement of #fitspiration and images of fit girls on Instagram and other social media sites seems to be towards an appreciation for stronger women. However, through discussing the interviewees' opinions about social media and how they believe it has impacted them, it was evident such images caused complex responses from a number of the interviewees. The images showed a more toned frame but are still very close to the slender or thin ideal embodied by supermodels. The difference between models and fit girls is that the latter are wearing athletic sports apparel such as sports bras and spandex. Beatrice commented:

It's like a newer form of supermodels and what used to go on, you'd look at magazines and they'd get, there was so much stick towards magazines photoshopping people and doing stuff like that but in actual fact that never stopped it just moved onto social media. So now it's even more accessible especially for the younger generation when they are looking at people. I mean if it was someone being super thin and a super model and being like almost to the point of anorexic and you see their bones… everyone goes "oh no that's horrendous like you can't show someone that" but it's okay for someone to starve themselves for two weeks for a competition so their muscles are more defined. I don't see that as being any different (Beatrice).

Beatrice's comments support Katie and Cathy's description of their preparation for a physique competition discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.6. The image Katie and Cathy looked to endorse was popularised by physique competitors on social media. This influenced the women's training in the free weights areas as well as the food they consumed. Physique competitors are depicted on social media as lean. This means a physique competitor must go on a calorie restricted diet to lose unwanted fat before a competition. When getting ready for a competition, Katie described how her training became harder; her strength decreased, she was more susceptible to illnesses and her mood fluctuated with hunger. Katie also discussed disruption in her menstrual cycle because of the extent that she had to exercise and diet. Katie's athletic performance, or performance in the gym was pushed aside, as was her health and wellbeing. It is important to note that although images of physique competitors and other fit girls on social media may present this look as

'healthy' and 'fit', the extremes required to achieve this shape are not a true representation of physical health or strength. As Mansfield (2005, p. 183) suggests "rationale for exercise that is founded on cosmetic fitness can also jeopardise rather than improve people's health". This finding support arguments made by Bordo (1993) who suggests that women actively engage in their own oppression. I suggest those interviewees who took part in physique competitions or looked to replicate a similar image, were neglecting to look after their bodies. The women did this by starving their bodies of necessary nutrients in order to achieve a desired look. Being fit and strong does not equate to having abs and a rounded bottom. In fact, after discussing with a small number of participants who tried to achieve an ideal female body endorsing a more athletic look, it became apparent that by the time they were lean enough to see distinct muscle definition, they often experienced negative effects on their strength in the gym, their energy in their daily lives, their health or their performance in other sports.

During the period in which I undertook participant interviews, I wanted to be as informed as possible about social movements such as #fitspiration. When searching images of #fitspiration I also came across a number of campaigns *against* the movement to help combat women's lowered self-esteem from images on social media. This included a social movement named #stopfitspiration with a website dedicated solely to identifying the problems with #fitspiration. The site described itself as:

> bringing awareness to the harm of Fitspiration messages and to offer support for those recovering from exercise addiction while providing information and tips for a more healthy, balanced, and body positive approach to fitness (Libero Network, 2016).

The site suggested ways, mostly through images, how individuals who had become obsessed or negatively affected by trying to achieve the #fitspiration image could become more body positive. An example from the site included a list of reasons why a person would squat. Rather than focusing on body changes such as rounded glutes, the site showed an image (Figure 5.1) of how a person could practically use squatting in the gym to enjoy the outside environment and the challenges within it.
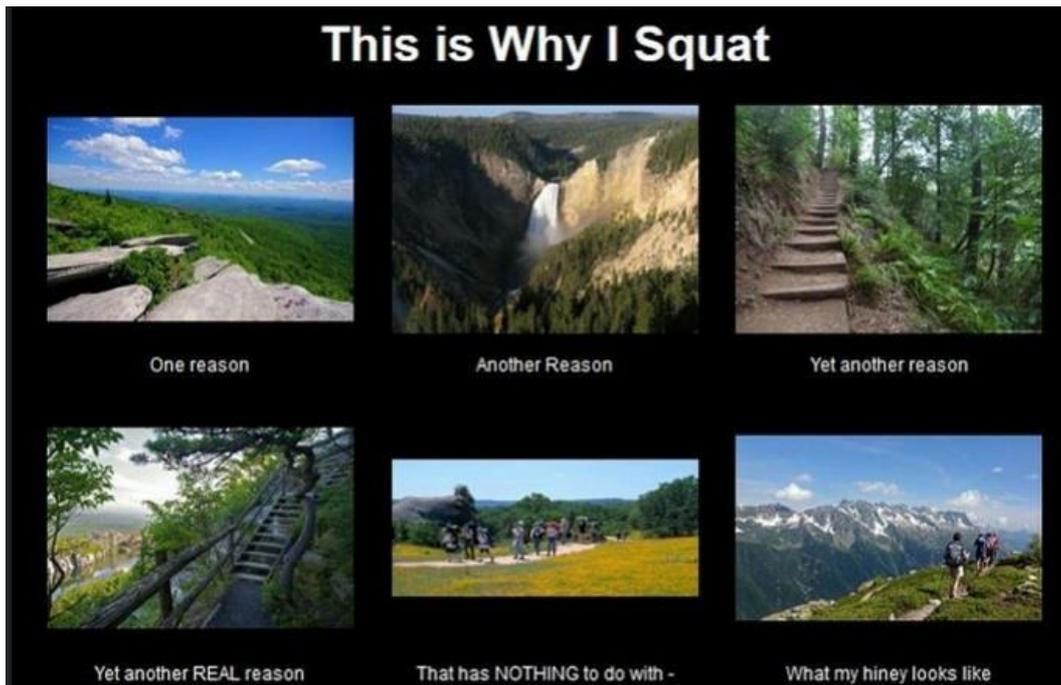
Figure 5.1: From the website Libero Network

Contrary to the images the interviewees were consistently viewing on social media, this site attempted to show women that sculpting the 'ideal' body was not the most important reason to exercise. Even though most of the women in the current study had a number of motivations to take part in free weights training, almost all of them commented that sculpting their body was an important factor and for a number of the women this led them to view their bodies negatively.

Another negative impact of social media discussed by one of the interviewees was cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, the use of electronic communication to bully a person, can include sharing comments, pictures or information aimed at embarrassing or intimidating a victim (Anderson *et al.* 2014). Previous research suggests that cyberbullying can have a number of negative effects on its victims, including lowered self-esteem, an increased risk of depression and feelings of powerlessness (Mills and Carwile, 2009; Smith *et al.* 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Yik Yak is a social media site which claims to "help people discover their local community, letting them share news, crack jokes, offer support, ask questions and interact freely" (Yik Yak, 2016). The site allows users to share content in a similar way to Twitter but anonymously, and only to those who are in a five mile radius. One of the participants discussed a situation where she felt victimised by a dialogue that took place on Yik Yak:

Sally: I went on it once on my friend's phone and someone said on it: My name or this other girls name, as in who would you rather get with or whatever. And someone commented saying, the other girl's name. "[Sally] would probably start trying to bench me" and I know that sounds quite stupid but I got quite offended by that. Guys taking the mick.

Me: So what's the app? Can you explain what it is?

Sally: Like Twitter but what you post is anonymous. So people were posting about me saying "oh she would probably start trying to bench me if I started talking to her" and stuff like that… People talking about me on it… I got quite upset by it and… It's 'coz it's anonymous and I wouldn't care if someone came up to me and I knew who it was it was because people were going out of their way to like say stuff like that and I dunno why I took that personally (Sally).

Sally found these comments more hurtful because they occurred on social media, which supports work by Tokunaga (2010) who suggests that cyberbullying can be more upsetting than traditional bullying because of increased anonymity. This example shows how females who are noticeably physically strong and have the physicality to challenge male dominance, may be ridiculed by some males (Lowe, 1998; Shea, 2001; Steinem, 1994).

As paralleled in other academic research, females in this project who were striving for a more muscular look, than what the ideal female body embodied, had to endure derogatory comments about their appearance (Brace-Govan, 2004; Heywood; Lowe, 1998; Schulze, 1990). Within Western society, Brace-Goven (2002, p. 404) concludes that the "appearance and presentations of women's bodies are key determinants of feminine identity and cultural acceptability". Throughout the interview with Sally, she emphasised that after building muscle mass for a physique competition, she then attempted to lose muscle mass because she felt she became, "too big". Sally trained to compete in a figure category requiring greater muscle mass and definition than the more popular bikini category. However, Sally never actually competed in the competition, as she felt she did not have the energy to train two to three times a day *and* complete her academic work as a student. She commented that throughout her training she was self-conscious of her upper body muscularity. She explained she would often try to hide her body by wearing long sleeved t-shirts or jumpers. Sally was the only woman who discussed experiencing

any type of cyberbullying on social media. However as specified social media in some way negatively affected almost all of the women.

5.4 The Influence of Social Media on Young Girls

Evidence suggests that UK teenagers spend a lot of time online. In 2013, two-thirds of UK teenagers had signed up to the social media application Facebook (Roxby, 2014). This application allows users to view Facebook through portable mobile devices or electronic tablets, making Facebook available at the touch of a button. Statistics from 2013 also show that out of the one hundred and twenty minutes every day an average UK smartphone user spent on their phones, only twenty-two minutes were spent texting and making phone calls. The rest of the time was spent on apps that allowed internet surfing, listening to music and social media access (GSMA, 2013). In fact, in 2015 an article in the *Telegraph* suggested that young people in the UK aged from sixteen to twenty-four spent more than twenty-seven hours a week on the internet due to the increased use of smartphones and tablets (Anderson, 2015).

A number of participants in this study commented on an increased pressure on young females to strive towards a particular body shape or size and linked this to the accessibility of social media sites. Mary-Kate commented:

> in my experience girls are so self-critical. I think it's just something that is built… social media doesn't help, like when I was at school there wasn't any social media so I dread to think what it would be like for teenagers at this day and age… you must be so on edge because people are analysing everything you are doing and don't do…. a lot of girls will feel faint, they've scraped their legs down the boxes because they are tired. You ask them about eating, "I've not ate anything that's what fitness models do." So a lot of them have still got this thing in their head, if they are not eating it is going to do them good whereas in actual fact we both know that that is nonsense… There is still so much [importance] in looking smaller and so much emphasis on eating or not eating enough in a lot of cases (Mary-Kate).

Mary-Kate evidently worried about adolescent girls experiencing body image pressures arising from social media. Through observing girls aged sixteen and older in the gym, she noticed that they ate less and worked out in order to tone their figures and replicate the ideal female body displayed on social media. This observation by Mary-Kate shows that she believes it commonplace for adolescent

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females to use exercise and diet to control their bodies. It was interesting to find that a small number of women within the study indeed discussed how social media affected their training in the weights areas more when they were younger than at the time of interview (Lola, Ellie and Lucy).

Using diet and exercise to control the body is not a new concept amongst teenage girls and has been discussed prior to the current explosion of social media. Hargreaves (1994) describes how the increase in prominence of images of femininity and sexuality in society causes female teenagers to be more self-conscious about their bodies as they are growing, changing and developing. She explains that the socially accepted female body is so strongly linked to consumerism, that teenagers are continually forced to view idealised pictures of femininity. Such pictures are extremely difficult to avoid and can cause young females anxiety if their own bodies do not resemble them. Hargreaves (1994, p. 156) articulates that female teenagers give attention to activities they believe help develop the ideal female body and increase feminine attractiveness, including more "feminine appropriate PE options" for example, keep-fit, aerobics and dance. None of these activities challenge the dominant understanding of how young females should look, act and behave. Moving on twenty years and images of femininity and sexuality are even easier to consume as social media is so readily accessible on their smartphones. Through Mary-Kate's observations it is important to articulate that young females still attempt to shape their bodies towards the ideal female body. However, rather than this being empowering for them, some young females are eating less and exercising more in an attempt to achieve the fit girl body viewed on social media.

5.5 Summary

The influence of social media cannot be over emphasised. Images of fit girls affected the women's training, their dietary habits and the way they believed they should look. The image of the fit girl overtaking the previous ideal body of the skinny model was summarised by Lisa:

> I guess a lot of it comes from social media… I think typically we would like to be seen as like skinny. But now it is more like slim but in a kind of muscular, athletic kind of toned look rather than just skinny I would say (Lisa).

Eighteen out of the twenty interviewees highlighted how social media had negatively impacted them or other women they knew. Social media was a place to consume images of the ideal female body as well as a space for remarks to be made against a woman who was viewed as strong and muscular. Many of the women also worried about how social media would affect teenage girls. I suggest social media made the women's lives harder, but they chose to consume it nonetheless. These images can be avoided to some extent, but most interviewees followed fitness pages, physique competitors and other fit girls on social media and therefore increased their exposure to such images.

In the life of a female free weights user, consuming these images was the norm and they were in some way able to relate to them. They took part in an activity that was previously viewed as masculine and trained in an area that was still often dominated by males. Even though the images of the fit girl on social media were unrealistic, the images did depict weight training as an accepted activity amongst females. The images did not demonise weight training, in fact movements like #fitspiration endorse weight training as an acceptable form of exercise. Social media images of fit girls normalises weight training amongst females. Women in the study had the option to either ignore the acceptance of their chosen activity on social media, or to follow pages that endorsed weight training but depicted an ideal female body that could potentially cause them anxiety and concern. This highlights how participants were controlled by popular societal discourse. Social media was a tool that only made this easier.

Chapter 6
Conclusions and the Future

This study aimed to further academic research on the importance of the ideal female body and gender stereotypes amongst a group of female free weights users. Throughout this study I have learnt about the female free weights community at the facility, identifying the motivations, fears and insecurities of the women in my research group. The findings of this study have added to the body of feminist scholarship arguing that the female body is constructed and female behaviours are influenced by popular discourses within society. Significantly, the findings of the study have led to practical implications that could prove useful for organisers of fitness classes at the chosen fitness facility and other fitness establishments with weight training areas. The findings also have implications which could be of benefit to those responsible for providing strength and conditioning opportunities to young males and females; as well as educational lessons on body image. As I communicated and analysed my findings through a social construction feminist lens, I believe it is important to discuss the practical applications that this research can have. These will be discussed in this final chapter.

To achieve my research aim, I developed the research around five objectives. My first objective was to identify the motivations behind women taking part in weight training. My journey into the lives of the free weights users was much more complex than I could have imagined. For example, I asked Mattie to take part in the study as she was a competitive weightlifter and I believed she trained in the gym every day to increase her strength for her sport. However, her justification for using the areas was much deeper and more complex than that. Her weightlifting formed an important part of her identity, however so did her need to come to the gym every day to shape her body in a way she believed was perfect or ideal. She did not just go the gym to train for weightlifting but to counter other anxieties arising from sources such as social media and comments made by her partner. In fact, amongst all of the women there was never just a single reason why they chose to train in the free weights areas. I conclude that motivations for the women to weight train were more complicated than merely to tone their bodies, accompany training for a sport or for health benefits and included: escapism from day to day problems, lifestyle changes, pressures from social media to look a certain way, influences from their

social circle, the environment they were exposed to and in order to feel powerful and strong.

My second objective was to discuss participants' definitions of the ideal female body and to comprehend the significance of this body to the participants. Popular characteristics of the ideal female body as described by the participants included: being toned and slender with a defined upper body, a slim waist, rounded glutes and larger breasts. I conclude that amongst participants weight training has increased in popularity as the women have found it can help them to achieve their 'ideal' bodies. I also looked to comprehend the significance of the ideal female body to the participants. Not all women strove to replicate this look, as they believed it was either unrealistic to achieve and maintain, unhealthy to be as slim as what was depicted by the 'ideal' female body or could be detrimental to their strength or sporting performance. However, the majority of women were at some point in their lives driven by the toned, slender look and *all* of the women were in some way constrained by believing that they should be slimmer.

Even though participants' perceptions of the ideal female body did not embody the supermodel-slim look, they still believed fat to be "ugly" and that they should aim for a slender body. Additionally, every woman had a certain form of body image anxiety at some point in her life, stemming from the popular image of the female body that has been constructed within society. For a small number of participants, achieving the ideal female body was *so* important that they took part in obsessive behaviours. Some of these behaviours, even if they felt like a means to control the body, were oppressive and dangerous to their health, for example: overtraining, undereating and bulimia. In fact, both Mattie and Sally both described bulimic behaviours as teenagers whilst Lola discussed undereating as a young adult.

From my findings I conclude that body image anxieties are endemic amongst participants. It is worrying that in an attempt to control body shape, dieting can be an everyday occurrence amongst teenage girls and young women, and may involve unhealthy behaviours such as taking diet pills, laxatives, or vomiting on purpose (Eisenberg *et al*. 2005). Therefore, as a feminist researcher, I believe lessons on body image should be incorporated into young people's education. Educating children about healthy eating and a positive body image is extremely important. In 2011 the celebrity Gok Wan, a fashion consultant, starred in a series called "Gok's Teens: The Naked Truth". The series aimed to give teenagers support to deal with

body image anxieties through school lessons directly teaching them about body confidence. Wan commented:

> It is as important as Science or English; because you can teach somebody to write but you can also teach them to respect themselves. When you're looking at kids with eating disorders, kids that are bullied, self-harming and taking their own lives, a lot of times it stems back to a really poor body perception and I think we can make a difference in schools. If we get them educated about airbrushing, educated about images of perfection... Just to be told that every single one of us is subjected to over 3000 images every single week without even realising; just to have that information out there, I think kids will start building up a dialogue with their peers as with their teachers that would be invaluable (Wan, 2011).

After the series an information pack for teachers was put together to give them the tools to run their own classes on body confidence and can still be found online today (Gok's Teens: The Naked Truth, 2011).

Unfortunately, these lessons did not become compulsory within the curriculum. However, there are other educational tools available for youngsters who take part in sports which attempt to counterbalance the pressures of living up to the 'ideal' body. For example, the International Olympic Committee offer support and advice for female athletes so they can:

> learn about healthy eating and exercise habits, understand the importance of a health body image, and find out how to prevent the development of the female athlete triad (The International Olympic Committee, 2016).

The site presents four short fictional films based around athletes and their families in their attempt to educate females on the dangers of body image anxieties. I conclude that educational lessons on body image should be incorporated into both girls' and boys' education, in an attempt to help the battle against body image insecurities and subscribing to an 'ideal look'.

My third objective was to discover what influenced the definitions of the ideal female body. I found that the women were influenced by many factors, including what they saw in the media and social media by popular celebrities, sports stars and fit girls. These influences inspired a number of women to develop a more muscular body and they believed athletes such as Jessica Ennis-Hill made this body shape more acceptable amongst women. The women were also influenced by the

environment they were exposed to. Because they were around other male and female weight trainers so often, a slightly more muscular body became their perceived norm. However, when in social situations away from the weight training areas and with friends who did not weight train, the majority of women felt conscious about having a slightly more muscular body. The women were also influenced by personal trainers who they hired to help them achieve their fitness and physique goals.

My fourth objective was to comprehend the impact of social media on participants' use of the free weights areas. I conclude that the women felt their use of the free weights area was more accepted because they followed a variety of different pages on social media which endorsed weight training as an acceptable activity for females; making their use of the areas feel less like a transgressive act. I therefore conclude that social media is a strong influencing factor on the women's construction of the ideal female body. The interviewees related more to images of fit girls who were toned, slim and relatively strong rather than to celebrities or fashion models on the cover of magazines. In turn these images caused the women a number of body image anxieties. Therefore, alongside educating young people about body image, I suggest they should also receive education about how images can be manipulated, for example through the use of filters, camera angles and lighting in an attempt to create the 'ideal' body.

My fifth objective was to explore how the women's perceptions of the terms masculinity, femininity and muscularity affected their training within the free weights areas. From the interviews, it was clear that the women both advocated and opposed popular views of femininity, masculinity and muscularity. Interestingly, the traditional understanding of what it means to be masculine; for example, strong and powerful, versus what it means to be feminine; for example, emotional and physically weaker resonated with almost all participants. Additionally, a number of females within the study revealed feeling anxious about having their sexual orientation questioned due to their use of free weights or their belief that they were more muscular than the socially constructed image of femininity. This anxiety did not stop any of the women from exercising in the area, but it did affect how much they elected to develop certain muscle groups, for example their shoulder or chest muscles. Only two of the interviewees associated the term femininity with physical strength and muscularity. I conclude that interviewees were by no means

constrained by their abilities in the gym but instead by their concerns about becoming too muscular and being viewed as abnormal.

I found that when the women first started using the free weights areas, there was a reliance on males to introduce them into the areas due to their perceived superior knowledge of weight training, strength and developing muscle mass. However, after this initial induction, the presence of men who the women perceived to be stronger and more experienced than them caused most of the interviewees some form of anxiety. Interestingly, in regards to training and pushing the body to the limit, Beatrice, Cathy and Jamie were embarrassed to lift heavy weights in front of men for fear of being judged. They limited their own capabilities because they were worried about what men would think of them. Taking a Foucauldian theoretical view, I conclude that at times the women's behaviours made them active agents of their own oppression. They limited their own abilities so as not to be judged by the males surrounding them. This leads me to believe that female only free weights classes would give women the opportunity to explore their physical capabilities without feeling judged by males.

In addition to this finding, a small number of women discussed how it could be demoralising lifting weights next to or with males, as they did not believe they would ever be able to lift weights as heavy, leading them to feel inadequate regarding their own achievements. Once again, this gives argument for female only free weights sessions, an argument further strengthened by feedback I received from a female who attended a clinic I ran. In February 2016 in my role as a Fitness Officer, backed by my own personal interest in free weights training, I was asked by my line manager at the fitness facility to run a female only free weights clinic. This hour long clinic covered the safe use of certain pieces of equipment, how to perform three compound lifts: squat, deadlift and bench press and provided an opportunity to discuss common misconceptions about developing muscle mass. After the session, I asked for feedback and received a number of positive comments, suggesting the group enjoyed the female only environment and being led by an experienced female coach. Two months after the clinic, I received an email from the oldest attendee (aged fifty-two), which she was happy for me to present here. It read:

Thank you for your delivery of the female class in the weights room a while ago. I have always found these areas daunting and have never gone in them on my own until after the session. Learning alongside other females who were just as inexperienced as me was great. It was also nice to have you as a fellow female who seemed extremely passionate about weight training. This combination worked really well for me and I am now quite content using both areas, even that downstairs area on my own! I've started to do weight training more than my previous training which was running monotonously on a treadmill. I email my experience to find out whether there will be a regular group in the centre where women can meet up even if only for an hour and train together in the weights room with a supervised female coach to help us with technique or answer questions regarding training? (Class Attendee, 2016)

After receiving this email and from the discussions I had with the interviewees, almost all of whom expressed an enjoyment of being surrounded by female free weights users, I believe that a regular female only free weights class would help women become more confident using the areas and rely less on the experience of males. I am aware that this could cause some form of gender divide, however, my opinion is informed by my observations in the weights areas and the discussions with the interviewees; to me it is apparent that experienced males still dominate the areas.

Referring to the concept of hegemonic masculinity in relation to subordination of females as discussed in Chapter 1, a female will nearly always be inferior to a male within the free weights areas. If she exerts considerable strength or muscularity, rather than experiencing equality she could be stereotyped as a lesbian, or labelled butch or masculine. This was experienced by a number of the women and supports findings by Bunsell (2013), Heywood (1998) and Lowe (1998). However, a small number of the women discussed enjoying training alongside males as they felt they pushed themselves more in this situation. Whether a female only free weights clinic is something that would help *all* women is immaterial - I conclude in at least providing women with the opportunity to learn how to weight train and develop as weight trainers alongside other women. I feel this would encourage more women to feel comfortable practising new lifts and physically pushing themselves without the fear of being judged.

Additionally, referring to women feeling comfortable in the free weights areas it is important to consider the opportunities that girls receive at a young age.

Whilst working at the facility, I observed two young boys' football teams using the upstairs free weights area for strength and conditioning sessions with a qualified coach. I spoke to their coach, who gave me permission to use this discussion. He suggested there are not the same pathways for girls who play football to take part in strength and conditioning sessions as there are for boys. He suggested from his experience as a coach, only when females play for a high performing women's team are they offered this type of training, and even then it is not guaranteed, whereas strength and conditioning training is considered a fundamental part of boys' training and development.

This resonated with my findings. The three female footballers in this study played at the highest level within Scotland. It wasn't, however, until they were adults and became involved with a high performance women's team that strength and conditioning training was offered to them. This was true for six out of the seven women who got into strength and conditioning training through their sport. Therefore, I would recommend that strength and conditioning sessions, including the use of free weights, should be offered in secondary school physical education. This would focus on technical ability with light weights, or bodyweight exercises and look to teach movement patterns. The aim of such sessions would not necessarily be to increase strength or develop muscle mass, but to teach children the movement patterns needed to perform exercises such as a squat, lunge or press up. If taught correctly, these skills teach an individual how to engage their entire body throughout the movement. In addition to providing both boys and girls the same opportunities to develop these skills, it would also mean correct technical ability would be learnt from an early age, so those looking to take part in strength training in the future would have the confidence and the technical ability to do so safely.

Throughout this research it was apparent that the way the women looked and how others perceived them was extremely important to them. As discussed by the majority of females, I found that the ideal female body had moved away from "skinny" towards favouring a more athletic, toned look. Indeed, this athletic look is now appearing in popular mass media such as the *Times Magazine's* article about Lacey Stone (Day, 2016, p. 24). However, as described in the article, this is "a look lusted after by many but sported by few" - the women in this research struggled with *not* being able to conform to the athletic image. Indeed, I would suggest that

this look could still be viewed as detrimental, as it can be extremely physically demanding for a female to have such little body fat. In Western society, one socially constructed idealised female body seems readily exchanged for another. I argue that we must find a way to move on from the fascination of how the body looks and instead celebrate athletic talent, participation, empowerment, enjoyment, strength and health.

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Appendix 1

Glossary

Term	Definition
Barbell	A metal bar, usually fifteen or twenty kilograms, which is used in resistance training and weightlifting for different exercises. Weight can be added to the bar at either end. Merriam Wester (2016) *Barbell*. Available: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/barbell [Accessed: 28 May 2016].
Bench Press	An exercise in which an individual works against the resistance of a barbell, lying flat with their back on a bench. Both arms are used to pick up the barbell from a stand then the weight it lowered under control to the chest. The barbell is then pushed upwards until arms are almost straight. This exercise aims to work the chest, shoulders and triceps and is a compound movement. Stronglifts (2016) *How to Bench Press with Proper Form: The Definitive Guide.* Available: http://stronglifts.com/bench-press/ [Accessed: 29 May 2016].
Bikini Category	The UKDFBA's guidelines for their female bikini competitors: The Bikini Contest is designed to find the most athletic and fit athletes that represent the ideal for the division. Bikini is a "softer" and lighter muscled look than competitive Fit Body and Bodybuilding, and competitors should be aware of the judging differences. Athletes displaying levels of muscularity (both muscle size and conditioning) that are more appropriate for Fit Body or Bodybuilding competition and may be marked down. UKDFBA (2016) Competitor Rules and Guidelines. Available: www.drugfreebodybuilding.co.uk/UKDFBA-Competitor-Rules.doc [Accessed: 1 June 2016].
BODYPUMP™	A full body workout developed by Les Mills (see Less Mills), who advertise the class for those looking to get "toned" and "lean". The class can last for thirty, forty-five or fifty-five minutes. The website quotes: The original barbell class. Using light to moderate weights with lots of repetition, BODYPUMP gives you a total body workout. It will burn up to 590 calories… You'll leave the class feeling challenged and motivated, ready to come back for more. Les Mills (2016) *WHAT IS BODYPUMP?* Available: http://www.lesmills.com/uk/workouts/group-fitness/bodypump/ [Accessed: 1 June 2016].

Bodyweight Exercises	A strength exercise where the participant uses their own bodyweight rather than free weights as the resistance to work against during a muscle contraction. This includes exercises such as: pull-ups, abdominal crunches and push-ups. Schoenfeld, B. (2007) *Sculpting Her Body Perfect*. 3rd ed. Leeds: Human Kinetics Europe Ltd.
Calorie deficit/restricted diet	A diet in which energy that has been taken in by food is less than what is being expended throughout the day. On this diet a person will lose weight. Hall, K. D. (2005) What is the required energy deficit per unit weight loss? *International Journal of Obesity,* 32 (3), pp. 573-576.
Calorie surplus diet	A diet in which energy that has been taken in by food is more than what is being expended throughout the day. On this diet a person will gain weight. Gard, M. and Wright, J. (2005) *The Obesity Epidemic: Science morality and ideology*. Oxon: Routledge.
Cardiovascular Fitness	One of the components of physical fitness that involves working the circulatory and respiratory systems. Frank Moran Fitness (2016) *Glossary of Fitness and Health Terms*. Available: http://www.frankmoranfitness.com/fitnessglossary.htm#C [Accessed: 27 May 2016].
Clean and Jerk	A full body exercise attempted in the sport of weightlifting. The exercise is broken down into two movements. The first movement is the "clean" and it involves a barbell being lifted from the floor to a position where the barbell is rested on the shoulders. In "the jerk" the barbell is lifted from the position described to an overhead position. Bodybuilding (2016) *Clean and Jerk*. Available: http://www.bodybuilding.com/exercises/detail/view/name/clean-and-jerk [Accessed: 28 June 2016].
Compound Exercise	A resistance exercise that engages several muscle groups at one time. Very Well (2016) *Which Is Better - Compound or Isolation Exercises?* Available: https://www.verywell. com/which-is-better-compound-or-isolation-exercises-3120718 [Accessed: 25 May 2016].
CrossFit	On CrossFit's website the activity is described as: varied functional movements performed at relatively high intensity… based on functional movements, and these movements reflect the best aspects of gymnastics, weightlifting, running, rowing and more. These are the core movements of life (CrossFit, 2016).

	Mullins (2015) suggests that since its creation in 2000, CrossFit has inspired a vast number of people to take part in regular physical exercise and has become an affiliated activity in over eleven thousand gyms worldwide. Those who take part in CrossFit usually do so in a group session. CrossFit (2016) *What is CrossFit?* Available: https://www.crossfit.com/what-is-crossfit [Accessed: 25 March 2016]. Mullins, N. (2015) CrossFit: Remember What You Have Learned; Apply What You Know. *Journal of Exercise Physiology Online,* 18 (6), pp. 33-44.
Deadlift	A compound exercise which engages the full body but predominantly works a person's lower back, glutes and hamstrings. The participant lifts a weight, normally a barbell, from the floor to their hips in a controlled movement. Stronglifts (2016) *How to Deadlift with Proper Form: The Definitive Guide.* Available: http://stronglifts. com/deadlift [Accessed: 28 May 2016].
Dumbbell	A dumbbell is a piece of equipment that is used in resistance training to complete different exercises. They come in various weights. Pearl, B. (2001) *Getting Stronger: Weight Training for Sports.* Rev ed. Bolinas: Shelter Publications Inc.
Female athlete triad	A combination of three different conditions: amenorrhea, osteoporosis and disordered eating. A sportswoman can have one or all conditions. ACSM (2011) *ACSM Information On… The Female Athlete Triad.* Available: https://www.acsm.org/docs/brochures/the-female-athlete-triad.pdf [Accessed: 6 July 2016].
Female Bodybuilding	The WNBF's guidelines for their female bodybuilding competitors: Men and women in the Bodybuilding Divisions will be judged through a series of poses that will allow the judges to evaluate not only individual body parts, but also the "whole package". Athletes are judged in two rounds: Symmetry encompasses overall balance and conditioning. Muscularity and conditioning judges mass, definition and proportion. WNBF (2016) *Judging Criteria*. Available: https://www.worldnaturalbb.com/judging-criteria/ [Accessed: 3 June 2016].
Figure category	The UKDFBA's guidelines for their female figure competitors:

	Figure is a class of physique competition judged equally on symmetry, tone, and stage presence (to include the stage walk). Judges will be looking at balance and proportion (e.g., between upper and lower body). Figures should be symmetrically balanced; upper or lower body should not overpower the other; no one-body part should overpower the rest of the physique. Competitors must also show good muscle tone. Leanness and muscle development is expected; however, competitors should NOT exhibit as much conditioning and muscle mass/size or present a physique as is presented in Bodybuilding. UKDFBA (2016) *Competitor Rules and Guidelines*. Available: www.drugfreebodybuilding.co.uk/UKDFBA-Competitor-Rules.doc [Accessed: 1 June 2016].
Fitness Category	Pure Elite's guidelines for their female fitness competitors: Models are to have a lean toned body with good overall muscle mass and definition without too much muscle separation. Abs are to be visible. You should not be as "bulky' as those in the muscle model and bodybuilding categories. Pure Elite (2016) *Fitness Model*. Available: http://pure-elite.com/fitness-model/ [Accessed: 2 June 2016].
Free weights	Equipment used in resistance training that is not attached to anything. Examples include: dumbbells and barbells. Free Dictionary (2016) *Free Weight*. Available: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/free+weight [Accessed: 28 May 2016].
Free weights area or weights room	The area in the gym that houses the free weights equipment.
Les Mills	The biggest producer of pre-choreographed exercise to music classes. Les Mills deliver different programmes or classes including BODYPUMP™ or BODYATTACK™ which is offered in gyms all around the world. Felstead, Bishop, Fuller, Jewson, Lee and Unwin (2006) *Moving to the Music: Learning Processes, Training and Productive Systems – The Case of Exercise to Music Instruction*. Learning as Work Research Paper. No. 6. Cardiff: Cardiff University. Available: http:// learningaswork. cf.ac.uk/outputs/Moving_to_the_Music_Final.pdf [Accessed: 22 June 2016].
Olympic Lifting	See "Weightlifting"
Resistance Bands	Equipment that can be used in a resistance training routine. Bands come in various lengths and resistances. They are portable and can be used at home, outside or in the gym. Bowen (2016) *Adding Resistance Bands to Your Strength Training Routine*. National Personal Training Institute. Available http://nationalpti.edu/blog/2016/03/adding-

	resistance-bands-strength-training-routine/ [Accessed: 23 June 2016].
Resistance training	Also known as strength training or weight training. A type of training where the exercise causes muscles to work against a resistance to increase their strength, endurance or muscular development. The resistance can be anything from bodyweight, a barbell, dumbbells, resistance bands etc. eMedicineHealth (2016) *Resistance Training*. Available: http://www.emedicinehealth.com/strength_training/article_em.htm [Accessed: 27 May 2016].
Snatch	A full body exercise, where a barbell is pulled in an upward movement with speed, from the floor, to a position where the participant is stood up and arms, are locked overhead. It is a complex exercise to learn and must be completed in one continuous movement. This is one of the two lifts that are attempted in the sport of weightlifting Starr, B. (2010) *The CrossFit Journal: Learning How to Do Full Snatches*. CrossFit. Available: http://library. crossfit.com /free/pdf/CFJ_Starr_Snatches.pdf [Accessed: 15 June 2016].
Spotting	Assisting an individual during a certain exercise when lifting a weight.
Squat	A compound resistance exercise where an induvial primarily works their muscles in the lower body but the whole body is engaged during the exercise, especially if weight is added on the back, for example in a back squat. BodyBuilding (2016) *Barbell Squat*. Available: http://www.bodybuilding.com/exercises/detail/view/name/barbell-squat [Accessed: 26 May 2016].
Strength training	See "Resistance training"
Weight training	See "Resistance training"
Weightlifting	A sport that involves lifting a barbell from one position to another. The two lifts in modern weightlifting are "the snatch" and "the clean and jerk". Weightlifting is also known as Olympic lifting. Oxford Dictionaries (2016) *Weightlifting*. Available: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/weightlifting [Accessed: 25 May 2016].

Appendix 2

Men's Health and *Women's Health* Website Screenshots

Picture 1: "Fitness and Workouts" page on the 4th of April 2016 (Women's Health, 2016)

Women's Health (2016) *Fitness and Workouts*. Available: http://www. womenshealthmag.co.uk/fitness/ [Accessed: 4 April 2016].

Picture 2: "Workout" page on the 4th of April 2016 (Men's Health, 2016)

Men's Health (2016) *Workout*. Available: http://www.menshealth.co.uk/workout [Accessed: 4 April 2016].

Appendix 3

Sample of Field Notes

July 27th 2015
Training session and evening shift

Observations	Comments
(Notes taken during my session) Area was quiet so I walk straight to the squat rack to train legs. Upstairs was booked out so I am training downstairs. Music keeps flickering on and off.	Training from 15.30 till 16.45 With the music flickering on and off the atmosphere seemed quite sombre
Two other females training, one a lifter I recognise… normally comes in in during the evening … another female who I have not consciously remembered seeing before.	Both have headphones in and seemed in the zone
Went over to the lifter I had observed before as she asked if I would spot her during her squat. 80kg squat for 5 reps. She asked about my training and how I was enjoying my job at the facility. She knew I did a masters so I told her about my project. She asked if I was looking for any more participants as she would be really interested in taking part. I told her I was yet to start interviewing but would love to get in contact when I do and she gave me her email address.	She really looked like she was pushing herself hard and she absolutely smashed the 80kgs for 5!! I had seen her in training (mostly on her own and I knew she had also worked with one of the male personal trainers at the facility) She seemed very open and honest so I told her about my project and she seemed very interested. Happy days!
She discussed how she was in the middle of trying to get a little bit stronger and trained because she knew it was good for her, she enjoyed it and she liked shaping her body.	To me it seemed like she was looking to build strength. Especially as she used me as a spotter. Seemed really friendly. Even though I had seen her many times this was the first time we'd spoken.
(Notes taken after my shift) Gym seemed warmer than usual, don't think the air con was working especially downstairs.	Working from 17.00 to 22.00, closing up gym. Quite a lot of people training. Not at full capacity.
The two free weights areas were open for the public to use all night.	With upstairs being open most people seemed to pick there to train first.

10ish bodies downstairs by 20.00 and 15 upstairs. At 21.00 downstairs got quieter as most people were using upstairs.	
Started to clean up weights from 20.00. Weights everywhere especially downstairs.	Downstairs was so messy! The metal weights were everywhere, especially by the bench press areas.
Incident when I picked up a 25 kg weight I was told by one of the male regulars to leave it and put it down because it was too much for me to carry and he would do it. I put it away anyway.	It was a weight I was completely capable of lifting. The gentleman definitely was being nice but it was a little undermining especially as I was perfectly capable lifting that size of weight. This was the second time this has happened since June!!

Appendix 4

Interview Profile Summary

Interview 1 Jamie (aged 22)
20th of September 2015 – Interviewee's own house

Jamie identified herself as American and white. She was a fourth year undergraduate student in a BA programme in Journalism Studies. Jamie played football but sustained a serious anterior cruciate ligament injury one and a half years prior to the interview. She had just got back to playing football after spending a lot of the time in the gym on a rehabilitation programme. She started to enjoy weight training off the back of this rehabilitation programme and incorporated weight training as part of her everyday exercise regime. She exercised in the gym most days, football trained three times a week and played one competitive game a week.

Interview 2 Alex (aged 20)
30th of September 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Alex identified herself as British and white. She was in her second year of a BA Sports Studies undergraduate degree. Alex played football for a Scottish Women's Premier League side. She got into weight training through the strength and conditioning programme she was required to do as a football player. However, Alex began to enjoy this type of training so much that she designed her own programme to work on her muscular development. Alex trained for football three times a week, she went to the gym around five times a week to weight train and played competitive games one or two times a week. Alex had been with her girlfriend for one year.

Interview 3 Sally (aged 22)
8th of October 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Sally identified herself as British and white. She was in her fourth year of her BSc Psychology degree. Sally had previously been an international swimmer and competed at the Commonwealth Games. She then quit swimming and took up training for a physique competition. To help her preparations she hired a male personal trainer. Sally found this training too demanding due to the physical and mental stress of dieting for a competition, so instead started competitively swimming again. She previously trained in the gym everyday doing both weight training and cardiovascular training in preparation for her competition. At the time of interview, she weight trained three times a week in the gym to assist her swim training.

Interview 4 Katie (aged 27)
13th of October 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Katie identified herself as Scottish and white. She worked as a waitress at a local restaurant. Katie also was looking to start her own personal training business. She was in a long term relationship with her boyfriend, who was a bodybuilder. Katie got into weight training through hiring a male personal trainer and was inducted

into the area by him. She had competed in three physique competitions at the time of interview, two competitions within the bikini category and one in the slightly more muscular fitness category. She came second in the fitness category and did not place in the two bikini competitions. At the time of interview, she was in the middle of preparing for her final competition of the season. Katie trained at the gym five to six times a week during her competition preparation. She mainly took part in weight training but did incorporate cardiovascular training when she was looking to drop body fat for a competition.

Interview 5 Penny (aged 22)
4st of November 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Penny identified herself as Scottish and white. She was in her third year of a BA Sports Studies undergraduate degree. Penny got into weight training through an interest in Powerlifting. She sought help from a male friend who wrote her first powerlifting programme. At the time of interview Penny was preparing to compete in her first powerlifting competition. Penny was new to the sport and had only been powerlifting for three quarters of a year. She weight trained three to five times a week. Penny had previously been a swimmer and water polo player.

Interview 6 Stephanie (aged 26)
6th of November 2015 – Interviewee's own house

Stephanie identified herself as British and white. Stephanie worked as a sports administrator. She classed weight training as her main form of physical activity. She got into weight training through completing a gym instructor course at the facility. She had also previously taken part in athletics and was hoping to do a sprint triathlon in June 2016. She was being encouraged to do this by her girlfriend who was a triathlete. Stephanie aimed to weight train three to four times a week but knew she would need to incorporate more cardiovascular activity into her training if she wanted to compete in a triathlon.

Interview 7 Ellie (aged 31)
10th of November 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Ellie identified herself as Italian, Scottish and white. Ellie worked for a small sports charity. At the time of interview, she had been living in Scotland for ten years. Ellie had had a stroke two years prior to the interview. She used weight training as part of her rehabilitation to help her feel stronger and fitter. Ellie weight trained five to six times a week and incorporated cardiovascular training into her workout regime when she was looking to lose weight. She was first introduced to the weights area by a male friend but had recently employed a male personal trainer to help her with her diet and work out programme. She was diabetic and had been with her boyfriend for two years.

Interview 8 Catriona (aged 26)
12th of November 2015 – Interviewee's private work office

Catriona identified herself as British and white. Catriona worked as a Graduate Assistant, at the fitness facility, which involved a part time Sports Management

MSc. Catriona had started weight training with a male friend. For a couple of years, she looked to train each day and had considered competing in a physique competition. During her interview Catriona admitted that she had to stop training as much as it "took over her life". She had previously been a cheerleader and narrowly missed out on competing internationally in the sport.

Interview 9 Janine (aged 25)
19th of November 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Janine identified herself as Scottish and white. Janine worked as a Management Officer. She started weight training due to a recommendation from a physiotherapist to help prevent back pain. She hired a male personal trainer who introduced her to the weights areas at the facility. Janine started enjoying her weight training and it became her main form of physical activity. She quit the athletics club she had been a part of because she believed she was constantly getting injured. Janine took part in weight training at least four times a week. Any cardiovascular activity she did came from an Indoor Cycling class at the facility. Janine was in a long term relationship with her boyfriend.

Interview 10 Mary-Kate (aged 34)
20th of November 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Mary-Kate identified herself as Scottish and white. She worked as a lifeguard but also had her Level 2 Gym Instructor Award and worked at various facilities in the local area delivering fitness classes. She had previously played football at national level. She did not take part in weight training during her time as a football player but was introduced to the activity through the Gym Instructor course at the facility. Mary-Kate weight trained three times a week and also enjoyed high intensity cardiovascular training. Mary-Kate discussed being in a relationship with a female for six months

Interview 11 Mattie (aged 24)
21st of November 2015 – Interviewee's private work office

Mattie identified herself as British and white. She got into weightlifting, through a local club, after giving up athletics due to constantly being injured. Mattie weightlifted six to seven days a week as well as worked as an accountant. Mattie had competed in weightlifting at the British Championships and two Scottish Opens. She had been in a relationship with her boyfriend for almost two years. He was also a weightlifter.

Interviews 12 Lola (aged 28)
26th of November 2015 – Interviewee's own house

Lola identified herself as Norwegian and white. Lola had played handball at a regional level and rugby internationally. She started weight training as a teenager to help develop as a handball player. As a rugby player she suffered from an anterior cruciate ligament injury which forced her to quit the sport. She took up weightlifting after one of her male colleagues suggested she would be good at it. She had competed at the British Championships and won a silver medal. She weight trained

four to five times a week and her future goal was to compete at the Commonwealth Games. Lola had been married to her husband for two years.

Interviews 13 Natalie (aged 27)
29th of November 2015 – Meeting room in fitness facility

Natalie identified herself as British and white. She worked as a Marketing Assistant. She got into physical activity through fitness classes at the facility. She hired a male personal trainer who suggested that she might enjoy weight training. She initially weight trained alongside her personal trainer but became confident enough to train in areas without him. She weight trained four times a week and did cardiovascular training once a week. Natalie had been in a relationship with her boyfriend for seven months.

Interview 14 Cathy (aged 24)
1st of December 2015 – Interviewee's own house

Cathy identified herself as British and white. Cathy was a part time MSc student in Gender Studies as well as a Personal Trainer (not at the fitness facility where this study was based). Cathy got into weight training due to her love of health and fitness classes. At the time of interview Cathy was in preparation for her first physique competition. She hired a male personal trainer to help her prepare for this competition. She trained in the weights room four to five times a week.

Interview 15 Lisa (aged 26)
5th of December 2015 – Meeting room at fitness facility

Lisa identified herself as British and white. Lisa was a full time PhD student. She discussed being in a relationship with her boyfriend, who wrote her weight training programme. Lisa got into weight training through taking part in strength and conditioning training as a rugby player. Lisa played for a Scottish Premier League rugby team and had been competing in the sport for four years. Lisa took part in weight training two to three times a week, trained outside for rugby three times a week and played one competitive rugby match a week.

Interview 16 Katharine (aged 34)
11th of December 2015 – Interviewee's own private office

Katharine identified herself as British and white. Katharine worked as an Office Administer. She first started lifting weights when she joined a local gym and went to CrossFit classes. She took up weightlifting after enjoying CrossFit and had competed at two Scottish Opens at the time of her interview. Her goal was to compete at the British Championships. Katharine trained four times a week and only did cardiovascular training when she was looking to lose weight to meet the demands of her weight category for weightlifting. She was in a long-term relationship with her boyfriend.

Interview 17 Lucy (aged 22)
14th of December 2015 – Meeting room in the library at the University

Lucy identified herself as British and white. Lucy was in her second year of a BA programme in Marketing. She was also a part time Cadet Officer in the British Army. Lucy had taken part in a number of sports including hockey and football but had taken up weight training after a male friend had introduced her to the areas. Lucy had an ambition to compete in a physique competition in 2017. She trained in the gym six to seven times a week and did cardiovascular training when looking to lose body fat. She had also hired a male personal trainer to help her with a diet plan.

Interview 18 Beatrice (aged 21)
20th of December 2015 – Interviewee's own house

Beatrice identified herself as British and white. Beatrice was in her final year of study for her BA programme in Sports Studies. She started using the weights room due to the strength and conditioning training she was required to take part in for her football training. She then began to enjoy the activity so much that she started doing additional weight training outside of her football sessions. She weight trained four times a week alongside her football training and played a competitive game once a week. Beatrice had been in a relationship with her girlfriend for one year.

Interview 19 Dora (aged 31)
4th of January 2016 – Interviewee's own house

Dora identified herself as Northern Irish and white. Dora worked at a local café but was looking for a career change at the time of her interview. Dora took part in rowing and highland dancing when she was younger but got into weight training through CrossFit. She took up weightlifting, after enjoying CrossFit, and had competed at two Scottish competitions. Her ambition was to reach the British Championships. She weight trained around four times a week and her long-term boyfriend wrote her programmes.

Interview 20 Tracey (aged 20)
16th of January - Meeting room in the library at the University

Tracey identified herself as Scottish and white. Tracey was in her second year of study for her BSc Sport and Exercise Science degree. Tracey got into weight training due to the strength and conditioning sessions she did alongside her training as a rugby player. Tracey suffered from a serious injury and gave up rugby. Weight training became her main form of physical activity. Her boyfriend wrote her workout regime. She trained at the facility five to six times a week and sometimes incorporated cardiovascular training into her programme. At the time of her interview she was considering taking part in a physique competition.

Appendix 5

Participant Information Sheet

I am a postgraduate student in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport at the University of Stirling, where I am undertaking a Master of Philosophy research degree in sport sociology. In my research I am exploring the importance of the ideal female body and gender stereotypes amongst women who use the free weights areas. In particular, I'd like to find out more about why you use free weights, your experiences of the activity, your opinion on the ideal female body and what influences your opinion on the ideal female body.

My interest in the importance of the body arose from my passion for sport, especially football, which led me to utilise the free weights areas as part of my training regime. Now as a postgraduate student and as a Fitness Officer I am developing understanding of the female body and women's participation in sport and physical activity. I am developing my interest in this sphere by considering women's utilisation of free weights. I am particularly interested in women's views and experiences, regarding the body, both when using the free weights areas and within their everyday life. Specifically, I would like to explore with you:

- your ideas, values, and beliefs about the body and gender
- your motivations for using free weights exercises as part of your training
- ideas about the ideal female body within society and what influences your opinion
- your opinion on how you want your body to look

In order to explore these topics, I will be interviewing women who use free weights areas.

Observation

Through my own weight training sessions and my role as a Fitness Officer, I am aware women use free weights training for different purposes such as training for a certain sport, physique competition, for health or in order to make changes to their appearance. Through these observations I have identified potential participants for my research.

Interviews

One-to-one interviews will be held at a suitable location for you. Within this interview a number of different topics will be discussed associated with exploring the importance of the body and gender. The interview will be a semi-formal discussion lasting approximately forty-five minutes. The interview will take place at a mutually convenient time and place, and at a venue that is private, and free from interruption. In accordance with research protocols, I would like to record each interview using a digital voice recorder. Each interview will then be transcribed into a word document; you will have the opportunity to review this transcript, to identify any amendments or information you do not wish to be utilised in the thesis. The original voice recording will be held no longer than twelve months after completion of the project. You will have the right to keep a copy of the

transcript. The agreed transcript will be stored as a word document on my personal computer and will be password protected. Depending on the topics discussed at the interview, and on reviewing the recording I might want to ask you to take part in a further discussions regarding the topic areas.

Transcriptions will form part of my final thesis and could be used for future presentations and potential publications associated with my research. Your name will not be used within the transcript. A pseudonym will be agreed at the start of the interview.

In accordance with requirements of a Master of Philosophy degree at the University of Stirling, the full word processed transcription of the interview may be included as part of the Appendices to the thesis. The audio recording will only be available to my academic supervisory team and myself as the researcher. The audio recording of the interview will be deleted after the satisfactory completion of the Master of Philosophy degree. In accordance with ethical procedures governing academic research your anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved throughout the research process, and in the report submitted for assessment.

This research has been given Ethics approval from the School of Sport Ethics Committee at the University of Stirling. Guidelines of anonymity and confidentiality will also be followed in accordance with the University of Stirling ethical practice. If you have any questions regarding the study please do not hesitate to contact me either by email: r.c.spice@stir.ac.uk or telephone; 07825173526 or Dr Irene A. Reid by email: i.a.reid@stir.ac.uk.

Appendix 6

Consent Form

Name of Study: Strong is the New Slim: A Study of the Body and Gender Amongst Female Free Weights Users

Name	
Age	
Occupation	
Nationality	
Length of Membership	
Ethnicity	

I have read the participant information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to discuss the details with Robyn Spice and ask questions. The investigator has explained to me the nature and purpose of the research to be undertaken. I understand fully what is proposed to be done. I have agreed to take part in the study as it has been outlined to me, but I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any point. I understand and agree that my participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

I understand that the research project is designed to promote knowledge and understanding, which has been approved by the University of Stirling's Sports Studies Ethics Committee, and may be of no benefit to me personally. The Sports Studies Ethics Committee may wish to inspect the data collected at any time as part of its monitoring activities.

I hereby fully and freely consent to participate in the study which has been explained to me.

Signature of Participant:

……………………………………………………………………………………

Date:

……………………………………………

I confirm that I have explained to the participant named above, the nature and purpose of the interviews to be undertaken.

Signature of Investigator:

…………………………………………………………………………………….

Date:

……………………………………………..

Interview Script

This script was used to guide the interview. Importantly, I did not follow this script word for word. The order of the topic areas discussed differed in each interview and so did the way I introduced each topic.

Introduction

Thank you for giving up your time today to help me with my research thesis. As you know my name is Robyn and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Stirling. To tell you a little bit about myself I graduated in June 2014 from the University of Stirling with a Sports Studies degree. I have played football since the age of five and at various levels. Through my University football career, I was introduced to strength and conditioning training at the age of nineteen. Since then weight training and using the free weights areas has become something I take part in around four times a week. Along with postgraduate study I am also working as a Fitness Officer.

When completing my undergraduate studies, I embarked on a dissertation project on body image and female athletes. I thoroughly enjoyed this project so I decided to carry on with further academics and complete a postgraduate study; combining my interest in free weights training and the female body.

Purpose of the study

In this research thesis I am looking to explore the importance of the ideal female body and gender stereotypes amongst this gym's female free weights users. In particular, I'd like to find out more about why you use free weights, your experiences of the activity, your opinion on the ideal female body and what influences your opinion on the ideal female body.

Are there any questions you would like to ask me regarding the study or about the information sheet you've read through?

As I mentioned there are particular topics that I'm exploring in my research but rather than having a rigid series of questions to ask, I've prepared a framework of themes relating to the topics. The interview will be quite informal; I can say more about each topic now, or as we turn to them in our conversation?

> *Note: if interviewee seems nervous or uncomfortable ask a few questions about their day to try and get them more comfortable.*

Background

To begin with it would be interesting for me to find out about your background in physical activity or sport. Learning about how long you've played sport/taken part in a chosen physical activity, how you became involved and what motivates you.

Discussion Points
- The participant's main sport/physical activity, how they became involved, other activities

- Level of participation in this activity e.g. competitive or recreational and the length of time the participant has been taking part in this activity
- Motivation to take part in this sport/activity
- Motivation to use the MP Jackson Fitness Suite

Participation is Weight Training

Now you have talked a bit about what has motivated you to get involved in sport, I wonder if we could talk about your use of the gym's free weights areas. In this part of the discussion it would be interesting to talk to you about your experience level within the area, the type of training you do and why you use the free weights areas in your training.

Discussion Points
- The participant's use of the free weights areas such as how long they have been using them for.
- The type of training they use the areas for e.g. weightlifting, physique, health etc.
- Description of their training programme
- Participant's motivation to train within the area.

The Free Weights Environment

One of the other topics I'm interested in hearing about is your experiences of using the free weights areas in regards to your surroundings. For example, what time of day do you prefer to train or do you like to use one area over the other? This allows me to understand what kind of environment you prefer to train in.

Discussion Points
- The popularity of the two free weights areas. Why the participant may prefer one environment to the other.
- The participant's preference on training when the area is lively and busy or when it is quiet
- Training with a training partner
- Experiences of training alongside female users
- Experiences of training alongside male users
- Discussing what clothing the participant feels comfortable wearing to the gym e.g. tank top, leggings etc.

The Ideal Female Body

If it's okay with you it would be useful to discuss with you your opinions on the body you aspire to have and whether you think this correlates with the ideal or most popular female body within Western society. To begin discussions can you tell me if you believe there is an ideal body for your sport/activity? If you believe so can you please describe to me what you think this body is?

Discussion Points
- The ideal body that the participant aspires towards and the reasons why they aspire towards that body e.g. influences from social media, friends, health, competition etc.
- The body they think is most popular or ideal amongst female's in Western society
- Opinions on how the media represents female's bodies and different female athletes' bodies e.g. tennis players, weightlifter, gymnasts, netball players, footballers etc.
- Stereotypes that surround females due to the way they look
- The participant's understanding of femininity and whether it relates to them
- The participant's understanding of masculinity and whether it relates to them
- The participant's opinions on muscularity and whether it is something that inspires them

Control/Obsession

Within this part of the interview it would be interesting if you could talk to me about your opinions on using free weights and resistance training as a way to control how your body looks. First of all, would you be able to tell me about whether you believe you use free weights training to control/express the way your body looks? If so why is this important to you?

Discussion Points
- The importance of looking good and being in control of appearance
- Free weights as a form of control over their body
- Participant's opinion on whether free weights training can become an obsession (whether this is relatable to them or other people they know/train with)

Competition

Note: These questions will be aimed towards those women who take part in a sport or compete in bodybuilding/physique competitions however all participants will be given the opportunity to comment on the importance of competition.

Now for this part of the interview, if it's okay with you, it would be interesting to discuss your experiences of competition, competition against others and yourself, as well as getting your body competition ready. So to start discussions in this area can you tell me whether you have been involved in any sporting competitions and if so can you please describe them to me?

Discussion Points
- The participant's preparation both mentally and physically for a competition
- The participant's goals e.g. higher weights, develop a certain muscle etc.

- The importance of competition and whether this is a big motivation for the participant
- Physical and mental stress of a competition and how it affects the mind and body
- Meeting a specific weight/physique category for a competition
- Understanding the motivation to pick a certain weight/physique category
- Pushing the body to its limits

Being Transgressive

Earlier in the interview we talked about the ideal female body. We also discussed your opinions on femininity and how you believe a female is expected to look within Western society. It would be interesting to now discuss whether you feel like you are breaking the norms of femininity or societies' ideal view of the female body due to the weight training you are taking part in. First of all, to start discussion can you tell me whether you feel like you are challenging the norms of femininity with your training?

Discussion Points
- Breaking the social norms of femininity or a new perception of femininity
- If participant does feel like they are being transgressive discuss whether this is something that motivates them or hinders them
- Participant's opinion dependent upon the social setting

Social Body

For me it would now be beneficial to move on and talk about your opinions on your body outside of the gym. The reason why I would like to discuss this is each day you may only train for one to two hours. Over the course of the day this is a relatively short period of time. You are likely to spend more time at work, with friends in social situations, at formal events etc. When you're away from the gym, and when you're not competing in sport what do you think about your body? Are you satisfied with it?

Discussion Points
- Discuss whether participant has ever received comments from others about their body in a setting away from the gym
- Participant's satisfaction with their body within different social situations e.g. formal occasions, going out with friends etc.
- Environment in which participant is most comfortable with their body e.g. in the gym, when they are covered up, when they are showing more skin etc.

Influences

For this part of the interview it would be useful for me to understand what influences your opinions on the ideal female body. This is the body that you strive

towards and the most popular female body within society. What do you think influences you on your views on the ideal female body?

Discussion Points
- The media
- Social media
- Family and friends
- Environment etc.

Picture Questions

To end the interview, if it is okay with you, I would like to show you some pictures of women who have different body shapes and sizes. Can we look at the images and first I'd like you to tell me if there's anything you like or dislike about these women's bodies and why?
Out of these pictures is there a certain body that you would like your body to closely resemble/you think your body resembles? Which one is it and why do you relate to this body? Do you have any other comments on the pictures?

Appendix 8

Images Shown to Participants

Image 1

This is an image of a woman who is competing in a bikini competition. Women in these competitions must be "toned" but not overly muscular or else they could be marked negatively by competition judges. With the women in the study it will be interesting to discuss whether they prefer this look to that of a female bodybuilder. I also hope this picture will stimulate discussions on the bikini she has to wear for competition, as well as how her hair and make-up is presented.

Hinds, I. (2014) *2014 Bikini International Preview*, BodyBuilding. Available: http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/2014-bikini-international-preview.html [Accessed: 5 June 2016].

Image 2

The below image is of a female bodybuilder during a competition. This image was chosen as the woman's stance highlights her muscularity. I would like to discuss, with the participants, whether they find this body acceptable for a female. I cannot comment on the women in the image however steroid use is something that is ingrained in bodybuilding competitions. I look to stimulate discussions on female bodybuilders and muscularity with this picture

Williandana, A. (2016) *Bodybuilding for Women*.
Available:http://sellingpricedown.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/natural-bodybuilding-for-women.html [Accessed: 13 May 2016].

Image 3

The below image highlights the three categories women could enter within the International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness in 2012. In federations within the United Kingdom, these categories would be known as bikini, figure and bodybuilding from left to right. This picture was chosen as it is an easy way to view three different categories together, as well as three different women's body shapes and sizes. It would be interesting to see if there was a category the women preferred.

Griffiths, T. (2015) *UKBFF and IFBB Categories*. Available:
http://www.terrigriffiths.co.uk/blog/ukbff-and-ifbb-categories [Accessed: 10 July 2015].

Image 4

These women are competing within a physique category called "fitness". This category allows for more muscle mass in comparison to the bikini category, shown in Image 1, as well as a "six-pack". However, the women would be marked negatively if they had as much muscle mass as a female bodybuilder. It would be interesting to find out whether the participant's find this more/or less acceptable than the bikini and bodybuilding categories. I have also used this picture as the women are in a pose that shows off their muscles and how lean the women are. Do the women within the study believe this is a 'healthy' look?

Vegh, Z. (2015) *Fitness Exposure.* Available: http://fitnessexposure.tumblr.com/ [Accessed: 22 May 2015].

Image 5

The below image has been used as Jessica Ennis-Hill is a household name. It would be interesting to discuss with the women their opinions of her body especially after her success in the London 2012 Olympic Games. This picture also shows off Ennis-Hill's abdominal muscles. The 'six-pack' definition she shows in this picture is a physical characteristic that has previously been associated with males. This will hopefully stimulate conversations on whether the participants believe this is an acceptable look for a woman.

Eastham, T. and Chapman, J. (2015) *How to get Jessica Ennis' abs.* Stylist. Available:http://www.stylist.co.uk/life/how-to-get-jessica-ennis-abs#image-rotator-1 [Accessed: 12 June 2015].

Image 6

An image of Serena Williams has been selected as Williams, in the past, has been criticised for her shape and size by both fellow athletes and the media. Williams has been referred to as "masculine". She is however an extremely successful tennis player. This image was chosen as it is an action shot that shows off the size and definition of Williams' muscles.

EPA. (2014) Available: http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2012/01/03/article-2081467-0D70ECF2000005DC-804_468x344.jpg [Accessed: 10 May 2016].

Image 7

The below image shows Zoe Smith competing in London 2012 as a weightlifter. Weightlifting is a sport that needs a huge amount of strength, power and co-ordination. In this image Smith has completed "the snatch" and is in the end phase of the lift. Smith completed in the 58kg category at the London 2012 Olympic Games. This picture was selected as it opens discussions on Smith's size and strength. Smith is relatively light but still managed to snatch 85kg. Smith is also in a powerful stance showing she has concord the weight she lifted.

Hooper, A. (2012) *Have some of that, trolls! Teenage record breaker Zoe Smith silences vicious Twitter bullies with inspiring Olympic performance.* Daily Mail. Available: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2181557/No-medal-teenage-record-breaker-Zoe-Smith-silences-vicious-Twitter-trolls-inspiring-Olympic-performance.html [Accessed: 14 May 2016]

Sample Transcript – Lola

R: Just again talking a bit about your surroundings and environment, do you prefer to train with someone else? Have a training partner with you?

L: Yes.

R: Why would that be?

L: Because I haven't had the liberty of anyone to train with (laughs).

R: Yeah I get that.

L: I've been alone training since, ever since I started. Em, I, my first, I think it was two years into training that I had someone joining me.

R: Was that a female or a male?

L: Female. Em, is always, I always like to train with females because it changes the atmosphere of a gym or the training environment. Em and because, it you, you drive each other on in a different way and it's em, yeah so two years in training I got a training partner but she was more taken by, she was doing HIIT classes and highly aerobic sessions rather than actually focusing on some strength. So that split off quite a bit but at least I was in the gym with a girl. Em, the next girl didn't really happen until maybe my third year and eh I introduced her to a clean and a jerk and this girl is amazing and has an even more spectacular background, you know, but she was a power house and she's now competing in weightlifting, eh, internationally in Canada. She was on my rugby team and I got, I'm not taking any credit for it but she was always keen to go into the gym herself and I still laugh about it when I see her compete and keep winning medals, run her own business, and trying to breakdown to break the stigma of women and weights as well. Em, but she was only here for a year, I lost her, back to training by myself and did so for obviously all the way through my rehabilitation for my knee all by myself. It wasn't until in the last year again that I have had training partners. But when it comes to day to day training I actually prefer to have females around me.

R: Excellent now in terms of when you are coming into the gym, would you say there's an outfit that you come in, you pick to wear that you feel comfortable in or most comfortable in depending on what you are maybe training or what you are doing?

L: I, I guess the stigma, well not stigma that's the wrong word. You think functionally like sometimes I have forgotten a pair of tights and I have like, still Lycra but with wide, long ones, and eh it gets in the way when you are lifting and pulling it up to your shins. But, I eh, I never used to think about it, it was more, but it depends on the day. Honestly it depends if I am feeling bloated one day, if I am feeling uncomfortable you know you can see the way I pull my top out because the most functional clothes sit close to your body and some days it is good, other days

it is not. For example, the suit that we wear in weightlifting I hate it. I hate it with a passion because when you sit at the bottom of a clean, you are not attractive and it is one of the, and it's one of the things that I am having to deal with at least with a pair of Lycra tights. You have a holding point, a hold in, at the top but I know that's one of my issues. Like I am proud of having big thighs, I am proud of having an ass. Don't know if you are allowed to write that.

R: No, no I can.

L: I am proud of my back; I have a wide back. I have a strong back. One of my insecurities which we all have one or another is my stomach.

R: Okay.

L: Because if I react to anything that I eat. I will bloat up like no other. So, you get started, you might be a little bit careful, maybe pull out your top a little bit when you are training. Em, very, very rarely it may stop me at the start. When I get into it, it disappears in the back of my head. Due to the way I work, I am always in sports gear. So, I wear tight Lycra instead of joggies because I get to show off my form, like my shapes. The shapes are feminine to me. Also having my nails done, having earrings jewellery on, having make-up on, and doing a little bit of extra with my hair. I don't always get to do it and sometimes I can't be bothered but I think, I find myself, through training and through sport I, you sometimes just want to feel more feminine.

R: Does it motivate you then to feel, because you perceive feminine to be all these different things, is that a motivation for you, that you would change, you would change something you would do in the day to look more feminine, to feel more feminine?

L: I could put jewellery on, yeah it motivates me that, that I can, yeah. It's, it's it's the, if you see, I can see a woman in tracksuit bottoms, another women and she, she's laughing she has make-up on, I'm not talking loads of make-up and she's got a, blush, she has got a freshness over her. That's feminine. But for me it's em, it's the female shape, then sometimes, the times I feel most feminine is when I can pull up a pair of high heels and have a cocktail dress on me and be fully, that's as most feminine as I would go. It has bugged me in the past when I have been pulled up and been not called feminine.

R: Okay, yeah you told me you had a story about this. What…

L: In a very unprofessional manner.

R: Do you mind saying what was that experience?

L: I was trying to build a programme to gently introduce women to the gym. Which has always been a side passion of mine through my work and eh, we got the approval to run a trial for four weeks. Outstanding! And I gradually, and I ran the trial, got really positive feedback and introduced, introduced them gradually into the gym so learning techniques which is one of the hindrances that women have

going into the gym, not knowing what to do and look silly while doing it because someone else might know, or people will look at them. And eh, knowing, giving them the knowledge of what to do they then realised that half the people in there don't know what they are doing. Men or female, like then you can help. They have the confidence, they have the knowledge to move forward and then you gradually, as you build that in and brought all the review and hoping, brought this forward and set it up with my manager. I got told they were really positive about it but I would have to teach, I would have, I would have had to teach someone else to run the course and I asked why is that? Because you know it was my programme, I set it up, I wanted to run it because it was my passion, my drive and they said because I wouldn't attract the right type of women because I wasn't feminine enough. And I guess my reaction wasn't very feminine (laughs). If you go by the book, but who says a woman can't be angry and aggressive because I got really angry. I got really hurt and I said just because I don't wear make-up every day, because I put my hair up because I'm not doing anything with it and I wear tracksuits every day, you don't have any right to call not call me feminine.

R: How did that unfold? What happened?

L: Well, they quickly recognised their mistake and started back tracking fast but honestly I said this meeting is over and eh, and I walked out of there. I said this programme won't take place unless I drive it and it fell dead because of it and it wasn't a nice experience and maybe, so, later in the years like the fact I do put the effort to put on make-up, I do get to wear jewellery. So it's not only the fact that it is men that put you down, it is other women as well. Em, and I went against that due to my previous experience. I said well I will have earrings, I'm not the one who will have a necklace dangling over someone but I will put my, I will have a little bit of make-up on because that's something, maybe not in the right or the wrong way, but it makes me feel better.

Appendix 10

Instagram Images Sent from Penny

Picture 1
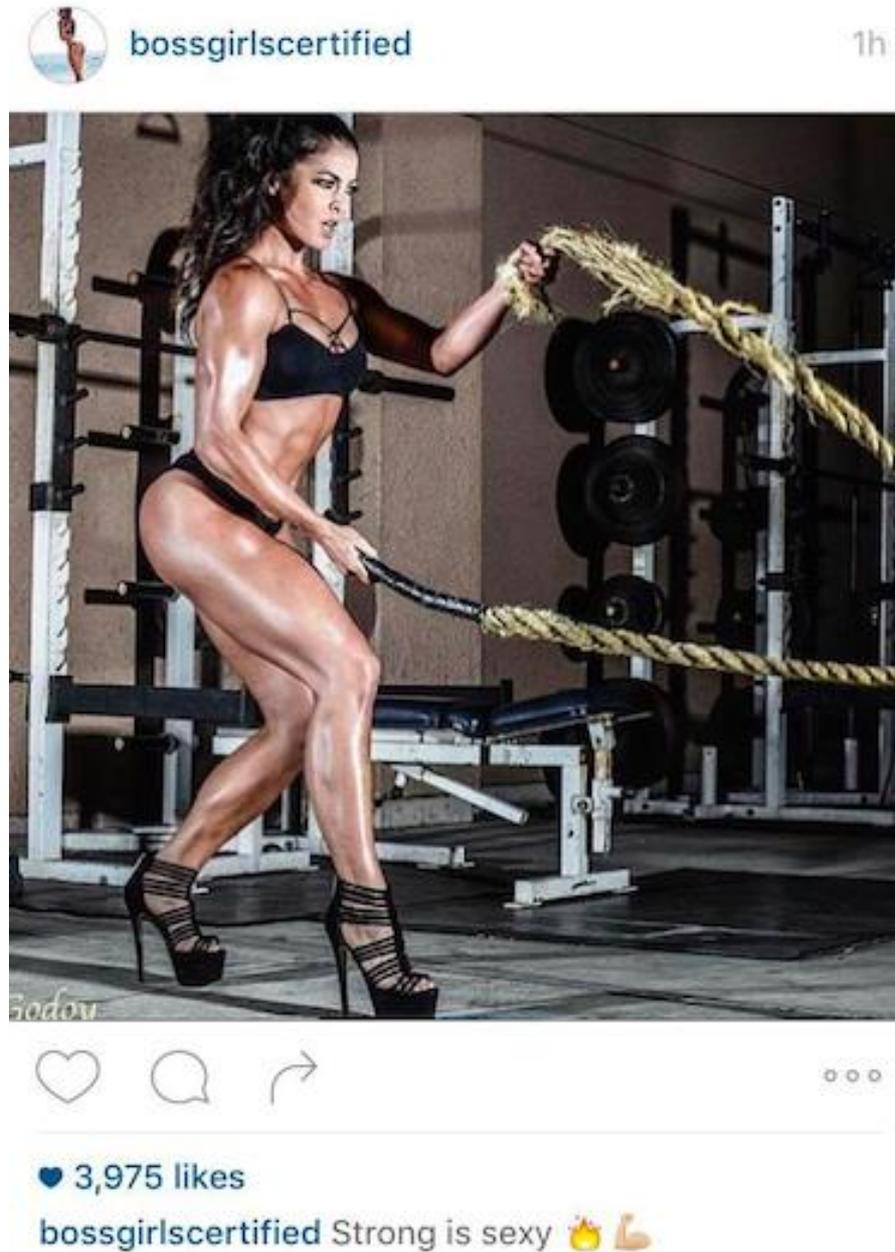
Bossgirlcertified (2015) Strong is sexy. *Instagram*. 5 December: Available
https://www.instagram.com/bossgirlscertified/?hl=en [Accessed 5
December 2015].

Picture 2

Bailey, C. (2015) Bailey Image. *Instagram,* 20 December. Available: https://www.instagram.com/baileyimage/ [Accessed 20 December 2016].

Picture 3
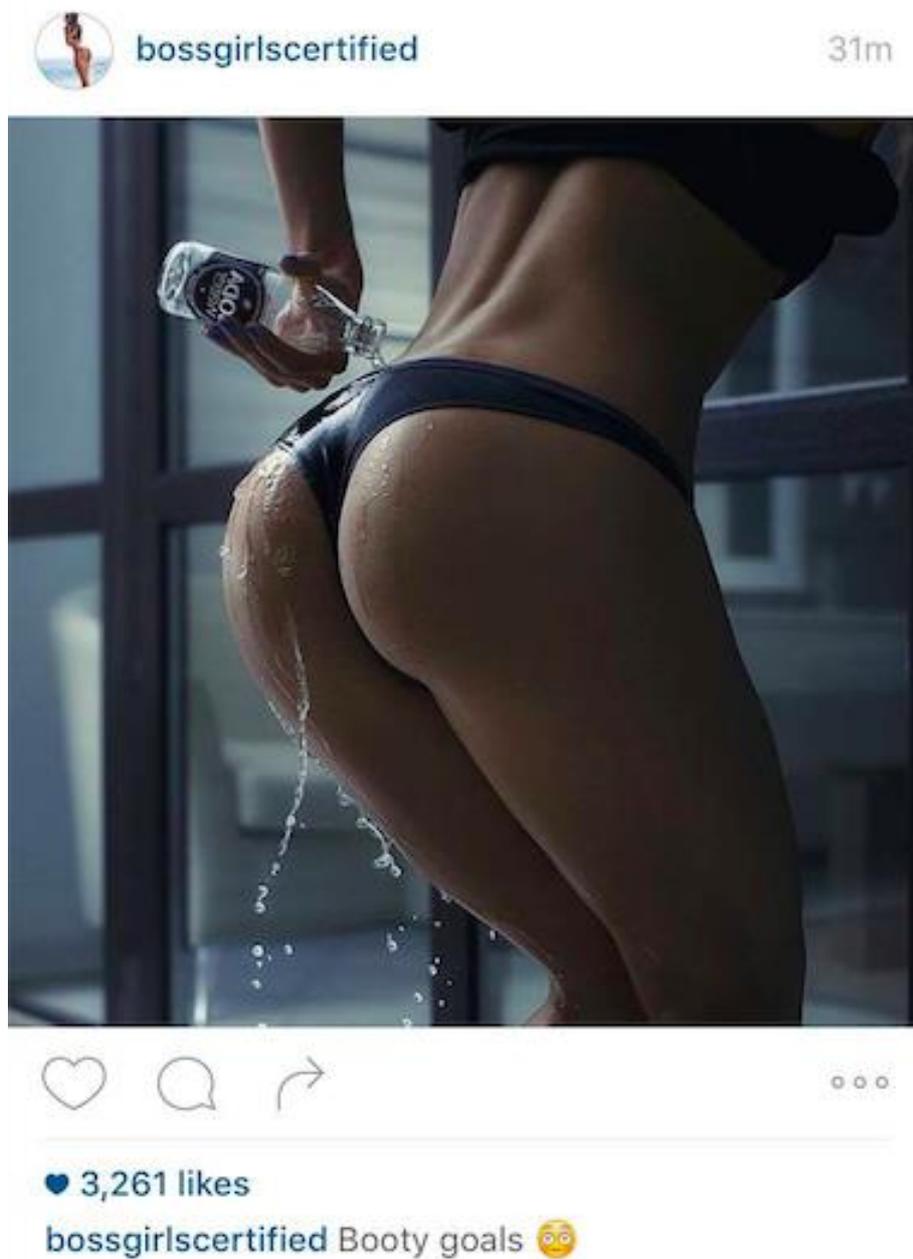
Bossgirlcertified (2015) Booty goals. *Instagram*, 11 December. Available:
https://www.instagram.com/bossgirlscertified/?hl=en [Accessed 11
December 2016].