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Women's exercise experiences in women only gyms: an examination within the framework of self determination theory and feminist cultural studies

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Publicado por: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra

URL persistente: URI:<http://hdl.handle.net/10316.2/34973>

DOI: DOI:http://dx.doi.org/10.14195/2182-7087_5_12

Accessed : 26-Apr-2023 10:38:07

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2 • PSICOLOGIA DO DESPORTO / SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

**WOMEN'S EXERCISE EXPERIENCES IN
WOMEN-ONLY GYMS: AN EXAMINATION
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SELF-
DETERMINATION THEORY AND FEMINIST
CULTURAL STUDIES**

Within fitness industry, women-only gyms have become an important market throughout the world in recent years. These spaces represent “male and mirror free exercise spaces” especially for women not preferring the weight-lifting exercises in mainstream gyms and in need of different needs and interests (Craig & Liberti, 2007). Women’s experience of physical activity is closely related to culture and social space (Markula, 1995; Krane et al., 2001). Therefore, it is important to understand the role of gender-segregated gyms in different cultures such as Turkey which women are frequently in disadvantaged position in social, political and economic life. This research examines the factors that affect the experience of women exercising in women-only gyms within the frame of Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and feminist cultural studies (Markula, 1995). In this respect, the study aims at two main issues: (a) How does the socio-contextual environment of women-only gyms effect women’s experiences and perceptions of exercising? (b) What kinds of roles do these gyms play in the satisfaction of competence, relatedness and autonomy basic needs?

The data was collected through participant observation and interviews that are based upon qualitative research methods, in GoFit (pseudonym) in Ankara, Turkey (Patton, 2002). 40-90 minutes semi-structured interviews are conducted with 20 women exercise participants of ages 19-58. The data is analysed with content analysis. Peer scrutiny of the research, prolonged engagement, reflexivity and triangulation strategies were employed to enhance the credibility of the study (Patton, 2002). The collected data was sorted into three main categories: (1) Exercise in minimum (intensity of daily life and time of one’s own), (2) The structured program (no harm from the equipments and controlled exercises) and (3) Comfort of being in women-only environment (avoidance of body exposure and relatedness). Consequently, women-only gyms have gendered structures enabling the satisfaction of competence, relatedness and autonomy needs and these gendered structures specify the perception of women about exercise.

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