Towards a critical geography of physical activity: Emotions and the gendered boundary-making of an everyday exercise environment

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Abstract: In this article, we put forward a proposal for a critical geography of physical activity that attunes to experience while centring on the socio-spatial processes and power structures enabling and constraining physical activity participation. Drawing on our research that explored women's and men's emotional geographies of an everyday exercise environment—the gym—in a Canadian city, we show how this approach can identify otherwise invisible environmental influences on physical activity participation. Our thematic analysis reveals that the gym environment is generative of three place-based emotive processes of dislocation, evaluation, and sexualisation that collectively configure an unevenly gendered emotional architecture of place. Through this interstitial structure, the boundaries of localised hierarchies of masculinities and femininities become felt in ways that create tensions and anxieties, which in turn, reinforce gendered boundaries on physical activity participation. Two additional themes reveal how gendered motivation and individual factors mediate negative emotional experiences. Our findings indicate that emotional geographies are one way in which gender disparities in physical activity are naturalised at the scale of the everyday exercise environment. Interventions for gender equity in physical activity would benefit from being empathetically attuned to the subtleties of place-based experiences. More widely, bringing emotions into geographies of physical activity sheds light on the larger question of the role of place in (re)producing gendered health inequities, with implications for geographical research on health and social justice. Future critical geographical inquiry is necessary to ensure that public health interventions are grounded in the experiential realities of practicing physical activity in particular places.

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1 Introduction

Closing the gender gap in leisure time physical activity is a crucial component of increasing population-level participation in physical activity and has important implications for overall population health (Mielke et al., 2018, p. 481). A recent study reported that a 4.8 percent reduction in the number of women falling short of the World Health Organisation (WHO) physical activity guidelines across the world would be sufficient to achieve the WHO target of a 10% decrease in global inactivity (Mielke et al., 2018). Yet, health geographers have been primarily concerned with the effects of built environments on physical activity, often focusing on obesogenic environments and walkability (Andrews, Hall, Evans, & Colls, 2012; Rosenberg, 2016), with less attention to the gendered and experiential aspects of physical activity (Andrews et al., 2012; Blacksher & Lovasi, 2012). Given persistent gendered (Guthhold et al., 2018) and other social (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexuality) inequities in physical activity participation, we argue that a more critical geographical approach is necessary to ensure that public health interventions are grounded in the experiential realities of practicing physical activity in particular places.

In this article, we put forward a proposal for a critical geography of physical activity as one that attunes to experience while centring on the socio-spatial processes and power structures enabling and constraining physical activity participation. Drawing on our research that explored women's and men's emotional geographies of an everyday exercise environment—the gym—in a Canadian city, we show how this approach can identify otherwise invisible environmental influences on physical activity participation. In doing so, we build on Barnfield's (2016, p. 1) call for public health approaches to physical activity to account for "affective and spatial

entanglements" by showing how addressing these entanglements in a place like the gym is necessary to inform interventions for health equity. For one, we demonstrate how bringing emotions into geographies of physical activity sheds light on the mechanisms by which place plays a role in (re)producing gendered health inequities, with wider implications for geographies of health and social justice. Second, we add empirical voice to address ongoing critiques that emotional geographies are often devoid of action and policy relevance (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Barnfield, 2016; Thien, 2005; Windram-Gedes, 2013; Wright, 2010;) by evidencing how the emotional dimensions of space matter materially for physical activity opportunities and, in turn, health. Third, we contribute across the fields of geographies of health and physical activity, feminist geographies, and emotional geographies by building on their intersections and putting into practice the theoretical proposition put forth by Thien and Del Casino Jr. (2012, p. 1149) that "the gendering of health and health care is simultaneously about the processes of emotion." In connecting these fields, we take Thien and Del Casino Jr.'s claim a step further to show that gender, health, and emotions can be mobilised into a lens for identifying and intervening in inequities.

Gyms are part of the everyday landscape for physical activity opportunities with nearly 6 million health and fitness club members in Canada and 162 million members globally (Walsh, 2017), but they can be emotionally fraught environments. Sassatelli (2010, p. 69), based on years of cross-country ethnographic research, claims that "a measure of anxiety seems to be a well-recognised feature of fitness gyms." Frew and McGillivray (2005, p. 173) go so far as to characterise gyms as "spaces of fear" in that they encapsulate a gap between body expectations and the lived experiences of gym users (see also Sassatelli, 2010). Women in particular are reported to experience psychological distress in gym environments related to social comparisons, body evaluation concerns, and social physique anxiety (Kruisselbrink, Dodge, Swanburg, & MacLeod, 2004; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012; Salvatore & Marecek, 2010; Wasilenko, Kulik, & Wanic, 2007). From a geographical perspective, a handful of studies have considered issues of gym access (Evans, Cummins, & Brown, 2013; Pascual Regidor, Martínez, Calle, & Domínguez, 2009), but little geographical work has ventured inside the gym. Of the work that has, the focus has been on bodybuilding gyms (Andrews, Sudwell, & Sparkes, 2005; Johnston, 1995, 1996, 1998) and a gym exclusively for pregnant women (Nash, 2012). Johnston's (1996) work on women bodybuilders has called attention to the gendering of bodies vis-à-vis the gender-dimorphic spatialities of gym environments, yet non-competitive everyday exercise experiences in gyms are under-studied from a geographical perspective. In an era

when exercise is increasingly 'prescribed as medicine'—an issue that is not unproblematic (see Williams and Gibson, 2018)—gyms have arguably become default places for a great deal of physical activity practices. Although gyms comprise discrete facility sites, it is still possible to speak of "the gym as a world in itself"—a particular type of place with shared contextual features due to its common material and social organisation structured around exercising the body (Sassatelli, 1999, p. 229; Sassatelli, 2010). We contend that addressing gendered and other social disparities in physical activity requires critical geographical approaches that scrutinise the normalisation of difference in such everyday environments.

2 Conceptualising a critical geography of physical activity

2.1 Moving beyond the built environment

Despite growing work on critical geographies of obesity (Colls & Evans, 2014; Evans, 2006a) and critical geographies of sport (Koch, 2017), there has been little conceptualisation of what critical geographies of *physical activity* might look like. This may be because health geography research has largely subsumed physical activity into anti-obesity-oriented research agendas. This entanglement reflects growing research and policy concern with obesogenic environments; that is, built environments understood to encourage behaviours related to increased bodyweight (i.e., sedentariness and high caloric intake) (Townsend & Lake, 2009). Yet, the obesogenic environments thesis delimits physical activity to the prescriptive role of 'calories out' in a biomedical model of energy balance (Guthman, 2012), relegating physical activity as a means to an end rather than a topic of geographical study in its own right. This is not to say that physical activity does not play an important role in obesity, but rather the potentially positive implications of physical activity range well beyond body weight, from physical health benefits like chronic disease prevention to mental health benefits such as reduced risk of depression (Lee et al., 2012; Warburton et al., 2006). A more recent body of qualitative work on exercise and environment has emerged in health geography and made headway in refocusing attention to the benefits of physical activity outside the frame of obesity (Hitchings & Latham, 2017). Notwithstanding earlier contributions from Evans (2006b) and Windram-Geddes (2013) on girls' experiences in school-based physical activity settings, much of this research fails to engage substantively with questions of gender, diversity, and equity (Coen, 2018). Conversely, longstanding work in social and cultural geography that has foregrounded critical perspectives on gender in sporting and leisure activities, from body-building (Johnston, 1996) to surfing (Evers, 2009; Roy, 2014; Waitt, 2008) to walking (Clement & Waitt, 2017) to roller derby

(Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2012), has rarely done so within an explicit frame of health. Andrews (2016, p. 3) has recently called for greater cross-talk amongst sports and health geographers, in particular around the health-related aspects of sport and non-elite "physical activities associated with training/'working out'."

In the same vein that Colls and Evans (2014) highlight how critical geographies of obesity challenge the coupling of body weight and disease, we contend that critical geographies of physical activity can productively unhinge physical activity from the obesity priority in geographical research. This opens up the possibility for geographies of physical activity to be sceptical of health orthodoxies and assumptions that moralise about individual behaviour (Brown & Duncan, 2002; Colls & Evans, 2014), foreground questions of equity, agency, and experience (Andrews et al., 2012; Blacksher & Lovasi, 2012; Colls & Evans, 2014), and attend to the socio-spatial processes and factors that work to support or exclude people in being active (Colls & Evans, 2014; Hopkins, 2008). Akin to how emerging critical geographies of sport highlight the constitutive role of sporting spaces in power relations (Koch, 2017), critical geographies of physical activity would likewise seek to identify and dismantle power dynamics underpinning inequities physical activity practices and opportunities. As opposed to critical geographies of sport, however, critical geographies of physical activity encompass a wider array of body movement activities and venues, and have a core concern with health and wellbeing (see also Andrews, 2016).

Critiques levied at the obesity and walkability literature caution that favouritism of neighbourhood built environments is reminiscent of environmental determinism (Andrews et al., 2012; Blacksher & Lovasi, 2012; Colls & Evans, 2014; Rosenberg, 2016). Moreover, studies indicate that neighbourhood is not necessarily the most salient geography for all types of physical activity (Troped et al., 2010; Zenk et al., 2011). Neighbourhood-level analyses do not capture the dynamics *within* physical activity places, such as gyms, that may impact upon people's engagement with health-related opportunities. Biehler and Simon (2010, p. 174) argue that "the pervasive fallacy of enclosure"—the assumption that indoor environments are bounded-off from other scales—has perpetuated gaps in our understanding of the spaces and processes shaping health. According to their logic, it is precisely because of the centrality of the indoors in our daily lives that interventions *inside* can reverberate across various scales and modify human-environment relations. From this perspective, it is possible to situate the gym as a physical activity place that is at once influenced by, and has the potential to influence, the gendered nature of physical activity more widely.

2.2 Bringing in emotions

Challenging the fallacy of enclosure requires thinking beyond the materiality of indoor environments. As Lin's (2015, p. 297) work on airplane cabins exemplifies, it is also the infectious quality of *affective atmospheres*—or collective affective qualities of places irreducible to constituent parts (Anderson, 2009)—that yields the "potential to spill over into other parallel time spaces as their design templates gain currency elsewhere." These flows across scales matter because—as feminist geographers have long argued—they are the mechanisms by which the micro contexts of everyday life connect to wider structures of power relations. We therefore see part of the task of a critical geography of physical activity as bringing emotions out in the open and considering their role in the production of health—especially gendered—inequities. This acknowledgement seeks to counter the historical relegation of emotions to more private, so-called feminised domains (Anderson & Smith, 2001; Thien, 2005). While geographers have made important contributions towards demonstrating the policy and practice relevance of emotions in the areas of alcohol studies and social activism (Brown and Pickerill, 2009; Jayne et al., 2010; Jayne et al., 2012), when it comes to physical activity "the emotional is written out of policy" (Windram-Geddes, 2013, p. 48; Barnfield, 2016). A core question in a critical geography of physical activity then is how do we mobilise feminist emotional geographies toward actionable ends?

An ongoing concern is that the emotional geographies literature remains abstract, in ways that preclude delivering on feminist social justice aims. Wright (2010), for example, warns about a "fetishization of language that might miss out on making the very connections that the more progressively minded and certainly many feminists in the field advocate" (p. 820; see also Bondi & Davidson, 2011). Further, feminist geographers working in emotions have highlighted that the conceptual and semantic distinction between 'affect' and 'emotion' may simply be another iteration of false binary logic that reduces emotion to the realm of the personal/private and elevates affect to political/public (Thien, 2005; Wright, 2010). Following others (Bondi & Davidson, 2011; Foley, 2017; Roy, 2014; Thien, 2005; Wright, 2010), we consciously refuse to draw a distinction between these terms, and deliberately, as Wright (2010) says, keep our

"sights on the work that directly puts the theory in connection with activist practice" (p. 821). These sights are at the centre of a critical geography of physical activity.

Wider feminist theorising on emotion and emotional geographies scholarship provides a way to think about emotion as mechanism via which place gets under our skin and affects our health through what our bodies *do* in space. In Ahmed's (2014) sociality of emotions, emotions are conceived to "work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies. Bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others" (p. 1). From this perspective emotions are a (seemingly) invisible driver with material effects on how people participate in and experience gyms and other physical activity sites. Davidson and Milligan (2004, p. 524) use the metaphor of "connective tissue" to articulate the formative way that emotions interlink people and place. These approaches consider emotions to be relational, emerging in transactions between people and places and among people within places, not inherent to objects or static in places (Ahmed, 2014; Bondi et al., 2005; Davidson & Milligan, 2004). For Ahmed, emotions play an active role in constructing difference in that "emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects" (p. 10). If we take emotions as a difference-making force, it is possible to envisage how emotions are vitally implicated in the (re)production of gendered disparities in physical activity and health inequities more widely. Understanding how physical activity places, such as gyms, are productive of power with exclusionary effects on participation requires contending with their emotional surfaces. As Ahmed (2014, p. 12, emphasis added) says, "emotions show us how *power* shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds."

2.3 Connecting gender, emotions, and body movement spaces

Research in social and cultural geography and allied disciplines, including leisure and physical culture studies, demonstrates how emotions in body movement spaces can work to dichotomise gender and hierarchise gender relations. These studies show how the emotional dimensions of sporting spaces operate as in/exclusionary influences, yet do not extend to consider questions of health. Focusing on men's and women's surfing

experiences in Australia, Waitt (2008) neatly sums up the links between surfing, gender, and emotion echoed by others (Evers, 2009; Roy, 2014): "gender relations that help explain the persistence of a binary gender script are embedded not only within the materiality of the waveform but also attached to the social fabric, bodies and *emotions* of surfers" (p. 85, emphasis added). Roy (2014), for instance, in work on women's surfing in the UK, reports how women attributed a fear of 'being in the way' to the masculinised nature of surfing—an emotional process that had a shrinking effect on women's bodies in space. This finding evidences the importance of centring emotions in efforts to understand how gender differences take shape in spaces of moving bodies. As Ahmed (2014, p. 69) holds, it is through such emotional processes that femininity becomes a "delimitation of movement in the public, and over-inhabitance in the private." Another example is roller derby (more often conceived as a women's sport) where emotions have been shown to play a role in the gendered construction of sporting spaces (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2012; 2015). In much the same way that Pavlidis and Fullagar (2012, p. 683) demonstrate that "gender norms that regulate this 'alternative' sport via the affective power relations that include/exclude" we consider how emotions are central to the gendered doing of physical activity in place.

2.4 Gender and emotions in the gym

Empirical work outside of geography points to how emotions in the gym intersect with gender. Frew and McGillivray (2005, p. 173), in their qualitative study of UK fitness clubs, concluded that gyms perpetuated negatively reinforcing cycles of body dissatisfaction by "selling" unattainable idealised physiques. Evaluation concerns—worries about body scrutiny or competence judgements by others—can be barriers to women's participation in weightlifting (Salvatore & Marecek, 2010). Likewise, upward social comparisons—perceiving someone to be more fit—in the gym can be discouraging for women experiencing body dissatisfaction (Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012) or even lead women to shorten their duration of exercise (Wasilenko, et al., 2007). Kruisselbrink et al. (2004) found women were more likely to plan shorter workouts in the presence of mostly men, but not in more evenly gendered or all-women settings, due to social physique anxiety. For men there was no compositional gender effect. Work by

Richardson, Smith, and Papathomas (2017) speaks to how normative masculinity in gyms can be a barrier to participation for those who feel incongruent with dominant masculine codes. Men with disabilities in their UK study reported experiencing negative emotions in gym environments due to feeling unable to enact previous aspects of their pre-disability masculine identities. Our critical geographical perspective builds on this work by focusing on how gender and emotions on the gym floor relate to how place is implicated in gendered inequities in physical activity.

3 The study

This analysis focuses on the emotional geographies of the gym using a sub-set of data from a larger study exploring the role of the gym in the gendering of physical activity (our methods and sample are detailed in Coen, Rosenberg, & Davidson, 2018). Data are drawn from fifty-two participants (34 women, 18 men) aged twenty-five to sixty-four (mean age 40 years) who self-identified as regular gym users and were currently members of co-ed gyms (n=10). The research was undertaken in a mid-sized Canadian city that was home to 11 gyms, including several franchises of a popular commercial chain, municipal recreation centres, YMCAs (non-profit community centres), and educational institution gyms open to the public. Most participants self-identified as white (n=44) and heterosexual (n=46); however, they represented a diverse socioeconomic spectrum. Using semi-structured interviews, we engaged participants in discussions about their gym experiences and their ideas about gender and the gym. A drawing activity was embedded as a final interview question to facilitate engagement with emotional aspects of experience not readily arising in traditional interviews (Coen, 2016; Guillemin, 2004). We employed drawing as a tool for talk and thus treated participants' oral descriptions of their drawings as textual data in our thematic analysis; no visual analysis was performed. Thirty-seven interviewees completed week-long journals documenting the negative and positive aspects of their gym experiences. Journaling was used to provide additional insight into emotional geographies at the scale of the workout activity space with more immediate observation and personalised reflection than afforded by interviews (Filep et al., 2015). We employed thematic analysis across all data types to inductively identify patterns and build conceptual themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study was granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen's University policies by the University's General Research Ethics Board. All names are pseudonyms.

4 Surfacing emotions: Feeling gendered in/out of place

Our thematic analysis reveals that the gym environment is generative of three place-based emotive processes of dislocation, evaluation, and sexualisation that collectively configure an unevenly gendered emotional architecture of place. Drawing on key tenets of Ahmed's (2014) work, we envision these processes as circulating emotional flows that, in aggregate, comprise an interstitial structure that both connects and draws distinctions amongst bodies and environments. We borrow the architectural concept of interstitial space—a space in-between building floors to house circuits of wires or pipes that can be opened up to create new spatial configurations—as a metaphor for thinking how these emotional flows fit together and shape surfaces of people and place. Our findings below illustrate how this emotional architecture is deeply implicated in the gendered boundary-making of physical activity participation in the gym, albeit with potential for openings and intervention to configure more "seamless space...where you can't see the 'stitches' between bodies" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 148). Two additional themes reveal how gendered motivation and individual factors can mediate some negative emotional aspects.

4.1 Dislocation

Many participants described cognitively wrestling with their gendered locations in the gym, as Brad (man, age 29) put it, "it's almost like the public school dance, right. You know, the music's on, but the guys are on this side, the girls on this side and they're just too afraid to meet in the middle."[1] Citing fear at the centre of this gender binary, Brad's analogy captures the tension embedded in a set of placed-based gender relations that polarised women and men. Women and men experienced an anxious sense of gendered dislocation in perceiving that their masculinities or femininities were not congruent with, and even subordinate to, those dominant in the gym environment. This misalignment created a gap in place-belonging that necessitated emotional negotiation to fit in to place, illustrating how fear operates as a regulatory and territorialising emotional process. The uneven experience of fear allows for the public mobility and claiming of space by some bodies, while spatially constricting others (Ahmed, 2014).

[1] Interestingly, in their research on Australian gyms, Johansson and Andreasson (2016, p. 161) reported a very similar participant metaphor: "I call it the high school dance, where all the girls go one way and all the boys go the other way." This highlights how pervasive the gendered polarities of the gym are, even across some country contexts.

For women, this often came down to feeling like, "I am the *only* girl here and it's weird" (Alexis, age 25, her emphasis). There was often a recognition that certain spaces in the gym, namely the weight room, were perceived and experienced as men's spaces. Indeed, the masculine-coding of these spaces was so entrenched that several women referred to weightlifting areas as the "boys' club" or "men's section," casting women as an odd gender out. Many women traced their discomfort to the friction they felt when their femininities clashed with masculinised space, similar to how Ahmed (2014, p. 145) identifies the consequences of regulative dominant norms as "repetitive strain injuries" whereby "bodies become contorted…into shapes that enable some action only insofar as they restrict capacity for other kinds of action." As Sarah (age 33), an experienced gym-goer and fitness professional, pointed out in reference to the weight room, even mentally coaching herself could not extinguish the unease, "I'll go in there and just be like, 'No. You guys don't own this place,' *but* it doesn't feel that comfortable" (her emphasis).

The spatial mismatch between women's gendered sense of self (as feminine) and the gendered ways space was experienced (as masculine) was an enduring discomfort that many women simply tolerated as part of the emotional price of the gym. Still, this gendering of spaces, and the emotional fallout from it, was not always fixed, but could shift depending on who was perceived to be there and the types of masculinities at play. Lillian (age 57) echoed the sentiment shared by many that it is a particular hegemonic type of masculinity, and how it consumed space, that contributed to women's dislocation, when she said: "if you go to the [gym] at 5 o'clock or something it's a lot more like big guys lifting weights and that can be […] But then if you go at 9 or 10 it's all the old fellas […] [which] feels more benign to me like, well they, they take up less space." For many women, the masculine normalisation of certain gym spaces created an emotionally taxing backdrop they had to cognitively work against in participating in the gym.

To minimise discomfort, some women chose not to invest such emotional labour and instead withdrew from space, shrinking their bodies in space as a preventive measure. In this way, "anxiety becomes *an approach to objects*" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 66). For women like Chloe, a twenty-eight-year-old student, this resulted in circumventing certain areas entirely to evade the disquiet they evoked:

> I tend to avoid, sort of where people do like their big heavy lifts, and they're screaming, and I don't know, slapping each other on the back, and that sort of

> thing. And I feel like that's their area and I don't really feel comfortable entering that area, so I like—it's kind of a high testosterone region maybe.

She went on to explain how a sense of 'confinement' characterised her gym experience, depicting in her drawing that "there is sort of a dark wall, which is I guess sort of like the limit, or the boundaries of, of her space and of her, yeah. Yeah, there's confinement" (Figure 1). Chloe's experience illustrates how, for some women, emotional preservation drives a material shrinkage in gym space, exemplifying how emotions contribute to the gendered boundary-making of the physical activity participation in the gym (Ahmed, 2014; Roy, 2014).

[Figure 1. Approximately here]

A number of women persisted in exercise routines that utilised the full scope of gym space, but their experiences were often replete with examples of gendered dislocation. Women described moments of encounter that reinforced their sense of having a tenuous position in particular gym spaces and triggered scenarios that exacted a decisive emotional toll, often shaking their self-confidence and self-esteem, even for the most experienced women in the gym. This again highlights Ahmed's concept of the "repetitive strain injuries" resulting from coming up against regulative norms (Ahmed, 2014, p. 145). Emily (age 27), a skilled recreational weightlifter, put this into sharp focus when she described being subjected to gendered ridicule in the weight room:

> …a guy came and he wanted to butt in and I actually was like, 'Oh, no I'm next.' So then [these guys] took a step back and they stood there for 5 minutes while I couldn't undo the knob [to adjust the equipment]. And they're laughing at me. […] It was just this experience of feeling like—{pause}—I felt like such a girl. And I mean that in like a—in how it sounds. When you're like into like the situational, cultural sense of being weak, being, um, unable to be self-sufficient, and this is what—I hate feeling like this.

In one moment, Emily feels a sense of accomplishment having rightfully asserted her place in the equipment queue among a group of men; in the next, her femininity becomes an emotional liability when her success is undercut as her brief struggle becomes the focal point of masculine attention and mockery, leaving her feeling demoralised. Many women described the weight room as unstable ground that heightened insecurities about their self-confidence and

competence about exercising, precisely because their legitimacy in these spaces was never certain—the "'stitches' between bodies" coming into sharp relief (Ahmed, 20014, p. 248). As Jeff, a twenty-nine-year-old man with a great deal of empathy for women in the gym, said, "it's probably more ok for a guy to be in, uh, like the feminine sections than the other way."

Men also described feeling out-of-place due to hegemonic masculinities in the gym. Even if men did not necessarily desire to embody hegemonic characteristics, they were often self-aware of how their own masculinities contravened dominant masculine traits in the gym. Frank, for example, a fifty-seven-year-old using the gym seven times per week, sometimes more, attributed his uneasiness in the weight room to feeling alienated by the ascendant masculinity in that space: "I have to say sometimes I feel a bit sheepish? In there? Because I'm not one of these, uh, manly grunters, right." Other men similarly felt like outsiders when they came up against manifestations of hegemonic masculinity, as Tom (age 26), who had been lifting weights since he was a teen, recounted in a visit to a gym in a different city:

> It was totally the Arnold Schwarzeneggers of Ottawa that were there and I was the smallest guy for sure, and I was working out, so I wasn't like, you know, like, uh—it was, and you could just, you knew it. I wasn't welcome there. I wasn't…. you know, like, 'who's the pip squeak?' kinda thing. […] I didn't join [that gym]. Yeah, I dropped out. I'm not doing this.

Here we see clearly how emotions, as per Ahmed (2014, p. 4), "are bound up with the securing of social hierarchy: emotions become attributes of bodies as a way to transforming what is 'lower' or 'higher' into bodily traits." Tom, despite his wealth of experience with weightlifting, felt relegated to the pejorative role of "pip squeak," a sense of diminished physical and social status in the masculine hierarchy of the gym.

Even men who could potentially appear to others as embodying hegemonic masculinity were just as affected by dislocation. When asked to describe how gender matters in the gym, Brad, a frequent gym-goer, paused for a considerable moment before responding:

> It does matter. I just—I need to think about how I phrase this. I really do think it does matter. It does matter. 'Cause even as a burly man who's 6'1 and 240 [pounds] I can still walk into the gym and feel very intimidated. Um, and I know a lot of my friends who are in the same boat. So I feel like, you know, walking into a gym full of loud, sweaty, screaming guys is intimidating for me as a man.

His confession makes clear how widespread the emotional cost of gender hierarchy in the gym is to a diversity of gym participants. Similar to Roy's (2014) observation that peak masculine aggression affects both women and men surfers negatively, Brad's experience highlights the extent to which hegemonic masculinity is the gender default in certain gym spaces, rendering femininities and other masculinities as out of place and making the gym an emotionally precarious place for a range of gym users. The way these tensions and anxieties work to dislocate women and men in the gym can be seen as a health equity problem when we consider that fear is not felt by all bodies equally. As Ahmed (2014, p. 70) says, fear "works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained." This matters in that the gym effectively operates as a quasi-public space; there may be a membership system to gain access and certain rules or etiquette articulated in varying degrees of formality, but people are generally left to their own devices.

4.2 Evaluation

The gym can be an emotionally-triggering place with regards to in-situ comparisons that prompt negative self-evaluations and anxieties about being evaluated negatively by others. Among women, there was a common sentiment that "you have to go looking hot to the gym, if you're a girl" (Hannah, woman, age 32). Clothing was a powerful social differentiator of femininities. Sassatelli (2010) even referred to gym clothing as an 'identity toolkit.' Women understood the gym to dictate a specific normative femininity embodied as a thin physique donning form-fitting clothing. The inflexible unwritten rule about what women *should* wear in the gym was so strong that diverging from this norm compromised women's comfort levels and self-esteem. For example, Marie (age 27) described how she would prefer to wear looser clothing at times, but doing so negatively impacted her sense of feminine desirability in a way that she could not tolerate, even though it troubled her ideologically:

> I started saying to myself, 'Ok, like I should be able to wear sweatpants if I want sometimes.' And I've started wearing them every once and a while 'cause sometimes you don't want to wear really tight pants and I felt a little bit weird when I wore the sweat pants. I felt like I looked frumpy and I thought to myself, 'Well, what does it matter if I look frumpy in the gym?' and, like, it bothered me that I looked frumpy. I was disappointed in myself that it bothered me, but it did bother me that I looked frumpy.

By signifying which women's bodies were socially acceptable within the gym, clothing was part of the emotional surface that (de)valued certain femininities in place.

Appearance comparisons with other gym bodies were also a source of negative emotions for many women who felt they did not embody the archetypal gym femininity. Leah (age 30) spoke about her gym journey from feeling previously "very uncomfortable in my own skin" to persevering in the gym by employing a "nobody else is around me type of attitude to try and push myself to go." Still, she reflected in her journal on how old body insecurities surfaced in the gym from on-the-ground reminders:

> The other thing that discouraged me was seeing some of the girls who are in great shape who wear the small workout sports tops and small spandex pants. I am all for women and men who are completely self confident and like to show off their hard work, I applaud them; however, sometimes it just sits in the back of my mind that I will NEVER have that type of body. I will never look that good in those outfits. (20 February 2015, her emphasis)

Despite pride in improving her level of fitness, clothing in the gym was a reminder of any lingering body dissatisfaction, exemplifying how "objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 11). For Leah, popularised feminine gym clothing symbolised an unattainable physique that infused her gym experience with a sense of resignation to self-perceived bodily limitations. Leah was hardly alone, as many other women shared the feeling summed up by Hannah, "I don't look awesome in my gym clothes like they do, so sometimes—most of the time I'm fine with it, but sometimes you're kind of like, 'I'd rather not be here'." Clothing literally and figuratively laid the stitches differentiating bodies (Ahmed, 2014), creating anxious surfaces around women's participation in the gym.

Men's evaluation concerns, on the other hand, did not revolve around clothing specifically, but several men expressed similar anxieties and discomfort in relation to body image and fitness-level comparisons with other men in the gym. For these men, the gym heightened dissatisfaction with aspects of their physical appearance, especially body size and shape. Thirty-three-year-old Dev, for example, in describing his drawing (Figure 2), spoke of how the gym amplified his sense of feeling physically small:

> This is a gym and this is like a bench press bar. This is me sitting on it. There is a mirror there and I can see a reflection of myself. Um, it's essentially me seeing a

> slightly skinnier version of myself, at least my partner tells me I have like body dysmorphia or something [laughs] […] I think I see myself as smaller than I am, maybe. Yeah, I don't see myself as a particularly big person. I'm not a big person, but I think he always says that I see myself as like being this like tiny little scrawny kid […] I want to be bigger. I want to be considered bigger.

For Dev, reflecting on his "scrawny" figure in the mirror, the gym environment emotionally intensified the gap between his own body image and his desire to increase his body size. In expressing his wish not only to be "bigger," but for others to deem him as bigger, Dev speaks to the emotional significance tied to men's bodies taking up space in the gym, with bigger bodies ascendant in the hierarchy of masculinities. Likewise, Joel, a twenty-five-year gym veteran, directly linked his happiness to his body size and shape relative to other men in the gym: "The guys that have big wide shoulders and the huge chest that, you know, I wish I could flash around my body... I wish I could do that and if I could lift that weight, I'd be so much bigger and so much happier." Joel sees a bigger body as enabling him "flash" or celebrate his physique, highlighting how a bigger body would positively shift his emotional positioning in the gym by socially and spatially (re)positioning him in the hierarchy of masculinities. Thus, for men, as for women, the gym environment could act as a magnifying glass on contentious aspects of their body image in emotionally charged ways.

[Figure 2 approximately here]

A number of women and men stated that they enjoyed their current gym environments precisely because they perceived appearance to matter less than in their past experiences. These gyms tended to be non-commercial and offer programs to mitigate income barriers, thereby engaging a potentially more socially diverse clientele. Gary, an older man who attended one of the municipal gyms, noted that "I could walk down [Main] Street here and I would not be surprised to see any of those people I pass on the block at the gym." A more heterogeneous and seemingly relaxed atmosphere helped to diffuse potential evaluation concerns for some individuals. Abby, a fifty-two-year-old woman using one of the city gyms with a subsidised membership, rated her current comfort level at a "9 or 10" as opposed to feeling "very, very intimidated" in a previous gym:

> They're all competitive at the [other gym]. They're all like, 'Oh, I see you and you're lifting this, so I'll lift that. And I'll run faster than you.' Like, it's like these women are in their mind thinking they need a smaller body when they already have this perfect body and in their mind they're insecure. So it makes you feel insecure yourself. I go to somewhere where everybody is just down to earth, friendly. You're not competing. If you can run on the treadmill without falling off, good for you. I don't care. I'm doing my own program.

Abby's experience illustrates that links between gender, emotions, and place are not immoveable, but rather can be subject to (re)negotiation and re-configuration. This points to the potential for opening up interstitial spaces where it is possible, as Ahmed (2014, p. 148) says, to "be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins."

Women in particular expressed a fear of being judged for poor exercise performance in the gym, or as Linda (age 55), put it, "I don't want to look foolish on the playground." Linda's infantilising playground metaphor captures the extent of her vulnerability in a gym. The prospect of being viewed by others as incompetent in the gym was a pervasive source of discomfort for many women. When contextualised by the view that "men are *supposed* to be [in the gym]. Women still don't feel like they're supposed to be there" (Marie, her emphasis), bearing this pressure to perform 'correctly' can be understood as emotional weight tied to women's seemingly less legitimate position in the gym.

Embodying femininity on the masculinised playground required significant emotional work on the part of some women who bore this burden of perfection as a strategy to render difference (their femininity) less visible and thus less subject to negative evaluation. For some women, these were momentary clouds, but for others it shaded their entire gym experience with a tinge of doubt about their legitimacy in the gym. Vanessa, a twenty-five-year-old who mainly engaged in cardiovascular exercise, illustrated the latter when she spoke of feeling as though the validity of her presence in the gym was continually subject to question:

> …there's also just a little bit of fear that I would be doing something wrong, or like doing an exercise incorrectly and that, you know, they'd be like, 'Oh, look at that rookie. She doesn't know what she's doing. She only comes twice a week. She's not a real—she's not a real gym member,' or something.

The gym for her was experienced as a place where she was precarious and other gym members were positioned as more rightful occupiers of space, another example of the powerful ways that fear territorialises space (Ahmed, 2014). Even the *potentiality* of performing 'incorrectly' weighs women down and hampers mobility in the gym.

To lessen the emotional risk, some women altered their practices to pre-empt making any seeming mistakes. Linda, for example, took care to avoid situations that could undermine her self-efficacy and jeopardise her sense of belonging in the gym. This anticipatory anxiety illustrates "an acute awareness of the surface of one's own body" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 148), a marker of difference in place:

> I would never pick up anything that might be too heavy 'cause I didn't want to look stupid or not be able to do a full set. […] But, yeah, just not wanting to look out of place or whatever. I just want to look comfortable. I don't want, I don't want to have people laugh, you know, kind of thing.

Two other women admitted to practicing exercises at home or in uncrowded areas before attempting them in the gym, underscoring the interconnection between how women feel and their concern with how they are perceived by others in the gym. Indeed, while several men spoke broadly about avoiding activities they did not know how to do or for which they would need assistance for safety reasons, there were actually only two men who spoke explicitly about performance anxieties and one noted more general discomfort when feeling observed. In contrast, about two-thirds of women were concerned with their performance in the gym. This trepidation speaks to the extent to which gym knowledge and skill are naturalised as masculine, which heightens the emotional stakes of women's participation in the gym by setting up an unequal premise for participation.

4.3 Sexualisation

Women and men described experiencing the gym as a hetero-sexualised space, but this had different gendered effects. Simone (age 26) summed up the sentiment of many women when she said, as though speaking to men in the gym, "I'm not here for you to eye candy me." Many women described experiences of feeling sexualised by men in the gym as an unpleasant, but almost expected, by-product of working out. A number of men also confirmed they were aware of these dynamics, and were sympathetic to women's experiences, as Adam, a thirty-five-year-

old man, noted, “I see those guys and I feel bad, sometimes feel bad for girls, um, in the gym ‘cause, yeah, um, there can be, there can be some guys there that objectify women and that whole piece.” This sort of attention was not only a nuisance, but occupied significant mental space for women, who had to work through this perceptual layer of tension to pursue their activities. Recognising the emotional labour this entailed, Chloe was proactive in avoiding areas of the gym where she was susceptible to feeling sexualised:

> I would much rather avoid that [area] than sort of always have to cognitively like fight and say, ‘Well I do have a right to be there and if I want to,’ and I, you know, I can contextualise like feeling self-conscious about like getting stares and stuff… I could if I wanted to, but I chose just not to spend that emotional energy.

Here, Chloe is managing her emotions using a spatial strategy for self-preservation—the same strategy that simultaneously contributes to her feeling of confinement. The negative emotional cost of direct unwanted advances or perceived sexual gazes factored prominently into many women’s experiences in the gym. This pattern parallels Waitt’s (2008, p. 87) observation that women in surfing spaces are subjected to masculine gazing in ways that normalise heterosexism.

Furthermore, the directionality of the flow of sexualisation, from men to women, added to the gendered asymmetry of women’s sense of legitimacy in the gym by bypassing their consent. Sarah was one of the few queer-identified women we spoke with and she highlighted how indiscriminate this was, pointing out that “ultimately it doesn’t matter, like whether you look gay or not. Boys still check you out.” She went on to articulate how violating such experiences were for her:

> I call it like ‘rapey.’ Like literally with their eyes, there’s different parts of like—so the downtown [gym] you have to walk right by all these machines to get to the women’s change rooms and there’s like mirrors. Like on both sides going like this [gestures]. And there are guys that will just sit there and just like watch you do your thing and it’s just, ‘rapey.’ [laughs] Like I don’t like it. It feels gross.

This speaks to Ahmed’s point (2014, p. 79) that there is nothing inherently vulnerable about women’s bodies, but rather that emotional flows work to position femininity as a liability in public space as well as reify compulsory heterosexuality.

There was also self-awareness on the part of women about the potential to be viewed in a sexual manner depending upon the exercise being performed and how it positioned their body or their clothing. This worry layered a sense of caution onto some women's workouts in the gym, for fear of inadvertently attracting sexual surveillance. William (age 32), for example, explained that his friend "specifically says that she doesn't do butt work, glute work at the gym because she feels like people might stare at her more." Despite women's negative experiences feeling sexualised, it is important to note that this was not to the exclusion of women's sexual agency in the gym; women of diverse sexualities noted taking pleasure in seeing attractive people at the gym, but disliked being involuntary objects of sexualised staring.[2]

For men, on the other hand, sexualisation in the gym created anxieties, but for different, albeit related, reasons than for women. Several men described feeling pressure to be perceived favourably by women. This desire to present themselves in a pleasing way to women created continuous tension for some men, who felt they could not be entirely at ease. A few men felt vulnerable in the gym because it was difficult to regulate their appearance while exercising. This heightened self-awareness led some men to alter their comportment, as illustrated by Jim, a forty-three-year-old man who was guarded about his behaviour in the presence of women:

> I think as a guy it's always, um—you're not—how to say that—you're not perfectly relaxed. No, no, that's not the right word. The awareness of having females around you—you do really think more about things—not that you're 100 percent thinking only about that, but you have that awareness of the presence, and maybe you wouldn't do stuff like, I don't know [laughs], like… I think for me, I tend to—because of that awareness—I tend to be more conscientious of maybe how I behave, maybe [laughs]. I wouldn't allow, like if I'm, let's say, running on the treadmill, and I wouldn't allow my sweat to splatter all over the place.

These conscientious behaviours can, however, simultaneously contribute to the reinforcement of gender hegemony in place by positioning femininity as delicate, to be shielded from seemingly more masculine perspiration and odours.

Because many men were aware of women's negative sexualised experiences, a number of men were concerned about the potential for themselves, as men, to be perceived by women as

[2] This is similar to Johansson's (1996, p. 38) observation in Swedish gyms that although some women "*protected* themselves with large sweaters" in masculine dominated areas, others founds these gazes pleasurable (emphasis added).

perpetrating this objectification. In response, some men monitored their spatial proximity to women, even going as far as to consider where they potentially—inadvertently—intersect women women's fields of vision, as William explained,

> I think I'm more cognisant of where I'm at in relation to the females in the gym. So if someone's on a machine, or if someone's doing weights and I'm on a machine that might, might give the impression that I'm like looking at her as she's working out, I think I'm much more cognisant of that than with the guys.

This is not to say that there were not some men who noted taking pleasure in viewing women's bodies as a "another reason why you go to the gym" (Amir, man, age 35); yet, on the whole, men grappled with competing pressures in relation to sexuality in the gym. On the one hand, men felt pressure to appear attractive to women; on the other, they wished to project a platonic disposition to position themselves counter to those masculinities contributing to sexualisation.

4.4 Motivation

Both women and men identified specific intra-gender situational dynamics that positively supported their gym participation by bolstering motivation to intensify physical effort or try new things. Some women derived positive reinforcement by measuring their performance against other women whom they perceived to be physically similar to themselves. Alexis, for instance, drew inspiration to pursue new goals when witnessing other women's strength, saying "if I see someone, you know, a girl my size doing bench press then I'm going to try to see if I can match her." At the same time, it is this very competitiveness that can conversely activate participants' insecurities in terms of evaluation concerns. These motivational comparisons may be most beneficial when individuals perceive themselves to occupy the upper tier of the comparison. Women additionally described motivational comparisons with bodies perceived as less directly comparable. For some women, these comparisons functioned to re-position themselves in the gender hierarchy of the gym; that is, by out-performing those appearing to occupy more privileged positions. Liz (age 25), for example, enjoyed "seeing what the guys can do and if I can do it too, that's a bit of a motivation." This form of motivation points to the potential for on-the-ground emotional situations to be mobilised in re-drawing the boundaries of women's gym participation and create new interstitial openings.

Men's motivational competition tended to be cultivated in a masculine group dynamic that Tom described as "competition over status, I guess, if you will. Sort of an archaic way to say it, I guess, but it's sort of, it's like it's true. It's, um, everybody wants to be the biggest guy in the gym." In contrast to gendered dislocation, however, several men cited this mode of vying for rank in the masculine hierarchy as constructive. Eric, for example, a thirty-year-old man attending one of the commercial gyms, explained how the situational opportunity to observe other men created an internalised sense of competition he used to increase his effort:

> …if there's three people on [the benches] at the same time, it's kind of like a little competition, might be subconsciously, but where you're trying to out-lift those other two people. So, I guess that type of stuff does, would motivate—or even doing squats, like the squat rack or dead lifts and stuff like that, yeah. […] I think it's positive.

For some men, these in-the-moment opportunities to (re)position themselves within the masculine hierarchy had a motivational effect, especially when successful. This was particularly profound for Joel, who spoke fondly about his experiences in previous a gym. When sharing equipment with men who were lifting heavier weights than he used, rather than lighten the load, Joel would "talk myself into it as opposed to talk myself out of it," knowing the other men would assist if necessary. This sense of camaraderie, along with some underlying competition, was part of what made the gym feel supportive for Joel and contributed to achieving his "most physical success as far as size was concerned." There are thus situations where masculinities and evaluative emotions in the gym were mobilised in beneficial ways. The same competitive attributes that at times leave some men feeling out of place, can conversely be positively taken up as a source of encouragement.

4.5 Attenuation

There were four main individual-level factors that women and men identified as mitigating some of the negative feelings associated with dislocation, evaluation, and sexualisation. First, several participants cited their longstanding histories with feeling at ease in the gym, as Vivian, a fifty-two-year-old woman, explained, "I've just been going into gyms for so long, and I'm from, and as I said from high school, so I, for many, many years I would have been the only woman or one of the only few women in a gym environment doing some weights so I'm completely comfortable." Second, a few women credited experience in masculine-dominant environments as facilitating

their emotional navigation of the gym. Marie, while unnerved about the constraints on women's clothing and deliberately manoeuvring to manage those emotions, still felt that overall, "[gender] matters less for me because I'm in a science discipline so I'm really used to being the only girl around." Third, both men and women emphasised how feelings of increasing self-confidence diminished evaluation concerns, as Jocelyn, a forty-nine-year-old woman, summed up:

> …when you get to a certain age, there's a realisation you really don't care what other people think to that extent anyway. I mean obviously you wanna make sure you look good but it's more about how you feel as opposed to how other people see you, I think. And that makes a big difference. Confidence I think.

This went hand in hand with shifting personal goals, as Melissa (age 43) described, "When I was younger like I wanted to have that physique type of thing. But, when I got older, it's not something that interests me anymore." These shifts highlight how changing individual biographies may play a role in mediating negative emotions in the gym for some and, at times, facilitate smoother navigation of its surfaces. Finally, women and men maintained emotional equanimity by adopting specific spatio-temporal strategies, such as using gyms at certain less busy times when the potential for triggering certain anxieties and stresses was less likely because of the perceived qualities of the bodies present.

5 Emotional geographies and the gendered boundaries of physical activity

Our analysis shows how the surfaces of localised hierarchies of masculinities and femininities were *felt* by men and women in ways that provoked tensions and anxieties, in turn, reinforcing gendered boundaries on physical activity participation. The net effect of this emotional topography was to catch women and men in a web of cognitive wrangling over their legitimacy in the gym. Feeling gendered-out-of-place was not only a matter of feminine subjugation, but men also described feeling marginalised when their masculinities misaligned with hegemonic masculinity. Still, emotional processes in the gym interwove with gender relations in ways that had the greatest overall negative cumulative effect for women due, in part, to hierarchical differences *among women*. Women's emotional geographies were additionally wrapped up in a fine-grained hierarchy of femininities that served to further delegitimise women's participation in the gym overall by narrowing the scope of 'appropriate' gym femininities. This was particularly clear in the case of evaluation where women described feeling that fitting into place meant

signalling the 'correct' femininity with their clothing and exercise performance, pointing to the significance of the body as an emotionalised site in the gender and place relationship (Johnston, 2009). This echoes findings from Evans' (2006) work on participation in sport and physical education among adolescents that showed how girls negotiated their gender presentations within the constraints of acceptable feminine bodily presentations and competent performances of sport in front of boys.

Given the gendered asymmetries of these emotional surfaces, we argue that emotional geographies are one way in which gender disparities in physical activity are (re)produced and naturalised at the scale of the everyday exercise environment. We thus maintain that the type of critical geography of physical activity we advocate for here is necessary to identify and intervene in the socio-spatial processes implicated in gendered inequities. In line with Thien and del Casino Jr.'s (2012) proposal, our findings show that the gendering of health is simultaneously about the processes of emotion. Without understanding the emotional processes in place, we miss a key component of how physical activity participation becomes gendered in place. Centring emotions highlighted the invisible processes by which gender and place are co-constituted in ways that matter for health. Kath Browne's work has shown how seemingly mundane indoor places, like restaurants (2007) and public toilets (2004), are implicated in maintaining gendered and heterosexualised regimes of power as 'common sense'—so too does the gym. As such, critical geographies of physical activity must also challenge the fallacy of enclosure (Biehler & Simon, 2010) and address the ways that social differences in physical activity participation are (re)made as part and parcel of physical activity places at more proximate scales than residential neighbourhoods.

Women and men in our study made conscious choices about how to preserve emotional wellbeing and conserve emotional energies. The sequelae of this, however, was in some instances to circumscribe women's and men's engagement with the gym in ways that narrowed the scope of gym participation for some users. This was most apparent in gendered dislocation whereby some women and men strategically mapped their gym geographies to avoid encountering hegemonic masculinity, showing us *par excellence* how power operates through emotions with material effects for bodies and health (Ahmed, 2014).. This had the material consequence of delimiting the nature of some participants' engagement with the gym, while reinforcing a hegemonic hold on certain spaces and activities, similar to Roy's (2014) observations in surfing. This complex role of agency in the emotional geographies of the gym underscores the importance of attending to experiential accounts of physical activity and

provides a counterpoint to deterministic tendencies in some work on the built environment (Blacksher & Lovasi, 2012; Andrews et al., 2012).

Despite the overall veneer of discomfort, some participants cited motivation from gendered comparison and competition as a positive aspect of their gym experience, encouraging them to increase their efforts or try new activities. This points to the potential of gender relations to be harnessed in supportive ways that expand, rather than contract, the scope of physical activity participation. For some men in particular, there was a sense of masculine solidarity that was emotionally beneficial; however, in some instances, this motivation had a positive effect precisely because it resulted in privileged re-positioning in the gender hierarchy of the gym that subordinated others. This paradox raises the question as to how we can mobilise potentially supportive aspects of gender relations while de-hierarchising their structure.

The intimate, and invisible, nature of this emotional architecture suggests that interventions for gender equity will benefit from being empathetically attuned to the subtleties of place-based experiences. Taking these emotional geographies into account could extend public health messaging to show what taking up physical activity guidelines looks and *feels* like within particular places. Such messaging might use first-hand testimonials to expose gendered anxieties and tensions, thereby challenging and disrupting their routine embeddedness. Our findings also indicate that designing out the emotional surfaces (Ahmed, 2014; Lin, 2015) that maintain hierarchical gender relations is necessary to create more inclusive environments and more equitable physical activity opportunities. Given geographers' capacity to work at the intersections of the material and social, our discipline is particularly well-placed to engage public health practitioners and community stakeholders (e.g., municipal recreation programmers, community leisure organizations) in creatively thinking about new ways to holistically (re)imagine physical activity environments. A promising starting point would be to focus on non-profit gym spaces, such as community or publicly funded gyms, before wading in to challenge the further capitalist layers of power within commercial gym environments.

It is important to note that our study was limited to an English-speaking North American context, which may express a particular cultural relationship with the gym that differs elsewhere. Other than age and socioeconomic diversity, our sample was relatively homogenous in terms characteristics such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, and cis-gender identity. Future research should advance a more intersectional perspective in considering the emotional geographies of physical activity. Finally, we also recognise that due to gender norms, men overall may have

been less vocal than women about emotionality in the gym. Even if this were the case, this potential silence points to a quality about men's emotional geographies of the gym that warrants further investigation.

6 Conclusions

The critical geography of physical activity we have called for here is one that works to expose the place-based processes at play in gendered inequities in physical activity participation. Through our analysis of women's and men's emotional geographies of the gym, we demonstrated how such an approach augments our understanding of environmental influences on gendered inequities in physical activity. Our findings made clear that bringing emotions into geographies of physical activity yields insight into the larger problem of the role of place in (re)producing gendered health inequities. The emotional geographies of place are one way in which gender differences in physical activity become 'the norm.' At the micro scale of an everyday exercise environment we were able to see how emotions operated as a gender boundary-making force (Ahmed, 2014). These emotional surfaces are of material consequence, and have wider implications for geographical research on health and social justice, because they: (1) shape what we do with our bodies in space in ways that matter for health, and (2) invariably carry over to other scales and contexts (Bielher & Simon, 2010; Lin, 2015), affecting broader regimes of power relations. Centring emotions also opens up geographies of physical activity to places and scales foreclosed by favouritism of neighbourhood built environments. Everyday places, such as gyms, represent a finer unit of analysis than residential areas or formal administrative units (e.g., census tracts or blocs) often used in research by health geographers. From this standpoint, accounting for emotions can improve interventions to close the gender gap in physical activity, as well as health and social inequities more widely, by bringing public health interventions in step with the experiential realities of practicing physical activity in particular places. This possibility presents a promising counterpoint to ongoing critiques that emotional geographies research lacks policy and practice relevance, and lends support to work in this realm by others (Brown and Pickerill, 2009; Jayne et al., 2010; Jayne et al., 2012). Going forward, critical geographies of physical activity need to interrogate how other types of physical activity places may be wrapped up in the socio-emotional-spatial processes underpinning inequities in physical activity participation. Physical activity is but one form of health and social practice, and so we hope our call to examine the emotional surfaces at play in

(re)producing inequities in everyday environments will speak to a range of geographers seeking to contribute to a healthier and more just world.

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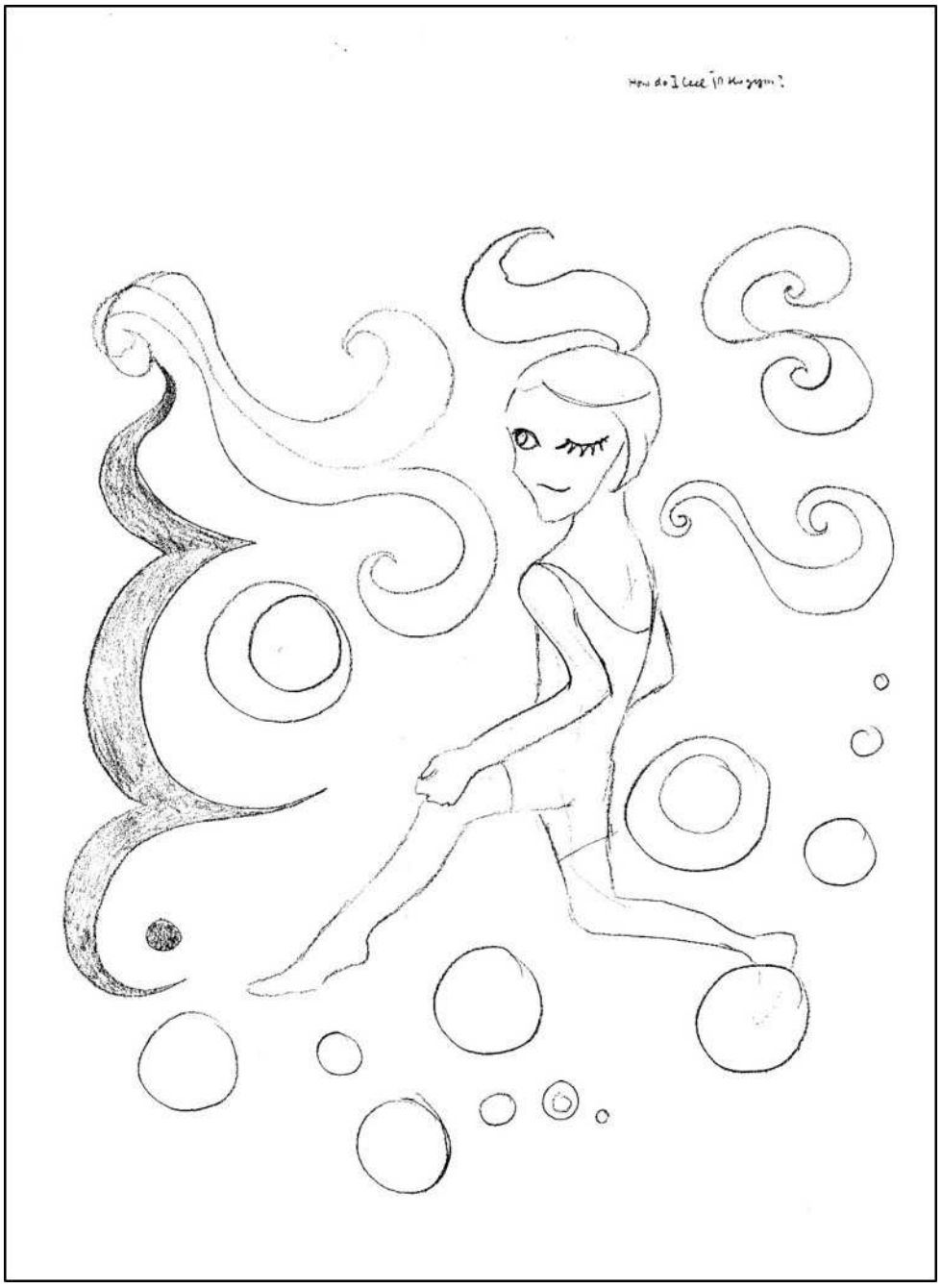

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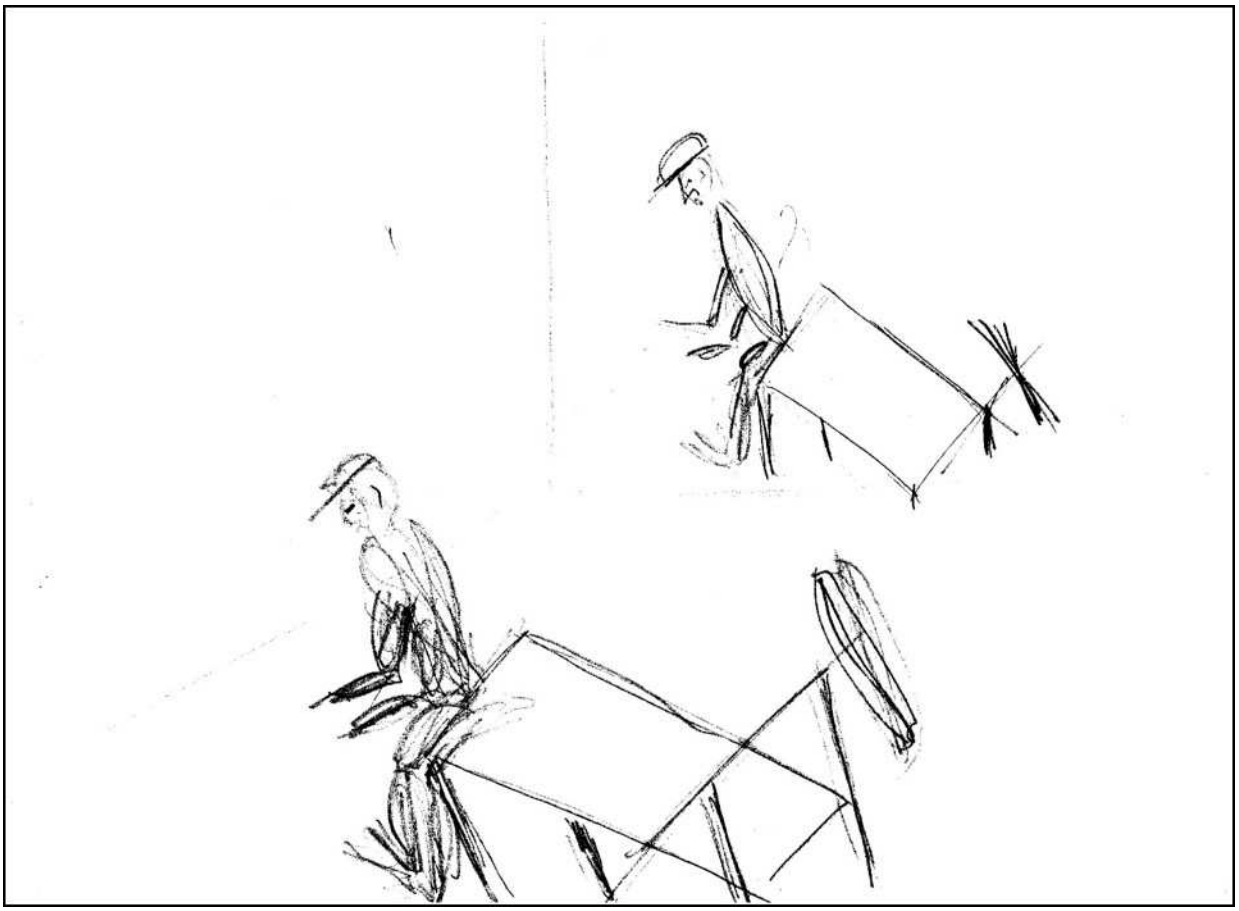

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