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The Manchester Military Academy Weight Room: *A Cult within a Cult*

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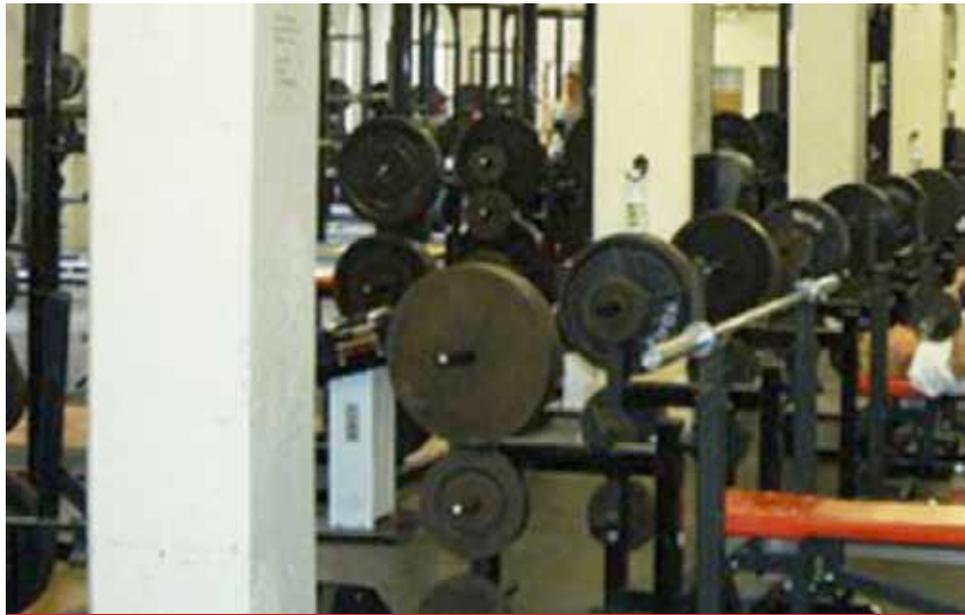
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ABSTRACT

Through analysis of behavioral patterns such as language and social norms, this ethnographic study explores the role of masculinity in a unique culture, the weight room, within an exclusive environment: a military school. The findings come from numerous interviews, both formal and informal, hours of observation, and the use of a double-entry journal. This study reveals a masculine, military cultural group's attitudes about gender as it relates to exercise. These attitudes significantly relate to broader cultural themes at the military institution and offer a revealing look at how a cult of masculinity undergirds day-to-day life there.

Keywords: masculinity, military, weight room, culture, institution

“I froze, utterly confounded by the scene before me. Here was a room full of people pulsating with what seemed like some mysterious, erotic force. The collective grunting and swaying... the hyper intimate preoccupation with the body proved disconcerting... Why were its inhabitants not self-consciously monitoring their behavior in accordance with modesty?” – Alan M. Klein



THE FOCUS

As one of the premier military colleges in the nation, Manchester Military Academy boasts the ability to produce quality citizens-soldiers. An “alpha male” attitude often informs cadets’ perception of this claim. To explore this attitude, I sought out a subculture at MMA that produces an even greater degree of masculinity than the corps itself: the MMA weight room in Jordan Hall. By immersing myself in this culture, I wanted to discover if there was a connection between ordinary MMA life and the weight room atmosphere. Does the weight room culture significantly resemble the same values held within the Corps of Cadets, or are the traditions of MMA left at the top of the stairs of Jordan Hall? Through my observations, I got an enlightening look at a hidden culture within an already unique college experience.

Manchester Military Academy has a history of masculine dominance, in which it has faced gender issues since its acceptance of females in the past fifteen years. The issue made it to the Supreme Court in which Congress threatened to remove public funding unless females were accepted into the academy. Even though females were allowed in, there still remains

discrimination against females and an ongoing presence of the alpha male attitude. Although many years have passed since the legal decision to allow females in to MMA, male students still remain unaccepting towards the presence of females, which has developed into a deep history of controversy. Because of this issue with female bias, especially in the weight room, I felt uncomfortable over the course of my study revealing identities of my informants, my own personal feelings, and the real identity of the school in which I am referring to.

I am a sophomore here at MMA, brought here by the unique reputation of a disciplined and distinguished school that would allow me to pursue a career in the military. Having been an avid exerciser for many years, I was naturally drawn to the weight room here at the academy. As a military school, MMA already had a strong feeling of masculinity common in its students, but even more so within this unique arena. Throughout this study, I was hesitant to include my own personal feelings toward different aspects of the gym due to the sensitivity of some of my issues addressed and implications that could emerge from my comments. That did, however, not keep me from including the opinions of my informants and asking about the issues.



Although I did not include my own direct opinions, I found that those who I interviewed had the same feelings and opinions that I have, which allowed me to voice my personal feelings through outside sources.

THE METHOD

There were three specific areas from which I recorded my observations. They were my outposts that I returned to when I started a new day. In the front area, which I classified as the “beginner section” because newer participants congregated where the less intimidating machines were stationed, I would sit on the leg machine and try to blend in and not look so obvious in my intentions. This area also provided me with a good view from the help of the mirrors, which reflected the open gym around me. In the back half, which I called the “veteran section” because it was where the free weights were located and where stronger lifters tended to stay, I sat within a power rack, where I had a wide range of view. Finally, in the back corner there was a designated place for abdominal exercises. From this vantage, I was not part of the action out in the weight room floor, but I could observe the action from afar.

I liked to be reserved in my observations and to not interfere with the natural atmosphere by walking around with a notebook. People were there to workout, not to be interviewed, and I did not

want to disrupt the authenticity of my observations. In order to blend into my environment, I carried my normal workout log down to the room along with my field journal to make it seem as if I was just recording entries into my normal workout log. I conducted my interviews outside of the weight room in a more comfortable environment so that my informants would be more open and thorough with their answers. I set up a time and met with the cadets in barracks, the living quarters of all students at MMA.

I brought my field notebook with me to the weight room and would occasionally do an exercise in between my observations so that I could gain a fresh perspective and realign my thoughts. Often times, I could make a connection to a thought I had in one part of a weight room to another time a few days later. For example, I wanted to find something that I could work with about the rules of re-racking your weight after you are done with it. A week later one night, I was finishing up my own personal workout when I looked over and on the back of the cadet assistant’s sweatshirts was stenciled “Rack Your Weights.” With outside reflection, the culture of the weight room began to culminate into something I could begin to record. What really helped me develop my research was the use of a double-entry journal. I would record my observations within the weight room, and then I could go back and record what I was thinking and how connections were made between varying aspects of the culture.

I did not have a strict regimented plan to my observations. I would go during the day when I had at least thirty minutes I could devote to observations. Sometimes I would make it in the morning, when there was minimal activity but provided a different perspective to the culture. Mid-afternoon was usually the busiest periods for the weight room. The environment became very loud and hectic to observe all at once. I was also able to observe at night time after Supper Roll Call, which is the time cadets march down to the chow hall to eat.

My study lasted the course of four months during the fall semester of 2011. Having a full semester to observe this culture, I feel that I was able to gain a complete perspective of the unique atmosphere that is the weight room. I devoted at least thirty hours to being in the weight room, and I spent many hours afterwards reflecting and comparing my observations.

I used several informants during my study of the weight room that I site throughout my research. Jason Allen¹ was one of the most helpful resources. He was very personable and willing to provide a deeper meaning to the questions I asked. Jason is a third classmen, a sophomore for civilian colleges, and a regular attendee of the gym. I had known him from my first year at MMA, and he was very accessible whenever I wanted to discuss the weight room atmosphere. He explained many aspects of the culture, varying from physical characteristics, accepted behavior, and similarities between traditional MMA and weight room culture. I was able to discuss questions I had with Jason to really understand some of the confusing customs in this culture. Eric Ward² was also another informative interviewee, who provided a different outlook compared to Jason Allen views. Eric came across more accepting and indifferent, while Jason had a more direct and aggressive opinion of weight room culture.

I often had unplanned encounters and brief segments of communication that I would catch during my time in the weight, which added more genuine perspectives.

THE WEIGHT ROOM

Located one hundred and twenty-five steps down into the basement of Jordan Hall, the fitness facility at MMA, sits the old, run-down, Steve B. Wright Weight Room. Renovated in 1983, the weight room has seen minimal improvements over the years, which is obvious due to the paint chips hanging from the ceilings and walls, old water pipes that protrude from the ceilings, and the old radiators that still clang and click every time the heat turns on. The machines and equipment are painted in MMA colors: red, black, and yellow. However, there is a fine layer of rust covering nearly every part of the weights and stations. Specifically,

the ordinary weighted plates look rustic. These old plates seem to be the oldest equipment in the room, but are involved in almost every exercise. It is because of the history and amount of use that these weights take that they caught my attention.

There are dents and chips across the face of the plate where it has been dropped and slammed into bars and other weights. The edges, which are normally sharp and precise, have been rounded off from continual use. The face of the plate is smooth and the engraved letters have faded away, whereas the newer plates still maintain their coarse feel and the painted letters are bright white. Talcum powder is cemented into the crevices of the lettering and cracks. Lifters commonly put the powder on their hands to absorb the sweat, which allows for a better grip on the bar. When the weight is picked up with sweaty hands, a black residue is left over from the collected dirt, grease, and dust that have permanently covered the rusty weight. The plate itself is always cold to the touch, which gives off a harsh depiction about the weight and its similarities to the intimidating environment that is the weight room.

Although the plates are such a vital part of the weight room, cadets overlook their significance. They are stacked in the corners, thrown from shoulder height, and treated with little care. It could be that they are made for the abuse, but one would think that a piece of equipment that makes up such a large part of the weight room would be treated with better care.

THE NOISES

I had no idea that such a small environment could produce so much internal noise. Old rotating fans that are connected to the brick walls produce a cringing noise with ev-

¹The names of informants have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

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ery oscillation, probably from a lack of lubrication on the old ball bearings. The open windows that line the exterior wall let in street noises from passing cars and other outside events. One of the more modern day upgrades, the speaker system, blasts loud music in all corners of the weight room, which puts a background wave of noise to all the other sounds of the gym. The actual noise that comes from workout equipment and participants is just as varied as environmental noises. Lifters moan and groan under the heavy loads on their backs and then quickly slam the iron barbell against the steels racks, producing a snapping clash. When the barbell is placed back on its stand, the plates on either side of the bar smash into one another, producing yet another scraping noise of iron metal.

Everywhere you look you can find a producer of noise. Cadets who are able to hold a conversation stand close together, purposely talking into one another's ears to be heard over all other noises. One of the regular attendees I interviewed, Eric Ward, said he does not go to the gym to be social and hold conversations. He comes down there to work out. I can understand why this culture does not value verbal communication.

Cadets bottle up personal emotion at MMA. Personal expression is subdued and looked down upon outside of the weight room, so visiting the weight room provides a release. The noise level does not seem to bother anyone, and has actually come to be expected. When the room is silent, the normal atmosphere of the gym is lessened. I enjoy walking into the weight room and immediately become drowned out by the noise. I do not want to stand out, but rather mix into all the action and perform my own workout without having to worry about what others are thinking. The noise is a distraction, but a good one that allows you to become engulfed in the environment and forget about everything around you. One night, around thirty minutes before closing, the staff turned off the radio, and an unusually quiet dullness swept over the weight room. People awkwardly looked around and said, "What happened to the music?" Cadet Ward discussed the issues he has with people in the weight room who are too loud. He said, "I hate it when people are loud and obnoxious, and they don't really have to be. They just have to make their presence known." He later shared that he goes to the weight room by himself because the gym is not a place to socialize. To Cadet Ward, the excess noise that comes from cadets is an annoyance in the weight room. For others, maybe

the ones who choose to wear personal headphones, noise does not seem to bother them.

THE RESPECT OF SPACE

Depending on the time of day when you go to the MMA weight room, the amount of personal space you are able to keep, and hold, will vary. In the mornings and late evenings, when few cadets are working out, it is easy to maneuver from one machine or exercise to another. With plenty of open power racks, dumbbells, and benches, there is even enough room to leave a "courtesy spot" between you and another lifter. Many times I have observed a person, who just entered the room, make his way over a bench and select one that has at least one open spot on either side of the bench. According to Allen, leaving space when available shows respect and courtesy. With all the pieces of equipment down there, it's hard for lifters to find enough space to perform their exercise, so it would make sense for everyone to be cognizant of their surroundings to make the functioning of the room go smoothly.

One of the best examples of cadets negotiating personal space happens around the water fountain. Located in the middle of the weight room on the wall next to the main office, the water fountain is the central location of all activity in the weight room. Whether or not a participant is actually going to the water fountain to get a drink, fill up a water bottle, go to the bathroom, or pass to the other side of the weight room, a participant will pass the water fountain numerous times during his or her workout. As a central location for activity, the water fountain leads to several issues with personal space. Those who are waiting in line usually leave a two to three foot gap in between the next person. There is a mirror in front of the fountain, which allows everyone who is waiting to use the fountain to awkwardly look at everyone around them. To me, with the combination of the mirror, the water fountain takes on a "watering hole" sense. While drinking, or waiting to drink, everyone can look up at the mirror and see everyone around them waiting and staring. Because of this potentially unsettling situation, the respect of personal space keeps the awkwardness level down. It is one of the few "gentleman" behaviors that are incorporated into this harsh and rigid environment.

Usually when two people cross paths at the water fountain, both participants will very generously insist on the other person

to go first. Usually someone will go first just to hurry up and not make an awkward situation of back and forth gesturing of who will go first. Other times when a participant is filling up a water bottle or protein shaker bottle and notices someone waiting behind him, he will let the waiting person go in front of him because it will take him longer to finish filling up his bottle. It is unusual to see a cadet continue to fill up his bottle even though someone is waiting. From observing, I have seen the disgusted and annoyed looks of cadets waiting for someone to finish filling up their bottle. This practice has developed into an unwritten expectation of courtesy.

Although the impact is low, the respect of social space helps keep the atmosphere of the weight room positive. By keeping as much personal space and making an effort to help other participants keep theirs, participants create a healthy atmosphere for working out. Back in the barracks, cadets live with a range of two to four other people, so they value any personal space they are able to get.

THE BODY LANGUAGE

To first time guests and outside observers, the weight room can be an intimidating place. As you walk down six flights of stairs, you gradually begin to hear the sounds of the weight room. For someone entering this culture for the first time, there is a sense of “earning your place.” This is not, however, a hazing type of initiation. You will fit into this culture if you are comfortable and knowledgeable about exercise, and if you are able to follow the guidelines of the weight room. It is easy to distinguish the newbies from the veteran participants. For instance, on a Sunday afternoon, about one o’clock, I was sitting in the weight room and in walks a broad-shouldered rugby player. The temperature in the room was at least seventy-two, pretty comfortable. But he was wearing a sweatshirt and a black beanie cap on his head, with headphones. Quickly behind him followed what looked like his girlfriend. He strutted from machine to machine, continuing to wear his sweatshirt and winter cap. The common participant would not wear this outfit in the gym, lest the rest of the room judge him or her. This rugby player was physically huge and very intimidating. Some people have a way about them that warns others to keep their distance, and he had it. He showed no concern for being judged by those around him, mainly due to the respect he already commanded.

This seemed significant to me because the rugby player embodied the alpha-male mentality that is common in this culture. At first I thought he was very arrogant by the way he strutted around and had the audacity to bring his girlfriend into the gym. Who would parade their girlfriend in front of all these males, especially here at MMA where males are restricted in their access to female interaction? However, I realized that this behavior was the essence of the MMA weight room: breaking the norm. After considering this cadet and comparing it to past observations, I understood that this behavior was not abnormal at all.

However, not twenty minutes after my experience with the rugby player, in walked a tall, skinny, and timid cadet. He immediately went to the machines, right past the dumbbells and free weights. From my experience, the cadets who are stronger or more comfortable in the gym will bounce from machine to free weights, showing their experience with both types of equipment. Those who are new to the gym, however, stay with the machines and do not venture out into the area with power racks, dumbbells, and squat racks. Two ordinary attendees who I was able to quickly ask about this stigma in the gym both said that some people do not want to be judged and have not gained the confidence to try new things yet. The weight room is a very scary place for newcomers, and it takes some time to become entirely comfortable in this culture. I do not think this type of behavior only applies to the MMA weight room, but is part of human nature. This military environment that is dominated by masculinity and alpha-male personalities amplifies it.

The stronger, more confident rugby player took on the typical persona of a masculine cadet in the weight room. He showed little concern for how he was viewed and broke some of the formalities of traditional weight room behavior. The skinnier cadet, however, showed how hard it is to blend in to this culture. Gaining confidence and transferring that to one’s behavior is how one will be accepted into the MMA weight room, shown by the rugby player and the struggle of the timid cadet.

Cadet Jason Allen pointed out that eye contact can be awkward in the weight room. He says people stare at one another because “they want to see how they match up to other people” and that it is “weird because it’s obvious that you were either staring at him or he was staring at you.” Eye contact and watching other people, to Jason, are not necessarily negative, but rather a self-reflecting action that can create satisfaction

and motivation. Jason says it is okay to see how you stack up to others and how much you are lifting and how others are doing an exercise, but you have to be cognizant of not staring and being awkward. You cannot mentally invade others' spaces. Although Jason seems to emphasize these strict guidelines of watching others and how carefully people tend to avoid obvious eye contact, he says people do it every day and even admits to doing it himself. I found it ironic that even though Jason was able to point out this cultural abnormality, but he openly admits to doing it himself. In a more judgmental culture, it becomes impossible for cadets not to compare themselves to their peers in an effort to gain reassurance or motivation.

By examining body language and the way people carry themselves in the MMA weight room, I was able to examine the different type of personalities in this culture and how those personalities develop. It is a process for cadets to become completely comfortable in the gym and put the possibility of judgment behind them. The weight room is a very physical and harsh environment, and personal judgment is all part of that. Those who have confidence prosper, while those who are still trying to find their niche in the culture have to put forth effort physically or else face being judged.

THE GUIDELINES AND EXPECTATIONS

At MMA, cadets live with strict rules, guidelines, and regulations. As far apart as the weight room is from typical MMA standards, there are ways in which these cultures collide. Even in the weight room, there are unwritten, written, and implied regulations in which participants are expected to follow. After cadets are finished with a machine, station, or dumbbells, they immediately put the weights back on the correct rack or the dumbbells back in their proper place on the shelf. Why? "It shows responsibility and respect to the facility" according to Cadet Ward. Cadets are encouraged to be model citizens at MMA, which translates to cleaning up after oneself and making the weight room presentable and ready for the next person to use. It shows decent behavior and responsibility.

One of the written rules in the weight room states "Do not drop the weights. Purposely dropping the weights can lose you your weight room privileges for the rest of the semester!" Although the entire weight room is covered in rubber mats to protect the floor, the weights are still very old and subject to

breaking if dropped with too much force. During my time spent in the weight room, I have seen cadets treat the dumbbells with great care and respect. There are designated places for cadets to throw weights on the ground and drop them from shoulder height. The stations are designed for this abuse. These power racks are elevated off with the ground with three inch rubber mats and outfitted with specific rubber weights that help absorb the impact during exercise that require dropping weights.

Those cadets who see other cadets leave weights out when they are finished often give them disgusted looks. Those who leave the weights out are not even paying attention to what they have done, and hardly ever catch the negative looks they get from other cadets. One afternoon I was observing the back half of the weight room in the corner when I saw a cadet about to leave a bench press machine. He had left forty-five pound plates on both sides of the bar. Usually when the bench press is used, having one forty-five pound plate on each side is typical. Right after this cadet left, another one jumped right on that machine and proceeded to use the machine. Instead of hindering the next cadet by leaving the weight on the barbell, it actually speeded up the process of changing weight over for the next person. "Could this be an exception to the standard?" I thought. After I observed the bench press machines specifically, I realized more cadets would leave the weights on the bench press machines. Not once were cadets confronted for leaving the weights, and I saw one cadet actually thanking another one for leaving the weights on the barbell for him. This exception shows the complicated nature and systems of the MMA weight room culture that can only be understood through in-depth observation and assimilation.

THE CHANGING ATMOSPHERE

The atmosphere of the weight room changes as the time of day progresses. Early in the morning when the room opens at nine, the weight room has minimal activity. I have seen, at most, ten people at once in the weight room in the early mornings. It is significantly quieter in the morning. The sense of urgency to move from one exercise to another is gone, which says a lot about the type of people who choose to work out early in the morning. There are not a lot of fast paced moments, and cadets take their time and seem to enjoy this slower pace of exercise. In contrast, as the afternoon approaches and classes end, there could be one hundred cadets in the weight room at one time.

Because there is competition for equipment, there is an urgency to get done quickly, and I can see the subtle stress level rise in the faces of cadets as they try to maneuver their way around the weight room. Personal space is invaded, and cadets then have to make compromises on their specific routines that are broken up by the availability of equipment. Oddly enough, I have not once observed a conflict between cadets over usage of a machine, which points to the maturity cadets have in dealing with one another and solving conflicts.

After supper roll call (SRC) at 1900, and by the time cadets eat, there is usually one hour left in the day before the weight room closes at nine o'clock p.m. During the last hour, cadets move around the weight room with a calm and relaxed manner, but with a sense of purpose. The cadet assistants, who help take care of the weight room, walk around cleaning benches, sectioning off space that have been cleaned, and re-organize the weight stacks to make sure all equipment is back to its original place for the night. It is odd to see that this important facility to MMA is actually ran and tasked to cadets. Normally, janitors or MMA staff would be in charge of cleaning up and locking down any property that is owned and has a significant amount of valuable merchandise. It shows the level of trust that MMA has in the cadet assistants, which speaks volumes for these cadets' personal knowledge of exercise, managing skills, and maturity.

The time of day in the weight room impacts the changing atmosphere of this gym in a way that is almost impossible to fully describe through written text. It is similar to an overhead view of a city street. Early in the morning, traffic is minimal, but as the day moves on, more and more people enter the area until it becomes congested to the point of being unproductive. Eventually, the amount of activity will die down, and by evening there are only a few stragglers finishing up their daily routine.

THE LANGUAGE

When I decided to focus on the language used in the weight room, I was immediately disappointed. I was expecting to hear a type of language unique to this culture. After much time spent specifically listening to conversations and word choice used in the weight room, I felt as if I had wasted too much time. It was not until after I went back to my barracks room and reflected on what I had heard that I realized the significance of the comical dialogue that I had ignored. I recalled a conversation between

a cadet and myself who I was familiar with, in which he came up to me, put his finger into my chest and said "Ain't nothin' but a peanut, Murphy!" I playfully batted him away and asked him what that was from. He said Ronnie Coleman, a famous bodybuilder said that after deadlifting "like a thousand pounds." It was not until I thought about this playful dialect that I realized that masculinity breaks out in informal exchanges in the weight room. Joking in manner, but referencing something a massive bodybuilder said in the weight room shows this cadet's mindset about his personal image in the gym. Obviously, he felt as if he was getting stronger and wanted to flaunt it to others. Big-headedness is a reoccurring theme in this weight room. According to a study conducted by Susan Alexander, an author for the Pacific Sociological Association, "Masculinity, then, stems from the fear of being seen as sissy, feminine, or anything less than a man (Alexander, 2003)." Going to a military college brings with it the expectation that everyone who attends will be physically strong and capable, which sometimes results in cadets over-compensating for their lack of manly attributes.

When I had my interview with Cadet Allen, I got an unexpected lesson on language when he explained why he goes to the gym: "to get yoked, to get swoll...to get my Allen on." He was referring to improving his physique, but by comparing getting into shape to his last name shows the humorous and cocky attitude of cadets in the gym. There are many odd terms that cadets reference in the gym and have become universal slang across many gyms. Lee Monaghan, an author for *Sociology of Health & Illness*, quoted Arnold Schwarzenegger on one of his most famous descriptions of the weight room:

This type of vocabulary shows the similarities that weight lifting can have to physical appearance and manly characteristics. Seeing outward improvements in physical physique can really motivate a man, or cadet, to act flamboyant and big-headed.

It is bad enough to be at a military school where alpha males reign, but the attitudes that can develop in the weight room are an even further extreme. The language that is the result of big-headedness can range from crude joking to big-headed cockiness. I have, however, never seen this type of attitude go further than playful joking between friends. The unique language that belongs in the weight room is left behind as cadets leave the weight room. They know how to turn it on and off and return to their polite and mature behavior upon leaving the gym.

THE FEMALES IN THE WEIGHT ROOM

Historically, one of the most disputed topics at MMA has been the issue of female presence in the Corps of Cadets. It was only within the last twenty years that females were legally allowed admittance into MMA. The female stigma, however, has still not gone away. Focusing on this stigma, I wanted to see how cadets viewed females in a weight room, which is a predominantly male culture outside of MMA, as well. My personal observations of female cadets in the weight room are just as varied as the comments I received from cadets.

The greatest feeling you can get in the gym or the most satisfying feeling you can get in the gym is the *Pump*. Let's say you train your biceps: blood is rushing into your muscles and that's what we call 'the pump'. Your muscles get a really *tight feeling*, like your skin is going to explode any minute. You know it's really tight like somebody is blowing air into your muscles. It just blows up and it feels different, it feels fantastic. (Monaghan, 2001)

One Wednesday afternoon I was in the weight room when I saw a female sports team walk in. I had been waiting for an opportunity to see female interaction in the gym and this was a perfect opportunity. Immediately the team congregated around a power rack. They stood around, talking and being social, which was very different from the secluded majority of the rest of the room. At least ten minutes had passed and still no one from the team was working out. The only working out I observed was someone getting on an exercise bike and slowly peddling. I noticed other cadets around them with annoyed looks on their faces as they maneuvered around the impeding blob in the middle of the pathway. Others gave subtle glances in their directions and then raising their eyebrows and shaking their heads. No one on the team was doing anything productive except taking up space. Finally the lifting coach entered the room, and the team dispersed. Ironically, the noise level in the gym decreased significantly.

Although the team's intentions of exercising might have been good, their presence did not fit within the weight room culture. They were overly social: it was weird to see so much laughter and "softness" in the weight room. It is not my place to say who deserves to be in the weight room, but from the typical

culture that I have seen, female presence does not blend well in this masculine atmosphere when they choose not to exercise quietly.

A cadet, who preferred not to be named, very blatantly stated that "it doesn't matter if you're a guy or girl...if you're gonna stand there with five pound weights, go away, just get out." It was from this comment that I understood that this dissatisfaction was not solely linked to females. Yes, females typically lift lighter weights, but that is not to say that male cadets always lift heavy weights. The problem cadets have is not over females, but rather the issue of productivity.

The cadet noticed that a lot of females came to the weight room without being serious about what they are doing. The cadet did contrast two different females, in which one of them, according to the cadet, stood around the weight room just flirting with other guys and was just annoying to be around. The other female "blended in with everyone else" and "did work." From this cadet's perspective and the attitudes observed from other cadets, most male cadets are fine with females in the weight room as long as they are being productive and not disrupting the culture. They believe it is not a place to be overly social, but rather a place to exercise and get things accomplished. There are many female cadets who productive in the gym, and even women sports teams.

During another observation after my evening meal, I was finishing up my own workout and I noticed a few of the female members of a different team working out. Their attitudes and appearance were completely opposite from that of the previous team. They were not noisy. They did not congregate into a large group. They were not aimlessly walking around. They worked out like everyone else and were very productive. I almost missed them entirely because it did not seem abnormal to me. Maybe the attitudes of the two different sports teams have an effect on the female's actions in the weight room. Regardless, if a cadet comes down to the weight room to be productive, he or she blend well with the culture and does not stick out. If he or she comes down to the gym to over-socialize and take up space, most of the cadets I observed seemed to feel that he or she then did not belong, male or female.

There have been many studies on female presence in male-dominated gyms. Maxine Craig and Rita Liberti, both from the California State University, stated that women's "comfort

was provided by an organizational culture of nonjudgmental and noncompetitive sociability and that the foundation of that culture was the organization's use of technology and labor." Their study focused on an all-female weight room and the differences that made it appealing to females instead of a co-ed gym. A place of "nonjudgmental" and "noncompetitive" attitudes is not to be found at MMA (Craig and Liberti, 2007). Female cadets have dealt with a predominantly male environment ever since they matriculated and have learned to cope with it. A place where someone faces no social pressure would be ideal, but impractical at a military institute. That is not MMA culture, and definitely not the MMA weight room culture. From my observations of the weight room, I have concluded that, for most, the sexist attitude that females do not belong there is not universal among males. The same discontent applies to males who choose to be unproductive, not just females.

THE CONNECTION

As an avid attendee of weight rooms, I had developed my own personal attitude of typical weight room culture. I always assumed the gym to be a primarily male-dominated place, but understood growing female participation. My experience in the MMA weight room has only supplemented this view. I judge whether or not someone belongs in the weight room by their, not their sex. The weight room participants I interviewed took a similar view as well. MMA teaches cadets to be productive with their time, and the same is expected in the weight room. Someone earns their place in this culture by their level of effort and productivity, which is supplemented by the way he or she carries themselves in the room.

To some extent, cadets have incorporated MMA traditions into the culture of the weight room. Specific aspects, such as the dress code and lack of outward aggression, are left behind and exceptions are made to facilitate an environment that cadets can enjoy when they exercise. Cadets have taken other aspects, particularly respect for personal space and property, from the MMA way of life and carried them into the weight room. From these additions and exclusions, the MMA weight room embodies a unique culture that is both necessary and beneficial to the Corps of Cadets and the MMA system.

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