Does Fitness Bring People Together?
Zain Lodhia

EVOKE

About the Ethnographer
My name is Zain Lodhia. I was born in Chicago and raised in its northern suburb Skokie. I attended Niles North High School, where I participated in Track and Football. My residence this freshman year is Florida Avenue Residence hall which is pretty far south of campus. I enjoy meeting new people and living here on campus has definitely given me that opportunity. My hobbies include working out and playing sports, as well as reading material that interests me. My writing comes out best when I am interested in the topic I write about. Hopefully I will learn from my successes and failures of first semester and bring those experiences with me as I enter my second semester here in Illinois. Right now, I am majoring in physics and will stay there unless I feel it is not for me. I look forward to a great second semester full of more college life for me to experience.

Files:
Positioning Your Essay.doc (Fri 01/27/2006 20:31)

EXPLORE

Question
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?
List of Possible Fieldsites:

CRCE/IMPE
Computer Labs
Research Labs
Residence Hall Floor
Residence Hall Cafeteria
MTD Buses
Library
Restaurant/Fast Food

Plan
How will you go about answering your inquiry?
Files:
explore-plan.doc (Wed 01/25/2006 0:55)
Site Proposal.doc (Tue 03/21/2006 9:20)

OBSEERVE

What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?
Here are some of the field notes that I have typed up. More are on the way.
Files:
Monday February 20th.doc (Tue 03/21/2006 11:05)
Friday February 24th.doc (Tue 03/21/2006 11:05)
Saturday February 25th.doc (Mon 03/27/2006 22:30)
Thursday March 2nd.doc (Thu 03/30/2006 20:12)
Friday March 10th.doc (Sat 04/01/2006 19:11)
DISCUSS
Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data

Files:
Analysis of Fieldwork Essay.doc (Mon 03/27/2006 22:35)
Research Paper Outline.doc (Tue 03/28/2006 15:08)

REFLECT
Link
Connect with other resources and materials.
Self-Reflective Writings

Files:
My Life As a Student.doc (Tue 03/21/2006 10:51)
My Life As a Writer.doc (Tue 03/28/2006 23:28)
Reflective Questions.doc (Thu 03/30/2006 20:29)
Self Reflective Essay.doc (Tue 05/02/2006 15:06)
Annotated Bib - Library.doc (Tue 02/14/2006 10:23)
Archive Notes.doc (Tue 03/21/2006 10:50)

OTHER
A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.

Files:
First Draft.doc (Tue 04/04/2006 10:51)
Final Draft.doc (Tue 04/18/2006 10:56)
Research Paper Outline.doc (Tue 03/28/2006 15:08)
research+paper+outline.doc (Thu 03/30/2006 15:07)
Interview Narrative.doc (Tue 02/28/2006 14:55)
Interview Analysis.doc (Mon 02/27/2006 23:43)
Interview Transcription.doc (Mon 02/27/2006 23:43)
Annotated Bib - Web.doc (Tue 02/21/2006 9:28)
Fitness Options at CRCE

In order to lose weight and improve health, many people like to go to the gym or a fitness center. At Illinois, a popular place to do such things is CRCE (Campus Recreation Center East). At CRCE, there is a circular track that is 1/8 of a mile long as well as many treadmills, elliptical machines, and other cardiovascular equipment. The subcultures I plan to study are ones that in my first have conflicting views. Those subcultures are the ones that use the machines in CRCE vs. the ones that use the track. My goal while observing these subcultures is to find out the preference in technology and the difference in opinion that each side has to offer.

Since I rarely use either option of exercise when I go to CRCE, I do not know much about the advantages and disadvantages of either the machines or the track. The logical reasoning that I have heard in defense of equipment use is that there is less pressure on the joints of the body when used. The newly designed machines have luxurious features such as a heart rate monitor, distance measurer, a calorie counter, and more. It would make sense that a machine designed in such a way would have been tested to help reduce the negative effects that exercise might have on the body.

The other option at CRCE is the track, which is made of synthetic material. There must be a reason for the specifically designed track, otherwise the gym could have used
cement or tile for the runners. This implies that there is some technological design and reason for using the material made for the track. Another form of technology that CRCE offers its track users is a large display, digital clock, in which the runners can pass by on each lap and check their time.

Being an athlete and enjoying physical competition, I feel that I share some similarities with the subcultures at CRCE. When I go to CRCE, I play basketball on the courts below the fitness area. I feel that there has to be a purpose to exert such physical energy and that basketball as well as many other sports are worthy using that energy. I understand to some degree that machines can be used to improve body conditioning and strength, but that they are only a stepping-stone to make sports contests more competitive. I do not share the joy and even more the understanding of why people would choose to run. Maintaining health and fitness are of course very important to me, but it would make more sense to have fun while doing so, and that is what sports competition provides.

In the days before my observations begin, I do not anticipate and problems in understanding the reasoning or learning about the technology. I hope to find the right people and ask the right questions about why they exercise in the manner that they do and what technological advances influence those their opinions on exercise. I will expand the observations to two subcultures in search of a better explanation in terms of technology preference. Hopefully, the comparing and contrasting will bring out answers that could only be found by studying both subcultures.
Through all this observation and interrogation, I hope to learn in more detail about the technology provided by the gym and other available options that I didn’t know about before. My main goal is to come to an understanding of why people exercise in the manner they do, specifically and strictly on the options of the track and cardiovascular machines. The main issue in relating the two subcultures is the use of technology in the everyday actions by the people in them. I will attempt to compare the subcultures through their uses of technology and hopefully learn what I need to in order to understand them.
Explore: Plan

My focus for the ethnography research paper will be the use of technology at the student recreation center, CRCE (Campus Recreation Center East). To narrow it down, I would like to study the subcultures that do fitness and cardio exercises, comparing and contrasting the users of the track and the users of the various fitness machines. I would like to get their opinions on why they prefer/don’t prefer the more technologically advanced machines. I will also be asking the users of the technology that they use while performing their exercises on the different machines or the track. The weekday evenings would be the best time to observe the subcultures because there are many more people who come to exercise at night. In order to investigate these subcultures, I will have to observe them first-hand as well as interview a couple of them in order to get an inside opinion of how they feel about the technology. Hopefully, with many hours of observation and the various opinions of the many users of the technology in these subcultures, I will get a better understanding of why people exercise with the methods they do.
Site Proposal

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The track isn’t too crowded tonight
The track is structured so that the inside lane is the fastest lane while the outside lane is the slowest, meaning that people who run at a faster pace should stay on the inside lane. Most of the people are walking in the outside lane.
I asked a person that I know using the track why there exists a pattern like this, and he tells me that since the entrance to the track is on the inside lane, it only makes sense that people at a slower pace should drift to the outside and not slow other runners down. A pattern like this makes for a more organized group of runners.
There is a digital clock that counts up to 99:99 and it seems everyone passing by glances at it, probably to time them.
I started observing a runner at around 8 PM who stretched out a little bit and started running on the track. He ran for about 20-25 minutes, he later told me his total time was 23:14. He had exercised a total of 3 miles, which were 24 laps around the track (runs 20 and walks 4). I asked him about the clock and he said he checks it every 2 laps to make sure he is on pace, or at least not slowing down too much. Said he did this same routine 3 times a week, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
Off one corner of the track is a sort of rest area where people can get water and stretch out. There is also a view of the racquetball courts from this area.
In the cardio machine area, there are a lot of TV’s hanging up for people to view, a lot of them showing different channels and shows.
There is a signup board for all of these machines. 3 rows with about 20 machines in each row. The elliptical machines are all in the third row, and everything has been signed up for the night. Every machine can be signed up for a _ hour slot.
The people using the row of elliptical machines are 90% female.
At the end of the elliptical row is a shelf of magazines for people to read while on the machines, many people are using them.
From the 20 people on the 3rd row machines at 8:45, 16 of them have ipods, this is a huge use of technology.
Everyone cleans up after they are done using the machines. There are many paper towel dispensers around the cardio area and people use them along with a disinfectant spray to wipe up the machines after using them.
Today my objective is to view the first row of cardio machines, which contains mostly stationary bikes with some Stairmaster machines.

The signup board is pretty empty as well as is the machines. There are still people using them, but it does not seem as crowded or in as high demand as the elliptical machines.

I talked to a guy using one of the bikes. He is about 5’8” and 160 lbs, or at least that’s what I think. He said he does cardio exercises every weekday (Monday to Friday) along with a lot of abdominal workouts. He told me he prefers the bike to running on the track or using the treadmill because he has weak knees and that he would use the elliptical if he could but there is always such a long line to use one. He stays on the bikes for 30 minutes per session.

I ended up seeing the guy who I talked to about the track the last time I was here. I noticed he had an ipod this time and decided to ask him about it before he started his workout. About the ipod, he replied that it wasn’t charged the last time I saw him so he couldn’t use it. It helped him keep his mind off the pain and the feeling of tiredness, which helps him focus on running and what he has to accomplish.
• The main thing is that at this time it is definitely not as crowded as it is at night.
• There seem to be a whole new bunch of faces here too, nobody that I can recognize from the first couple times here.
• I surveyed 10 people to see if they only come during the morning and 8 people said they did because it was less crowded. The other two said it didn’t really matter when they went.
• One of the people I asked was a girl who told me she came on the mornings of Saturday and Sunday because it wasn’t crowded then. She also went early in the morning sometimes before class, around 7 or 8 AM depending on when she started. The reason for this was because she wanted to use the elliptical machines and that she couldn’t stand how they were reserved for the entire evening on weeknights. She said that before, she would get out at 5:00 and stopped by here to reserve a machine for later that evening, but by that time everything until 9 or 10 PM would be reserved and she felt that was too late to work out, especially since she had some early classes. So that is why she resorted to coming early in the morning and on the weekends.
• She prefers the elliptical to the track or the other machines there because it is really easy on the body. It also burns a lot of calories. The track and treadmill can’t offer this because they are high impact activities and she said that bikes just didn’t work fast enough. Therefore, she claimed the elliptical was the perfect machine for her and she made sure she used it every time she came to work out.
• I finally caught someone not wiping up after they were done using one of the treadmills. Since I was still talking to this girl, I asked her what she thought of cleaning her machine after she used it. She said it was good to be clean and felt strongly about it. So I asked ‘what about people who don’t clean the machines when they are done?’ and she said it was disgusting and I should probably tell them if I saw them. She would.
• Technology Note: She had an Ipod with her while she worked out.
• The track wasn’t that crowded, probably less than 10 people on it total. On my way out I saw 2 guys racing on one of the longer stretches of the track. They reserved the outer two lanes for their race and did it while nobody would get in the way. They did it twice and then took a break, that’s when I left.
• The main thing I noticed about today in terms of attendance is that it CRCE starts to get really crowded around this time. I came in at 5:00 and it wasn’t too crowded, there were still some open machines and people on the track were pretty scattered. But by the time I left, the signup boards were getting filled until as late as 8:00 PM and there weren’t too many gaps in the track.
• Before I left I observed two girls complaining about how crowded it is now and how they thought it was ridiculous for them to come later. They signed up for 9:30 slots and kept complaining to each other on their way out.
• A machine was reserved for 5:30 and when the person came to use it, the machine was occupied. She told the other girl already using the machine that it was reserved during this time and the other girl immediately got off and cleaned it. What really struck me was how smooth and courteous the whole affair was. Barely any words exchanged except those in the beginning.
• A person who was new to CRCE asked a facility member how to use one of the treadmills. The member explained the features and how to get started on the machine.
• Some of the people on the track don’t have any place to keep their Ipods or mp3 player while they run so they hold them. Today I saw a person who strapped his Ipod around his upper arm so that he wouldn’t have to carry it while running.
• There was an older gentleman today who I have never seen walking on the track. What was eye-catching was the fact that he used a cane and had a large ankle brace over his right ankle. He was just doing lap after lap walking along the outer lane of the track. That is some real determination to come and exercise with a body in that type of condition.
The first thing I witnessed after I arrived was a confrontation on the track. It didn’t escalate into anything serious but there was definitely some tension. There was a girl messing around with her Ipod and she had her headphones on. The problem was that she was walking, and pretty slowly I might add, on the inside lane, which is where you should go the fastest. Two girls were running behind her and as they passed her told her to move to the outside lane. After she didn’t hear them they got a little irritated and yelled at her, asking, “Didn’t you hear me?” The walking girl then heard them and yelled back, telling them to mind their own business. Many other people on the track looked on but said nothing and after the two girls moved on, the girl with the Ipod left and the situation was over.

None of the TV’s worked while I was there. The treadmills were also empty, except for maybe one or two. I am guessing that there is some kind of connection there. Since the TV’s weren’t working, people probably thought there was no reason to use the treadmills and decided to run on the track.

Both signup boards 1 and 2 were pretty much empty. The only machines used during the time I was there were the elliptical machines, which were all in use and reserved until 5:30 PM at the earliest.

I never really noticed the use of water bottles until today. Two girls had reserved adjacent machines in the third row at 4:30 PM and when they were decided who would use who, one of them said she should use machine number 13 because is had a water bottle holder. After this I noticed that not everyone had water bottles, but there were a lot of machines with the feature of holding a water bottle.

There was an older gentleman in gray sweats who was running on the track. I really admire the determination that people here have. He is probably exercising for the sole purpose of staying healthy. For whatever reason that people attend CRCE, they have goals and they are accomplishing them just by being there.
• In the water fountain area off to the side of the track, I noticed people were keeping their towels on the glass posts. The posts are connected to windows that show the racquetball courts below. About 3 or 4 people just stuffed their towels into a crack on the window and left it there while they went to run.

• A lot of older people come today. I noticed them especially on the stationary bikes. Other than that, the place seems really dead right now. It is really not as crowded as this time that would make sense because people are still in class. It also makes sense that the older people would come at this time since it wasn’t as crowded with the younger generation.

• One of the facility workers was walking around checking all of the paper towel dispensers. Any that were empty he would mark down and return later to replace the paper towel roll.

• Because some of the dispensers were empty, I caught a couple of people not cleaning off their machines after using them.

• After seeing people use towels on the track, I inquired more about the use of personal towels. Usually people bring their own or they can rent one from the customer service desk on the second floor. It is not a necessity or requirement to have a towel, just another courteous thing to do for yourself and everyone there by keeping the place clean.
An Athlete’s Paradise

When it comes to fitness centers and gyms around the University of Illinois campus, CRCE (Campus Recreation Center East) is definitely the place to go. Renovated recently and including many new and upgraded machines, CRCE provides many options to those who want to get in shape, lift weights, or play sports.

As you walk through the automatic electronic doors at the entrance, you already get that upbeat feeling. The music playing, the basketball games going on to the right, and a swimming pool on the left. Past the lobby is the check in area, where Illinois students and registered members of CRCE hand their ID-cards to the CRCE employees who then swipe the card through a scanner. If you are cleared to enter, your picture along with some university information comes up on the screen.

After checking in, a customer service desk runs along the right wall. If you need to rent any sports equipment you can do so here. Immediately after customer service is the most eye-catching item in the lobby. A big screen television rests in the wall and usually has some kind of sports event showing on it at all times. There are even a couple of sofas in front of it to help comfort the viewer. An item like the big screen television shows that the kind of technology that this facility has to offer should be incredible, since they can afford to put such an expensive and luxurious item in a simple lobby.
The swimming pool is another attractive sight. It is more of a recreational pool with its slide, volleyball net, and basketball hoop. There is also a Jacuzzi towards the back of the room. The pool is usually lively with people in their swimming gear playing, relaxing, and just having a good time.

From the lobby a person can get into the men and women’s locker rooms. The locker rooms offer a highly advanced security system in which each locker has its own electronic lock. After the user finishes securing their items, they simply close the locker, enter a 4-digit pass code of their liking, and set the lock. This technology is used on over 400 lockers in both the men and women’s locker rooms. The locker room also provides a digital weighing scale.

Upon leaving the locker room, there are many options that a person has in order to use the facility. On the main floor are gyms for racquetball, basketball, and soccer. There is also a second floor that contains all of the center’s fitness equipment along with a 1/8-mile track. As you reach the top of the stairs, you are able to see the whole area from where you are. The upper floor is completely open, allowing everyone to see everyone. A person on a stationary bike can see someone lifting weights. A track runner can see the lower level basketball courts. The idea of that upbeat and cooperative feeling again presents itself as one can see others and be motivated by their progress.

To the left of the stairs is the weight lifting area. This is usually a male dominated area of CRCE where the men come to show how they are men. The whole area is lined
with a bunch of mirrors that of course raises the moral and self-esteem of the people working there. As you walk across the work out area, it seems as if every machine and free weight available has access to its own mirror or at least a part of a mirror. Another interesting note is that most of the weights are pretty heavy, just adding to the notion of the free weight area being male dominated.

Right behind the stairs is the circuit training section that contains a bunch of new machines. These machines are located in close proximity with one another so that the circuit training can be completed successfully by anyone. New technological additions to this section of CRCE are the televisions mounted on the wall. This provides the circuit training users a little entertainment while conducting their program.

Circling the entire facility is the synthetic track. When you first start off, there is a double-sided digital clock that keeps your time. It is double-sided because the direction of the track changes everyday, alternating each direction every other day. The clock runs from 0:00 to 99:59 before it resets. It provides the runners with a way to keep their time as they finish each lap. The track consists of three lanes that have unofficial speeds, outside being the slowest and becoming faster as you go inward. The track overlooks the basketball courts for _ of its route, and the other half cuts through and besides the circuit training area, free weight area, and fitness/cardiovascular training area. The track is obviously one of the major highlights of CRCE because of its stunning view around the entire facility. The ability to see everyone else working out and training hard gives
runners that extra motivation as well as motivation to others around the facility since they can see the runners at every point around the track.

The final area on CRCE’s 2nd floor is the fitness and cardiovascular training area. This is the area filled with stationary bikes, treadmills, ellipticals, Stairmasters, and more machines that help a person in their aerobic exercises. All of these machines are electronically powered and provide up-to-date technology. There are three main rows of machines as well as other similar machines near the windows. Sign up boards for every half an hour are posted to organize the usage of the machines throughout the entire day.

A particular treadmill has a uniquely designed shape for its handles and side railings. It is a cream color, which along with similar models stands out among the mostly dark colored machines. It provides the user with a heart rate monitor, distance measurer, a calorie counter and more health related information. It has a safety wire, which causes an emergency stop whenever pulled on with a little bit of force. There is also a deep, round pocket that was designed to hold water bottles. This pocket is usually filled with an Apple Ipod or some other type of mobile music device. The LCD screen is probably the most technologically advanced item on the machine, and it doesn’t disappoint giving accurate and clear displays of the information you request.

The technology at CRCE is definitely very impressive. Hopefully thorough research and observation will allow a better understanding of the layout of the facility as well as the people who use the facility.
Analysis of Fieldwork Essay

Examining a subculture is long and engaging process. There are many different areas to cover and each must be observed carefully in order to get a useful understanding of the subculture. Along this process, many steps were taken to get thorough information and each of those steps will be examined to see how the ideas did or did not change along the way.

CRCE is a field site filled with different subcultures. From the weightlifters to the basketball players to the track runners, there exist numerous groups within the facility that have their own unique qualities and characteristics. The subcultures studied for this ethnography were the ones doing cardiovascular activities such as the treadmill or the track. A lot of observations were taken of these subcultures at different dates and times to see how they acted with one another.

The first ever step in an ethnography paper is deciding on a subculture to observe. Weighing out the ideas that I had come up with along with those recommended in class, CRCE seemed to be a place that would be good for observing a subculture because they have so many in one field site. Since we were told to choose a subculture that we did not know much about, I decided on studying the cardio machine users since I had never had much interaction with them.

The next part of the project was to explain how I would incorporate technology with my chosen field site in the Site Proposal essay. In this writing, I narrowed down the subcultures that I would study to the track and fitness machine users. Comparing the
usage of these facilities along with their technological features would be the main focus of the project.

Positioning yourself was the following part of the project, consisting of how I fit into the subculture so far and what my initial feelings toward the group were. Also included in the essay was information about what kind of facilities were going to be studied. Some interesting questions posed about the track were what kind of material it uses and why, technology-wise is it used for the purpose of a track. On the other hand are the fitness machines, which consist of the elliptical machine, treadmill, and stationary bike. For the technology used in these machines, I looked at the items such as the heart rate monitor and the data counter, which kept track of distance, measured, calories burned, and more.

I was starting to learn more about the facility that this subculture resided in and was hoping that this would help in understanding the subculture. My next assignment was to study in detail an artifact from my field site. The format of the paper was to start out with a broad picture of the field site and to slowly zoom in on one the artifacts within it. I started out describing the technology that was used in the facility from the moment a person walked in. This continued throughout the entire walkthrough until I reached the chosen artifact, a treadmill. The treadmill chosen had a unique shape for its side railings and came in a bright cream color that stood out from the mostly dark colored machines. It came with many features that a person wouldn’t get if they were to run on the track or outdoors unless they had special equipment. These features included a heart-rate monitor, distance measurer, calorie counter, and other features related to distance or health.
Research is always important in learning about a subject, and therefore I feel the library and web-based research could be the most helpful item in the entire paper. Through the research I was able to find a lot of information on fitness centers, the machines they use, and track material. I found the track material information very interesting and had no idea that so much technology was being put into making a track. The idea of optimizing it for both long-distance running as well as sprinting was very interesting. The articles about the benefits of using an elliptical vs. a treadmill will also be helpful in understanding the subculture. This part of the project greatly enhanced my knowledge of modern day fitness centers and was definitely vital for my progression.

At this point I had a good idea of the facility and now it was time to observe the people who inhabited it. This was done mostly through taking field notes, where I would observe the people while the facility was in use. These notes and observations will give an accurate guide into how this subculture acts on a normal, daily basis. During this part of the experiment, it was important that I stay as objective as possible in the notes. The reason for this was because keeping the essay objective would make it similar to those printed in the *New Yorker*. The aim of a good ethnography project is to present the facts and have the reader draw their own conclusion after reviewing the material.

During my first couple of visits everything seemed rather normal, or at least it seemed so compared to my perception of a normal fitness center. The main thing that caught my eye was the cleanliness of the place, not only garbage but how it was very sanitary also. I learned that after people are finished using a machine, they use a disinfectant spray and paper towels to clean it off for the next person. This isn’t a
requirement, but a courtesy and after 2 days of observation it seemed as if everyone did it after they were done working out.

Since technology was to be incorporated into the paper, I was on the lookout for technology usage. Many people nowadays use Ipods, or digital music players while they are working out. For track users, there is a large digital timer at the track entrance that runners can use to time themselves with. Unlike the timer, which requires its users to do a little math to calculate their time, cardio machine users have this technology to themselves with a whole lot more. As mentioned before, these fitness machines came with many features that measured distance and health related items.

The last part of the project was the analysis of insider language essay, where I interviewed a member of the subculture, transcribed the interview, and analyzed his responses. Being able to ask direct questions to an expert of the subculture, I learned a lot about what and why they do certain things. The most important thing that I learned from the member is that he felt no connection to the other members of the group. It seems they are all connected because of what they do together but they do not feel this way towards one another.

My views toward this subculture changed over the course of the semester, as observing them and learning of their feelings toward each other helped me to understand them better. Because they all go to the same place, have the same goals, and perform the same actions one would think that being together was a kind of motivation. Instead it seems, that these are just a bunch of people in the same place doing the same things for their own reasons.
• Track material
• Elliptical vs. treadmill
• Self motivation (interview)
• Connection to others in the subculture (interview)
• Cleanliness of facility
• Features that CRCE offers
• Track changes direction everyday
• How crowded it is at night compared to mornings (weekends)
• Signup board of elliptical
• Ipods, mp3 players
• Large display digital timer for track runners
• Feelings toward the subculture at different times of the project
• Technology features on the new cardio machines (HR monitor, calorie, distance)
• People’s workout schedules
• 30 minute sessions for reserved machines
• The racers on the track in the early morning
• Feeling of going somewhere (interview)
• Working out has a rhythm to it, one has to find it (interview)
• Best running surfaces
• Urethane
• Marketing fitness
• Renovations for CRCE (archive notes)
• Survey of people
• Courtesy of people for reserved machines
My Life As a Student

If I could describe my life as a student in one word, it would be regrettable. I have never given 100% in high school or grade school when I knew that I could have. Many times I ended up watching TV or going out instead of studying and reading the material that would be on the exam. Just getting myself together for an hour the night before each exam would have definitely been helpful when test time came around.

I do enjoy learning though. Exploring new fields and subjects is always interesting, but I really dislike being tested on what I learned. Assessment is always necessary to distinguish the hard workers from the lazy, but I feel that another form of assessment rather than tests would be more effective for students.

If I could change one thing about myself as a student, it would be to stick to the motivation and goals that I had coming into the school year throughout the entire year. I want to be able to put full effort into everything I do academically and otherwise and not lose focus as time goes on.

As a student, I learn best when things are explained to me, a step-by-step solution to a math problem, the mechanics of why things happen in physics, or who the greatest Roman emperor was and why. Books are always good to review from but I feel that a teacher’s explanation is the best way to go. A major reason for this is because you can have your questions explained along the way by a teacher, whereas a book you must understand what is on the paper because that is what is written.

UIUC is a great school for me to learn because of the way many of their classes are formatted. The lecture-discussion sections of each course are good because you can be introduced to the material by the professor and then go through analysis with a T.A. the following day.
My Life As a Writer

I look at writing as something I can do but prefer not to. I enjoy if the topics I write about are interesting. I like to elaborate and literally present what I have to say well. When it comes to writing about thing I’m not so interested in, I feel I can still be creative and elaborate to make what I’m presenting feel like more than it actually is. Forced writing is definitely not a hobby of mine and I feel that people write best when they enjoy what they are talking about.

A personal example of this is that I love writing narratives. When I was still in grade school, we had a yearly competition called Young Authors, where all the students would write stories and the best would be judged and rewarded. I won that award a couple of times because I really liked to write about what interested me.

If I could change one thing about my life as a writer, it would be to write in a less structured and more flowing way. I feel that now my writing is structured from formats that I learned as a child. My ultimate goal as a writer is to break from that but be able to keep the paper flowing. I think I have achieved that somewhat in that class already. I am starting to come out of that shell and try new ways of expressing myself as a writer.
Reflective Questions

1. My project seems as though it will be very time-consuming. Spending time at CRCE sounds really good but unfortunately I won’t be working out, I’ll be watching other people workout and exercise. I am hoping that it is easy to write about this subculture and field site.

2. The idea of studying ethnography is interesting but I am not sure how to structure a paper like this. Reading all of the examples given in class are good because they give a good idea of how to write this kind of paper. Hopefully this paper won’t be too hard after I get a better understanding of it.

3. Nothing so far has really disturbed me but I hope I find something soon otherwise the paper could get really boring. So far the observations have seemed really mild, everyone is doing their own thing. If the subculture ends up being like that, I might have nothing interesting to add to the paper.

4. I think my subjects see them selves as motivated and determined. I think most of them have a schedule of some sort, whether it is to come daily or a couple of days a week require a lot of willpower and I think a lot of them have it.

5. There is no real evidence to prove that they feel this way but the fact they keep coming back and that the facility is crowded every night implies that people keep coming back.

6. Honestly, I envy people in my subculture because of the willpower and determination that they have. I really respect these qualities and wish I could find some motivation and willpower so that I could start exercising like they do.

7. My evidence for feeling this way is because I have tried to work out and exercise in the past but always end up stopping. I have never been able to find a schedule and stick with it and so I envy those who have found a routine that they like, fits their schedule, and is easy to stick with.
Self-Reflective Essay

Studying the Campus Recreation Center East (CRCE) for my ethnography project this semester was much harder than I thought I would be. During my first semester here, I had been to CRCE many times to play basketball. I understood that studying a field site that I had been to previously or was part of was against the wishes of my professor, so I narrowed down the field site within CRCE to a place I knew very little about. My chosen field site was the fitness area and track on the second floor of the facility.

Getting into the project took me longer than I had expected it to take. First of all, my schedule this semester was a lot busier than last semester so actually visiting CRCE had to be fit in. The first task I had to complete was getting the consent form signed by the manager at CRCE, and after I had done this I was able to take my field notes.

During my first few visits there I wasn’t sure on how I should go about taking notes. I had always imagined the CRCE second floor to be packed with people working out and exercising in all different forms. My imagination wasn’t too far off when I first arrived there. The place was filled with people doing all sorts of things. There were people on machines, lifting free weights, and running on the track. The second floor had a high ceiling and no internal walls so a person could see the whole floor from anywhere they were standing. I noticed this because of the early discussions I had had with my professor. These discussions were about how fitness centers were specifically designed in this way, allowing everyone to see everyone. The structure had some kind of effect on the people working out there. My initial guess for the purpose of these structures was
that since people working out could see everyone else doing the same, it gave a group motivation for everyone on the floor. Seeing other people doing the things that you are doing must have some kind of positive effect on the person’s mindset. Although my early notes didn’t really include this observation, I made sure to mention it in the final draft.

After visiting CRCE a couple of times, I noticed that it was much more crowded on weekdays than weekends, especially in the evening [A]. Through all of my drafts I have not been able to really analyze this fact. I noticed it early on when there was a big difference in the number of people during different times. In my final draft I was able to incorporate a quotation by a member of the subculture in order to provide the evidence that this type of crowdedness happened. Unfortunately I still wasn’t able to find a good enough analysis for it.

Cleanliness was also a big part of subculture, as everyone cleaned their fitness machines after using them. I found myself surprised by this fact and immediately put it into my notes. I wasn’t sure how to present this at the time, mostly because I didn’t know why I had found it fascinating. At a later time I realized that it was because the people working out were the ones who had to clean up after themselves. In my final paper, I was able to mold that idea to say that by giving the exercisers at CRCE the responsibility of cleaning up after themselves, it gave these people a sense of belonging to the facility. In the long run, they were keeping the place clean for themselves [B].

Technology was also an important issue in the project. Although technology was abundant and in all different forms at CRCE, I was initially unsure of how to incorporate it into this project. The major forms of technology that I saw at the beginning of my
observations were Ipods and other music players, the digital clock hanging over the track, and the measurement features on each of the machines. Of course I later found more complicated forms of technology through research such as urethane and impact of workout. Using a comment made by a member of the subculture on music players, I analyzed the use of music while working out in the final paper.

The research I did was another major factor when writing my final paper. Some of the things I found either in journals or online gave me great insight into the technology used in the subculture that I would have never thought of. Probably my biggest find in the research was the article on urethane. Looking for what kinds of synthetic material tracks were made of, I came across two materials, urethane and tulfite. Urethane was much more popular and more widely used because of its technological advancement in relaxation time. Fortunately for me, I knew exactly what I would do with this little piece of information the moment I got it, so all I had to do was shape it and get rid of any unneeded information. By the time I reached the final paper it was easy for me to express this information in the way I wanted the reader to comprehend it.

My other major topic of research was a bit more difficult for me work with. I had learned about impact in workouts and how different machines were designed to reduce that impact to have less strain on the body. This information wasn’t hard to find, but it was definitely hard for me to express it to the reader. As the project progressed, I came across a many people in the subculture who understood this concept and used the low-impact machines such as the elliptical trainer and stationary bike for that purpose. My interviewee Todd mentioned it in the interview, saying that he used the elliptical trainers instead of running whenever his knees felt weak. It was the article “Treadmill vs.
Elliptical Trainer” which gave me all the necessary information, but it was the first hand accounts given by Todd and other members of the subculture that helped me fit the low-impact concept into the paper. In the final draft I made claims for low-impact benefits and was able to provide valid evidence of its use through my interviews [C].

The next step in the project was the interview with a member of the subculture. Todd, who was previously mentioned, was the person I chose to interview. He is a legitimate member of the subculture because he goes to work out at CRCE about four days a week. From this encounter, I obtained many useful comments and his perspective on the subculture as well as the facility. Major points that I used from the interview were his feelings of connection to the subculture, his views on self-motivation, and his comment on finding one’s own rhythm. I thought these comments gave great insight into the subculture and in my Interview Analysis I tried to figure out how I could put these quotes to good use in the final paper.

One of the purposes of the project was to determine how the subculture came together and felt about each other. Analyzing Todd’s comment on how he felt about his subculture, I found it difficult to understand why he felt this way [D]. I also viewed this as a negative factor in my project, since Todd had said there was no real subculture. Taking that into account when writing the final paper, I was able to use his comment to my advantage, saying that there may be no real connection between everyone at CRCE, but while they are there, member of the subculture are all working together for their own purposes [E]. I wasn’t sure how well it would work but it was the best way that I could tie a comment that significant into the paper.
After a couple of visits, I had noticed that the routine was pretty repetitive. People on bikes, people on treadmills, and people on the track- everything just seemed to repeat itself every time I went to take notes. I even saw a lot of familiar faces every time I attended. That is when I realized what Todd was saying about rhythm. He believed that everyone had to find their own rhythm when coming to CRCE and stick with that. For me, the rhythm was boring because I was just taking notes of people working out. But for members of the subculture it wouldn’t seem as repetitive as it seemed rhythmic because they enjoyed what they were doing and felt productive. I decided to use this when finishing the project because I felt that Todd’s perspective was important, even if it didn’t agree with a lot of my ideas.

When writing the first draft of the paper, I really wanted to try and fit everything into one day just like the example reading we had in class. I felt that this would be the best way to introduce all of the different items that I had observed throughout the semester. I also tried to design my paper so that it wouldn’t have any direct analysis. My initial understanding of the project was that I was supposed to present the fact and have the reader draw the same conclusions I had come to. Unfortunately this didn’t go as well as I thought it would, as everything seemed rushed and pushed together. The estimated grade on the first draft finally convinced me to drop that style of writing and try something else. I also got a lot of good advice after my meeting with the professor on how I should add analysis, at least indirectly. The paper needed more of my perspective of the subculture and how it has changed over the course of this project.

It finally came down to putting together the final draft. Since I had abandoned my earlier style of having everything in one day, I was practically writing a whole new paper,
except this time I knew what I needed to include. There was a lot of useless information in the first draft, and after reviewing it I narrowed down the topics I would talk about and analyze to a select few which I thought were necessary. These topics included information about each machine and any research found on it, the archive notes about the renovation of CRCE, urethane and technological benefits, music and television technology, the concept of marketing fitness, and more. Having fewer topics to talk about, I tried to add a lot of analysis to direct the reader and their opinions about CRCE and its subculture.

My writing style as well as perspective of the subculture at CRCE changed throughout the entire semester. After visiting and observing the field site many times my attitude about the place changed. I started to notice different things about the place and analyze them with my initial perspective. As the project progressed so did my outlook on the field site and fortunately for me, I was able to reflect that in my writing.
Annotated Bibliography
Library Research


The article presents itself in a question/answer format, discussing the necessary equipment and maintenance in order to have an attractive fitness center. By giving details on specific machines, such as the treadmill, the article explains essential features that a gym and its products must offer to members. Using a treadmill as an example, the article explains that a treadmill must be well lubricated in order to prevent slipping. It must also be easy to use and have a built-in heart-rate monitor. Another important note made in the article is that the machines must be made for commercial use and professionally installed. If the machines are for non-commercial use, there may be insurance problems if a member were to become injured in an accident while using the machines. The last point pertains to the organization and cleanliness of the facility. In order to attract customers as members, proper maintenance must be kept and all equipment should be regularly sanitized to reduce the spread of germs. These main points were greatly stressed throughout the entire article.

The article by Bill Hirsch may turn out to be not as helpful as hoped for when writing the final paper. The fact that this article came in a question/answer type format gives some uncertainty to how general the article is vs. how personal it might be. In order to use the article to its maximum potential, one must investigate the attractiveness and cleanliness of the facility that they are choosing as their field site. The article does provide useful information on the technology required to facilitate a high-quality fitness center.


The article by Tanya Lochridge gives a detailed explanation of many different machines used in a fitness center and the pros and cons of each of them. The machines that Lochridge goes into are the elliptical machines, step-up machines, rowing machines, treadmills, and cross-country skiing machines. An example of the advice given by the article for the pros and cons of the elliptical machines are that it gives the entire body an excellent cardiovascular workout and helps condition lower body muscle but that the
machine may be difficult to use for beginners. If a person is a beginner, the article suggests they start off on the treadmill to build some stamina before trying the elliptical. The end of the article provides a minor fitness quiz that answers basic questions about aerobic exercises and activities.

Though the quiz at the end of the article provides absolutely no help or information, the rest of the article is filled with it. Since one of the subcultures planned for study is the people who use cardiovascular and aerobic machines, this article provides great insight as to why a person would or would not choose a specific machine for their cardio workout. The article covers the major machines used by exercisers, explaining treadmills, ellipticals, and step-up machines. The one important machine that the article failed to cover was the stationary bike and its pros and cons. The bike is one of the more popular machines at current fitness centers and it is surprising to see it left out of a major article like this one. Other than that, the article should be really helpful when writing the final research paper as it has a lot of useful information.


The article by Shaffer from the Hotel and Motel Management magazine guides hotel and motel owners how to go about building a fitness center at their facility. Any design of a fitness center is unique in that the designers built structures and open spaces where they are for a reason. The article gives great explanation and reasoning on each detail of the facility. One main concern is that the facility is that it should be at least 500-600 square feet. Otherwise a feeling of tightness and discomfort may come to those who use it. The optimal size would be 800 square feet in order to give room between machines and other items used in the center. Another point the article addresses is the type of weights or workouts that they have available. Free weights are a great way to attract members because of their customizability and variation but a are at a much greater risk for theft. There is also a greater chance of injury if there is no spotter or the user not using the weights properly. Shaffer was able to briefly interview the executive vice president of the American Leisure Corporation and get his opinion on matters such as numbers of items compared to the number of hotel rooms in the facility. The vice president Rick Bouza stressed the need for multiple cardiovascular machines as well as a good amount of strength training machines aimed at the major muscle groups.

This can be a very helpful article when the time comes to writing that final paper. The article offers so much useful information on the reasons for designs of fitness centers. These designs are specifically made to attract customers as members and with an article like this one explaining the reasoning for different designs and variations, a better understanding for the field site can be reached when observing the subculture in that site. The quotes of the vice president are essential to any time of research of this field site because it offers advice from a professional and expert of fitness center design and setup. Hopefully this article will come in handy when writing the final paper. Its detailed
information on the necessities for a successful fitness center will be crucial in understanding the field site and the subcultures residing within it.


The theme of this article is that the more a club has to offer you for a certain price, the better chance they have of converting you into a paying member. Sullivan raises a great point in arguing that the presence of a health club will not automatically ensure that members will join, but that features offered with a certain price in comparison to others will solely make the difference. Sullivan goes to back this up by saying that the public is more aware of fitness terms and techniques and is therefore on the lookout for a fitness center that will offer them these features. He reasons that people nowadays are more interested in their image and the results of their workout than just the idea and feeling of being in the health center. Now prospective customers are picky in their selection of a center and will investigate the facility thoroughly if interested in what they have to offer. Fitness club marketers can now take another step forward in campaigning their facilities by attracting customers with new fitness resources and healthcare benefits.

This article provides a different way of looking at the same topic of using new technology to attract members. Sullivan properly argues that the public is more aware of fitness trends and will use them in determining a place to workout. The material in this article can be very useful when researching this particular subculture. By explaining that customers’ awareness of new trends directs and determines the amount of technology used and the features that fitness centers try to make available to its members, an observer can clearly see why firstly the centers offer such features, and secondly, why the users want those kinds of features. The article will be very helpful when writing the final research paper and can really make a difference on how to understand a subculture and its ways.
This article is by far the most relevant to one of the subcultures being studied. This is the subculture that uses that synthetic track everyday rather than the newly designed, feature filled cardio machines. Williams goes into a brief history of the surface material used for synthetic tracks, stating they were first used over forty years ago. Few significant improvements were made during most of that time until recently, when advancement in urethane technology vastly changed the world of synthetic tracks.

The main focus of the track surface is its ‘relaxation’ time, which is the time it takes to reorient itself on impact. If the relaxation time is too fast, the ground will not give and this could cause a lot of internal damage to the knees and legs for all the jarring it will have to take. If the time is too slow, it will absorb way too much energy and slow down the runner. An example of something similar is like a person running in sand, where it gives too much and slows down the runner. A perfect track is one that balances those two issues to give the runner the most effective amount of relaxation time. Urethane technology is now being used to strike that balance and has become very popular in many of the outdoor and indoor fitness facilities.

It was discovered that hard cement or flooring used for tracks in the past had little effect on any short races or sprints because of their quickness. This was the exact opposite for any long distance races, as the minimal cushioning provided by such a hard floor would damage joints in all parts of the legs throughout the long run. Steve McBride, a project manager on a track construction completed for Hayward Field during the year 2000, explained why this happened. His statement said that in a sprint, hard surfaces were ok to have because they returned all energy back to the runner to get him to his next step quicker. The problem was long distance runners, as the more the runner ran, the more punishing it would be on his or her body.

To complete the Hayward Field project in 2000, the University of Oregon turned to the Athletic Polymer Systems (APS), which is the industries leading innovator in athletic surfaces. In response, the APS came up with technology for urethane, which turned out to be the perfect all-purpose track surface. Since the time of the track installation, there have been many new records set on that track which can be directly related to the use of urethane in the surface.

What makes urethane so ideal for a track is that it rebounds on the right time-scale. The track can be used for both sprints and long distance runners because it has a balanced rebounding time that is great for sprints and long distance runs. For sprints, the rebounding time is short enough to provide equal competition on a hard, cement surface. For long distance runs, the urethane gives way enough to make the run more comfortable.
and less punishing for the runner. In short, the surface matches the athlete’s natural rhythm to maximize energy return while also providing sufficient cushioning to ease the joints of the runner. Another benefit of urethane is that it is used in full-pour resurfacing, meaning that the material is self-leveling and will fill any crack or dips on its previous surfacing. For any other material, the existing surface would have to be completely removed before a brand new surface could be put in. Its just a simple task for urethane though, to fix the surface all one must do is add another layer.

This article will be fantastic when it comes to writing the final paper because it provides so much information on the design and material used for tracks nowadays. The case study of Hayward Field at the University of Oregon speaks about the exact track that will be observed as the field site, because the field site is at another major university and has many similarities. The quotes from current coaches or athletic directors as well as quotes from the Athletic Polymer Systems personnel will greatly benefit the paper’s evidence to support any claims made by runners who will be interviewed. Overall, this was indeed the most helpful article and will definitely be used and looked into while writing the final research paper.
University of Illinois Board of Trustees Report 2000-2002 (Pg. 72)

- A student referendum was held on November 12th and 13th in 2001 regarding an increase in the general fee by no more than $77 per semester in order to improve the campus recreation facilities. Out of the 5456 students who voted, 74% supported the referendum. These renovations were supposed to take place over a three-year period, between 2005-2007.
- Since the expansion and renovation would be done to both of the campus recreation facilities, it was planned out so that at least one facility would remain open at a time while the other was being worked on. This would ensure as little interruption for campus recreation users.

University of Illinois Board of Trustees Report 2002-2004 (Pg. 38)

- The total cost for renovation and expansion was estimated to be $77.6 million.
- The new facilities at CRCE would include: 1/8 mile track, 3 basketball/volleyball courts, men’s and women’s locker rooms, recreational pool, lounge area, 2 multipurpose rooms.
- 10,000 square feet of strength and conditioning space.
- Attached access to neighboring Freer Hall.

Campus Recreation Renovation Update Flyer – 3/28/05

- The renovated CRCE facility will open on March 30th, 2005.
- Here is an exact quote from the flyer: “In an effort to create a more open atmosphere for students, we’ve added a mezzanine level that provides a wealth of state-of-the-art cardio, selectorized and free weight equipment in an expansive array, surrounded by a three-lane, eighth-mile, track which overlooks the aquatic center and three-court gym below.”
Can Fitness Bring People Together?

Determination is a very powerful factor when you are trying to achieve something. It is the force that drives people to do things to their maximum capabilities. These things can range from insignificant actions to seemingly impossible ones. Imagine this: a major university recreation center, where the amount of weight lifted by a person is usually triple digits, over 300 calories are burned at a machine, the average mile time is under ten minutes, and in the middle of it all is a male senior citizen, a brace over his ankle and a cane at his side, doing laps around the track. That should be the definition of determination.

CRCE (Campus Recreation Center East) is the epitome of a fast-pace, high quality college fitness center. After re-opening from major renovations in March 2005, CRCE offered its member, of which a great percentage consisted of college students, many features in the facility including up-to-date fitness machines, a 1/8 mile track, new free weights, 3 basketball courts and more. The facility is filled with many things to do to keep you in shape.

The renovations resulted from the student referendum held on November 12\textsuperscript{th} and 13\textsuperscript{th} in 2001. The proposition was a general fee increase of no more than $77 per semester in order to improve campus recreation facilities. The total cost of the project was estimated to be $77.6 million. Of the 5,456 students who participated in the vote, 74% supported the referendum. These renovations were scheduled to take place over a
Walking in for the first time through the automatic doors I saw how bright and clean the place was. White-tiled floors below and plentiful lighting, natural and artificial, filled the room. To the right I see through floor to ceiling windows a gymnasium full of basketball players and to the left a swimming pool complete with slide and Jacuzzi. As I walked on I came to a small desk with two people sitting and letting people in. The girl working there, probably a college student herself, asks for my student I.D. card and swipes it through a card reader. The reader is connected to a computer monitor where my picture and information come on the screen after the card is swiped. She takes a last look at me to make sure I match the person in the photo, hands me the card, and says thank you. Now I’m in.

Moving on, I go up to the customer service desk to my right where bored employees look eager to do something interesting. The only action they get is to answer questions and rent out equipment. When asked where the fitness equipment is, the man behind the counter, probably another student, says to go up the stairs just down the hall. I thank him and move on. It is then that I noticed all of the flyers trying to convince people to get memberships or hire private trainers. Marketing fitness, as tough as it can be, is essential to most health centers. Legatt puts it best when she writes, “The sales department is especially vital in fitness clubs. The concept of health and fitness can be a tough sell because it isn't tangible. Potential members are buying a lifestyle and chance for physical improvement…” The concept of selling a product applies to every business, and CRCE was definitely no exception.
Beyond the customer service desk is a lounge area where a couple of sofas sit in front of a very large screen television usually playing ESPN or some other sports related show. I go around the sofas and up the stairs to the second floor.

Immediately after reaching the top, I look around and can see everything on the second floor. A track runs around the fitness equipment, free weights, and above the basketball courts. The second floor is crowded with people doing all kinds of physical activities. Looking around, I absent-mindedly forget where I’m standing, in the inside lane of the track. As a group of runners pass one yells at me to get out of the way and I quickly move to avoid the stampede of people.

Why would people use a track? My opinion at that time was that there were two reasonable options when it came to running – outdoors and a treadmill. A track, except for sports purposes, seemed like an unneeded middleman. While contemplating the purpose of a track, besides the advantage of measuring distance, the question of what kind of material was used to make a track came to mind. I later found out that urethane, which introduced ‘relaxation’ time to the world of running, was the material of choice when it came to modern tracks. Williams described relaxation time perfectly in the following, “If the track surface's 'relaxation' time -- or time it takes to reorient itself on impact -- is too fast, it'll seem jarring to the athlete," continues Garrett. "If it's too slow, it'll feel energy absorbing, like running in sand. A good track will strike the balance between dynamic response for performance and cushioning for training.”(83) Relaxation time is very important in the impact it has on the runner’s body. A fast relaxation time could be very detrimental to the body’s joints. A track could not completely eliminate all impact, but at least the type of impact would not be as bad as running on concrete or
cement. These surfaces have a very fast relaxation time that over a long period could do serious damage to the body.

As further observation would inform me, I learned that the track changed direction every couple of days. I wasn’t sure why this happened and after asking many of the people who used the track, I still came up with no explanation. It seems that no one knows exactly why it is changed but there are a lot of ongoing theories. For example, one guy I asked said that it had to do with structure and that changing the direction every so often helped to keep the wear and tear on the track even.

After the large group of people had passed is when I noticed the older gentleman, white-haired and balding, a walking cane at his side and a large ankle brace on his right foot. He moved on steadily in the farthest lane, which is unofficially the slowest, with no regard to those passing him by or almost running into him. Determination was in his eyes as he glanced at the large digital timer display above the track. Deciding he wasn’t finished yet he looked straight ahead and continued on. My initial reaction was to see if he needed any kind of assistance. He seemed like a person I’d hold the door for or help across the street. But his manner, the tone of his body, and the look in his eyes told me he neither wanted help nor needed it. He would finish on his own.

I turned around to see the rest of the second floor when the sound of a paper towel dispenser caught my attention. I looked to see a girl, taking a paper towel, spraying it with something and wiping off a machine.

“What are you wiping it with?” I asked her, looking at the green bottle on top of the paper towel dispenser. It didn’t have any significant markings on it, just a generic plastic spray bottle. She replied it was disinfectant spray. After a person finished using
any machine, as more of a courtesy than a requirement they should get a paper towel with disinfectant spray and clean the machine for the next person. 

This was also interesting to me. I knew that places like this where sweat and germs got everywhere that sanitation was very important. I had just always figured that the people working at that facility would take care of it. But offering a chance to clean up after yourself seems to give everyone a sense of responsibility there. I asked what would happen if someone didn’t clean his or her machine after finishing and her response was “That’s disgusting! You should probably tell them to. I would if I saw someone not clean it off.” I kept that in mind as I walked past more machines. 

Looking around the fitness area, I saw three main types of machines: treadmills, elliptical machines, and stationary bikes. They were organized in three rows, stationary bikes making up the first row, treadmills the second, and elliptical machines the third. Treadmills imitate the act of walking or running, as the speed of the rolling belt underneath can be adjusted to the desired speed. An elliptical imitates the motion of skiing but provides a similar result in terms of heart rate increase. And stationary bikes are pretty self-explanatory; they imitate biking without any actual movement. 

A young man was getting off one of the treadmill, about to wipe his machine off when I decided to ask him more about the treadmill. My first question was why he was using the treadmill, more specifically, what more it offered him than the track. His response pertained to the technology it had, things like the heart rate monitor and calorie counter. Running on the track couldn’t give him information like that. His comment about the track was, “It can only tell me how long I’ve been running for.” Not
completely satisfied with his answer, I decided to look into the world of treadmills even more.

*Treadmills provide an indoor option to running and walking as there can be many problems with doing these activities outside. Gray presents these problems in his article. “The problem is that it isn’t fun or even feasible to walk or run in seriously inclement weather; it isn’t safe to run in various districts in cities or on deserted roads; and it’s not a good idea to run late at night without one or more running partners…Treadmills allow you to enjoy a safe and convenient indoor workout, and with so many choices, you will have no trouble finding a treadmill that is just right for you at a price you can afford.”* (1)

The treadmill also provided technological features such as a heart rate monitor, distance measurer, and a calorie counter. Because it is electronic, the treadmill can have information stored and calculated to give the runner an accurate presentation of his or her progress. I could see now why treadmills were a great alternative to running outside or on the track, because they not only imitated running but also had extra features and provided more information about the runner to the runner.

After the gentleman on the treadmill left, I noticed that the treadmills were pretty empty except for a few in use. That’s when I noticed the signup boards. There was a separate board for each row. Each board has 30-minute time slots for each machine in the row starting from open to close. Looking at these boards, I can easily tell that the most popular machine here are the elliptical trainers as they are signed up through a much later time than either of the other machines. While looking at the boards a girl came up to check the board, saw her initials at the present time slot and walked over to the
machine she reserved. I noticed that another girl was using the machine she had reserved at the time and so I moved closer to hear the exchange of words.

“Excuse me, I reserved this for the right now,” was all she said to the person using her machine. No other words exchanged as the other girl nodded and got off the machine. Not only did she give up the machine, but also she came back with a paper towel and disinfectant spray and cleaned the machine. The waiting girl said a brief thank you, turned on her Ipod, and got on the machine. So all you had to do if you reserved a machine is tell the person using it and there wouldn’t be any problems, or at least that’s how it seemed after this authentic example.

The machine that had been reserved was an elliptical trainer and the girl kicked off was my recent acquaintance – the girl who had been wiping off her machine earlier. I decided to ask her more about the elliptical, and why she was using it and not the treadmill or track.

Elliptical machines, also known as elliptical trainers, provide similar results but have a much different procedure than the treadmill. Elliptical machines boast an advantage known as “low-impact workout”. This type of workout has very little impact on joints in the body. A treadmill does not have this type of feature because of the continuous impact of each step, causing the runner to absorb the impact force (Unknown, 1). The article “Treadmill vs. Elliptical Trainer” describes the feature of low-impact workouts, saying, “Elliptical trainers allow the athlete to burn a similar number of calories as jogging...but without the risk of injury to the back, knees, hips, or ankles. Your feet never leave the pedals. As a result, this type of machine is quite low-impact and goes easy on the joints.”(1) Some elliptical machine designs also allow another advantage
not available on treadmills: moving handlebars that imitate the motion of cross-country skiing. This action combined with the normal lower body exercise gives the entire body a great workout and can potentially burn more calories than running.

The girl who had just used the elliptical trainer gave similar reasons to why she used the machine. She claimed she had really weak joints and any kind vigorous running on a continual basis would place a lot of stress on those joints. For her, the elliptical trainer was the perfect machine because it didn’t stress her body joints while still giving her a great workout. I understood that the track and treadmill were high-impact cardio machines, so I asked her about the stationary bikes and why she wouldn’t use those. She said that it was a low-impact cardio machine but it didn’t work her out fast enough. In other words, the stationary bike didn’t increase her heart rate fast enough or get it to the desired level for working out. As we parted ways for the second time I decided to head over to the stationary bikes to see what they were all about.

Upon arriving at the first row, the first thing I noticed was the view. The first row had a railing in front of it, and the drops below were the basketball courts. Anyone using a machine in this row had a really great view of the games going on underneath. Other than that, there was no view of the televisions or the rest of the second floor. There were a couple of people using the bikes, so I decided to ask one of them about the bikes.

The last major cardio machine in CRCE is the stationary bike. It is exactly what its name says, a bike that doesn’t move. It provides the same type of cardio workout that riding a normal bike would without actually going anywhere. It also provides the low-impact type of workout that an elliptical does because people using it are not stepping anywhere. The process consists of a continual circular pedaling, causing an increased
heart rate. The machine also has different levels of resistance to provide the exerciser with an increasing challenge as their fitness level improved.

So the person I started a conversation with was a male, about 5’8”, 160 lbs, and seemed to be in really good shape. The conversation started casually, I asked him about his workout schedule and the types of exercises he did, especially with the bike. His response was that he came to CRCE every weekday, Monday to Friday, and rode the bikes for 30 minutes. He said he also did a lot of abdominal work every time he came. When asked why he chose the bikes over the other machines or track he said that he enjoyed the bikes because it put all of the stress on his legs plus it was low-impact.

As I walked back to the middle, I noticed that the televisions weren’t working. There was just dark static on each screen. The other noticeable thing was the lack of people using the treadmills. None of them were being used. It would make sense though, that nobody would use a treadmill if the televisions weren’t working. Without any entertainment, running on a treadmill just became a stationary track, and I guess people had decided that there would be more interesting sights to see on the track. So when I walked over to examine the track, it seemed as though it were a bit more crowded than usual.

The first thing I heard when I neared the track was a confrontation. It seemed that there had been a girl walking in the first lane, which I later learned is the fastest moving lane. The lanes got slower as they moved outwards. Two other girls who had been running and had yelled at her to move out of the way because she was slowing down the lane. She yelled back at them as they jogged passed her and the situation ended. One of the runners had just finished and was doing a little stretching to help avoid injury. I was
hoping to get a more detailed perspective of the facility, especially the track and cardio machines. I would later interview this gentleman, whom we will call Todd for this project.

Todd is a freshman who goes to CRCE about four days a week. He has a schedule where he works out different muscles of the body such as arms, chest, and back for each time he goes. He also incorporates cardio workouts into his daily routine. Running outside if it weren’t too cold would be the first option, and if the weather were not permitting then he would run on the track at CRCE. Todd’s reason for not wanting to use the treadmill is because he likes to feel like he is actually going somewhere, something that the treadmill was specifically designed not to do. When asked if there were any machines that he would use he said his choice was the elliptical. Only if his knees were weak from consistent running would he ever use the machine. But according to him it did provide the increased heart rate in order to have a good workout.

Moving on to the subject of motivation, at the beginning of the semester I was presented with the idea of how structural design of a fitness complex affected its members. More specifically, how open space and the idea of seeing everyone else working out around you would help your motivation. When presented with this idea, Todd said that he felt no motivation by seeing others and said he felt no connection with them either. To him working out is very personal thing. He makes this clear by saying, “For me (working out) is more of a personal thing and like, when you are working out you just have to find your own rhythm and stick with that.” I interpreted this expression as that people have to figure out his or her exercise style, adapt their schedule to it, and stick with that particular program. In terms of belongingness to a subculture, he claimed
there was no effect and he had no feelings towards others in the subculture and his final comment on motivation was that it is derived from internal matters and that there were no significant effects from others.

The interview was very helpful in explaining some of the actions of the members of the subculture. From his responses, I got the feeling that this group of people performed similar actions completely independent of one another. They were connected only in a physical aspect; that being that they were all in the same place at the same time. Otherwise each person had their own specific goals and did whatever they needed and/or wanted to in order to achieve those goals.

Making a final pass through the area, I looked at all the options available to members here: the elliptical trainer, the treadmill, the bikes, and the track. Each had its own advantages and disadvantages and people used them based on those pros and cons. I learned that each and every person has his or her own agenda, as well as strategy to get through that agenda. They use these facilities at CRCE to fit their needs and achieve their goals. But even with all of these options, I realized that to keep coming in day after day to work out couldn’t be easy, even with a facility as nice and newly renovated as CRCE. It would take a lot of motivation, motivation that one member of the subculture thought came from within oneself. Todd’s sense of belongingness to the subculture could clearly be seen in the comment, “I don’t really like comparing myself or finding motivation in others. Just find motivation in yourself.”

When I reached the stairs leading to the first floor, I checked the track one more time. There again was my definition for determination. Coming around the corner to complete another lap I watched him move with a steady rhythm now. There was no
decrease in speed, no tiredness in posture, just the look of determination in his eye and the extra bounce in his step as he glanced at the timer and thought to himself. A smile came to his face as he brought his eyes straight in front of him and kept up the steady pace. He would finish on his own.
Does Fitness Bring People Together?

RHET 105
Griswold

Zain Lodhia
Does Fitness Bring People Together?

On a late Thursday afternoon I made a visit to the University of Illinois recreation facility known as Campus Recreation Center East (a.k.a. CRCE). Classes were out and many people wanted to get a quick workout in before dinner, so the facility was pretty crowded. As I walked along the outer lane of the track, known as the “slow lane”, I observed young men and women on various types of machines, lifting weights, and playing basketball. As I came around a turn on the track, an older man walking on the track caught my eye. He wasn’t moving too fast and when I finally caught up to him, I looked in amazement at the large metal brace over his right ankle and the cane he was using to keep him upright. He worked hard for each step, looking forward and coordinating his steps with the cane. As I got off the track, I watched him move on, paying no attention to dozens of people passing him. I waited until he turned the corner before I left.

History of CRCE

CRCE was recently renovated to provide new recreational facilities for students. Resulting from a student referendum to increase the general tuition for recreational purposes held in November of 2001, the university embarked on a $77.6 million project to renovate the recreation facilities on campus, which included CRCE. In a university of over 40,000 students, “out of the 5456 students who voted, 74% supported the referendum.” (Board of Trustees, 72)
Seventy-four percent of 5456 students who voted comes out to barely over 4000 students, which is about 10% of the student population. It amazes me how such a small group of people can influence the decisions made on campus. Such a small percentage of students care about the extravagance of their facilities yet only those who do care take action to achieve the results they want.

First Impression

My first visit to CRCE came on a Monday evening. I walked in at about 7:30 and headed to the check-in desk. This was the first major form of technology used that I came across. A young woman was taking student ID cards and swiping them through a reader. After it registered, the student’s picture and information came up on the screen, and the woman would let them pass. She was obviously a student because while she was swiping cards I heard her say to her co-worker, “I have a math mid-term next week that I need to study for.” Even at the entrance a student could feel comfortable because they were dealing with other students their age. This was a facility for the students, run by the students.

I headed to the second floor because tonight I wanted to observe the people on the track. The track is wonderfully designed at CRCE. It is pretty much the perimeter of the second floor, circling around the fitness center, free weights, and basketball courts. One half of the track runs around the fitness and free weight area, while the other half runs on an open, raised level above the first-floor basketball courts. Basically, a person running on this track would be able to see everything on the second floor as well as the basketball courts below.
My first thought while observing the track was why anybody would use it. A person who wanted to run on something other than a treadmill could easily step out their front door and start jogging. There had to be some technological purpose for why tracks were built. With the obvious forms of technology such as a heart-rate monitor or calorie counter not available on the track, it literally came down to what the track was made of; meaning what kind of synthetic material was used to build it and why was it used. This led me to further my knowledge of tracks through research.

A Little More On Tracks

Currently, the most widely used material when it comes to building running tracks is urethane. Urethane was the first material to introduce a concept known as ‘relaxation time’ to the world of running. Relaxation time – or the time it takes for a surface to reorient itself after impact – is an important factor affecting the runner. If the relaxation time “is too fast, it'll seem jarring to the athlete…If it's too slow, it'll feel energy absorbing, like running in sand. A good track will strike the balance between dynamic response for performance and cushioning for training.”(Williams, 83)

Fast relaxation times could also be detrimental to the body of the runner. With running being a high-impact activity on the body, fast relaxation times would mean the surface is hard and gives very little way when under pressure. This pressure would be redirected to the bodies’ joints, specifically lower body like ankles and knees, where continuous wear and tear could become a significant problem at a later time. The urethane material in tracks does not remove impact from running, but greatly reduces the negative effect of that impact through relaxation time.
Back To The First Day

The track here comprised of three lanes, of which I later found out had different “speeds”. Since the entrance to the track is from the center, it makes sense that the slower runners or walkers would drift to the outside to get out of everyone’s way. There was a minor confrontation when a girl, who was distracted with her music player, was walking on the inside or otherwise known as the fastest lane. Two girls running behind her yelled at her “Hey, move to the outside!” as they passed her. Glancing up and giving them a dirty look, she yelled back “Screw you! Just go around me!” The other two girls ran off without responding. Even though the walking girl had told them to go around her, she drifted to the outer lane as she went back to her music. On their next pass, the running girls passed her without any further comments and it seemed the tense situation had diminished.

Watching the runners do their laps on the track, I noticed technology was everywhere. Many of the runners were listening to CD players or Ipods. Some people carried them in their hands while running and others had placed them on armbands. Simply by viewing the high percentage of people using this form of technology, it was obvious to see that this was an essential part of the subculture. During another observation of the field site, I asked a male runner; about 6 feet tall with a slim build, his reason for listening to music while running. His response was, “It keeps my mind off of the feeling of tiredness. That helps me focus more on running, actually.” So pretty much a distraction then, right?

Why is it important to distract yourself while running? According to the runner I had talked to, it kept his mind off the feeling of tiredness, which in turn helped him focus
on running. The correlation between running and feeling tired is positive, the more you run the more tired you become. But by distracting yourself while running, in this case using music, you can focus on running without feeling the direct effect of tiredness, therefore allowing you to run more.

The other major form of technology I noticed on the track was the large digital timer display. The four-digit timer was hung low from the ceiling, allowing runners both up close and somewhat far to read its time. The timer started from zero and counted up to one hundred minutes before resetting.

Although it is one-dimensional in use, the timer provides a great tool to the people on the track. It is the type of technology that can be considered luxury yet also be taken for granted. Without it present, nobody would complain. Runners would either bring their own timers or resort to estimating their time by looking at the clock. But since CRCE does provide this feature, I’m sure that everyone using the track uses the timer to some extent. Doing a quick observation of about 15 people passing the timer, I noticed that each and every one of them glanced up at the timer. I even asked one of the runners after he had finished how much he used the timer and his response was, “I check the timer every other lap to make sure I’m on pace. It is so that I don’t slow down without realizing it.”

To prove my point, everyone uses the clock whether they need it or not. Who wouldn’t want to know their time after running a lap or mile? A timer is a useful tool that people will not go out of their way for but will use when readily available. Like I said, a luxury taken for granted.
My Second Visit

After viewing the track extensively in my last visit to CRCE, I would spend this time getting to know the fitness machine area better. This visit began on a Friday evening around 7:00 PM and lasted about an hour. Going through check-in again and finding the track was easy; and locating the fitness machine area was even easier since it was inside the perimeter of the track.

The fitness machine area is divided into three main rows, the first containing stationary bikes, the second treadmills, and the third elliptical trainers. Hanging from the ceiling were televisions sets playing a variety of shows and sports games. An interesting fact about the televisions is that they are only available to people in the second and third rows, as the first row of machines is placed behind row of hanging TV sets. It makes sense that since the ceiling is too high in front of the first row, the structure of CRCE wouldn’t allow televisions to hang there. Yet I still found myself wondering why CRCE managers didn’t arrange the machines in a way that would allow all fitness machine users to view the televisions equally. What is it about stationary bikes that make them entertaining enough so that one wouldn’t need a television? Or on the other hand, what made treadmills and elliptical trainers so boring that people on them would need TV’s?

Biking Without Going Anywhere

Biking is a fairly popular sport. The fact that it is in major events such as the Olympics and triathlons shows that it has components of fitness. That could probably be the reason why it is one of the most popular fitness machines today. Stationary bikes mimic real bikes in every possible way except movement. Different levels and resistances provided on these machines imitate real world situations.
Stationary bikes are probably one of the oldest types of fitness machines. Since these machines have been around for so long, it “can lead some people to think they are outdated or not as efficient as newer types of equipment.” (Gustafson, par. 1) But just because people think that way doesn’t necessarily mean that it is true. It is true that bikes are considered ancient equipment in today’s rapidly advancing world, but that doesn’t mean that the workout and results it provides are outdated or inefficient.

Technology on stationary bikes is pretty advanced. Most fitness machines now come with at least a heart rate monitor, calories counter, and distance measurer. The machines also come with preset cardio programs. Combine these with the tools listed earlier and the machine user can achieve any goal they have. For example, one of the programs tries to keep the person’s heart rate consistent and uses different combinations of levels and resistances do that.

Cleanliness Is Important

While observing the bikes on the second day, I happened to notice how courteous everyone was in terms of cleaning their machines after use. Scattered throughout the second floor are paper towel dispensers and disinfectant spray. After using a machine, in which people usually got pretty sweaty and dirty on, they would head over to the dispenser, take a paper towel and spray it with a disinfectant liquid. Then they would go back to their machine and wipe it clean, usually on the seat (if there was one), handlebars, display screen, and any other used parts of the machine.

I found this method of keeping the facility clean interesting. Not that I have been to large number of fitness centers, but from the ones I have been to I distinctly remember seeing facility workers clean the machines. They would walk around with a stack of
paper towels and a bottle of disinfectant spray and wipe each machine in the facility every so often.

In CRCE, since the members had already used the machine, this clean up was obviously for the next person using the machine. This was something I had never heard of or seen before. I understood that in facilities like this, where sweat and germs were everywhere, cleanliness was important and vital to everyone’s good health. My thinking though had always been that it was the facility’s responsibility to keep the place clean, not the member’s. This gave me a completely different perspective into the members’ responsibilities. By requesting, and not requiring, everyone to clean up after themselves, sort of gives members a sense of belongingness to the facility. It gives the feeling that the members are the ones using the facility and so in actuality they are keeping it clean for themselves.

Another Day

My next visit was different from the other ones in two aspects: it was on the weekend and in the morning. I came in at about 10 AM on a Saturday to start my observations. After viewing the track and stationary bikes, it was time to move on to the next machine, the elliptical trainer.

Elliptical machines, also known as elliptical trainers, provide similar results to that of running but have a much different procedure. Elliptical machines boast an advantage known as “low-impact workout”. This type of workout has very little impact on joints in the body. Normal running does not do this because of the continuous impact of each step, causing the runner to absorb the impact force. “Elliptical trainers allow the athlete to burn a similar number of calories as jogging...but without the risk of injury to
the back, knees, hips, or ankles. Your feet never leave the pedals. As a result, this type of machine is quite low-impact and goes easy on the joints.”(“Treadmill vs. Elliptical Trainer, par. 17) Some elliptical machine designs also allow another advantage not available on treadmills: moving handlebars that imitate the motion of cross-country skiing. This action combined with the normal lower body exercise gives the entire body a great workout and can potentially burn more calories than running.

Just from casual observations on my last two visits, I had noticed that the elliptical trainer was overwhelmingly the most popular and most used machine in the facility. It seemed like the third row was never empty. Today, even with early time, was no different. I decided to ask one of the people using the elliptical trainers more about the machines. As I viewed the area, I spotted a young woman, about 5’3” and skinny getting off of one of the machines. As she headed over to the paper towel dispenser I approached her and introduced myself. I got straight to the point and asked, “Why do you use the elliptical over the track or treadmill?” I learned more from her response than expected.

“My knees aren’t that strong and if I were to run continuously, whether it is the track or outside, would put too much stress on them. That is basically why I use the elliptical”, she replied. “Bikes offer the same type of workout for me, you know, with less stress on the knees. But they just don’t work as fast as the elliptical. It is just more worth my time to use the elliptical than bother with the bikes.”

Since we had reached some kind of comfort level, I decided to further interrogate her on her reasons for coming early on a Saturday. A look of frustration came onto her tired face at that time as she explained the situation.
“It gets really crowded here on the weekday afternoons and evenings. I stop by after class to reserve an elliptical and they are all reserved until like 9:00 PM. That is the main reason why I come on weekend mornings, just so I can reserve my machine of choice. Its just so aggravating how crowded it can get.”

It was interesting to see her reaction about how crowded it got. Obviously she wished she could come on afternoon weekdays to exercise, but the wait for her machine was definitely not worth it. I was also particularly interested in her knowledge of the elliptical. After researching the machine’s benefits, I had learned much about why people would use it over the other machines or the track. The way she had recited those reasons showed her knowledge of what she was doing. This young woman wasn’t just here to jump on a machine and see how many calories she could burn before she felt tired. She knows what to exercise to do for her condition, and she knew exactly why she was doing it too. Members here at CRCE don’t come work out just to say they did. They know what they are doing to their bodies and understand the benefits of their hard work.

The Next Phase

The next part of the project was to interview a member of our subculture to get first hand accounts and perspectives of the subculture. My interviewee was a CRCE regular, attending the facility about four times a week. He was 5’6” and about 140 lbs, but that was 140 lbs of muscle. His body wasn’t just slim; it was toned and defined. Just judging from the body type of my interviewee, one can assume that he is a legitimate source of information. It takes a lot of hard work, dedication, and time spent working out to achieve the body he has.
His name is Todd, and he is a freshman here at the University of Illinois. I got straight into it by asking him if he used the track or cardio machines when he worked out at CRCE. He responded,

“Usually if it is too cold outside I go to CRCE and run on the track for cardio exercises. Or if my knees feel a little bit weak from running, I go on the ellipticals and it stresses my knees less but it still provides the increased heart rate… I don’t really like running on a treadmill because I like to feel I’m going somewhere.”

So I had found another person who knew the advantage of elliptical trainers and used them to their advantage when needed. I also found it interesting how Todd didn’t use the treadmill because he needed the feeling of going somewhere.

When I was considering CRCE as a possible field site, my professor brought up an interesting issue about how fitness centers were specifically designed to be open and upbeat. I had mentioned earlier how open the second floor on CRCE was, making it possible for people to see the whole area from anywhere on the floor. During the interview I brought up this structural issue, asking Todd how he felt about openness of the facility and if it affected him in any way, particularly his motivation.

“For me (working out) is more of a personal thing and like, when you are working out you just have to find your own rhythm and stick with that. And I don’t really like comparing myself or finding motivation in others. Just find motivation in yourself.”

Here was a genuine member of the subculture telling me that he felt no motivation in seeing others working out around him. I was fascinated with how he said working out
was personal, and that everyone had to find a rhythm of his or her own. I understood what he was saying about comparing yourself to others, and of course no one would find motivation in seeing other men or women more fit than you. But the most important statement he made was when he said people should find motivation in themselves.

Analyzing his statements, I realized that maybe the structure of CRCE and motivation were independent of each other. One could go to CRCE not looking for motivation, but company. If motivation was so personal, then maybe the real motivation was in getting yourself to go to the gym and work out, and not in seeing people more disciplined and fit than yourself.

More Observing

On another visit I went in with the purpose of observing the treadmills. My first impression of treadmills was that they were some kind of middleman; there was no reason for people to use them. If a person wanted to run, they could run outside and if the weather wasn’t permitting, they could use the track inside a fitness center. What features, specifically technological, attracted people to use treadmills?

Research into treadmills gave me insight into what they offered runners. I already knew that running was a high impact sport. Measures were taken to reduce this impact of this force on the track, but I had no idea that treadmills offered similar benefits. “Treadmills usually absorb some of the force from the impact of your feet. Some use cushioning under the belt, others have cushioning in the belt itself. Some even offer electronic adjustable cushioning. The lower the impact, the better.” (Treadmills Buyer’s Guide, par. 5)
Treadmills also came with other features usually provided by fitness machines – heart rate monitor, calorie counter, distance measurer, and more. Most of all, they gave runners the opportunity to run in place. Now I know that Todd, the person I interviewed, was not a big fan of running in place. But many other people were. As I observed the runners on the treadmills, I saw many of them reading magazines or books and watching television. Besides all of the technological features, many people just liked the option of being able to do something else while running.

On one of my later observations I noticed that all of the televisions were not working. Maybe independent of that factor, the treadmills weren’t as crowded during that time. This somewhat confirmed my theory that people enjoyed running in place so they could do something else. With the televisions not working, it seemed the benefit of running in place was nonexistent, and so people would just run around the track. Of course this is all just speculation, but there was some kind of correlation between the televisions not working the treadmills being empty.

Selling Fitness

Aside from the track and fitness machines, there was one major idea I came across. Coming in for an observation one day, I happened to glance at some of the flyers on the customer service counter. There were just stacks of flyers advertising different types of memberships offered at CRCE as well as personal and group trainer deals. The brightly colored flyers had caught my eye, and while going through them a point in my research came to mind.

“The sales department is especially vital in fitness clubs. The concept of health and fitness can be a tough sell because it isn't tangible. Potential members are buying a
lifestyle and chance for physical improvement...” (Legatt, 1) That is when everything finally clicked. I had found the magic word: lifestyle.

People who came to CRCE on a regular basis had bought into this lifestyle. Yes, they are students who automatically pay for membership in their tuition, but they all make the effort to go to CRCE and work out. With all the observing and researching I had gone through, I could finally put them together into one single concept. It is the motivation that members of CRCE find within themselves that brings them together because of the similar lifestyles they all share.


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• Track material
• Elliptical vs. treadmill
• Self motivation (interview)
• Connection to others in the subculture (interview)
• Cleanliness of facility
• Features that CRCE offers
• Track changes direction everyday
• How crowded it is at night compared to mornings (weekends)
• Signup board of elliptical
• Ipods, mp3 players
• Large display digital timer for track runners
• Feelings toward the subculture at different times of the project
• Technology features on the new cardio machines (HR monitor, calorie, distance)
• People’s workout schedules
• 30 minute sessions for reserved machines
• The racers on the track in the early morning
• Feeling of going somewhere (interview)
• Working out has a rhythm to it, one has to find it (interview)
• Best running surfaces
• Urethane
• Marketing fitness
• Renovations for CRCE (archive notes)
• Survey of people
• Courtesy of people for reserved machines
CRCE is a much newer building than IMPE (Intramural Physical Education) is per say, so I feel like it is more aesthetically pleasing. It also feels like a lot of the equipment there is just more up to date and more new. So I feel like I’m getting more out of the facility there. Usually if it is too cold outside I go to CRCE and run on the track for cardio exercises.

A lot of my workout schedule incorporates cardio workouts, which is I’m either on the ellipticals or the track. If my knees feel a little bit weak from running, I go on the ellipticals and it stresses my knees less but it still provides the increased heart rate. I don’t really like running on a treadmill because I like to feel I’m going somewhere.

Usually when I’m running, I listen to an mp3 player. But when I’m, weightlifting and all I don’t really listen to anything because it just tends to get in the way. For me [exercising] is more of a personal thing and when you are working out you just have to find your own rhythm and stick with that. I don’t really like comparing myself or finding motivation in others. Just find motivation in yourself.
Interview Analysis

To help me gain valuable insight into the subculture of CRCE (Campus Recreational Center East), I interviewed a member of the subculture. The purposes of this interview were to learn and analyze the “insider” language and get a first-hand account on their personal views of the subculture and field site.

Fortunately for myself, the person who I met at CRCE and requested an interview from lived at my residence hall. This made it much easier to schedule an interview and also made the interview that much more comfortable. By having similar housing arrangements it gave a much more informal feel to the interview, sort of like having casual conversation with a neighbor about the local fitness center. In my opinion, I felt that this type of environment opened up the member to the interview and I was able to get more detailed answers on how the member really felt. We met at a common lounge in our housing facility, which was empty during the time of the interview.

The first question that I asked was about the member’s frequency of use of the fitness center, and he replied that on a typical week he went there about four times. Going for over half the week shows some kind of commitment to facility and program that he follows. His next response showed that he was more of a weightlifter than a cardio person at first glance. But after asking him if he performed any cardio exercises or activities he replied that he did. According to the member, cardio workouts were well incorporated into his fitness program, and he performed them on a regular basis according to his schedule. When asked about his cardio activities in detail, he replied
that he preferred to run outside and that only weather conditions would sway him to do those activities indoor.

Indoor facilities like CRCE usually offer a synthetic running track as well as cardio machines. There are different types of machines such as the treadmill, which simulates walking, jogging, or running. There is the also elliptical machine, which simulates cross-country skiing. This is a newer machine which has all of the good benefits of cardio exercises while providing less stress on the lower body and back, especially the knees. The reason for this is because the machine is a little to none impact workout; the person’s feet never leave the pedals. The last major cardio machine is the stationary bike, which is also a low to zero impact machine because the rider never leaves the pedals. This machine is not as efficient as the other two, but gives an alternative to the other machines.

The member’s preference when it comes to the track or fitness machines is definitely the track. As more of a psychological reason, the member said he likes to feel “as though he is going somewhere” while running, and the treadmill certainly didn’t give him this feeling. There are times though when his legs do feel weak from running, and that is when he uses the elliptical to give him an increased heart rate for his workout with less stress on the body.

For technology, the member uses an mp3 player whenever he is running or using a machine, but doesn’t use it while lifting weights. To him, it becomes more of a distraction while weightlifting. As for watching the TV’s that CRCE provides for its cardio machine users, the member replied that his general lifestyle doesn’t really include watching TV, and that this mentality carries over into his workout periods.
I then changed subjects in the interview and started talking about CRCE. Just recently, CRCE was renovated and now offers 110,000 square feet of activity space. Its features now include an aquatic center, three basketball courts, a synthetic track and new fitness and weightlifting machines. I asked what the member thought of the atmosphere of CRCE and his reply was that it is a much newer building than IMPE (Intramural, Physical Education, the other fitness center on campus), and that it offered newer equipment. He used the term “aesthetically pleasing” to help describe the atmosphere of the facility. He also feels he is getting more out of the facility at CRCE than another place on campus.

After doing a little research on fitness centers in general, I learned that a fitness center’s structure could have a significant effect on an exerciser there. The idea of an open space for working out and seeing everyone else doing similar activities can be very influential. CRCE has a unique set up where the weightlifting and cardio machines are on a balcony above the basketball courts. There is also a track that goes around the whole facility on the second level. This setup allows for everyone to see each other while in their own respective activities. A setup like this is supposed to give people extra motivation as they see others around them working out and engaging in physical activities also. I expressed this idea to my interviewee and asked him if he thought it was true and that there was some effect. His response was that working out was more of a personal thing and that one just has to find their rhythm. He said that he didn’t like comparing himself with others or finding motivation in them. Finding motivation in yourself was really important. I realized that it wasn’t the question I was trying to get
across and tried to clear up the confusion by asking if it was the type of environment that gave motivation. He replied with the same answer.

The last question that I had time for during the interview was similar to the one before it. I asked the member what it was about the CRCE facility that attracted him to it. He replied that CRCE was obviously his first choice because of its proximity to his housing facility. He says that the atmosphere of CRCE is good, emphasizing adequate lighting and joking about the greenery.

At a later time I was able to ask the member another question pertaining to his feeling of belongingness to the subculture. Unfortunately the interview was interrupted and I wasn’t able to record this part but in response to my question of any feelings of belongingness to the group, he replied that all his motivation was derived from internal matters and he didn’t share anything with the other people of that subculture.

The interview was indeed successful in getting a first-hand opinion of the subculture and what they do. It was informal and had a comfortable feel to it as we both had things in common. Hopefully that casualness translated into more honest and open responses to the questions posed to the member. Overall it was very helpful and will definitely help others and myself in understanding the subculture.
Interview Transcription

ZL: In a typical week, how often do you go to CRCE (Campus Recreational Center East)?
RM: Four days, of the week.
ZL: What are the usual activities that you do there?
RM: Usually I have like a schedule, umm, like sometimes I'll work forearms and like, the upper arms. Or I’ll do chest and abs and back. Or sometimes I’ll just do leg muscles such as quads or hamstrings or calves.
ZL: Do you ever do any cardio activities such as use the track or the cardio machines there?
RM: Usually if it is too cold outside I go to CRCE and run on the track for cardio exercises. Or if my knees feel a little bit weak from running, I go on the ellipticals and it stresses my knees less but it still provides the increased heart rate.
ZL: So I’m guessing that your preference is for the track. I’m wondering why?
RM: A lot of my workout schedule incorporates cardio workouts, which is I’m either on the ellipticals or the track. I’m not really a…I don’t really like running on a treadmill because I like to feel I’m going somewhere.
ZL: Okay, that’s good. Technology-wise do you listen to music or watch TV? I understand if you are on the track then you can’t really watch TV but do you have an mp3 player or CD player that you bring along with you?
RM: Usually when I’m running, uh, I listen to an mp3 player. Umm…I don’t really watch the TV but that’s just according to my general lifestyle because I don’t really watch that much TV, even when I’m not working out. But when I’m, uh, weightlifting and all I don’t really listen to anything because it just tends to get in the way.
ZL: I understand, okay. What do you think of the atmosphere of CRCE?
RM: CRCE is a much newer building than IMPE (Intramural Physical Education) is per say, so I feel like it is more aesthetically pleasing. And, uh, and it also feels like a lot of the equipment there is just more up to date and more new. So I feel like I’m getting more out of the facility there.
ZL: The structure of a fitness center is really important and during my research I found out that people like to keep it a little more open to have motivation and stuff, like seeing other people work out. I know in CRCE there are, you know, you can see the basketball courts. If you look around you can see people running around the track. Does this help in any way or motivate you instead of just being sort of like a closed room doing your own thing?
RM: Not really. For me it is more of a personal thing and like, when you are working out you just have to find your own rhythm and stick with that. And I don’t really
like comparing myself or finding motivation in others. Just find motivation in
yourself.
ZL: Well I wasn’t saying find motivation in others but just being around a lot of
people who are working out and doing other physical activities. Does that help
you or make you want to, you know, work out more?
RM: No.
ZL: Okay. What about the facility of CRCE attracts you to it? Sort of like what does
the building offer you? I know you said the, you like the machines there but is
there anything, I guess, in total that you like about the whole facility.
RM: I mean, it is the closest place so obviously I would go there first. And plus its,
like I said it was a new building, so it seems more aesthetically pleasing. Along
with like, the adequate lighting, the occasional plant strewn about, and uh, other
than that I can’t really say.
ZL: Okay, thank you for your time.

- At a later time I asked the member how he felt about the belongingness to that
subculture and if that affected him in any way. He replied that to him all motivation
was derived from internal matters and that he felt nothing significant towards the
other member of that subculture.
Annotated Bibliography
Web-Based Research


This is a great article because it gives information on what the best running surfaces are. It goes into detail with pros and cons of 10 different surfaces and rates them based on what they have to offer.

This Runner’s World article is great for the research paper because it says why some surfaces are better than others for running. It gives pros and cons for each of the 10 surfaces and will be useful when writing the final paper.


The article by Cosgrove gives 10 things that a person should consider before joining a fitness center. These 10 tips will give a prospective member a great sense of what the gym atmosphere will be like so that they may choose the fitness center that best fits them.

This article is somewhat useful because it offers ideas on what is looked for in a fitness center. Hopefully this information will come in useful sometime during the writing of the final research paper.


This article is strictly about how treadmills work the body out and some of the benefits they provide. It also talks about different features that treadmills should have to so that they best fit you.

This article will be helpful because it talks about how useful treadmills can be. It gives details on features like the motor, frame speed, and others that are important to choosing a treadmill that fits best.
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Elliptical-Workouts&id=27142>

In this article, Gresham talks about the types of workouts that one can expect while using an elliptical machine. Gresham starts off explaining how to use the machine, explains what it does for the body, and then gives a rough estimate of the most effective time span when it comes to using an elliptical. He then ends the article saying that the elliptical gives a good amount of workout in the shortest amount of time.

This article is useful when it comes to describing the elliptical machine and its benefits. The explanation of what the machine actually does along with an explanation of how to use it will give the reader a better understanding of what the machine is. The time estimate is also good because it will help calculate good workout times.

<http://www.info-guide.org/exercisebikes/>

Gustafson does a great job in this article of the talking about the benefits of using stationary bikes, the different types of bikes, popular models, and a comparison of the stationary bike with the elliptical machine. Gustafson says that stationary bikes are still the best choice for overall fitness and low impact workout. The different types of bikes available for standard bikes are single or dual action models. The dual action model gives a higher workout because it has levers to work the upper body as well as the lower body.

Like the articles describing the treadmill and the elliptical machine, this one gives great insight into the world of stationary bikes. It provides valuable information on the types of bikes as well as the kind of workout it gives you. At the end of the article, there is a useful comparison between the stationary bike and the elliptical machine.

<www.aboutconstruction.org/urethane.php>

This article talks about the uses of the material urethane. It has many benefits when it comes to making running tracks, as its elasticity and strength remain the same as it hardens. Urethane is also very durable, as it is resistant to erosion and many types of grease, oils, and other chemicals. The best attribute it has when it comes to running tracks is that it can be stretched into different shapes while still maintaining its original properties.

This article will be very useful when it comes to writing about the running track at CRCE. It provides great information on the material that many tracks are made of today. Urethane works amazing for these tracks and the article will give readers greater detail of the properties of this material.

The article by Leggatt is about how to market fitness and different techniques in order to attract new customers as members. Leggatt starts out by saying that the sales department of a company is what keeps it in business, and so a person can think of a fitness center as a company. She says that sales reps focus too much on meeting quotas rather than understanding customer needs.

This article may not be as helpful as the other articles gathered for this research paper because it deals with how fitness can be marketed and how to attract customers. Since the research is more about the machines and reasons for using them, something as general as the fitness center may not be helpful.


This article is in a question answer format and gives information on why a person should use either a treadmill or run outdoors. It goes into detail about other aspects of running as the article goes on.

This is an article that gives great information for the research paper. It shows the argument of running outdoors vs. running on a treadmill and that is similar to the actual observation of running indoor track vs. a treadmill. This will be essential when writing the final research paper.


This article is about benefits of using a treadmill and how a treadmill is the most effective fitness machine in terms of burning calories. The article is more of a guide to buying treadmills and provides the reader with features to keep in mind when purchasing a treadmill. These include the motor, speed, control panel, frame, heart-rate monitors, and other important features to keep in mind.

An article like this will be useful when talking about the benefits of using a treadmill. Since CRCE is full of treadmills, the article fits well into the paper and its information and advice can be used in helping to explain why it is that people choose to use the treadmill instead of the running track.

This is a great article for the research experiment because it talks about the differences between the elliptical machine and the treadmill. These are the two most popular cardiovascular fitness machines used in today’s world of fitness. The treadmill has been around for a number of years and provides users with the regular exercise of walking or running on a stationary platform. The elliptical machine is a newer device that can be beneficial to the whole body and is quickly gaining popularity among today’s fitness machine users.

The article starts out describing the treadmill first, defining it through Webster as “a device worked by treading an endless belt.” Treadmills have changed over time and can now be considered more than just “an endless belt.” These updated machines of course have the standard exercise options of walking, jogging, and running, but now they perform new functions, such as simulating a hill and having an incline while walking or running.

The treadmill is a great machine for burning calories, building bone density, and maintaining good cardiovascular health. The intensity of the workout though is proportional to the time spent, meaning that in order to achieve the same goal, with less intensity, more time would have to be spent at the machine. Most of these new treadmills have preset workouts or intensities built into the system and can be easily used by anyone on the machine.

As with beginning any new exercise program, a person should always start out with a lower intensity and work their way up. As a person’s fitness level increases, they will begin to notice that lower intensities are easier and will have to increase their workout intensities in order to achieve the same workout.

Running on a treadmill can be much less punishing on the runner also. If the treadmill running surface is cushioned, there will be less impact on the runner’s knees, shins, ankles, and back. Therefore, that runner is less likely to sustain any type of running injury than if he/she were to run on a concrete or pavement surface. Regardless of surface type though, there will always be a surface impact of about 2 _ times a persons body weight whenever that person steps.

Of course the greatest benefit of a treadmill is that it can be used indoors. Regardless of the weather, a person will always have the facilities to use a treadmill and get a great workout whenever they want.

Elliptical machines on the other hand are much newer than the treadmill. They have really increased in popularity over the last couple of years though, as more and more people realize the benefits it offers.
Elliptical machines are great in the fact that they allow the user to burn the same amount of calories as jogging but with no risk of injury due to constant impact. By having their feet never leave the pedals, an elliptical user has low impact on his body, therefore causing almost no risk of injury to the knees, shins, ankles, and back. An elliptical can be compared to running in midair, where a person’s body isn’t required to absorb the impact of every step. These machines imitate the motions of a normal elliptical step so they still give the leg a complete workout.

Another great feature of the elliptical is that it also works out the upper body, something the treadmill does not do. The dual handlebars give the upper body a sense of cross-country skiing, therefore making this machine much more effective. Because of the upper and lower body workouts, a person’s heart rate climbs at a much faster rate, burning more calories in the amount of time than a treadmill would.

An interesting option on the elliptical is the direction of the foot pedal. The elliptical pedals can go forward and backward, adding another dimension to the workout. This is because going forward and going backward provide exercise two different groups of muscles. It just goes to show the versatility of the elliptical.

There are also studies that have shown that the elliptical can trick you into believing you are working easier than you actually are. This is called “The Rate of Perceived Exertion and is great because it makes people feel as though they aren’t working out as hard as they are. The elliptical is also a good machine for building bone density and can actually improve bone thickness.

Overall, the article says that the elliptical is a safe and efficient machine that is really getting popular nowadays. As people become more fitness conscious, they will learn the benefits of what the elliptical can do and maybe one day the elliptical usage will actually pass that of the treadmill.

This in an incredibly useful article that will fit the theme of the final research paper perfectly. It provides a great comparison to two of the fitness machines that the subculture at CRCE uses on a daily basis. The treadmill and elliptical machine are two of the most popular machines and it is really beneficial to the paper to find an article like this one which gives great insight into what each machine does, how it affects the body, and all of the other benefits they provide.