

Subculture Research Brief_Fitness Culture

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Origins

The fitness culture came a long way from ancient Greece and Rome, and was more commonly known as “gymnasium”. By that time, the member who involved in this activity were devoted into physical educational training. Athletes were whom received high respect from the community. However, only males were allowed in participating in Olympics games at the very early stage of this culture. The patriarchy society was the cause of this situation.¹(Cheever)

As Roberta Sassatelli, a great an Italian sociologist, commented in her book *Fitness Culture- Gyms and The Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun* , “ ... fitness is in many ways a characteristically late twentieth-century story”.² (Sassatelli,17) Gyms are essential parts of this culture. Meanwhile, by gathering a group of people with similar interest, it also illuminated a thumbnail image of the society with clear class structure. The participants of gyms were mostly branded as middle-class.³ (Sassatelli, 14)The selling idea of idealized femininity body shape attracted female consumers to this up-growing culture. According to Shelly McKenzie, an archivist and librarian in the History of the Health Sciences Award, she wrote in her book *Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America*, the severe problem of large population of obesity in America was the primary cause of this rising subculture.⁴ (McKenzie)

From ancient Greece, this physical training activity was not simply about body, but also incorporate with music, art and logic. It was seen as education. Not surprisingly, in 1970s, fitness culture crossed with art culture of pop music in America.⁵ (Sassatelli, 17) Taiji, taekwondo, and other physical activities from Eastern culture are influencing the western fitness field as well.⁶ (Sassatelli)

¹ Cheever, David W. (1 May 1859). "The Gymnasium". *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group. Retrieved 19 March 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1859/05/the-gymnasium/305407/>

² Sassatelli, Roberta. *Fitness Culture: Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

³ Ibid.

⁴ McKENZIE, SHELLY. *Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America*. University Press of Kansas, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.newschool.edu/stable/j.ctt1dr36wm>.

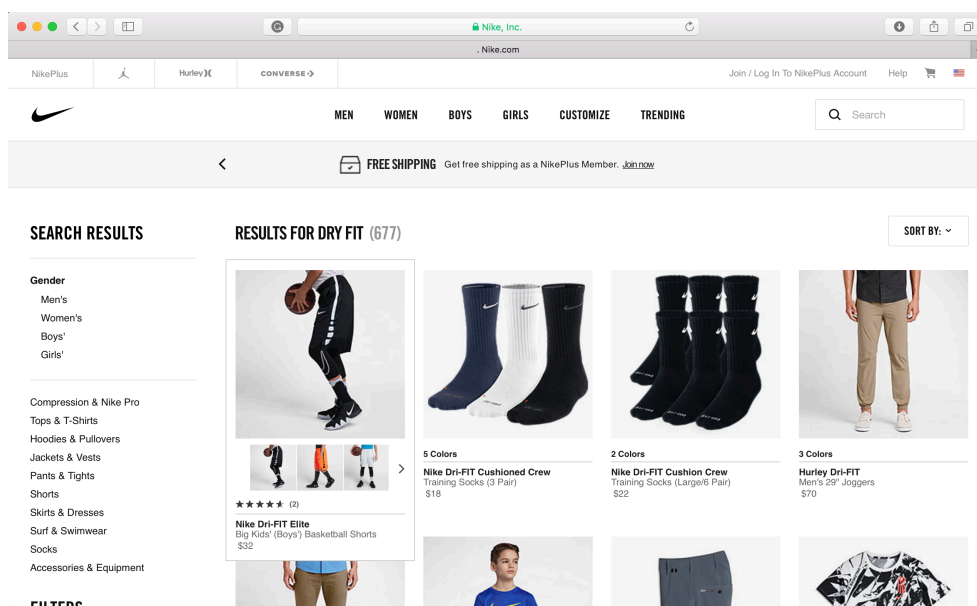
⁵ Sassatelli, Roberta. *Fitness Culture: Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

⁶ Ibid.

Some of the aerobic workout cooperate with hip-hop music to help motivating the energy of participants.⁷

Dress Practice

Due to the requirement for body movements for this subculture, the members usually wear activewear for ease and comfort. There is a cliché image of “shiny Lycra, Lillian Vader Zalm headbands and thong underwear” of workout outfit that left behind 1970s. The field of activewear has been expanded and spread across according to needs. For instance, lightweight bell bottom pants and camisole tops are essentials for dancing workout; “no cling-ons in the yoga” as Jennifer Worley, an American Association of Nurse Practitioner, wrote in her article *These Fashions are Gym Dandy*.⁸ (Worley) In addition, the looks of this group, according to Worley, can be generally seen in a trend of “unisex”.⁹ (Worley)



screenshot of Nike official website, searching result for “Dry-f.i.t.” has a reasonable amount
https://store.nike.com/us/en_us/pw/n/1j7?sl=dry%20fit&ipp=120

Functionality takes a huge role in the invention of sportswear. For each gender, the silhouettes of body shapes is considered for better supporting body parts

⁷ "Hip-hop fitness Hip-hop fitness." Virginian Pilot 29 June 2009: E3. Business Insights: Essentials. Web. 31 Mar. 2018.http://bi.galegroup.com.libproxy.newschool.edu/essentials/article/GALE|A202540335/7854323d90d2a86e7453f70771d266b2?u=nysl_me_newsch

⁸ Worley, Jennifer. "These Fashions are Gym Dandy." Calgary Herald Jan 26 1999: E1 / FRONT. ProQuest. 1 Apr. 2018 .

⁹ Ibid.

when moving. For example, sports bra are intended to support the weight of female breasts for stabilization and comfort. The famous world-wide sportswear brand Nike has its specialty collection called Dri-f.i.t., which is “a synthetic fabric that wicks moistures away from skin. While the activewear industry working on functionality, experimenting various materials that are durable and keep users dry and breath”, there’s more that this industry come across with fashion field. The hip hop but not limited to only hip hop, has always been conjugated with sports. Wearing gym wear on the street hasn’t been odd since 1970. From the old sweats, nowadays sports bra, sweatpants are in high fashion.



(image on the left)
 New York City, c. 1979.
[https://www.buzzfeed.com/thecarriediaries/15-reasons-why-nyc-was-](https://www.buzzfeed.com/thecarriediaries/15-reasons-why-nyc-was-better-in-the-80s?)

better-in-the-80s?

"It's a psychological thing," Stevenson University fashion professor Sally DiMarco said. "You want others to know you work out."¹⁰ (Prudente) The psychological idea behind casual wearing help boosting the activewear industry. The aerobic wear changes through seasons just as in regular fashion clothing, stated by Cindy Bard, manager of Bodythings.¹¹ (Worley)

(image on the right)
 Kendall Jenner wearing Tracksuits to New York Fashion Week 2018
<http://stealherstyle.net/kendall-jenner/>



¹⁰ Prudente, Tim. "From Gym to Dinner? Workout Clothes Now High Fashion." *Capital*, Jan 30, 2014. <https://login.libproxy.newschool.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.newschool.edu/docview/1492530277?accountid=12261>.

¹¹ Worley, Jennifer. "These Fashions are Gym Dandy." *Calgary Herald* Jan 26 1999: E1 / FRONT. ProQuest. 1 Apr. 2018 .

Sportswear to street is common sense for fashion industry. Celebrities like Kendall Jenner influence the consumers for latest trend of gym-to-street.

Political/ Economical Stances

The Fitness Culture in America is composed of characteristics of rationalization and asceticism. “And the quest for authenticity and hedonism” written by Sassatelli. The image of people in “fitness” illustrated the “masses” and “well-being citizens”. Working out promotes the positive energy not only physically, but also psychologically and socially.

In the nineteenth century in USA, the gymnastic was developed for specific military training. It was organized directly by the state. ¹²(Sassatelli,19) The profile of strong soldiers represents the power of a nation before and always. Therefore, the fitness education makes itself with bio-political aim. Unlike team sports such as rugby, recreational education of work out highlights the equality over every single members in this subculture, with self-control and leadership out of individuality.¹³(Sassatelli,19)

As mentioned above, the fitness culture has always been an up-spirit activity aims to build better health for everyone. It also imposes the beauty ideal for the body shape. “Fitness” the word can be understood in both physical status and mental status. The urge drive of those people who want to build shapes, the industry developed an enormous profitable business by selling fitness equipments and pills. By owning any product, for example wearing the sweatpants, the consumer felt successful reaching their fitness goal.¹⁴ (Worley) The commercialization of fitness and fitness itself are two objects inter-growth, depending on each other.

Culture Activities

In the first component of this brief, the logic comes out of fitness culture has been discussed. The somatic function strengthen along the way where the brain acknowledge more about individuals in all senses. The body movements cooperate with the essence of art. “At the heart of both ancient Eastern and more contemporary Western techniques is a desire of the efficient, effective and aesthetically pleasing movement, together with the cultivation of flexibility, co-

¹² Sassatelli, Roberta. *Fitness Culture: Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Worley, Jennifer. "These Fashions are Gym Dandy." *Calgary Herald* Jan 26 1999: E1 / FRONT. ProQuest. 1 Apr. 2018 .

ordination, balance and internal energy.”¹⁵ (Sassatelli, 23) The activities vary from old-fashioned boxing to modern hip-hop dancing aerobic. Equipments like dumbbell, treadmill are used tools in this culture. “From the dawn of the activity for body strengthening, aimed at achieving an aesthetic development of muscles (especially the chest: dorsals, pectorals and so on) by using weights and equipment.”¹⁶ (Sassatelli, 21)

A group of experts in the field of sports and science lead by Grant Anthony O’Sullivan documented the data they collected from NPD group in their research article over women’s activewear trends, “in the USA, in 2013-2014 activewear accounted for one-sixth of the overall apparel market, yet contributed significantly to the three-year sales growth of apparel (5 per cent growth without activewear, 9 per cent growth with activewear)”¹⁷(O’Sullivan) The consumption outburst in the recent years shows the demand for this specific type of dress. Worley says in her article, people can wear activewear to the cafe or even the bars.¹⁸ The dress make each member feel belong to this active group of culture, representing health and bright spirit. The mood of causal wearing has also been adopted into the merchandising of activewear. Since workout is the combination of recreation of body and soul, the consumer in the field is reaching out for comforting self with body condition and state of mind. While staying casual, individual wearer tends to be more meditated and less anxious from modern living.

¹⁵ Sassatelli, Roberta. *Fitness Culture: Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷ O’Sullivan, Grant Anthony, et al. "Women's Activewear Trends and Drivers: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 21.1 (2017): 2-15. ProQuest. 3 Apr. 2018 .

¹⁸ Worley, Jennifer. "These Fashions are Gym Dandy." *Calgary Herald* Jan 26 1999: E1 / FRONT. ProQuest. 1 Apr. 2018 .

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