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*“Working out our melancholy, our muscles and our masculinities” Depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism, body-modification and masculinity in a de-industrialised Northumbrian Town.*

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**“Working out our melancholy, our muscles and our masculinities”**

Depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism, body-modification and masculinity in a de-industrialised Northumbrian Town.

A PhD thesis, written and researched by Andreas Giazitzoglu; January 2007 – January 2010.

Presented to the *Department of Applied Social Sciences (Sociology)*, at the *University of Durham* for the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

Submitted February 2010.



## **Abstract**

This thesis is ‘about’ two places. Firstly, it is about Town A, which is a milieu located in South-East Northumberland (UK). Town A was once culturally and socio-economically defined by its coalmining industry. Town A’s last remaining mine closed around thirty years ago; at which point Town A became de-industrialised. Town A’s de-industrialisation, and subsequent, on-going transition from an industrial into a post-industrial economy and culture ‘frames’ this work and its dialectics. Secondly, this research is about Gym D, which is a gym that is located in Town A. Gym D attracts the areas’ ‘hard core’ (as distinct from casual) body-building community. Steroid use is rife among the gym’s close-knit community.

This thesis proposes that three typologies of working class males have co-evolved and currently co-exist in Town A and use Gym D. These typologies, as I have labelled them, are the Drifters’, the Changers’ and the Traditionalists’. The three groups have all been ‘constructed’ by different cultural habitus’ that have entered and now operate in Town A. The Drifters’ are all consensually unemployed. The Drifters share an anti-work ethic, and rely upon the Welfare state’s benefit systems for their survival. The Drifters constitute Town A’s ‘Chav’, ‘underclass’ culture and masculinity. In contrast, the Changers are all embourgeoised individuals, who aspire to be ‘middleclass’, global, yuppie men. The Changers dress and act differently to other users of Gym D and also socialise in Newcastle’s ‘fantasy spaces’, instead of the ‘rough’ spaces in and around Town A. The Changers all work in white-collar, post-industrial jobs; many of them have been to university. The Changers have thus successfully assimilated into the North-East’s emerging post-industrial economy. Simultaneously, the Traditionalists’ manage to retain Town A’s ‘traditional’, coalmining, artisan identity and lifestyle; despite such becoming increasingly obsolete. The Traditionalists’ all endeavour to perform ‘proper’, ‘hard’ (blue collar) jobs; and continue to live and act as the Town A miner stereotypically did, particularly during their leisure lives.

Epistemologically, this work does three things. Firstly, this work examines the contrasting ways that the three typologies of life identified in this research: 1) experience a disjunction in their lives between ‘how things are’ and ‘how things should be’; 2) work/labour (or fail to work), 3) spend money/buy commodities. By so doing, this work considers how relevant the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism are to users of Gym D today. I consider how the ‘mass sadness’ that afflicts my participants’ lived experiences can be accounted for and contextualised by the theories. Secondly, this work considers how my participants’ ‘gym labour’ and ‘commodity bodies’ relates to their experiences of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. I ask ‘does my participants’ involvement with Gym D alleviate or extend their psycho-social depression?’ Thirdly, this work considers how the ‘commodity bodies’ that my participants’ have constructed in Gym D relates to their existences and identities at a semiotic level. I suggest that my participants’ modified bodies act as communicative devices in their existences, which denote metaphoric and social information about my participant groups’, within their distinctive, subjective cultural experiences.

This thesis is a product of the phenomenological tradition. Its arguments are substantiated by a series of qualitative interviews and a period of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted ‘on’ my participants.



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For Jesus Christ. Who I still believe in and know; and who I hope I served in some way during my time as a PhD student.



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## Chapter 1:

### Introduction

*Town A* is a ‘de-industrialised’ Town that is situated in South-East Northumberland; fifteen miles north of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, where approximately twenty-eight thousand people currently live. In essence, this thesis is ‘about’ Town A, and the changing society it hosts.

I begin this thesis’ introductory chapter by giving readers’ a level of background relating to Town A’s industrial past. I aim to illustrate that Town A is, culturally and physically, a derivative of its mining industry. I then give readers an insight into the contemporary, de-industrialised context of Town A. I do so with a view to ‘framing’ Town A in my readers’ minds; and projecting a sense of place.

Physically, Town A was built for, upon and around its coalmining collieries, which began being mined in the latter 1800s. Town A’s mines ensured it once existed as a ‘boom town’. In 1871, Town A’s population was 1, 271. By 1911, Town A’s population was 24, 583 (Murphy: 20). Only the war in 1914 stopped Town A’s initial ‘boom and building’ (Murphy: 31), and the continuous arrival of workers who migrated to Town A from all over the UK, lured by the ‘job for life’ promise that its mining industry offered.

Thus, for most of the 1900s, Town A functioned as *the* quintessential coaling town. Town A housed a ‘genuinely localised’<sup>1</sup>, close-knit, somewhat insular and homogenous populace, whose collective identities, lives and economic status’ were governed by Town A’s mining industry. Town A’s mining industry also formed Town A’s ‘masculine hegemonic’ (Connell, 2000); by which I mean the ‘model’ of masculinity from which men in Town A ‘learned’

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<sup>1</sup> ‘unlike many UK regions containing prominent port cities, the North East was less reliant upon colonial trading links, leading some to speculate on the potential for a ... genuinely local ruling class’ (existing in it) (Massey, 1995; cited in Nayak, 2006: 194).



from and replicated, when presenting themselves, communicating and interacting daily ‘as men’.

Coalmining thus provided Town A and its artisan populace with a social and economic backbone; and defined Town A’s cultural habitus; i.e. the learned dispositions and tastes residents in Town A acquired, merely from ‘being’ in Town A’s cultural ecology. In this sense, Murphy (:62) is right to assert that it was once ‘impossible to separate community life’ (in Town A) ‘from the economic activity of the pit’. Town A and coalmining were synonymous: Town A was a place where ‘hard’, ‘real’ working class men worked in a ‘hard’, artisan industry.

‘Ashton’ is the fictitious name that was given to the Yorkshire mining community analysed by Dennis et al (1956). As in Town A, in Ashton ‘coal’ was ‘the means through which’ most residents made their ‘living’ (:25). By considering what life was like for residents of Ashton in the 1950s (according to Dennis et al) we get a clear idea of what life was like for residents of Town A during its industrial ‘heyday’, given the direct parallels between the two localities. It is useful to consider the account of Ashton provided by Dennis et al at this point in this thesis’ introduction therefore.

Dennis et al show that coaling labour was static, coerced and exploitative. For the coal worker:

‘arrives at a time set by the requirements of the enterprises. The time at which he leaves is also dependant on the needs of the job. Should he wish to spend a certain amount of time in some non-working activity during the hours when he would normally be at work, he cannot as a rule arrange’ to do so ... ‘his maintenance of life depends on regular fulfilment of the labour-wage contract with his employer, and acceptance of the



conditions involved' (:29) ... 'his work is the opposite of freedom, as he sees it, and yet no freedom is possible without it' (:31).

Thus, coal work in Town A (and Ashton) was fundamentally structured, regulated and guided by the notion that the mines (and mining companies) 'owned' their workers. As in Ashton, the miner in Town A would have had no chance of 'improving' his financial and cultural position, or finding a level of autonomy, for: 'in the basic industries such as coalmining ... the possibility of a man becoming 'his own boss is nil'' (:33). Presumably, this created a psycho-social sense of resignation and helplessness for Town A's artisan, mining populace.

Leisure time in Town A – like that 'enjoyed' by those in Ashton - was centralised around 'mainly drinking and gambling':

'with the former the miner was able to escape temporarily from the consciousness of the limitations of his life. With the latter, if he won a moderate sum, he could spend it on drinking to escape from his limitations in fantasy, and if he won a large sum he could escape in fact' (: 137).

Hence, leisure life in coaling communities was - like working life - highly structured and regulated; and used as an escape from the sense of helplessness, monotony and predictability that residents presumably endured in and as part of their existences.

In Ashton - as in Town A – an explicit relationship existed between the institution of the family and the mining industry. This relationship was not just founded upon the direct ways that families relied, economically, on the coalmining industry to survive ('60% of families in Ashton relied on wages paid to them by the coaling industry': 172), but also in the way that the mining industry depended upon families to produce not just workers, but the 'sort' of workers required to labour and create solidarity in such a context:



‘clearly the function of the family is as a mechanism for perpetuating the social structure, not only in terms of biological reproduction, but in terms of the production of the social personalities required by such a community’ (:245).

Thus, mining governed Town A’s collective life and identity; as it did in Ashton and other mining Towns throughout the UK.

Town A’s last remaining mine closed at the end of the 1980s. At this point, Town A’s final 8,000 mining jobs were permanently lost (Beatty et al, 2005) following a consistent series of mine closures in the region. Subsequently, Town A – along with countless other localities globally – became de-industrialised (Martin and Rowthorn, 1986) within a hostile national political climate<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the mining industry that formed and defined Town A, its cultural habitus and its populace became lost. Town A therefore embarked, and continually embarks, into an era of ‘post-industrialism’, as explained by Byrne (2001:2):

Those of us in the advanced industrial world are currently living ... the transition from an industrial society, in which the basis for most peoples’ livelihoods was waged work making material things - to a post-industrial society in which most of us still work for wages but more and more of us are now making immaterial services and signs’ .

While mining life and the waged labour it provided has been shown in this work to be rigid and exploitative, readers must not underestimate the impact that Town A’s de-industrialisation had upon Town A’s residents and their lives, both economically and culturally. Indeed, Town A collectively mourned the loss of its mining industry. Benyon (107-108) goes some way in illustrating the sociological impact that the UK’s de-industrialisation had upon working class males’ generally:

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<sup>2</sup> The documentary *Strike: When Britain Went To War* captures the cultural hostility and mood that resonated during this time-frame.



‘millions of men in the advanced economies lost their jobs and economic authority in the succession of recessions throughout the 1980s and early 1990s ... for the ordinary working man in areas of heavy industry (like the North East of England and South Wales) ... the traditional male career was attacked at all levels. The shift from ... industrialisation to electronic technology was immediately damaging for working class men. Why was the loss of often inhuman, exploitative jobs (like coaling) so mourned? First, these were not just jobs but benchmarks of masculinity ... the old moral authority which men used to have ‘just by being men’ ... second, this was ... the end of the United Kingdom as a major venue for heavy manufacturing ... what emerged was a hierarchy of masculinities based on appearance and which abolished more traditional masculinities.’

Town A’s working populace were not exempt from such rules. The loss of Town A’s mines caused sadness, insecurities and divisions within its micro community, as residents came to terms with the absence of not just mining jobs, but mining culture, habitus and identity.

According to literature ‘on’ de-industrialisation, there appears to be an indisputable correlation between the de-industrialisation of a locus, and that locus’ debilitation. To substantiate this correlation, one can cite Dudley’s *The End of The Line* (1994) which considers the deindustrialisation of Kenosha’s car manufacturing industry; Linkon and Russo’s (2002) investigation into the decline of Youngstown’s steel industry; Warf and Holly’s 1997 study which looks at the de-industrialisation of Cleveland, Ohio; Kideckel’s 2008 analysis of life in de-industrial, post-socialist Romania, and Ferguson’s *Expectations of Modernity* which draws attention to the loss of Zambia’s copper belt. For the works succeed in illustrating how the localities in question experienced high level of unemployment as a result of de-industrialisation; and how a collective mental strain came to define life for



residents' in the de-industrialised spaces. As residents found, and still find, themselves 'in especially vulnerable positions' (Linkon and Russo: 4) psychologically<sup>3</sup>, while they try and adjust to the new ways of working (or not working) and 'living' that are coerced upon them as a by-product of de-industrialisation entering their lives, and the cultural disequilibrium such causes. It is as if the loss of a place's industry represents the loss of a community's hope, convention and identity. It is 'working class young men' who typically suffer most obviously from a locus' loss of industry; for it is young men whose futures, identities and rights' of passage become most confused; as put by Nayak (2006: 816):

'generations of young men whose cultural worlds would once have been shaped through a prism of schooling ... and hard labour' (find themselves as a result of de-industrialisation) 'as unskilled, unemployable, redundant youth'.

I will go on to suggest that Town A – like the other de-industrialised localities that are referred to in the references mentioned above – has also been debilitated, economically and psychosocially, by the loss of its coalmining industry. Yet, I will also suggest that Town A, twenty years after the loss of its mines, provides us with a fascinating empirical case study, that allows us to truly examine processes of cultural negotiations, resistance and assimilation.

Thematically, this thesis focuses upon the relationship between Town A's de-industrialisation, Town A's 'depression' and Town A's contemporary masculinity. This

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<sup>3</sup> Ferguson's 'theory of abjection', which was written with specific reference to the de-industrialisation of Zambia's copper belt, gives an especially poignant demonstration of the extent to which a peoples' collective psychology can be debilitated as a result of de-industrialisation. Thus Ferguson, who 'found an overwhelming sense of decline and despair' (12) in the Zambian Copper Belt; ventures that:

'Mineworkers in tattered clothes who were struggling to feed their families had to remind me' (Ferguson) 'that there was a time, not so long ago, when they could not only afford to eat more regularly but could even buy tailored suits mail ordered from London ... a time when better-off mineworkers could own a car. And what had been lost with the passing of this era, it seemed, was not simply the material comfort and satisfaction it provided but the sense of legitimate expectations that had come with them – optimism that, many seemed sure, was now (like the cars) simply gone ... gone never to return'.



thesis explores how men in Town A have found (or resisted) new ways to live, think, work, spend money and ‘present’ themselves today; in a post-modern, ‘glocal’, post-industrial society. I define this thesis’ epistemological aims and objectives, and introduce readers to this work’s methodological orientations in more detail later in this chapter. For the moment, I will concentrate on ‘framing’ Town A further as part of this introductory chapter, by giving readers an account of Town A’s contemporary culture.

### Post-Industrial Town A: the current situation

I have drawn attention to Town A’s industrial past, and illustrated that Town A is a derivative of its mining industry. But what can be said about the empirical context of post-industrial Town A: a place where coal was once but is no longer life? The *WithinReach* study (:5) describes contemporary Town A as being a place that:

‘has low car ownership, suffers from low life expectancy and high levels of long term sickness and industrial disease (largely due to the area’s mining legacy)’ ... (The Town’s residents suffer from) ‘low levels of health, and low aspirations in general’.

The study highlights that in Town A unemployment rates are currently ‘very high’: only 61.8% of the Town’s ‘working age population’ are in employment compared with the national average of 74.6%; although, this statistic should be seen as optimistically misrepresentative, for it masks the fact that many of Town A’s ‘employed’ residents find themselves existing as casually employed individuals, who labour on the unfixed occasions when ‘work is available’, in a non-committal, non-assured way. The study also emphasises that Town A’s suicide rate is ‘double the national average (1.9 per 10,000 compared to 0.9)’<sup>4</sup>;

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<sup>4</sup> The town’s high suicide rate may well be a result of the Town’s high levels of unemployment, as suggested by Wilkinson (1996: 162):



and that ‘rates of teenage pregnancy are ... high’ in Town A. ‘41.2% of children’ in Town A ‘live in low income households’. Accordingly, Town A’s intergenerational cycle of deprivation will continue.

An MORI survey (2001) gives us further insight into Town A’s contemporary culture, by:

- Placing the district that Town A is located in as that ‘which suffers the highest crime rates’ in the county.
- Demonstrating (2.1) that ‘anti social behaviour has been identified as a major concern for residents’ of Town A, many of whom ‘live in fear’ because of the existential climate of crime that has been created here.
- Highlighting that in the Government’s Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004), seven of Wansbeck’s sixteen wards ‘ranked amongst the worst 10% of wards in England’ (2.7) in terms of their deprived nature. Town A’s ward was one of those listed.
- Emphasising that ‘many council properties have become difficult to let and over 700 have been demolished’ in Town A. Thus ‘housing market problems are found’ in Town A, in part due to ... ‘a shortage of affordable housing ... as a consequence of a raise in house prices in the area which has not been matched by an equivalent rise in incomes’.

It is within the landscape described above that this thesis’ and its research is rooted.

I believe that contemporary Town A constitutes an under-researched and debatably misunderstood ‘sort’ of Sociological landscape. While one can cite an abundance of studies - such as Roberts, 1971; Hoggart, 1957; Young and Wilmott, 1962; Jackson and Marsden,

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‘Although suicide rates are often inversely associated with violence against others, in Britain suicide rates among young men 15-24 years old rose by 75 per cent during the mid and late 1980s ... the rise in suicide is likely to have been particularly closely related to rising unemployment’.



1966; Willis, 1977; Brown, 1987; Bulmer, 1975; Fraser, 1968, 1969 and Benyon, 1973 - as being ‘grounded’, empirically-led works that depict British working class society as it existed in earlier, industrial milieus, insights into contemporary British working class society are sparse. Yet, paradoxically, working class culture has changed fundamentally since the above studies were undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s (a period when the analysis of working class life was sociologically popular). These fundamental changes to working class society are due to the themes of de-industrialisation and ‘globalisation’ diversifying and modernising working class culture; as we shall come to. Nonetheless, British sociology has failed, as a discipline, to truly document and analyse post-industrial, ‘global’ British working class society; with the exception of the commendable efforts of a few scholars<sup>5</sup>. For as working class society changed to the post-modern, ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 2005; 2006), de-industrialised form that we have now, class, as a subject of sociological analysis, fell out of methodological and epistemological vogue. Meaning that, at the time of writing:

‘the study of class is no longer central to British sociological analysis, and the debate on class is largely on whether this should be celebrated or lamented’ (Savage, 2007:7);

‘There is no interest in class within the University and among publishers. Apparently, “people do not read books on class”, so there is no market’ (Charlesworth, 2000: 14).

Hence, as a discipline, British sociology has failed to ask what is at the centre of working class existence – or the working class ‘lived experience’ as Charlesworth refers to such (2000) – in places ‘like’ Town A today; even if ‘Ongoing and New Directions in Working Class Studies’ are predicted and encouraged in the sociological agendas of other countries

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. Lawler, 2000 and Parker, 2007, who focus on the lives of working class women; Woodward’s compelling 2004 and 2007 works on the relationship between boxing and working class masculinity; the publications contained in the journal *Sociology* (Volume 37 Number 3 August 2003), edited by Stephanie Lawler and David Byrne; and Simon Charlesworth’s 2000 insight into South Yorkshire’s working class communities, which I critique later in this chapter.



(Roberts, 2007), most notably in America<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, the white, British working class male - the non exotic other – and his de-industrialised world has become an anthropological and sociological enigma. This epistemological hiatus aims to be addressed to some degree through this work, which reflexively investigates the white, working class mans' world(s), gym, body-modification, depression, labour patterns, consumption lives, conception of masculinity and sense of social strain; in a de-industrialised setting where coal was once, but is no longer, life.

Accordingly, the only recently published source which resembles this thesis in terms of its epistemological orientations, geographical area of analysis, methodology and chronology - and, therefore, the only publication that this work can genuinely 'expand upon' and contrast itself with - is Simon Charlesworth's *A phenomenology of working class experience* (2000). It is right, therefore, to briefly consider<sup>7</sup> Charlesworth's work at this point in this introductory discussion.

Charlesworth's work, like mine, aims to answer the general question of 'what is at the heart of working peoples' experience?' (:184), from a phenomenological perspective. He addresses this question with reference to the locality of Rotherham, which – like Town A – is a de-industrialised locus in the North of England that is undergoing a social-cultural 'shift' at the time of analysis, due to the onset of post-industrialism. Charlesworth defines phenomenology, having been influenced by the thought of Merleau-Ponty, as 'how place is

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<sup>6</sup> Thus it is said that British Sociology's position, in which 'class' is neglected as an area of analysis is 'kind of an inversion of the position in the USA', where 'de-industrialisation has brought the issue of class more to the fore in the academic debate' (Savage, 2007: 7) in recent years.

<sup>7</sup> Readers should note that Crossley (2003) provides a more detailed review of Charlesworth's work from an *Epidemiological perspective*; in which Crossley commends Charlesworth on both 1) his attempts to document working class life (which is a 'vital' epistemological task: 676) and 2) his use of overlapping phenomenological theories (:675) as a means to understand working class experience. However, Crossley also points out that Charlesworth's thesis fails to 'think against' itself (:675); i.e. Charlesworth fails to question his findings and even propose that features other than those he identifies may define working class life.



experienced through the founding of a sense by human communities' (:19). Charlesworth proposes that 'places exist to individuals as constellations of affective senses expressive of the life of those who inhabit them' (:19). Thus, Charlesworth conducted a series of recorded conversations with 'working class' people existing in contemporary Rotherham, in the hope of producing a description of what life (or lived experience) is like for them in their locality, 'phenomenologically', based upon their experiences of 'their place'.

At this point, I would like to make it clear that I can empathise with Charlesworth's situation and intellectual project. Like Charlesworth, I know what it is like to be a (self-labelled) 'working class lad' subjected to the snobbery of *Oxbridge*; even if my own experiences of 'being' at *Oxford University* were considerably more positive than those evidently endured by Charlesworth at Cambridge (:X). Therefore, I agree with Charlesworth's statement that:

'it is difficult to express how hard it can be living among some of the most privileged people in the world when you come back to (or from) the context described in this work' (:5)

and can understand some of the anger that Charlesworth expresses towards the 'establishment'; although I do go on to argue in this thesis (chapter five) that my experiences of the habitus of *Oxford University* allowed me to 'pronounce' upon the context of Town A – the place I am from, and 'came back' to - in this work with objectivity and authority. (The fact that *Cambridge University* did this for Charlesworth – as well as publish his book – seems to have been overlooked by him). Further, I want to emphasise that I admire Charlesworth's desire to 'relay' the culture of his 'own town and people'. His attempted relaying is both a humanistic and epistemologically needed project, as Charlesworth states:



‘Working class people require intermediaries in the realm of culture to relay their condition: that is, people committed to expressing their condition through the instruments offered by the field of cultural production’ (Charlesworth: 13).

I believe that Charlesworth does manage to document the ‘despair’ - or ‘depression’ as my work terms it - that characterises life for many working class people today psycho-socially.

Yet, despite my empathy with Charlesworth’s position and cause, and despite Charlesworth successfully drawing attention to the unhappiness of working class life (which, I argue in chapter two of this thesis, is an unhappiness that is not limited to working class culture per se, but a feature of life for all who exist in a capitalist society, regardless of their class) I believe his insight into working class life is, on the whole, over value-laded, and at times schematic. Charlesworth does not *explain* working class life sociologically; he merely *describes* components of working class life in a rather generic way. This prevents him from truly examining the ‘working class experience’ phenomenologically, and the cultural complexities that such an account needs to be aware of. I challenge Charlesworth’s work for three reasons in particular.

Firstly, Charlesworth suggests that a defining feature of working class life is ‘silence’ or muteness. He suggests this silence is especially prominent in the private spheres of working class existence:

‘A disturbing feature of the world I am trying to capture is that it is being enveloped in silence. A silence that is not merely metaphorical ... but one which describes the form of their intimate lives. It is in the most personal dimensions of intimate life that the cultural conditions of working class life are most pronounced and disturbing ’ (3-4).



My research does not suggest that this is the case however. Rather, I found working class life to be very loud and vocal, especially during its ‘intimate’ or private manifestations. For it is during its intimate times that working class culture is at its realest and most honest (for it is at its most unregulated) and, thus, its most vocal and ethnographically insightful. Hence, it was in Gym D - a gym in Town A where I gathered my research sample and conducted my ethnography - at parties, on street corners smoking marijuana ‘spliffs’ and drinking from bottles, comforting people after rows and fights, on the way to and from football matches etc that I elicited my most representative (even if private and thus ethically challenging) data, and recognised, in contrast to Charlesworth, the complete loudness and openness of conversation – the ‘talking for talking’s sake’ – that defines working class life. Thus, as one of my participants said to me one night when I tried to explain the principles of participant observation to him:

‘If you’re going to study us by listening to us, then get good hearing! Cause these cunts’ (other participant gym users) ‘talk and talk and talk ... most of us just talk for the sake of it ... about anything, we’re all experts on everything and we’re all loud mouthed opinionated twats, so I hope you’re good at listening. Mind you, you’re always fucking gossiping as well so you should be fine’.

This is not to say that working class people are necessarily happy. Working class loudness is not an indication of working class joy: indeed much working class discussion – so often passionate and repetitive - is thematically about how ‘shit’ life is; how unfair existence is. But it is to say that ‘silence’ and ‘working class culture’ – from the loudness of televisions and music speakers in working class houses and bars to the animated conversations that working class people share - are often contradictory nouns. Inevitably, muteness and sadness is *one* component of working class life. Yet, muteness and sadness is not the *only* or defining feature of working class life. This thesis will draw attention to the extremities of emotions



and noise which exist within Town A's community; and challenges Charlesworth's contention accordingly.

Secondly, Charlesworth gives readers the impression that working class people have no choice but to be as he suggests they are. Charlesworth thus presents a deterministic view of working class people. He presents working class people as being passive victims who, by definition of being born working class, are helpless individuals; resigned to being:

‘a form of humanity that humanity takes for those whose being is shaped by the absence of freedom to become other than what they find themselves having to be’ (:4)

He describes working class people as:

‘the zombies that British culture has created by condemning them to the living death of a stigmatized, abject, being’ (:160).

This is a further assertion that I found to be untrue (not to mention somewhat insulting to working class people). The fact that three very different forms of masculinity and working class life were found in this research's fieldwork to exist in Gym D alone shows how working class people actively construct different lives and identities in the current epoch. Working class people are free-thinking and capable of making radical changes to and in their lived experiences: Charlesworth fails to recognise this. The fact that both Charlesworth and I made it to Oxbridge as graduate students, ‘despite’ our working class roots demonstrates this point further. Out of the three typologies of working class life identified in my research, only the Drifters’ adhere to the ‘stigmatized’, blanket account of working class culture provided by Charlesworth. In this thesis, I suggest that the ‘Working class’ should not be discussed as a homogenous group, as Charlesworth makes the mistake of doing. Instead, diversity defines



working class existence: we should talk of the working *classes* rather than the working class.

This position was affirmed by one of my participants, when I read the above statements:

‘no, that is wrong cause it makes all working class people sound like they’re from *Shameless*’ (a television show that stereotypes working class life) ‘which we’re not ... see people in Rotherham might say, oh yeah, we’re working class, like that other scientist would say’ (Charlesworth) ‘but if they’ (people from Rotherham) ‘came to Town A, they’d look at us and say, oh no, we’re middleclass compared to those savages but then if we go to Middlesbrough we’ll say, nap we’re not working class cause compared to these smoggy peado bastards’ (derogatory term for people who live in Middlesbrough) ‘we’re fucking royalty.’

My third criticism of Charlesworth’s thesis – and the reason he perhaps fails to document the variegated nature of contemporary working class life – is that he hardly mentions the effects that de-industrialisation has had upon working class localities’, *habitus*’ and, thus, culture(s). He also ignores the fundamental changes to working class culture that globalisation is creating. To provide an account of contemporary working class life that ignores these two variables - as well as the ease at which working class people can currently ‘drift’ through their lives while ‘living on the state’ - is to ignore the most seminal realities of working class life today. It is to overlook the sociological factors that ‘make’ contemporary working class life both ethnographically interesting and sociologically relevant and transitional at the time of writing. As we shall come to, one can’t ignore the impact that ‘macro’ society has on the micro of Town A.

I am therefore trying to develop our understanding of contemporary working class life in this thesis, and give an account of working class life that I believe is more relevant and accurate than what is currently offered. Here, I hope to highlight the variegated nature of



contemporary working class life, and explain how this (micro) variegation has emerged as a result of wider (macro) socio-economic variables. I will venture that working class people are not victims of their society so much as they are constructs of the different cultural habitus' that have penetrated and currently operate in working class communities.

### Sad Minds, Muscular Bodies

Readers have now been introduced to the locality of Town A. They know of its industrial history; and of its contemporary, post-industrial empirical nature. Readers have also been shown that research into de-industrialised areas in the UK is sparse and lacking. I now develop this introductory chapter by outlining the two 'cultural truisms' which inform this work. I then define this work's wider epistemological objectives, in mind of Town A and its history.

The first cultural truism that informs this work, as Chapter 2 of this thesis demonstrates in detail, is that contemporary society is a society in which conscious 'depression' is a defining feature of life (James, 1997). Hence, existence – working class or otherwise, in Town A and every other capitalist milieu – can be seen as being characterised, chiefly, by melancholy and existential dissatisfaction. In line with the general ontology advocated by the Frankfurt School of social theory (Schindler, 1996), contemporary 'lived experience' intrinsically saddens those who partake in it.

The second truism to inform this thesis, as Chapter 3 of this work illustrates, is that this research takes place during an epoch in which an increasing number of males modify the aesthetic look and shape of their bodies in gyms (body-modification). They do so by performing 'gym labour' - i.e. by them lifting weights and using fitness machines, typically in congruence with a high protein diet and increasingly through the use of anabolic steroids. Body-modification is performed in the hope that its practitioners will construct and inhabit



‘muscular bodies’; for a muscular body has come to constitute society’s ‘masculine hegemonic aesthetic’ (Filiault and Drummond, 2007; Connell, 1995; 2000; 1977), by which I mean society’s ‘idealised’ conception of how a man’s physical body should look. Hence, a muscular male anatomy functions as a commodity, or form of (physical) capital in today’s aesthetic lead culture (Pope et al, 2000, 2001); in which the muscular man visually ‘triumphs’ over his non-muscular counterpart.

In Town A, four gyms exist to satisfy the physiological demands of its residents. ‘Gym D’ is the most culturally interesting and sociologically significant of these four gyms (as chapter 6 of this thesis considers in detail). For Gym D, which is physically located in ‘the rough end’ of Town A, is the space where Town A’s bodybuilding community and ‘hired muscle’ chose to modify the aesthetics of their bodies. Gym D is thus frequented daily by a large number of ‘hardcore’ gym users (as distinct from ‘casual’ gym users) who use the space to pull, push, squat, bench and curl weights so as to construct and maintain their impressive physiologies. Steroid use is rife among users of Gym D. The availability, prevalence and acceptance of steroids in Gym D differentiates it from other gyms in Town A.

As well as steroid use being a feature of Gym D and a seminal reason for the gym’s clientele, Gym D houses significantly heavier free weights than other Gyms in Town A, and specialised training facilities that other gyms in the locality do not have; such as bench presses and squat racks. Gym D’s heavy weights and specialised facilities are further incentives for Gym D’s ‘serious’ clientele to use the space: for such facilities are conducive for ‘bulk training’ (i.e. training that sees the gym user gain physiological size and strength) as opposed to fitness training, where the emphasis is upon ‘fitness gains’. Importantly, it is ‘fitness’ – as oppose to purely aesthetic changes to the body - that other Gyms and gym users in Town A ‘specialise in’; as the manager of a recently revamped Gym in Town A explains lucidly below:



‘That gym you go to’ (Gym D) ‘is full of the monsters (big people) lifting the big weights and doing the heavy squats and dead lifts and what not. But the last thing I want in here is the big lads, they would put off all my clients, who are mostly women and normal fitness people. So, when I came in here, this gym was quiet cause there were some local meatheads with the heavy weights doing the benching and stuff. They were nice lads, don’t get me wrong, no bother, but the sheer look of them put people off. So as soon as I bought this, I got rid of the heavy weights, and the bench press and the numbers rocketed. They, the big lads, left, and the numbers rocketed. So, (Gym D) has its people, and the heavy stuff, and I have my people and the fitness stuff, no meatheads and thugs in here like there (Gym D) cause there is not the weights or facilities for them, and that was a choice on my part ... we specialise in fitness and so do all the other gyms around here except Gym D, which monopolises that (heavy lifting) part of the market’.

Hence, Gym D’s reputation is one where ‘meatheads and thugs’ train. It is the ‘hardcore’ gym in Town A. Gym D has its own distinctive purpose, function and clientele within Town A’s burgeoning, body-conscious community. Both the training ethos and training facilities in Gym D are conducive to polemically ‘excessive’ body-modification.

Gym D acted as the ‘field’ for this thesis. As chapter five of this work explains in detail, I researched a sample of 42 users of Gym D, through a combination of qualitative interview based and ethnographic based research, so as to substantiate this thesis, and the analysis of working class life and masculinity in a de-industrialised Town that it presents.

Now that I have introduced readers to the place of Town A, the space of Gym D (albeit provisionally) and the two cultural truisms that inform this work, this chapter introduces its readers to this work’s three central epistemological aims: I now inform readers of what my



research and this thesis hoped to do epistemologically; and I say something about how I fulfilled these aims methodologically.

### Aims

Firstly, my research aimed to elicit reflexive, ‘grounded’ data - through a hybridisation of ethnographic and qualitative interview-based research methods - ‘on’ how 42 men who live in or near Town A and use Gym D (my participants):

- 1) work/labour (or fail to work) in their existences so as to gain financial capital,
- 2) consume commodities/spend their money; and
- 3) fulfil/fail to fulfil their (relative) cultural ambitions

in and as part of their existences.

By so doing, my work aims to provide, firstly, an analysis of how the 1) Marxian theory of alienation through labour, 2) the Marxian concept of commodity fetishism and 3) the notion of anomie manifest in and relate to the lives of ‘body-modifying’ men residing in Town A today.

After defining the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism in chapter two, this thesis develops to describe and analyse the extent to which the depression that exists among my sample of ‘body-modifying’ men (my participants) is created because of those men’s labour lives (i.e. the jobs they work, or fail to work), commodity lives (i.e. the things they buy) and their sense of anomie or strain (i.e. the discrepancy between their actual cultural situation and desired situation). Therefore, this thesis considers, as its first aim, how valid the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism – themselves written in and about ‘industrial’ society - are to contemporary, post-industrial, allegedly melancholic



existence in Town A. I emphasise how the theories relatively and subjectively manifest themselves in the lives of the three participant groups identified and analysed in this work.

Secondly, my research aimed to elicit and consider reflexive data from my participants' that allowed me to consider how my participants' 'gym labour', which sees them pull, push, squat and curl weights and utilise resistance machines in Gym D so as to construct 'commodity bodies', relates to their experiences of alienation, commodity fetishism and anomie. Here, I consider whether my participants' gym lives and activities alleviate or extend their cultural depression.

My participants' bodies are perceived of as commodities in contemporary, image conscious society: yet are my participants' bodies susceptible to Marx's notion of commodity fetishism; or do they refute Marx's notion? My participants' must 'work out' on their bodies; and they do so in a way that follows the principles and practices of capitalism, as we shall come to. Does this mean that my participants' 'gym labour' is alienating in the way Marx proposed all capitalist labour must be; or is it the case that gym labour escapes Marx's theory. Like all facets of existence, gym culture is defined by 'strain'; i.e. the inability to 'hit targets' and obtain gym-specific success (such as the inability to 'look how I want', 'lift as much as I want' etc). Does this mean that my participants' experience of Gym D extends their everyday anomie? Or is gym culture immune to the anomie that ordinarily pollutes life, outside of Gym D?

The third, concurrent, aim of my research was to elicit data that allowed me to discuss how the aesthetically modified - or 'commoditised bodies' – which my participants have constructed in Gym D relate to their existences and identities at the wider sociological, or 'culturally semiotic' level. Specifically, I consider how my participants' 'use' their bodies to denote information to other citizens about themselves today. I investigate how my



participants' bodies 'speak' for my participants'. I analyse what it is to be a muscular, working class man in a post-industrial society that reveres and celebrates the 'commodity of muscle'. I examine how muscularity relates to contemporary working class masculinity and 'lived experience', reflexively and metaphorically.

As chapter five of this work discusses in detail, the above research aims were completed in the phenomenological tradition: this thesis presents arguments and findings that are rooted in my participants' understandings and voices, rather than my own understandings.

Now that I have defined this work's aims, it is necessary to say something about the variegated nature of life and masculinity in Town A.

While researching masculinity and 'lived experience' in contemporary Town A and Gym D for the purposes of this thesis, it became clear that in Town A/Gym D today, three different typologies of working class 'masculinities' have co-evolved, and currently co-exist; being, as I have labelled them, 1) *The Drifters*', 2) *The Changers*' and 3) *the Traditionalists*'. This finding is in congruence with the proposition of Connell (2000:10):

'it is clear from ... new social research as a whole that there is no one pattern of masculinity that is found everywhere. We need to speak of 'masculinities', not masculinity. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct gender differently'.

I now introduce readers to the three typologies of Town A/Gym D life that were found to exist in a provisional way (chapter 7 of this thesis discusses the groups substantially).

Five of the forty two participants analysed in this research can be categorised as being '*Drifters*'. The Drifters' existences are defined, chiefly, by anti-work ethics, and subsequent socio-economic reliance upon the welfare state. The Drifters' are thus exigencies of a habitus



of idleness, and cultural products of the way working class lads can 'live on the state' today by claiming and surviving on 'job seekers allowances' if they desire. The Drifters' are increasingly marginalised within Town A. For they are jobless and commodity-less in a capitalist culture that is founded upon a Protestant work Ethic and the reverence of materialism. The Drifters' therefore constitute Town A's ostracised 'true aliens' (Merton, 1968); and are representative of the North-East's burgeoning 'Chav' (Nayak, 2006) category of life and masculinity. I go on to argue that the Drifters' represent an 'underclass' or 'ghetto poor' in Town A.

Seven of the participants analysed in this work belong to the *Changers* taxonomy of working class life. The Changers' are products of a 'global' habitus that has entered Town A through contemporary society's 'global' media system; and an education system that has, in line with the post-industrial economy it serves, encouraged its students to partake in 'vocational degrees' at 'new universities'. Thus, the Changers' are representative of a younger generation of Town A life who find themselves employed in and 'trained' to partake in knowledge-based, post-industrial white collar office jobs; and who are ideologically embourgeoised, i.e. they are pseudo-middleclass; and are keen to replicate the 'Yuppie model' of life and masculinity that is advocated in the global, didactic media system they subscribe to (as opposed to a 'working class' or 'local' model of masculinity). I will go on to venture that the Changers' represent a working class/middleclass intermediary in Town A.

Simultaneously, the *Traditionalists* – which is the taxonomy of life that thirty-one of the participants analysed here belong - are exigencies of Town A's past, 'old fashioned' mining ethos. Within Town A's contemporary climate of change and flux – where both state-dependent and middleclass lives are lived - the Traditionalists' remain committed to performing a 'proper hard days' graft' (i.e. they desire to perform 'manual', instead of office work,) and still, one suspects somewhat purposely, act, live, spend frugally and think as the



miners, stereotypically, did; particularly at the weekends when heavy drinking and violence is ritually partaken in by them. The Traditionalists' are bastions of town A's increasingly obsolete and unfashionable mining past and habitus, therefore.

Thus, there is a triangulation of working class life and masculinity existing in Town A, and using Gym D at the time of writing. Significantly, each of the three typologies of working class life that identified work (or fail to work in the case of the Drifters) in categorically different sorts of jobs, buy different sorts of things, harbour different existential ideals and expectations and, also, modify their bodies in contrasting ways. Accordingly, how working class men experience *depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism and body-modification* in Town A today is a subjective and relative notion and process, which is dependent upon the typology of Town A life in question. Therefore, this thesis goes on to present dialectics on *depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism and body-modification* that are specific to the three typologies of life and masculinity that this research identifies.

This introductory chapter now explains how and why this research was formulated. By so doing, I substantiate the epistemological aims of this work, discussed above.

It has been made clear that Town A provides the empirical locus that this work is framed within and around. It should be added that I was born in Town A; and was living a *form* of 'the working class experience' (Charlesworth, 2000) that is associated with 'Town A life' before writing this thesis. Yet, as this thesis' methods chapter considers further, I was 'living out' that experience not just:

1) as a resident of the Town who was all too aware of the collective melancholy, or 'low serotonin nature' of life around me;



- 2) as a body-modifying member of Town A who had both ‘access’ to Gym D and a level of status within the Town’s body-building community;
- 3) as a person with a, perhaps unhealthy, curiosity regarding how my fellow citizens’ gym lives and bodies related to their existences and identities; but also, crucially
- 4) as a trained social scientist with a bent for Marxism.

Accordingly, before formally researching this work, it occurred to me that the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism were no longer notions that I had to memorise to ‘pass finals’, or teach to students to pay my bills; as the theories had been at different and earlier times in my life. Instead, it became clear that the theories – or contemporary, ‘post-modern’ forms of the theories – are ‘reality’ for members of my community; and that the theories could, potentially, be used to investigate, explain, contextualise and account for the mass existential melancholy, or cult of depression that is - necessarily according to Neo-Marxist thought - so prevalently experienced by my fellow Town A residents and Gym Users. This observation acted as the motivation for me to write and research this work. What is offered through this work in the first instance then – to re-iterate the aims and objectives of this thesis discussed earlier - is an analysis, based on the ‘grounded’, reflexive views and experiences of my participants, on how the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism manifest themselves in the lives and minds of the different typologies of men living in Town A today.

Concurrently, ever since I lifted my first weight in Gym D as a skinny teenager, I was fascinated by the gym, its sub-cultural qualities, and the giant frames that encased its users. Only the phenomena of football hooliganism, Christianity and the disease of schizophrenia have intrigued me to the extent that body-modification did, and still does. As time passed - meaning that my own physical frame slowly but surely developed as a result of my own



body-modification, while my sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) also evolved - I realised that the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism were not just applicable to Gym D's users outside of the gyms walls, as they labour, buy and exist in their social structure. Rather, I realised that my participants' gym lives form a natural relationship with the theories: after all, body-modification is a 'laborious' phenomenon which, as I argue later, follows the 'principles' and spirit of capitalist labour; and which is, therefore, susceptible to the theory of alienation through labour. While the modified, muscular body functions as a cultural commodity in contemporary culture, that is thus open to the theory of commodity fetishism. Further, gym life is as open to 'strain' as any other facet of contemporary existence.

What is offered through this work in the second instance is an investigation into the relationship between my participants' 'commodity' bodies and 'laborious' gym work, and the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. I explore whether my participants' involvement with Gym D extends or alleviates their cultural depression; while also giving readers an insight into how the different typologies of life researched in this thesis 'use' their bodies semiotically, to communicate cultural identity about themselves to others in a visual culture.

Ethnographies have traditionally and typically emerged because researchers have chosen foreign, unfamiliar milieus; and thereby investigated the anthropological issues that are occurring in those milieus. Hence, ethnography is a process that has conventionally been characterised by 'encounters with unknown peoples'<sup>8</sup>; it is a research method geared towards *The Question of the Other* (Todorov, 1992) and the 'others' (unfamiliar and exotic) cultural nuances. In contrast, this ethnography is a product of Town A and Gym D 'choosing' me. This research is a result of me knowing and being familiar with the spaces in question 'a-

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<sup>8</sup> See Moore, G. 1998: Chapter One.



priori', and my being confident that there is something sociologically and ethnographically valid to be said about existence in and around 'this neck of the woods' at this point in the Town A' and Gym D's sociological evolution.

I did not formulate and research this thesis as the 'typical' anthropological voyeur, who found himself in an enigmatic, unknown empirical context, with the ultimate aim of turning his experiences of 'the unfamiliar' into a Malinowskian 'science'. Rather, I formulated and wrote this thesis as someone who, on a daily basis, had been embedded and active in the anomalies, bodily-processes, cultural melancholy and sociological change investigated and described in this work. Hence, I was – both before during the course of this research - in a comparable position to Hobbs (1988) who notes, in his analysis of London's East End, that he 'was very much part of the social world of study: an ex-member who returned in order to conduct an ethnographic inquiry (:15)<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, as part of this introductory discussion, it is worth considering the extent to which this thesis is, epistemologically and personally, an 'autoethnography'.

Reed-Danahay (1997: 2) state that:

'The term' (autoethnography) 'has a double sense – referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Thus, either a self (auto) ethnography or an autobiographical (auto) ethnography can be signalled by' (the term) 'autoethnography'.

To clarify, my work is an autoethnography in the sense that I present a standard ethnographic account of my 'own group' in my 'own Town'. I *do not* present an autoethnography of *my* experiences in Town A. This is not a highly personal account founded upon 'selfhood'. My primary concern is not 'self-other interactions' (Holt, 2003:2); or to inform readers of my

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<sup>9</sup> See, also, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 23.



own experiences of depression, anomie, alienation commodity fetishism and my body-modification in the belief that my experiences can be generalised and seen to be absolutely typical of other peoples' experiences of such things, in Town A or elsewhere. In short, this is not an autoethnography in the autobiographical sense of the term.

Rather, it is my primary concern to consult and consider the reflexive stories, experiences and views of 'other' men – my participants - who exist in Town A and use Gym D. This research is a 'classic' ethnography in every sense except for my familiarity with the locus: for the locus is, or at least was once, my 'home'; while my participants happen to be people who I am 'close to' in terms of geography, habitus and rapport.

Unlike Ferguson (1999), who was surprised by the 'despair, fear, panic, broken lives and shattered expectations' (18) that defined the lives of the Zambian participants he investigated via his ethnographic analysis of Zambia's copper de-industrialisation, I knew all too well of the somewhat tragic situation that is life for many of 'us lot and wor (our) types up here' before writing and researching this work. Indeed, I wanted to describe and analyse this - our – post-industrial, melancholic situation. Yet, as my time in the field evolved, I realised that I also had to draw attention to the tripartite nature of masculinity and working class life that exists in Town A and Gym D today; and show how Town A's de-industrialisation has prompted intriguing cultural changes and resistances: the sorts of which much work on de-industrialisation has not highlighted. By doing so, I provide an insight into a world that many in academia, and other 'middleclass' realms either don't know exists, don't understand or simply do not want to visit; and go some way in giving a 'voice' to those in Town A. For, as observed by Byrne:



‘the interesting thing about the north of England, industrial capitalism’s birthplace, is ... the discontents of people in these places (who) currently have no voice’ (Byrne, 2001: 194).

This work ultimately gives insight into a culture that is unavailable to those who are not from it. For non-natives are neither welcome nor trusted in these parts. If one was merely an ethnographer, as distinct from a local ethnographer, this research would be perhaps impossible to conduct: questions would fail to be answered and access would prove elusive. Especially in Gym D, where – among the shaved heads, tattooed giant physical frames and shows of ladishness - most ethnographers would look totally out of place.

Before concluding this introductory chapter, I give readers an insight into the structure of this thesis; which is presented over four ‘sections’, and through twelve chapters.

**Section one** (chapters 2 to 4) contains my work’s *Context and Problems* chapters; which function to dualistically introduce readers to the theoretical and sociological ‘*problems*’ and correlations being investigated in this thesis, and provide readers with a level of context about Town A’s ‘urban’ geography.

Chapter two of this work discusses the ‘problem’ of contemporary society’s endemic depression; and defines the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. It also makes clear how the theories are being used in this work to account for the depression that exists among my sample of Gym D using participants.

Chapter three then gives readers an insight into the phenomenon of body-modification, and emphasises the cultural significance of the male muscular body in contemporary society at large, and Town A as a specific locus.



Chapter four then ‘frames’ the locus of Town A further, by providing readers with a detailed insight into the Town’s ‘urban constitution’, akin to the ‘classic’ urban ethnographic approaches presented by the Chicago school (Park et al, 1925).

**Section two** of this thesis contains chapters five and six: Chapter five discusses the *fieldwork* that I conducted to support and substantiate my thesis, and considers the ethical implications of this research, as well as how objective, or valid, the data that informs this thesis is.

Chapter six introduces readers to the space, internal culture and ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1990; Wacquant, 2005) of Gym D.

**Section three** (chapters 7 – 11) presents this work’s *Findings and Analysis* discussions. Chapter 7 discusses the three participant groups that were found to exist in Town A in detail, and also considers how the three groups were ‘made’ sociologically. Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 then consider the participant groups’ relative anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism, and body-modification respectively.

**Section four** (chapter 12) acts as my work’s *conclusion*, in which I summarise what has been ‘found out’ in this work, and suggest what can be expected to happen in Town A, culturally and physically, in and over the next twenty years, based on the findings of this research.

All sections of this thesis are committed to providing ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973: 3-30) of the events, settings and findings that constitute this research.

### Chapter Summary

I now summarise the central points that have been presented in Chapter one of this thesis. Chapter one has suggested that contemporary society is an inherently melancholic and body-conscious one. In expansion of these two ‘cultural truisms’ - which are explored in detail over the next two chapters - it has been made clear that this research will:



- Analyse how empirically valid the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism are within the lives of men living in or near Town A and using Gym D today.

This work seeks to contextualise the surmised sadness of my 42, body-modifying participants' within a theoretical framework that analyses my participants' labour lives, consumption patterns and senses of 'cultural strain'. Epistemologically, this work asks: how do the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism – themselves written in and about an industrial society – relate to life in post-industrial Town A? To what extent do the theories explain the assumed unhappiness, or 'depression, that exists within my sample of Gym D using participants? What is it about my participants' labour lives, consumption patterns and sense of 'strain' that causes them to feel how they reflexively do? How do the theories relate to the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' subjectively and relatively, in mind of their differing labour lives, consumption patterns and cultural expectations?

- Explore whether my participants' body-modification adds to or alleviates their depression, and experiences of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism; and also consider how my participants' 'commoditised' bodies relate to their identities and existences semiotically.

This work investigates what it is, reflexively, to be a 'working class lad' who sports a physically modified body in contemporary society. I consider how my participants' 'gym labour' and the 'commodity bodies' my participants' have constructed relates to their cultural melancholy, and their experiences of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. I aim to explore and emphasise the seminal, somewhat cathartic role that Gym D and body-modification plays in my participants' lives. I will suggest that the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' bodies function as metaphoric and semiotic devices in their lives, which tell



us much about the typologies' places, identities and positions in the post-industrial society they inhabit.

By so doing, this work contributes to and fuses the paradigms of *Marxist sociology* (by applying Marxian thought to contemporary working class society), the *sociology of the body* (by analysing my participants' bodies and body-modification), and the *sociology of de-industrialisation* (by contextualising the dialectics addressed in this work in relation to Town A's ongoing de-industrialisation). This work also contributes to the field of masculine studies; by providing an insight into and analysis of the three different 'sorts', or exigencies, of masculinities that exist in contemporary Town A/Gym D at the time of writing. This thesis thereby challenges the homogenous, over-deterministic account of contemporary working class life and masculinity offered elsewhere (Charlesworth, 2000); and reemphasises the anthropological significance of the male body (Connell, 1987; Drummond, 1994), and male body-modifying gym practices (Klein, 1993; Monaghan, 2001) within the context of contemporary working class culture and masculinity.

Chapter one has also introduced readers to the locality of Town A. It has shown that Town A is a derivative of its mining industry. It has highlighted that Town A once functioned as the quintessential coaling community; meaning that labour, leisure, economic and communal life in Town A was once guided, symbiotically, by the Town's mining industry; and the industrial 'cultural habitus' that Town A purveyed. Concurrently, I have also shown that Town A's mines determined Town A's once homogenous 'masculine hegemonic'; i.e. the way men in Town A typically looked, acted, communicated and expected from and in their lives: Town A's men 'learned' to be men from an artisan, 'hard' model of masculinity; which was born out of, and advantageous to, mining culture. Chapter one has drawn attention to Town A's 'de-industrialisation', and illustrated how the loss of mining in Town A caused cultural and economic disequilibrium and transition in the locality, particularly to Town A's 'young men';



whose lives and masculine hegemonic became less determined in the era of post-industrialism, then it was in Town A's industrial era.

This cultural disequilibrium, which also occurred in the lives of men living in other de-industrialised areas (e.g. those as analysed by Dudley, 1994; and Linkon and Russo, 2002) has resulted in post-industrial Town A being a place where - twenty years after the loss of its mining industry - high unemployment levels, high suicide rates and high levels of apathy exist. It has also resulted in Town A, and the culture it contains, being something of a sociological enigma, due to the intellectual neglect that de-industrialised Towns in the UK have received from sociologists. This work will expand upon existing studies 'on' de-industrialisation - most of which analyse de-industrialised cultures in American society - by considering how de-industrialisation has changed working class culture and masculinity in post-industrial Northumberland. By so doing, this thesis hopes to fill the intellectual void and hiatus that contemporary working class society represents to sociology. While acknowledging the debilitating nature of Town A's de-industrialisation economically and psycho-socially upon its residents', ultimately this work will analyse how Town A's de-industrialisation has acted as a cultural catalyst, that has caused different sections of its community to 'adapt' to post-industrial life in different ways. This thesis does not simply emphasise the negative sociological components that emerged through Town A's loss of industry, as much work on de-industrialisation does. Rather, here I impartially explore how social change and transition is occurring and being negotiated in Town A and Gym D today, with reference to the 'Changers', 'Drifters' and 'Traditionalists' as a result of Town A's de-industrialisation. I will outline that while Town A's de-industrialisation has led to social exclusion and obsolescence for some of its masculine typologies, it has also led to cultural assimilation and 'success' for others.



Chapter one has also documented how this research came into being, and explored the extent that this work is ‘auto-ethnographic’. It has been shown that this thesis and the arguments it presents is based upon 42 qualitative interviews that I conducted with users of Gym D, and a year and a half’s ethnographic study; which I conducted in Gym D and the other spaces that working class life manifests itself. It has been made clear that this work is a product of the phenomenological tradition. Thus, this work aims to present arguments and findings which are rooted in the views, voices and perspectives of my participants’; all of whom live in or near Town A and choose to modify their bodies in the ‘arena’ of Gym D; which is a gym with its own distinctive purpose and reputation within Town A and its vicinity. This work therefore follows and affirms the need to investigate working class life (Charlesworth, 2000) and body-modification phenomenologically (Klein, 1993); as other scholars have established, so as to truly understand and document the subjectivities and complexities such entail.

With the above introductory discussion in mind, this thesis now presents its *Context and Problems* chapters.



**Section One:**  
**Context and Problem Chapters**



## Chapter 2:

### Depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism and contemporary being

#### Chapter Overview

As part of its introduction, chapter one made the assertion that contemporary society is a collectively ‘depressed’ one. Chapter one suggested that ‘lived experience’ today – in Town A and all capitalist localities – is necessarily unhappy. In expansion, Chapter two hopes to substantiate this assertion; and also demonstrate how the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism relate to this claim.

Structurally, Chapter two begins by highlighting the apparently synonymous relationship between contemporary existence and depression, as outlined in literature. Chapter two then clarifies what the nebular term ‘depression’ is understood to be in this work. I emphasise that depression is being treated here as a ‘cultural’, rather than a biological phenomenon in this thesis; and introduce readers to what I’m labelling in this work as ‘the Town A stare’. Which is a phenomenon that I believe goes some way in visually elucidating how sad life can be for residents in Town A today, psycho-socially.

Chapter two then evolves to define what I understand the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism to be, and demonstrates how the theories are being understood and ‘used’ in this thesis so as to explain, contextualise and account for the surmised mass-sadness that impairs and defines my participants’ lived experiences.

Klerman (1992) demonstrates that rates of depression have drastically increased since the 1950s; while James’ 1997 work builds from the premise that British society is ‘unhappier now compared with 1950 despite being richer’. The *Office of National Statistics* estimate that ‘10% of the’ UK ‘population are depressed at any one time’<sup>10</sup>; although, according to the *Scottish Depression Alliance*, the percentage of ‘clinically depressed’ people in society increases to ‘one in four’ in ‘deprived areas’<sup>11</sup>, such as post-industrial Town A. Seemingly, then, people in contemporary British society ‘are much more likely to be miserable than previous generations’ (James, 1997: X). Hence, a ‘feel psychotic factor’, or an ‘existential

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<sup>10</sup> Cited at: <http://www.mind.org.uk/Information/Factsheets/Statistics/Statistics+1.htm#Depression>

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.dascot.org/blog/?p=6>



vacuum' as it has been labelled elsewhere (Schaff: 197), can be seen as an inevitable and quantifiable component of contemporary cultural existence. As put by Lashmar (1995: 57):

'There has been an irrevocable shift in the national psyche. 'The feel bad factor' is not only caused by job insecurity, but also by long term and widespread fears about finance, mortgages, negative equity, crime, social security, pensions and the cost of ill health in old age. A few prosper, the majority worry. This has created a new zeitgeist, reflected most poignantly by a dramatic increase in mental health problems, which I call the 'Feel Psychotic Factor'.

Every society throughout history has had a proportion of 'sad' members. The 'weeping well' has always existed, irrespective of place and time. In less than fifty years however, it seems that a paradigmatic shift has occurred in how humanity collectively feels. Unhappiness, forlornness and sadness have become normalised; and not limited to a minority in society. We are collectively melancholic, in Town A and elsewhere! This tragic but inescapable cultural fact forms the basis of this investigation.

Freud seminally suggested in his infamous *Das Unglück in der Kultur* (later published as *Civilization and its Discontents*) that:

'civilized man has exchanged a portion of his happiness for a portion of security ... what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery' (1939:23).

Seemingly, as our 'civilization' has evolved, and as our subsequent levels of cultural 'security' have increased, our levels of conscious unhappiness and dissatisfaction have also heightened. Ironically, our 'cultural security' has, itself, become the source of our psycho-social insecurity, in the epoch of post-industrial, 'liquid life' (Bauman, 2005).



Society's mass, endemic sense of melancholy is not, according to the ontology of this work, a *Hidden Injury of Class* (Sennett and Cobb, 1992) which is limited or specific to any particular demographic or populace in society. Nor is conscious discontent limited to 'city life', in the way that Simmel's 1950 discussion on 'mental life in Big Cities' and Eade's analysis of 'living in the Global City' imply. Rather, I believe, society's mass unhappiness transcends social variables (such as class, age, gender, ethnicity, and levels of a locus' urbanisation) and impairs the lives of all who live in a capitalist society, without mercy. Contemporary melancholy is thus all-encompassing. It is interwoven into Capitalist Society's socio-economic system and, therefore, a necessary part of the capitalist lived experience:

'Advanced capitalism has made most of us physically better off by meeting material and biological needs with unprecedented efficiency, but' (this) 'has actually made us more prone to low serotonin problems such as depression and aggression' ... Although most of us have enough to eat, live in warm accommodation, are able to read and write and have unprecedented choice as to how and where we live, travel and entertain ourselves, at least half of us are suffering from low serotonin problems at any one time' (James, 1997: XI).

It has been made clear that the society's endemic melancholy, or 'low serotonin problem', is being referred to in this work as society's 'depression'. This is controversial; for the term 'depression' is notoriously problematic at the level of definiendum<sup>12</sup>, and should perhaps not be applied in this work so readily given the specifications and complexity that the term carries, particularly in the clinical sciences.

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<sup>12</sup> See Marsella, A. J; Hirschfield, R; and Katz, M (Eds); Herbst and Paykel (Eds); Wilkinson, 1989; Hyman, 2001.



Importantly, my aim here is *not* to define depression per se. For that, depression can be understood as a ‘transient state of feeling sad, blue, forlorn, cheerless’ (Corsini, Ed: 399).

Depression can be specified as being a conscious state where ones’:

‘reasoning is focused on negative data and inferences about self and the world, accentuating the negative and eliminating the positive’. (meaning one will) ‘judge themselves negatively compared with others. Their attention and memory shifts towards the negative, with reduced mental agility and imagination. They ... become hopeless and pessimistic’ (James, 1997: 49).

Instead, my emphasis *is* on allowing and encouraging others – working class, body-modifying men who live in Town A and use Gym D – to talk about, define and classify their depression (their ‘sadness, forlornness, cheerlessness’ etc) and its causes. It is the schemata of my participants’ conscious misery, and how their misery relates to the concepts of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism and their body-modification that concerns this work chiefly.

Neuroscience has shown that ‘depression’ is a product of low serotonin levels. Concurrently, Zoological studies demonstrate the direct correlation between an animal’s serotonin level, and an animal’s environment<sup>13</sup>; for example:

‘studies of rats and monkeys show that levels of neurotransmitters rise and fall predictably according to environmental influences. Levels of serotonin in rats plummet if they have just been beaten up by another rat, whilst the winner’s levels soar. If you carry this across to humans, a child that has been abused consistently over many years could easily end up with low serotonin levels set by that environment rather than genes.’

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<sup>13</sup> This correlation has been demonstrated most succinctly by McGuire (1982), through his research into Vervet monkeys.



In the same way that an animal's environment will depress its conscious well-being, by causing its levels of serotonin to be reduced; a humans' cultural environment, or societal ecology, will also depress them, by reducing their serotonin levels. The general question being asked here, then, is why – according to those who live in or near Town A - does the 'cultural ecology'<sup>14</sup> of Town A depress those existing in it? What is it about life in post-industrial Town A that reduces the serotonin of those who reside in it? To what extent are men in Town A metaphorically 'beaten up' by the principles of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism manifesting themselves in their everyday lives and cultural experiences? How is 'depression' experienced and created for the Drifters', Changers' and Traditionalists' respectively, in mind of their contrasting 'working class experiences'? Further, as the next chapter of this work considers, what is the relationship between my participants' depression and their modified bodies, gym labour, and general involvement with Gym D? This work evolves to answer such questions, as part of its analysis of contemporary working class life and masculinity.

To view depression, or the reduction of serotonin in ones' brain, as being a derivative of culture (rather than being a derivative of an innate, pre-determined 'defect') shows that I'm viewing depression as a social phenomenon here; not as a biological one. The term depression is being used in this work as a 'sociological metaphor' then. It is as a way of referring to the way a humans' serotonin levels are reduced because of the cultural interaction and experiences that that human has gone through. I thus take a classically anthropological or 'cultural constructivist' view of a subject matter that has become the domain of positivistic and clinical sciences.

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<sup>14</sup> See Emery and Trist, 1975 .



Readers must not underestimate the apparent extent or severity of the depression that exists in the minds and psyches of those who reside in post-industrial Town A. Klerman defines ‘major depression’ as being:

‘a severe mental illness ... not just a case of feeling a bit down: things like having a depressed mood most of the day nearly everyday for at least two weeks for no good reason; feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt; and recurrent suicidal ideals’ (in James, 1997: 36).

Significantly but tragically, almost one quarter of the participants that I interviewed for this work claimed to suffer from ‘major depression’ as Klerman defines it<sup>15</sup>. Further, almost half of my participants suggested that Klerman’s definition had applied to their conscious state ‘at some point in their lives’. Thus, when I read out the above definition, several participants would look at me with a look of seriousness usually lacking, and make statements such as ‘Oh, that is me, that is exactly how I am’; or ‘that was just how I was when I (broke up with my wife, lost my licence, got beaten up etc)’.

Existence in post-industrial Town A is not, typically, a jolly affair then. I suspect that any objective observer who spent even a short space of time in Town A’s cultural context would recognise, and become susceptible to, the contagious melancholy that can transpire here. It is as if a metaphysical cloud of gloom and apathy hangs above the Town. Thus, Charlesworth’s account of the psycho-social condition of working class people in Rotherham (2000: 150) is equally applicable to the condition of residents in Town A:

‘people seem depressed, pessimistic, unhappy. Even the ways they have fun seem touched by the desperate conditions of their lives ... they live like this stoically, and, on the whole, without much criticism’ (of their condition) ‘... most see it as their fault, as

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<sup>15</sup> Although no participant admitted to having ‘suicidal thoughts’.



a personal failing that they feel like they do, rather than as part of a general social condition’.

This thesis will demonstrate the subjective nature of depression in Town A today. I will show how depression is experienced and constructed relatively in the lives of the Changers’, Drifters’ and Traditionalists’. I will consider how depression in contemporary Town A is derived from my sample’s labour lives, consumption lives and sense of strain; and thereby consider how Town A’s contemporary, post-industrial collective depression correlates with the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism; as I will come to. However, this thesis will also illustrate that life in post-industrial Town A is not only about depression.

Sadness is most, but not all of the story here! Town A’s collective depression – while undeniable – is fused with times and displays of joy and happiness. Thus, this work will give an account of Town A life that presents and communicates the wide spectrum of emotions – from despair to euphoria – that is experienced by working class people today; and thereby give a more realistic and empirically informed account of working class life and depression than what is currently offered. I also hope to draw attention to the role of Gym D in my participants’ lives. For Gym D, I argue, is a place where my participants’ essentially escape from their and Town A’s sadness. Gym D is a bastion of happiness, solidarity and benevolence, which is exempt from the cultural melancholy that is ordinarily experienced in society.

Town A’s collective melancholy – the defining but not singular feature of life in post-industrial Town A - is visually manifested through what I’ve here labelled as ‘the Town A stare’. I initially observed the Town A stare one day in a coffee chain that had recently opened in the town. While drinking my coffee, I realised that the busy shop was packed with expressionless faces which simply stared in a trancelike state: glumly, aimlessly, even with fear. Hardly any conversation was taking place among the coffee shop’s clientele. Instead,



melancholic faces, attached to lifeless bodies, simply looked on, seemingly at nothing in particular. Sadness epitomised. The Town A stare is so conspicuous that a friend from London who visited me in Town A during the course of this research managed to observe it within five minutes of his being in the Town. For during his stay, a bus-full of depressed souls pulled up at some traffic lights in front of a pub we were in. He began to laugh, cautiously, upon observing the bus, and commented: 'they look like they're all going to their death; I thought the tube (London Underground) was full of miserable people but they take the biscuit ... they look so tired and worn down, like they have had really hard lives!'

To reiterate, this work asks: to what extent is the Town A stare a product of Town A's residents' labour lives, commodity patterns and feelings of cultural strain? Hence, this work considers the extent to which the Town A stare a product of the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism manifesting themselves in the lives of Town A's residents'. Yet, before going on to consider such questions (part three of this work), it is necessary – while presenting this work's *Context and Problems* chapters - to be clear about what this thesis understands anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism to be. I begin this clarification process by answering the question 'what is anomie?'

This work understands an 'anomic society', following the work of Merton (1938), as being a society in which there is a discrepancy, or hiatus, between what a society's members' (subjectively) want, need, desire and expect in and as part of their existences, in comparison with society's ability to provide for its members' wants, needs, desires and expectations. A person living in an anomic society will, therefore, feel frustrated, unhappy, dissatisfied – or idiomatically depressed - owing to their society's inability to fulfil and provide for them in the way it, 'ideally', would. A conscious sense of 'helplessness' and 'meaningless' subsequently arises in society's collective psyche, as the 'strain' between peoples' cultural



hopes, desires and expectations and peoples' societal realities becomes realised, even if not accepted (see Featherstone and Deflem, 2003).

An anomic society is, therefore, understood here as one in which there is:

'a breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural goals ... and the ... capacities of members of the group' (or society) 'to act in accord with them' (Merton, 1968: 162).

Anomie is being used in this work to refer to the psychosocial condition that a persons' consciousness enters when that person's society and existence fails to provide the opportunities they need to achieve their goals and ambitions. A person living in an anomic culture is unable to 'achieve' in the way he or she wants, desires and expects; and is thus 'depressed' by their limiting micro and macro cultural position.

Anomie is seen in this thesis - as it was by Merton - as being a natural, normal and inevitable part of 'being' in a capitalist society. For when a social system is both 'regulated' so that those in privileged positions remain in privileged positions; and advocacy of 'success at all costs', while also being non-egalitarian, and overpopulated (as capitalism is), it is platitudinous that anomie, or 'strain' will manifest itself in the lives of most individuals, who by definition of their place in society's order, are unable to 'achieve' in the way they want, and in the paradoxical, impossible ways their culture specifies they should. As Orru (1990: 233) points out, capitalist:

'society is caught in the ambivalent position of encouraging its members to strive for success at all costs, while simultaneously regulating their pursuit of success'.

There is only so much 'success' and resources to be had in a capitalist society. Inevitably therefore, members of a capitalist society will be excluded from the sparse amount of success



and resources that is available: hence, cultural anomie manifests itself for society's proletariat class, whose routes to success – if not mythical – or sociologically blocked.

Research into the notion of anomie has generally considered how the culturally induced pressure to be 'successful' generates rule-breaking, often countercultural behaviour for individuals when their 'success' is not obtained. Therefore, much discussion on how individuals' who experience anomie, or 'social strain', commit criminal and deviant behaviour – often to compensate for their anomic existences – has been produced, most notably within the discipline of criminology. This thesis, however, deviates from the trend to expand upon the notion of anomie so as to account for and explain criminal and deviant behaviour. Rather, this thesis considers how the culturally induced pressure to be successful creates a cultural 'depression' (when that success is not realised) for men in post-industrial Town A. Epistemologically, this thesis will consider what 'success' is defined to be, phenomenologically, in Town A today by the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' comparatively. This thesis will examine how anomie manifests itself in the lives of the three typologies of life researched in this work, in mind of the typologies' contrasting cultural situations, goals and notions of 'success'. This work will also consider how my participants' body-modification relates to the notion of anomie: as chapter three of this thesis explores further, I consider whether my participants' experiences of Gym D alleviates or extends the anomie they encounter and endure as part of their capitalist lived experiences.

Now that I have defined the notion of anomie, and reiterated the way the notion of anomie is being used in this work epistemologically, I clarify what this thesis understands Marx's theory of alienation to be. As part of this clarification process, it is necessary to emphasise the onus that Marx's philosophy placed upon labour, and highlight how important Marx saw labour as being to a humans' condition and happiness.



Marx's philosophy proposed, most notably in *Das Kapital* and the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, that a humans' work should be their 'self-confirming essence'. Marx stated that a person's labour ought to function as the 'core of' their existence. For Marx, labour alone has the potential to make an individual a 'fully realized human being': i.e. happy, complete, fulfilled - the antithesis of being depressed. To love ones' work is to love ones' life. However, according to the syllogism of Marx, if a human is not satisfied by and through their work, then that human will necessarily endure an unhappy existence. For what should be the 'core' part of a persons' lived experience will function as a source of profound sadness. Thereby, the dissatisfied worker, void of their self-confirming essence:

'does not affirm himself in his work' (as he should) 'but denies himself, feels miserable and unhappy, develops no free physical and mental energy but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind',<sup>16</sup>.

Or, as put by Ollman (:138):

'The Worker' (who is dissatisfied by and through his/her work) 'is a mere fragment of his own body, a living pendance of the machine. The workers' mind, too, has been ruined by the nature of his task and the conditions in which he does it. His delusions, decaying willpower, mental inflexibility and, particularly, his ignorance are all of monumental proportions'.

The term 'alienation' is being used in this work as a way of referring to the 'depressed' state of mind that arises in a person's psyche because of that person's unsatisfactory labour life. Hence, 'alienation' is understood here as the depressed psychosocial condition that Town A's residents' endure due to the assumedly unsatisfying, non-affirming labour they are forced to perform, so as to gain financial capital in their existences.

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<sup>16</sup> Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in Simons: 61-62.



Marx's theory of alienation presupposes that all who work in a capitalist society (the proletariat) are necessarily alienated and exploited by their labour. Specifically, Marx's theory of alienation states that the capitalist worker is alienated:

- 1) from the product or object that his/her labour produces. ('The worker becomes a slave to' the 'object'<sup>17</sup>, he creates).
- 2) from the act or process the worker goes through at work, so as to create an object (or service).
- 3) from ones' fellow man/fellow workers ('a direct consequence of man's alienation from the product of his work, from his life activity, and from his species existence, is the alienation of man from man ... what holds true of mans' relationship to his work ... also holds true of mans' relationship to other men'<sup>18</sup>)
- 4) from ones' 'species being' or self (alienated labour hence turns the species existence of a man ... into an existence alien to him ... it alienates his spiritual nature, his human essence ... from his own body'<sup>19</sup>) .

Since the proletarian majority in a capitalist society *have* to work in order to exist, society's mass depression becomes understandable from the perspective of Marx's theory, which supposes that all who labour within the confines of a capitalist society are alienated and saddened in the four ways specified above.

As well as labour, Marx's theory of alienation in its totality also considers how commodities depress those who exist in a capitalist society; as outlined in Marx's notion of 'Commodity fetishism', which I now explain.

Marx defined a commodity as:

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<sup>17</sup> Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*: see pp 60-61 in Simon.

<sup>18</sup> Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*: 64 in Simon.

<sup>19</sup> Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*: 62-64 in Simon.



‘first of all, an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind’,<sup>20</sup>.

For Marx then, commodities are ‘external objects’ that are primarily meant to ‘serve’ humans, and improve humanity. However, capitalist society - according to Marxist and neo-Marxist thought - manipulates its citizens and their ‘one-dimensional minds’ (Marcuse, 1964) into developing ‘fetishisms’ with their commodities. Therefore, instead of commodities serving and ‘satisfying’ human needs’, human life has become defined by and subservient to the acquisition of commodities.

Hence, collectively, humanity reveres its commodities; and relies upon commodities not just to function, or ‘satisfy’ in the way commodities were design to; but, also, to give their proprietors’ lives meaning, happiness, purpose and identity. In substantiation, a raincoat goes from being a commodity that is meant to ‘satisfy’ its wearer by keeping him/her warm and dry, to a status symbol that – assuming it displays the right ‘brand’ and style - confers much about its owner, its owner’s wealth, and its owners’ sense of style to other, ‘commodity aware’ citizens. Individuals will be desperate to acquire such a raincoat (in spite of its cost, and the alienating work they must perform to acquire it), for their identities, happiness and in some cases cultural acceptance are contingent upon them doing so. Thus, as put by Marcuse (1964: 24):

‘The people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi ... home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced’.

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<sup>20</sup> Marx’s *Das Capital*. 220 in Simon



Society's commodities can be viewed as *The Plague of Fantasies* (Zizek, 1997) therefore: an endless array of fundamentally depressing, even if highly sought items, that humanity is prepared to alienate itself (through labour) for, in the 'false belief' that happiness and identity can be acquired through the consumption and ownership of commodities. This has 'devastating' consequences on ones' lived experience, perception of self and social relationships, as explained by Fromm (1949: 119):

'Not only the economic, but also the personal relations between men have this character of alienation; instead of relations between human beings, they assume the character of the relations between things. But perhaps the most important and the most devastating instance of this ... is the individuals relationship to his own self. Man does not only sell commodities, he sells himself and feels himself to be a commodity. The manual labourer sells his physical energy, the businessman, the physician, the clerical employee, sell their 'personality' if they are to sell their products or service'.

Lasch (1984:30) thus justifiably describes modern consumption as having a 'mirror effect':

'consumerism alters perceptions not just of the self but of the world outside the self' (consumerism creates) 'a world of mirrors, insubstantial images, illusions increasingly indistinguishable from reality. The mirror effect makes the subject an object; at the same time, it makes the world of objects an extension or projection of the self ... the consumer lives surrounded not so much by things as by fantasies. He ... exists only to gratify or thwart his desires.'

An alienating, symbiotic cycle that sees individuals buy alienating commodities, having worked alienating jobs to afford those commodities, comes to define and dominate the typical, contemporary lived experience; as put by Aronowitz (1992, A: 7):



‘nearly all human activity seems directed toward the single end of perpetuating the product-consumption cycle’ as ‘people become identical with their occupations, consumption styles, and social prestige’.

Money, or the ‘the universal pimp’ as Marx referred to it, acts as Capitalism’s quintessential commodity<sup>21</sup>. For money is the commodity that all other commodities can be acquired and controlled through; as explained (Kolakowski, 2008: 115):

‘That which exists for me through the medium of money, that which I can pay for, i.e. which money can buy, that am I, the possessor of the money. The stronger the power of my money, the stronger I am. The properties of money are my, the possessors’, properties and essential powers. Therefore what I am and what I can do is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy the most beautiful women. Which means to say I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness, its repelling power, is destroyed by money. As an individual I am lame, but money produces me 24 legs. Consequently, I am not lame. I am a wicked, dishonest, unscrupulous individual, but money is respected, and so also is its owner ... through money I can have anything that the human heart desires. Do I not therefore possess all human abilities? Does not money therefore transform all my incapacities into their opposite?’

Accordingly, in this thesis, the notion of commodity fetishism is understood dualistically. It refers to both the symbiotic relationship between work and consumption, which sees capitalist citizens perform (alienating) labour so as to acquire (alienating) commodities via

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<sup>21</sup> See, also, Simmel, 1907. *The Philosophy of Money*; Brunhoff, 1976. *Marx on Money*; Buchan, 1997. *Frozen Desire: An equity into the meaning of money*; Goodwin, 1986 “The political philosophy of money”; Lapavistas, 2000. “Money and Capitalism: the significance of commodity money”; Lapavistas, 2003. *Social Foundations of Markets, Money and Credit*; Moseley (Ed), 2005. *Marx’s Theory of Money: Modern Appraisals*.



monetary exchange<sup>22</sup>; and the depressing, unhealthy way citizens in a capitalist culture think of, view and are subservient to commodities.

What does Marx's theory of alienation (through labour and commodities) and the notion of anomie mean for residents in contemporary, post-industrial Town A; and the epistemological orientations of this thesis?

To reiterate, those who exist in an anomic culture are surmised to lack genuine meaning, realisable aspirations and 'success' in their lives because of the limits imposed upon them by their social structure. This causes a sadness born out of anomie in their existences; as the disjunction between their actual circumstances and desired circumstances become realised and resented. Those who work in a capitalist society are assumed to be alienated from themselves, those around them, the processes of their work and the product(s) of their work. For capitalism necessarily turns what should be the core of a humans' existence (their work) into a source of sadness and derogation. Further, those existing in a capitalist society are said to be subservient to the 'cult of commodities'; especially the quintessential capitalist commodity of money. Contemporary society's mass depression – and depression in the locality of Town A as a microcosm of a capitalist society - becomes theoretically comprehensible through the lenses of the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism: the theories account for Town A's sadness *conceptually* and in *principle*. In this work, as outlined in the previous chapter, I examine the extent that my participants' labour lives, consumption patterns and perceptions of cultural strain account for their 'depression' *empirically* and *in practice*, phenomenologically. By so doing, I consider the nature and applicability of the concepts of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism in relation to the post-industrial Town A 'lived experience', from the perspective of those in Town A.

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<sup>22</sup> I.e. fetishisms 'that arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them' (Marx: 233 in Simon).



A small but significant proportion of Town A's residents work in white-collar, IT-based jobs; having successfully assimilated into the post-industrial economy that has emerged in the North-East region. Within my sample of Gym D using participants, the Changers' exemplify such, white-collar labour patterns: all of the Changers' commute from Town A daily to work in IT based 'office jobs'. Simultaneously, a proportion of Town A's residents find themselves employed in 'traditional', manual, hands-on roles, e.g. building, joining, plumbing etc.

Within my sample, it is the Traditionalists' who adhere to this 'blue collar' pattern of labour; although the scarcity of manual work 'in and around' Town A at the time of writing means that it is increasingly hard for the Traditionalists', and people of their ilk, to find such 'proper' work. Therefore, many Traditionalists' find themselves 'casually employed'; and therefore working only when the opportunities to do so sporadically arrive. A third populace in Town A are unemployed by choice; and survive on state-provided benefits. Within my sample of participants, it is the Drifters' who represent this 'state-dependant' populace.

The diverse ways in which residents of Town A work (or fail to work) at the time of writing raises several epistemological questions and issues which I aim to go some way in answering in this work's Findings and Analysis section, e.g. do the four specifics of Marx's theory of alienation manifest themselves in my participants' labour lives? To what extent does Marx's theory of alienation explain my participants' wider sense of depression? Are those participants who work in 'traditional', manual jobs more or less alienated in the Marxian sense, comparatively, than those who work in post-industrial, IT jobs? Is Marx's theory more applicable to working class participants who are representative of industrial or post-industrial life; are white-collar or blue collar workers more depressed and alienated as a consequence of their labour lives? How does alienation through labour, apparently paradoxically, relate to those in Town A who do not work? Can the jobless be alienated in the way Marx foretold?



How does Marx's theory, itself written in and about society in the 1800s, apply to life in Town A in 2009; being a time when labour life is immeasurably more diverse and complex?

Grint (2005: 313) shows that:

“‘The Dissatisfaction Syndrome’, a report on the state of work ... suggests that more than half (55 per cent) of British employees felt depressed or unhappy at work in 2000, while a report ... in the same year suggests that only 25%’ (of British workers) ‘were ‘happy’ in their jobs, compared to half of all Americans and Germans’.

This research thus takes place at a time when work appears to be quantitatively more degrading and exploitative than ever before: if a reigniting and re-application of Marx's theory of alienation was ever needed, then surely it is needed now.

The act of consuming commodities has emerged as *the* defining aspect of contemporary, capitalist life. Shopping and buying exist as national leisure activities in western societies (Zukin, 2004) to the extent that after the atrocities of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001; Mayor Giuliani – the then Mayor of New York - urged the world to ‘take the day off ... go shopping!’ (Zukin, 2004:1). In Town A – as in the entire Western world – consumption functions as a seminal part of ‘lived experience’. Thus, the current epoch is a pragmatic time to consider Marx's views on consumption and commerce.

Yet consumption patterns, like working patterns, in post-industrial Town A are characterised by diversity. Some residents of Town A, as my thesis goes on to show, endeavour to buy ‘middleclass’ commodities. They do so in the hope of bolstering their middleclass identities and pretences in a ‘sign economy’ in which ‘the rapid flow of signs and images from advertising, film, television and other branches of the mass media ... saturate everyday life’ (Rojek: 121). In my sample of participants, it is the Changers’ who practice such,



embourgeoised and media-influenced commodity lives. Simultaneously, a proportion of Town A's residents have limited consumption lives, due to their anti-work ethics and limited financial resources. Such residents have learned to manage to survive on limited financial budgets. The Drifters' constitute such consumption patterns within the sample of participants. While a third category of Town A life typically buy 'practical' commodities, with a sense of prudence. They thereby adhere to 'old fashioned' spending patterns' and ethos'. Within my sample of participants, it is the Traditionalists' who comply to this model of consumption.

The diverse nature of my participants' consumption patterns raises further questions relating to depression that I address in this work; such as to what extent does Marx's theory of commodity fetishism explain my participants' wider sense of depression? Are those participants who buy 'middleclass' commodities (the Changers) more or less depressed through their consumption patterns, comparatively, than their peers in Gym D, who buy generalisably different types ('basic' and 'practical') of 'things' (Appadurai, 1986)?

The participant groups analysed in this work, as I illustrate in detail in part three of this work, all harbour systematically different cultural expectations and existential desires. Schematically, the Changers' desire to be 'embourgeoised', 'Yuppie' men (as such is defined by a global mass media); the Drifters' desire to 'avoid work' while 'living on the state'; while the Traditionalists' desire to live stereotypical, blue-collar lives and preserve and exemplify Town A's working class, artisan culture as much as they can in a post-industrial epoch.

Accordingly, several questions on the relationship between Town A life, Town A's depression and the concept of anomie arise which I address in this work, e.g. to what extent does the theory of anomie explain my participants' wider sense of depression? Are those participants who aspire to be 'global', middleclass men and who live 'embourgeoised' lives



more or less ‘anomic’ than their ‘traditional’ or ‘lazy’ counterparts? To what extent is Town A an anomic empirical context, according to those who exist in it?

As various theories on the causes of society’s depression, or low serotonin nature, are expounded, and cures to our mass sadness offered (most profitably within the medical/pharmaceutical industries and disciplines); a detailed study that is grounded in empirical research, which aims to consider and locate the precise, cultural causes of today’s mass melancholy from the perspective of those *in* society is lacking. Epistemologically, this is problematic; and representative of the fact that contemporary sociological investigation has failed to consider one of its most primary topics, namely the minds of those in society, and what, reflexively, causes society’s minds to ‘be’ as they are (depressed) by the cultural ecology they exist within. Further, contemporary analysis of society’s endemic unhappiness has, as a rule, overlooked Marxist and neo-Marxist thought. This is also problematic. For Marxian thought can be seen as a ‘readymade’, albeit somewhat abstract and perhaps dated, body of knowledge which identifies, and makes explicit, the possible, potential causes of contemporary capitalist society’s burgeoning unhappiness. For Burawoy (2000: 28), theory ought to be:

‘extended to accommodate observed lacunae or anomalies. We try to constitute the field as a challenge to some theory’.

Society’s - specifically Town A’s – spirit of depression is the lacunae investigated here then; and provides the grounded ‘challenge’ to the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism, which I am ‘using’ to account for my participants’ depression, at a time when the proletariat’s consumption, labour and social expectations are at their most complex and enigmatic.



## Chapter Summary

Chapter two has shown that a paradigmatic shift has occurred in how humanity collectively feels ‘psychosocially’ over the last fifty years (James, 1997). It has been suggested, in line with the ontology of the Frankfurt school of social thought, that humanities’ current ‘low serotonin nature’ is a product of their capitalist cultural ecology, not their biology. Chapter two has also introduced readers’ to the ‘Town A stare’, which indicates the extent to which melancholy is observably constructed and experienced in the lives of residents’ in post-industrial Town A, as a microcosm of capitalist culture.

In mind of Town A’s ‘cult of depression’, chapter two has made it clear that my participants’ phenomenological sadness is being explored, contextualised and accounted for in this research by me applying a theoretical ‘model’ or ‘framework’ to post-industrial working class life and masculinity in Town A. This ‘model’ fuses the principles of Marx’s theories of alienation through labour and commodity fetishism and the notion of anomie together. Accordingly chapter two has defined anomie as being the melancholic condition that humanity enters when their society is unable, as a social structure, to ‘provide’ for them in the way it ideally would. Chapter two has specified that alienation is the unhappy state that all who work in a capitalist society allegedly enter, as a result of capitalist work alienating the worker from 1) the product(s) of their work, 2) the processes of their work, 3) those one works with (ones’ co-workers) and 4) oneself (or species being). Chapter two has also shown that commodity fetishism is understood in this work as being the sad psycho-social condition that humanity enters as a result of the alienating work they must perform to acquire money so as to buy, and the unhealthy way citizens view what they buy.

This work will explore how relevant the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism – themselves written in and about an industrial society – are to life in a post-



industrial, working class Town. This work will analyse the form(s) that anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism take in the lives and minds of the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' today. This work will therefore empirically 'modernise' the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism – which have received much intellectual debate but little empirical application – by relating and applying them to a proletariat class and society that is inherently more diverse and complex (in terms of its labour lives', consumption patterns' and social expectations') than the ones they were initially devised for and about.

Thus, by building upon a series of qualitative interviews and ethnographic insights that I conducted upon and elicited from 42 men who use Gym D (my 'empirical data'), I am able to discuss, from my 'privileged' position as a social theorist, the extent to which anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism debilitates the lives of my participants; and how the theories relatively manifest themselves in the contrasting lives of the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' comparatively. It is worth noting at this point that a phenomenological approach, whereby one is able to 'probe' their subjects' melancholy and contextualise it within a framework appropriately, is the only pragmatic way to investigate such issues; given the complexities and relativity that is attached to such; as this work develops to explore later.

While emphasising Town A's collective sadness, chapter two has also highlighted that melancholy is not the singular component of working class life: while sadness is a key feature of life in Town A today, contemporary Town A life is also fused with periods of happiness and joy. This assertion, while perhaps obvious, challenges existing, polemically over-singular and deterministic thought on society's sadness in general (James, 1997) and working class sadness in particular (Charlesworth, 2000). I will thus present an insight into contemporary working class life, masculinity and melancholy in this thesis that takes into account the wide spectrum of emotions that working class males' experience. I will also draw attention to the



way that Gym D as an institution, and body-modification as a pursuit, functions to alleviate the melancholy that is ordinarily experienced by working class men in Town A at the time of writing. Indeed, this thesis goes so far as to suggest that body-modification is immune from the depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishisms that ordinarily define and debilitate capitalist existence; and positions Town A as being a place and micro-culture that cathartically contrasts with the melancholic world that exists outside it. I thereby reemphasise the seminal part that body-modification can play in the lives of its practitioners, and challenge the idea that body-modification may magnify, polarise and enhance ones' depression (Messner, 1992).

This thesis now advances to discuss the theme of body-modification, and how my participants' body-modification relates to the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism in its third chapter.



### **Chapter 3:**

## **Body-modification and the modified body in contemporary society at large, and Town A as a locus**

### Chapter Overview

Chapter two has introduced readers of this thesis to one of the two cultural truisms which informs this work: namely, that contemporary society causes a collective, mass depression for its members. Chapter two has also defined the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism; and outlined how the theories are being ‘used’, epistemologically, in this work to account for and explain the depression that is collectively experienced by a sample of men 42 men who reside in or near Town A, and who routinely ‘work out’ in Gym D.

The second cultural truism to inform this work is that contemporary society is a ‘body-conscious’ one, that celebrates and promotes a muscular male body. This has led to an increasing amount of males ‘working out’ in gyms, who modify their bodies to be more muscular. The second epistemological aim of this work is to address the question of how my participants’ ‘body-modification’- which takes place in Gym D, Town A’s ‘hardcore’ gym - relates to their assumed cultural ‘depression’. This thesis considers whether my participants’ ‘gym labour’, and the ‘commodity bodies’ my participants have constructed alleviates or extends their experiences of social anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. This work also considers how my participants’ bodies communicate information, identity and masculinity for and about my participants’, as part of their ‘working class lived experiences’. Chapter three develops this thesis by adding context to these research questions; and by introducing readers to the cultural phenomenon of body-modification.

Structurally, Chapter three begins by defining what ‘body-modification’ is understood to mean within the context of this thesis. Chapter three then emphasises how important the modified, muscular body has become within contemporary culture. I argue that a modified, muscular male body functions as a cultural ‘commodity’ today. Chapter three then presents an examination of how relative the concept of the ‘perfect’ male body is, in society at large; and in Town A as a specific locality. Before illustrating how different styles of body-modification, or ‘gym labour’ have to be practiced by the Changers’, Drifters’ and Traditionalists’ when they’re in Gym D respectively, in order for them to acquire the different sorts of physiques, or commodity bodies, that they subjectively desire. Chapter three then highlights how studies ‘on’ gym culture – like studies on British working class society – are sparse, and representative of a thematic hiatus in contemporary Sociology.



Within the sub-paradigmatic *Sociology of the Body*, the term ‘body-modification’ has been used somewhat openly; sometimes to refer to *any* visible changes which occur to a person’s physical body. As put by Featherstone (1999: 2):

‘the term ‘body modification’ refers to a long list of practices which include piercing, tattooing, branding, cutting, binding and inserting implants to alter the appearance of the body’<sup>23</sup>.

In this thesis, the term body-modification is being used more precisely. Here, the term refers to the aesthetic, physical changes that have occurred upon and to a persons’ body because of the ‘gym labour’ that person has performed. Hence, a ‘body-modifier’ is understood here to be someone who has modified the visuals and shape of their body by them lifting, pulling, pushing, squatting and curling weight(s) and/or using resistance machines in a gym. Body-modification is usually, although not always, bolstered by the individual in question eating a high-protein diet, using dietary supplements (e.g. Glutamine, Creatine etc) and using anabolic steroids; all of which are conducive to a body-modifiers’ physical form growing to proportions that it would not, otherwise, grow to.

As discussed in this work’s introduction, all of the participants’ analysed in this thesis have modified the aesthetic, physical appearances of their bodies by them performing ‘gym labour’ in Gym D over a period of several years. Thus, my participants’ bodies, ‘visual masculinities’, identities and to a point lives have come to be characterised by muscularity, and the attainment of muscles.

My participants’ body-modification and this PhD’s investigation takes place at a time when the male body has gone through something of a ‘shift’ in the way it is thought about, and the

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<sup>23</sup> See, also, Featherstone (Ed) 2000 for further definitions of the term.



way it culturally functions. For intellectually, the male body is now recognised as being a valid object of study, which warrants sociological analysis<sup>24</sup>; while, at the ‘everyday level’ (Goffman, 1959) the male body transmits cultural information and attracts cultural attention in a way it did not, before society became increasingly ‘body-conscious’ (Fraser and Grecco: 27). Hence, at the time of writing, the male body has found itself as an ‘object of the gaze’; and has joined the female body as a visual source of commercialisation and ‘fetish’:

‘Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic rise in the visibility of the male body in the media and popular culture. Men’s bodies are on display as never before, from the muscular heroes of the cinematic action genre, to the ‘sixpacks’ that grace the covers of *Men’s Health* ... where once images of women dominated advertising and magazines, increasingly men’s bodies are taking their place alongside women’s on billboards, in fashion photography ... the male (body) has become an object of the gaze rather than simply the bearer of the look’. (Gill et al, 2005: 38-39).

It should be emphasised that it is a *muscular* male body – as distinct from a *non* muscular body - that is glamorised, ‘gazed upon’ and subsequently revered within contemporary culture. As a rule, the non-modified, non-muscular male body does not receive the same sociological or cultural onus that a modified, muscular body does. Hence, it is a muscular body that constitutes society’s ‘masculine hegemonic aesthetic’ (Filiault and Drummond,

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<sup>24</sup> This fact is demonstrated by the existence and success of the Journal *Body and Society*, which is published by SAGE on behalf of the TCS Centre, at Nottingham Trent University.



2007; Connell, 1995), by which I mean society's temporal, mediated'<sup>25</sup> 'model' that specifies what a 'perfect' male body looks like<sup>26</sup>; as I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Contemporary culture has thus propagated the idea that the muscular male is somehow 'better' - or at least more 'attractive', machismo and 'manly' - than his non-muscular counterpart. Muscles have come to function as the quintessence of visual masculinity in contemporary society, as explained by Drummond (1994):

'now, more so than any other period in history, muscles have become an important part of masculine identity' ... 'heavily muscled bodies have traditionally been identified with and held strong appeal for men. In many ancient societies, warriors and gladiators were adorned with sculpted armour that depicted a highly muscular torso. In like manner, current popular cultural heroes are identified in such forms as Schwarzenegger's Terminator, or Stallone's Rocky and Rambo characters. These hyper-muscular figures ... idealise the mesomorphic male form, making it a cultural ideal'

Muscles thus act as 'cultural capital' today. Muscles emblematised manliness in a similar way to how breasts symbolised femininity, as explained by Perry (1992:131):

'the breast is defined as the quintessence of female sexuality in its externality of both the pornographic and erogenous possibilities of female flesh ... for women in twentieth-century America, breasts often emblematised their femininity'.

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<sup>25</sup> 'masculinity is constructed and represented in various guises throughout the mass media ... on television, in film, in advertising, literature, magazines, the tabloids and broadsheet press, pop music, even on the internet. By 'mediated masculinity', therefore, I mean the way in which popular media representations (in film, television and pop music in particular) provide highly crafted, alluring and accessible models for ... men'. Benyon, 2002: 64.

<sup>26</sup> See Elliott and Elliott's 2005 "Idealized Images of the Male Body in advertising", Kimmel, Hearn and Connell (Eds), 2005, McKay, 2000; and Lehman 2000.



For Zeldin (1977: 400) ‘the triumph of the thin woman over the fat woman’ is a feature of postmodernity. Similarly, the muscular, physiologically modified male ‘triumphs’ over his non-muscular brother in contemporary culture. This is, apparently, especially true for working class males (see Seale et al, 2006) who, according to Henwood (et al, 1999) are increasingly ‘defining themselves through their bodies in the wake of social and economic change’ (i.e. the changes brought on by working class society’s de-industrialisation, as chapter one of this thesis considered in relation to Town A).

While muscles have become the quintessential masculine physical ideal, male fatness has emerged as a ‘correctable problem’ (Monaghan, 2008) within a culture that is inclined to celebrate ‘the mesomorphic male form’. The muscular male body, devoid of fat, can therefore be seen as a ‘commodity’<sup>27</sup>; or, as Buchbinder (2004) proposes, a ‘fashion accessory’, in contemporary society. Although, when this thesis proposes that the muscular body is a ‘commodity’, I do not mean to ‘commodify bodies’ in the way that Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant’s (2002) work does. Through which, one is shown how the body, or parts of the body, are ‘fetished, bartered, sold or stolen in divisible and alienable parts’ (:1) in different contexts (e.g. how a financially poor Indian man willingly sold his kidney so as to feed his family in a South Indian slum). Rather, here, I mean that muscular male bodies are commodities in the sense that they function as status-symbols today: muscles give their proprietors’ identities, confidence and happiness, within their lived experiences and presentations of the self. Hence, I agree with the position of Bridges whose promising 2009 ongoing study asserts that (94):

‘while sports cars work for some men, money and occupational prestige for others, bodybuilding is a similar process of acquiring and utilising gender capital that purchases ... gender identification and status’.

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<sup>27</sup> As Toby Miller also suggests in his 2001 *Sportsex*.



Indeed, I'm going so far as to suggest here, in mind of the essentialism implied, that *all* men today would like to 'compensate' and 'resolve' their masculine insecurities, and 'emblemize' their masculinity visually through muscular physiques if they *could*. To borrow from Klein (1993:4):

'Probably most of us seek to conceal flaws or insecurities ... for men, it is often the use of the body, and in particular muscles, that is relied upon to compensate. Though he may not realise it, every man – every accountant, science nerd, clergyman, and cop – is, or has been, engaged in a dialogue with muscles. Without sinking into essentialism, I would argue that every man determines his sense of self through some sort of response to the biological emblems of masculinity: possessing a penis and male musculature. Bragging about the size of grants won or the number of publications one has is the same thing, in this respect, as showcasing a massive chest or arms with a skin-tight T-shirt.'

To substantiate the relationship between contemporary culture and its increasing reverence, or commoditisation of muscularity further (and, concurrently, the culturally induced desire for men to inhabit muscular bodies) one can cite the work of Leit, Pope and Gray (2001), which examines the ways that the 'sorts' of bodies inhabited by *Playgirl* centrefolds have becoming increasingly muscular over a period of forty years. Indeed, 'a Playgirl centrefold model of 1976 would need to shed 12 lbs of fat and gain 27 lbs of muscle to be a centrefold today'. For Leit et al, the 'evolution' of the *Playgirl* centrefold, which has seen models 'bulk up' their muscles while slimming down their fatness, reflects society's increasing association between physiological muscularity, leanness and masculine desirability.

Pope's 1999 discussion on how Action Toys have 'developed' over time to be increasingly muscular takes this sentiment further. Pope illustrates that:



‘male toy action figures have become more muscular over time; many of their physiques far exceed the muscularity of the most robust human bodybuilders. The trends are believed to reflect the increasing social desirability of heightened muscle tone in men. Media advertising now targets younger men and promises them greater sexual attractiveness and popularity in conjunction with a trim, muscular body’<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, one may have - in accordance with the ideals of the ‘advanced’, consumption based form of capitalism we live in today - the big house, the fast car, the good looks, the girl, the contacts; and all of the other somewhat clichéd possessions, status symbols and fashion accessories that hegemonic masculinity encourages and promotes; but without muscles – without an appropriately modified body – a man is not really, it is being ventured here, the ‘complete’, post-modern man he ‘should’ be. His lived experience, and his visual presentation is lacking; his masculinity and identity can be questioned; for he lacks the ‘muscular look’; the quintessence of contemporary masculinity, the ultimate male status symbol.

Men of all ages, in all milieus have in essence been ‘conditioned’ to want muscular bodies. They believe that acquiring and displaying a muscular body is ‘worth the effort’; regardless of the potential psychological, financial and physical<sup>29</sup> costs that come with ‘building’ such a commoditised physique. Some of these costs are elucidated in the below quotation, given by a user of Gym D who, now a retired body-builder, is always keen to nostalgically discuss the commodity body he once inhabited:

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in Michel and Willard: 93

<sup>29</sup> The 2005 documentary entitled *The Man whose arms exploded* gives an account of the life of Gregg Valentino, and illustrates the extremes that individuals will go in pursuit of a ‘modified body’. Valentino’s arm, which measured twenty-eighth inches in circumference, literally exploded due to the steroid abuse he endured in pursuit of physical perfection.



‘I hurt now. I hurt badly. Me (my) knees are fucked. Me hips, me ankles, me wrists – my elbows are the worst. When you put all the pressure on your joints like I have over the years, that has to happen. Now, I can hardly train, it hurts to train. And me liver and kidneys are fucked also from the gear (steroids) and dieting I did; years of steroids rotting away at me insides, like the heart and liver. So I’m painting an honest picture of me training for you here. And it was expensive, eating as I did, buying seven meals a day, buying the gear (steroids) like I had to. But do I regret it? No way! It was worth the effort. My body was fucking great, and that is the cost I have to pay now ... everybody wants the body I once had. My life was how it was because of my body. I am who I am because of my body!’

Interestingly, then, the interviewee is convinced that the sacrifices he made in the pursuit of physical perfection were unequivocally ‘worth it’, despite the implications of such on his current lived experience: such is the onus that he and society places on muscularity.

In response to contemporary culture’s glamorisation of muscle, and the subsequent pressure that men feel to ‘be in shape’, there has been a predictable rise in ‘gym culture’. Thus, the fitness industry is growing at a rapid rate globally, as men join gyms, in the hope of perfecting their ‘body projects’ (Giddens, 1991); as affirmed by Klein in his ethnography on bodybuilding in Southern California (1993: 38):

‘Now, almost everyday a gym is opening somewhere ... as millions of “pencil necks” finally arrive at gyms ... exasperated by loose flesh, concave chests, or poor health. The recent growth is by no means confined to the behemoths described in these pages. The fitness craze spawned a multibillion dollar industry, five billion of which is directly related to weight training ... By the mid-1980s one found some pretty unlikely people pumping iron ... housewives and college students, two populations not historically



known for Prussian discipline, came regularly ... seeing police and truckers in a gym is common enough, but who would have expected to see grizzled old professors of physics and Latin blasting away at their pectorals ... whether or not bodybuilding had, as *Life* magazine claimed, become the sport of the 1980s was unclear, but it most certainly had burst the restraints of its Southern Californian straightjacket and galloped across the American landscape’.

Indeed, body-modification keeps galloping around the globe, penetrating geography and social habitus; and seducing new generations of men to develop and build their bodies, and convolutedly, their masculine identities through their bodies. To the extent that:

‘a recent citizens audit ... found that 14% of the population belong to a gym, a figure just two percentage points lower than trade union membership (16%), double that of Church/religious membership (7%), and over four times greater than membership of environmental, animal rights or women groups (3% each)’ (Crossley, 2006: 23).

Recently opened and revamped gyms around the globe therefore find themselves packed with an abundance of body-modifiers, who come to utilise their gym’s fitness machines and weights, with a mediated conception of how their bodies should, ideally look and be.

Similarly, ‘real’, ‘old’, ‘proper’ ‘hardcore’ (Mansfield and McGinn, 1993) gyms – like Gym D- continue to attract their own clientele, who continue to practice their familiar, perfected gym rituals so as to preserve the impressive anatomical commodities that they have constructed over the years through arduous gym labour and dieting. As a matter of counterpoint, steroid use is becoming more prevalent among both serious and casual gym-users, despite the undoubted and well documented ‘risk’ that steroid use pose to ones’ health (Monaghan, 2001).



## Different Masses for Different Classes

It is important to highlight that dramatic variations exist in how body-modifiers want their bodies and muscles to look. Men, globally, may be modifying their bodies, but not all men are modifying their bodies in the same way, and with the aim of constructing the same sorts, shapes and proportions of muscle, or 'gender capital' (Bridges, 2009: 83). Different cultures view muscles differently, at different times<sup>30</sup>; and hence celebrate levels of muscularity subjectively. Thus, 'creating the perfect body' is an undeniably 'variable project' (Monaghan, 1999) given 'the many different visions of physical perfection' which exist' (Monaghan, 1999:269). Monaghan (2001: 74) is thereby right to assert that:

'physical perception' is 'spatially and temporarily contingent, varying from one individual to the next and also from the same individual during the course of their bodybuilding career'.

In expansion, we can consider the blatant contrasts between the muscular proportions obtained by bodybuilders in Gym D and, especially, on Venice Beach, California (being 'the Mecca of bodybuilding' where the world's bodybuilding elite gravitate to<sup>31</sup>) - i.e. the desired look of steroid using, 'hardcore meatheads' who dedicate their life to the pursuit and maintenance of extreme physiological size - and the muscles obtained by 'regular men', who find themselves 'toning up' in gyms attached to racket clubs and health clubs; seemingly content with 'looking healthy', 'muscular' and 'slim'. Indeed, one only needs to take the briefest of glances at the different styles of modified bodies displayed in figures one – four

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<sup>30</sup> In expansion, we can cite the works of Connell (1983a, 1983b) - which demonstrates what constituted the 'perfect' male body from an Australian perspective in the 1980s; Maliko, 2006 - which considers the 'ideal' body within the context of Samoan culture; as well as Drummond's 2005 work, which examine the notion of the 'body beautiful' from a homosexual perspective. Further, Yang et al 2005 compares Taiwanese and Western body ideals, while Rubenstein's 2003 study looks at body-building ideals in Israel. Collectively, these works demonstrate that physiological desirable has always been and remains subjective; and that the notion of the 'body beautiful' will remain relative to time, place and person.

<sup>31</sup> As considered in Klein's ethnography *Little Big Men*.



below (all of which show the ‘defined’, ‘healthy’, ‘athletic’ bodies which are typically displayed in the cover of *Men’s Health* magazine) in comparison with those ‘massive’, ‘wide’ bodies in figures five to six, which appeared on the cover of the niche bodybuilding publication *Flex* to realise how extremely different physical ideals and modified, muscular proportions can be.



Figure One

Figure Two

Figure Three

Figure Four



Figure five

Figure Six

Figure Seven

Figure Eight

Given that the *concept* of ‘the perfect male body’ is a relative notion - as the notion fluctuates between time, place, society’s changing hegemonic aesthetic and the preferences of the individual in question – it follows that the *creation* of the ‘perfect body’ is a relative process, given that one must utilise different gym methods so as to acquire different sorts of bodies. If one wants a big, strong, muscular body – i.e. if physical mass, or a ‘bodybuilders’ body’, like those on the front of *Flex* magazine - is ones’ physiological ideal, then one should



modify their body by them lifting heavy weights<sup>32</sup> for a small number of repetitions<sup>33</sup> ('reps'). This is known as 'maxing out', and is the style of gym labour that is conventionally, although not always, practiced in Gym D, where the training ethos is epitomised by the phrase: 'gan (go) heavy or gan yem (home)'. This approach to training ensures 'excessive muscularity' (Monaghan, 1999: 279); and will see the body-modifier routinely indulge in 'core', 'proper', 'old school', 'bulking' exercises such as squats, dead-lifts, and bench-presses. For these exercises, despite their challenging, fatiguing nature, ensures mass and bulk is constructed on the body.

This style of training, which constitutes 'bodybuilding' as distinct from 'weight lifting' (Monaghan, 2001), will often be aided by a spotter. Thus, the mass-seeking body-modifier will have another person – usually his 'training partner' – stand next to, behind or above him while he completes his 'set'. This is partly for safety, given the heaviness of the weights being handled, but mostly for function. During the set, when it is physically impossible for the trainer to push, or pull the weight anymore, the 'spotter' will add force to the physical movement. The use of a spotter ensures that 'forced reps' are completed. In this way the body is manipulated into lifting more weight than it can naturally, or unaided. The body has no choice but to grow in response to the physical demands placed upon it; especially given the plethora of growth supplements – from basic protein shakes to illegal steroids – which 'heavy' body-modification is, to varying degrees, typically enhanced through.

The mass-seeking body-modifier will typically train parts of his body (muscle groups) individually, autonomously and daily; thus the mass-seeking trainer may 'work' on his legs on day one of his training cycle, and then train subsequent muscle groups (e.g. arms, chest, shoulders, back etc) on alternative days (days two, three, four etc). This means the body-

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<sup>32</sup> As heavy as is physically possible.

<sup>33</sup> Typically between six to eight repetitions are performed.



modifier can truly exhaust the muscle group he/she is training on 'its day', and then give that muscle group enough time to 'recover', rest and grow from the work-out in question, while subsequent parts of the body are modified and rested appropriately as part of the trainers' 'cycle'. By training muscle groups autonomously, the trainer can truly exhaust the muscle group being 'worked', and also avoid the dreaded actuality of 'over training' occurring; which would happen if body-parts were not rested, and hence fatigued.

There is an observable correlation between the above 'heavy' approach to training and a certain type of gym culture and user. The above approach to training tends to attract a machismo sort of person: the sort who will typically swagger around the gym between sets, posing in mirrors; and shouting vocally while working-out. This 'style' of trainer will probably wear revealing clothes (such as vests) while training in this 'hardcore' way. When many individuals collectively train like this, it is both sub-cultural and intimidating, if one is not used to it; although somewhat addictive if one 'belongs' to such a clan, and is keen to partake in such activities. This sort of gym culture presides in Gym D. I also recognised it during my time training in Southern California, in its 'hardcore' Venice Beach Gyms; and have witnessed it in other 'hardcore gym' arenas that I've encountered as a body-modifier. Steroid use is synonymous with such a gym culture and machismo.

Both the Drifter and the Traditionalist taxonomies of life identified in this research train in the 'heavy' way outlined above. Hence, the sorts of bodies that the Drifters' and (especially) the Traditionalists' have produced by definition of their association with Gym D resemble the bodies paraded on the front cover of *Flex* magazine, and other niche bodybuilding publications. The typologies in question also indulge and reproduce the 'hardcore' gym culture outlined above while in Gym D. Significantly, the Drifters' and Traditionalists' modified bodies also resemble the sorts of bodies that working class men inhabited in Town A during its industrial mining era, as a result of the heavy, muscle-enhancing, artisan labour



that was practiced by the proletariat of the period<sup>34</sup>. I will go on to show that the choice of the Drifters' and the Traditionalists' to train in this way, and subsequently produce mass-defined, 'working bodies' tells us much about both their insecurities regarding their 'places' in post-industrial Town A; and their desperation to hang on to the industrial past, habitus and masculine hegemonic that 'made' them.

Although the bodies of the Drifters and the Traditionalists resemble Town A's 'idealised', hegemonic body shape as it was during the Town's industrial epoch, the big, physical frames sported by the Traditionalists' and the Drifters' are not generally viewed favourably by society at large today. Indeed, the 'excessively muscular bodies' sported by the Traditionalists' and the Drifters' 'represent a transgression from the culturally normative and celebrated notion of 'the fit looking body'' (Monaghan, 2001: 2). This is undoubtedly in part due to the connotations of steroid use that their 'big' muscular bodies signify (see Mansfield and McGinn, 1993: 59); as explained by Martin and Gavey (1996: 47):

'It has been suggested that the greatest public discomfort about bodybuilders is that 'all those muscles somehow came out of a bottle' ... that there is something ... faintly sinful about what they do and how they look ... that there is discomfort about the impurity of the chemical body, the unnaturalness of the steroid body';

and also, centrally, due to the fact that 'fit', 'toned' 'athletic', 'muscular but not excessively muscular' bodies (i.e. the sorts which appear on the cover of magazines like *Men's Health*)

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Orwell - when describing the 'iron bodies' of miners in *The Road To Wigan Pier* - lucidly and accurately, although totally unintentionally, described precisely the anatomical forms that grace the front covers of today's specialist, niche bodybuilding literature (such as *Flex Magazine*); and the sorts of bodies that many of the Traditionalist and Drifters participants' analysed in this work would like to have, and in some cases almost do have:

'They really do look like iron – hammered iron statues – under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them from head to foot. It is only when you see miners down the mine ... that you realise what splendid men they are ... most of them ... have noble bodies: wide shoulders, tapering, supple waists ... pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere' (Orwell, 1937). Orwell's description shows how similar the bodies of the Traditionalists and the Drifters are today to the bodies of their mining forefathers inhabited.



have come to constitute society's current hegemonic aesthetic (Filiault and Drummond, 2007; Connell) - i.e. society's idealised version of what the muscular male body 'should' look like. For society's global media system has glamorised the slim, toned, athletic body, which is epitomised by the body of David Beckham (figure three) at the expense of 'big', working industrial body; which is rendered obsolete and seen as somewhat 'thuggish', 'unnatural' and sub-cultural in a post-industrial, 'global' economy and society, where celebrity image – not industrial labour – defines masculine physiological desirability.

In terms of gym labour, if a body-modifier wants to develop a 'defined', 'slim' body that adheres to society's 'celebrated notion of the fit looking body' (Monaghan, 2001:2) then that body-modifier should incorporate a high amount of cardio vascular training in their gym work; thereby fusing activities like running, rowing and cycling with weight and resistance machine use. This will improve the body's visual athleticism and vascularity. It is conducive to the creation of 'definition', or shape, between muscle groups, as opposed to the construction of mere physiological size. 'Shaping' or 'finishing' exercises, as opposed to 'bulking' exercises (e.g. squats) will be practiced.

The body-modifier who is keen to create a 'ripped', defined body will, in comparison to his mass-seeking counterpart, lift light(er) weights, for a higher number of repetitions (between twelve upwards). This ensures that the body-modifier tires and exhausts his body and muscles through endurance related training, rather than by 'blasting' his muscles with weight. This style of body-modification gives the body a more 'toned' look, and can be thought of as a process of 'body-sculpting as opposed to bodybuilding' (Monaghan, 1999: 278) owing to its aerobic rather than purely anaerobic nature.

Significantly, within my sample of Gym D using participants, all of the Changers' train in the manner outlined above, in light of their shared desire to inhabit a body that is in



congruence with society's hegemonic aesthetic, as opposed to a 'big' body; as shown in the below quotation, elicited from one of the Changers:

'big, steroid bodies just look stupid. Nobody wants that now, I mean maybe around here (town A) that is fine, but if you look at all the male models and film stars, they are ripped and cut ... they look like proper athletes. That is what is cool now, being cut and stuff. Big people just look stupid, they are targets, and just look like steroid scrappers (people who like to fight)'

Hence, the majority of the working class participants analysed in this work don't just 'get working class jobs' (Willis, 1977), lifestyles, spending patterns and consciousnesses by definition of their geography and habitus'. They also acquire working class bodies (i.e. big, strong, powerful bodies) which metaphor and represent their working class 'roots', natures and identities (Featherstone, 1984: 129, 1987); and which resemble the artisan, 'industrial' bodies which their mining forefathers would have inhabited. Accordingly, the Drifters' and the Traditionalists' stated that they consider sheer muscular size and mass as being the most desirable anatomical feature in the interviews I conducted with them. They eschew the athletic build of the middleclass, as promoted in the contemporary mass-media, in favour of power, strength and obvious physical toughness. In essence, they acquire 'local', industrial bodies, as opposed to 'global', media-purveyed, post-industrial bodies. This rule is exemplified by considering the response given by a Traditionalist, when I asked him if he would like a body like David Beckham's, instead of his own eighteen and a half stone physique:

'Would I fuck! Beckham looks like a kid, like a little girl. His body is nothing. He is tiny, that is not a real man. His arms are like strings of piss (very skinny)! That is what kids think a body should look like now, growing up reading shite magazines that



confuse them, but if my kid (his son, who is a steroid using member of Gym D) looked like that I'd hit him in the throat, get him some protein, throw him a heavy weight and gan (say) right you little twat, time to look and train like a proper man ... eat some kebabs you skinny twat'.

In contrast, Gym D's pseudo-middleclass gym users – as represented in my sample by the Changers' - are committed to developing slim, toned, 'ripped', 'cut', 'well defined', 'muscular but not grotesquely big' middleclass bodies; as epitomised by the physique of 'Brad Pitt in *Fight Club*'. The Changers' place particular emphasis on building and displaying their abdominal muscles: the much coveted six-pack was found to be the Changers' fundamental anatomical training aim. Thus high repetition, low weight gym work is practiced by the Changers', who routinely perform lots of crunches/sit-ups so as to bolster their abdominal muscles. Low-fat diets and training programmes that are orientated around 'finishing' as opposed to mass building exercises are also followed stringently by the Changers', to complete their holistically 'healthy and athletic looking' presentation of the self: 'like Bateman's body in the movie *American Psycho*'. Thus, the Changers exist as a schism in Gym D, which they frequent late in the evenings to 'rep-out', after returning to Town A from Newcastle Upon Tyne, where they perform their white collar, post-industrial jobs.

This thesis evolves, as part of its analysis of post-industrial working class life and masculinity, to consider how the different sorts of bodies that are inhabited and constructed by the different typologies of life that use Gym D relate to 'the working class lived experience' (Charlesworth, 2000) semiotically and relatively.



## Building the body of bodybuilding literature

It has been shown that the onus which contemporary culture has placed upon the modified, male body has resulted in many males believing that it is ‘no longer enough to be a “normal bloke” with an everyday body’ (Watson, 2000: 80). Accordingly, the phenomenon of ‘gym culture’ has burgeoned, as men are increasingly inclined to practice gym-labour or ‘body maintenance’ (Monaghan, 2007: 97) as part of their lived experiences, having been influenced by the ‘hype and selling of muscle’ (Dotson, 1999) in and through society’s mass-media.

The sub-paradigmatic *Sociology Of The Body* has produced an intriguing, even if numerically sparse collection of studies that aim to ‘make sense’ of gym culture. (E.g. Crossley, 2001; Gimlin, 2002; Bloor et al, 1998; Klein, 1993; St. Martin and Gavey, 1998; Fussell, 1991; Messner, 1992; Smolak et al, 2005; Jefferson, 1998; Keane, 2005; Wiegers, 1998; Hennen, 2005; Brown, 2002; Connell, 2000; the impressive work of Lee Monaghan; and Aoki’s 1996 work on female bodybuilders). Despite the existence and success of the predominantly ethnographic works listed, Crossley is right to assert that ‘on the whole ... relatively little work has been done on and in gyms’ ( 2006: 24)<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, ‘the sociology of bodybuilding remains undeveloped’ (Monaghan, 1999: 267); particularly in terms of ‘grounded’, phenomenological knowledge and insights. Meaning, as put by Gill et al (2005: 40): ‘writers lament the fact that the increasing theoretical interest in the body has not been accompanied by empirical studies (e.g. Davis, 1997, Wacquant, 1995; Watson, 2000)’; for ‘the sociology of the body has, by and large, ignored the voices that emanate from bodies

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<sup>35</sup> As put by Monaghan (2001: 184): ‘While bodies are in, in academia as well as popular culture (Frank 1990: 131), relatively little social scientific work offers empirically grounded insight into the diverse ways in which specific social worlds are constituted by the embodied agents constituting those worlds’.



themselves' (Nettleton and Watson, 1998: 2)<sup>36</sup>. While sociology has recognised the importance of the body as an area of theoretical speculation, on the whole sociology has not investigated 'the body' reflexively, or contextualised the bodies' and body-modifying processes of its members' in relation to its members' wider existences, identities, struggles and histories. Hence, we do not really know what it is to, phenomenologically, 'be' a person in a modified body, committed to body-modification, in a body-conscious society. We do not know of the cultural meaning(s) that a humans' body and body-modification may carry for them and others in our contemporary, visual culture. We do not know how body-modification relates to ones' wider macro and micro sociological reality.

Accordingly, an authoritative, 'empirically grounded' study on gym-life in the North East of England remains to be written. As does a study on body-modification - in Town A or any other locus - that develops and solidifies the relationship between society's body-modification, society's mass sadness, and the theories of anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism. This thesis hopes to address the question of how my participants' gym lives, 'gym labour' and 'commodity bodies' relate to their existences, identities and their experiences of depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishisms. Further, as part of its analysis, this work hopes to demonstrate how the different 'sorts' of bodies that my participants have fashioned function, semiotically, in their existences.

As stated, my analysis is rooted in the phenomenological tradition, and informed by the reflexive views of others (my participants), which I elicited through both ethnographic

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<sup>36</sup> In part this, one can presume, is due to 'academics' ... tendency to sneer at body-builders for the appearance of their bodies and ... narcissism' (Aoki, 1996: 59). And the abundance of 'culturally dope' accounts of gym life that simplify the 'reality' of body-modification through their reliance 'upon official documents and texts, such as workout manuals' which thus 'neglect gym-goers' actual activities and the ... meaning they attach to them' (Crossley, 2006: 24).



research and, primarily, via qualitative interviews (see section two of this work) which, like those conducted by Drummond (2005), aimed:

‘to capture ... participants’ reflections on their bodies ... a phenomenological approach has underpinned this research in so far as the research ... has been based on the ‘essence and meaning’ (Patton, 2003) of what it is like to be a man with respect to ... the cohort in question’.

I go on to show that Town A’s de-industrialisation and globalisation are seminal themes in understanding and explaining the different bodies and body-modification processes that the Changers’, Drifters’ and Traditionalist’ have constructed and practice.

### Chapter Summary

Chapter three has drawn attention to the fact that different sorts of ‘gym labour’ is practiced, and contrasting types of ‘commodity bodies’ are constructed in Gym D today: both ‘working class’, ‘big’, ‘industrial bodies’ and ‘middle class’, athletic, ‘global’ bodies are sought and being fashioned by Gym D’s users’ at the time of writing. Thus, by analysing body-modification in Gym D - in mind of the relativity that the notion of ‘the perfect male body’ carries among the gym’s users (Monaghan, 1999), and the contrasting approaches to body-modification exhibited by the Changers’ Drifters’ and Traditionalists’ – this work is able to consider my participants’ gym lives and modified bodies (and how such relates to my participant group’s depression, identities and existences) cross-comparatively. By analysing Gym D, this work does not singularly focus on ‘hardcore’ and ‘elite’ ‘body-building’ (as the works of Klein, 1993; and Monaghan, 2007 do), nor does it solely focus on ‘normal’ gym or health club use and membership (as Crossley, 2006 does). Rather, this work is able to consider both the ‘excessive’ and ‘moderate’ approaches to body-modification that society’s



members display simultaneously; and thus go some way in filling the epistemological void that body-modification represents to sociology.

By focusing its analysis upon Gym D's users, this thesis is able to empirically substantiate the notion that a males' modified body act as a metaphor and semiotic device in his life. Specifically, this work will show that the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' are able to communicate 'cultural information' about themselves to others in society semiotically, through the bodies they have constructed in Gym D. This work will also suggest that my participant groups' bodies metaphorically signify much about their different ethos', places, struggles and adaptations in and to the post-industrial, 'Glocal' society they live in. While existing works on the body have recognised the metaphoric potential of the male body (Featherstone et al, 1991), none to my knowledge have 'read' the body in the semiotic way my participants' bodies are being 'read' here; whereby, I 'read' and contextualise the three typologies' modified body in relation to the wider lives, existences and depressions of their owners.

Chapter three has emphasised how important the modified male body has become in contemporary society. Indeed, it has been proposed, building upon thought like Leit et al (2001), that a muscular male body functions as a commodity and status symbol at the time of writing. Chapter three has also drawn attention to the laborious, capitalistic and potentially 'strained' nature of body-modification. Accordingly, how my participants' bodies and body-modification relates, epistemologically and empirically, to the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism has been considered in chapter three: if my participants' bodies are commodities, and their body-modification is 'strained' and laborious, then it follows that my participants' bodies and gym lives are, potentially, further sources of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism in their lives. This thesis therefore analyses body-modification from perspective of Marxian social theory. It applies Marxian thought to the act of body-



modification. By so doing, this work hopes to advance sociology's understanding of the body and body-modification, by reading body-modification as an act that is constructed by and adherent to capitalist society and capitalist ideology and principles. Significantly, within the small amount of 'grounded', phenomenological research into body-modification that has been produced, the relationship between Marxian thought and body-modification has not been sufficiently identified and explored.

As part of its ethnographic account, this thesis will draw attention to the vital way that Gym D - as an institution and sub-cultural community - functions in my participants' existences. I will argue that my participants' modified bodies do not merely play intrinsic roles in the way that they construct and 'display' their masculinities aesthetically; but also that body-modification is immune from and manages to refute the depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism that ordinarily defines existence for my participants'. This thesis will show that my participants' body-modification is not a perfunctory, arbitrary part of their lives. Rather, it will illustrate that their body-modification is a central part of their existences; and that Gym D has come to function as something of an exclusive 'social club' for its users, which essentially preserves masculinity and masculine solidarity in a changing, increasingly emasculated world. Here, I will draw attention to the extent to which some working class males orientate their lives around Gym D, and its social networks in a post-industrial society, in which they are otherwise obsolete. This thesis will add to those rare but insightful works that attempt to 'make sense' of gym culture in a 'thick', descriptive way (e.g. Klein, 1993) by providing an account of Gym D, which – as a result of its 'closed' nature – would be unavailable to most ethnographers'. This thesis will also affirm that if we are to understand the true social and cultural significance of the body, then we must listen to the reflexive voices that emanate from the bodies we speculate upon. This work will thus re-emphasise the need to research the body phenomenologically and through the ethnographic case-study



method, as has been done by those few scholars who have managed to make sense of body-modification culturally, empirically and reflexively (e.g. Drummond, 2005 A; Klein, 1993; Monaghan, 2007 and Crossley, 2006).

The themes of society's – and Town A's – mass depression and body-modification have now been discussed in Chapters' two and three of this thesis. The theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism, and how the theories relate to Town A's 'depression' and body-modification have also been discussed. I have, therefore, now contextualised the two 'cultural truisms' that inform this work; and also made clear how these truisms are being investigated and accounted for in this work theoretically and empirically. I now complete this thesis' *Context and Problems* section, by giving readers an insight into Town A's 'urban geography' in chapter four.



## **Chapter Four:**

### **The Physical Landscape of Town A**

#### Chapter Overview

I have now introduced readers to the structure of this thesis, and its epistemological aims and objectives. The phenomenon of contemporary society's 'mass depression' has been discussed. As has the notion of how and why the muscular male body has become 'commoditised' today; thereby resulting in the emergence of 'gym culture'. This work has defined the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism; and illustrated how the theories are being 'used' in this research. Readers have also been given an insight into Town A's 'industrial' past, and contemporary, post-industrial empirical context. The three different typologies of life that - this thesis argues - have co-evolved and now co-exist in Town A have also been discussed in a provisional way. Readers have thus been introduced to Town A's 'cultural landscape'; and the fundamental cultural, historical and theoretical themes that define this thesis and its research.

In expansion, chapter four hopes to give readers further context pertaining to Town A, by providing an account of Town A's 'physical landscape'; by which I mean an account of the man-made, physical infrastructures and spaces that act as the homes, places of commerce, places of work and places of leisure for those who live in or near Town A. By so doing, I hope to introduce readers of this thesis who are unfamiliar with the space of Town A to its contemporary 'urban geography', in mind of the 'thick' urban accounts produced by the classical Chicago Scholars<sup>37</sup>. Chapter four also hopes to explore the intrinsic relationship that exists between human culture(s), or 'lived experiences', and the physical space that human culture takes place within. I will explain how the tripartite model of Town A life and masculinity proposed in this work is essentially enabled by Town A's contrasting, physical constitution, which encourages and allows the three forms of working class life identified in this work to exist in their distinctive ways.

Town A's physical landscape, as it exists at the time of writing, should not be seen as a mass, spatial whole. Rather, Town A's physical landscape should be understood as being a constitute of ten 'spatial areas'. Each spatial area has its own sociological functions and ethno-history.

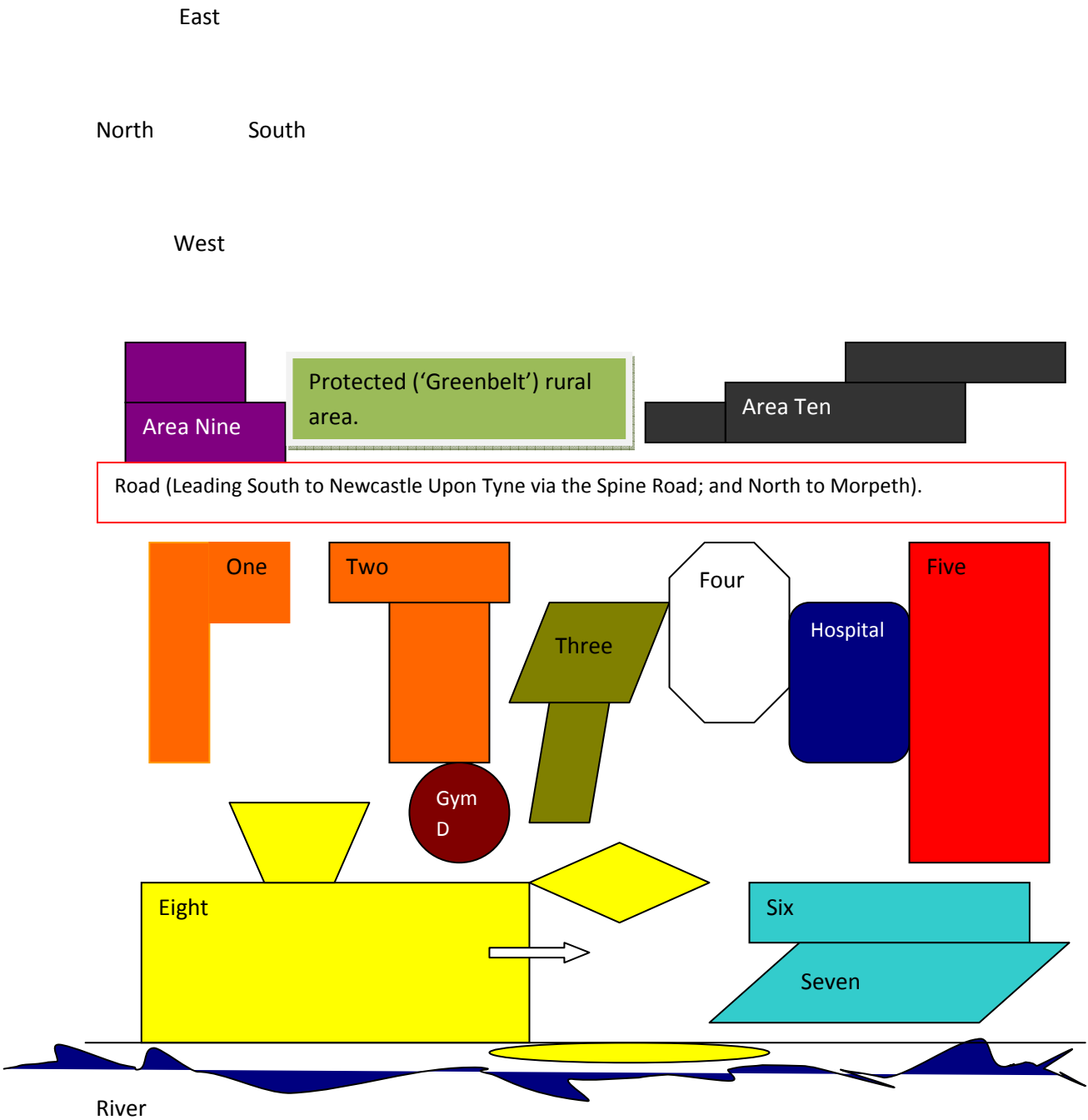
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<sup>37</sup> See Burgess et al 1964, 1967; Park, 1952.



The following diagram goes some way in helping readers to visualise Town A, and how its spatial areas correspond:

A Visualisation of Town A’s urban geography



I now discuss each of these areas in turn.



## Areas One and Two

Areas one and Two of Town A are made up of rows of occupied, terraced ‘colliery’ houses. These houses, which were built in a ‘grid plan’ system between 1910 and 1920 for residents of Town A during its industrial era, have not physically changed much, if at all, since their initial constructions, apart from the satellite dishes that now hang-off most of them. The houses in the space are small (typically two bed-roomed); as are the houses’ gardens. Overcrowding and a lack of parking is a component of life here.

Demographically, residents of areas one and two are overwhelmingly white and working class: only one ‘ethnic’ (Pakistani) family reputedly lives in the entirety of areas one and two, which collectively house about 8,000 of Town A’s residents. Residents of areas one and two are also predominantly, if not entirely, local; by which I mean ‘born and bred’ in Town A.

Residents of areas one and two have often inherited their houses: properties have typically been ‘passed down’ from generation to generation. Accordingly, some families have lived in ‘the same houses for years around here’, which is often seen as a positive thing.

Despite the diversity in age-ranges and situations of the areas’ residents – which sees the old and the young; and the married, widowed and singled all, literally, live side by side - a definite and often moving sense of ‘community’, kinship and kindness defines social relations in areas one and two. Significantly, this sense of community and solidarity was not found to exist, according to my research, in other (‘posh’ or ‘dodgy’) areas of Town A; as I consider in more detail later in this chapter. Relations in areas one and two are thus insular, close-knit, and ‘family-like’; as shown via the following quotation, given by a Traditionalist that lives in area one:



‘this (the community of area one) is a family. Like, my Sister and Mother both live near me; like within two doors me Mother is, but even people that are not like me relations are like me family around here. I’ve lived here all me life, and reckon always will ... Nobody fucks anyone over – like steals from you or hurts you ... you really can leave your doors unlocked around here and nobody will nick out. Everybody knows each others’ business – but that is nice: like, so and so is doing this, and so and so is doing that, who is going where on holiday and stuff. Like, if there is a party then we’re all involved. If it is good news or bad news, we’re all kind of together ... like have a barbeque, get the neighbours over sort of thing; and it is the same over there, in (area two) ... we’re (residents of areas one and two) known for being proper, nice down to earth people around the whole Town! (rest of Town A)’

The strong sense of kinship that characterises life in areas one and two of Town A is clearly appreciated by its residents then; and suggests that the concept of the ‘extended family’ proposed by Young and Wilmott (1957) in relation to life in the East End of London still functions in working class communities like Town A today, even in the age of post-industrialism, and in an epoch of collective, psycho-social depression. Hence, areas one and two are the spaces where Town A’s ‘traditional’, coalmining ethos and sense of working class community is retained - perhaps as much as it can be - in the current epoch of post-modernity, and the cultural transition it represents. As one resident told me:

‘people here (area one) gossip, know each other, talk to each other, and still love each other like in the olden days’.

Twenty three of the thirty ‘Traditionalist’ participants analysed in this research live in Areas One or Two. Two of the seven Changers’ reluctantly live here; one of the five Drifters’ lives here.



### Area Three

Area Three functions as Town A's commercial 'centre'. It consists predominantly of pubs/bars, betting shops, sports-clothes shops, charity shops, holiday agents and sun-bed shops. Evidence of Town A's 'glocalisation' (i.e. Town A's fusion of 'local' and 'global' culture) exists in the area: global fast-food chains can be eaten in; global banks can be used and multi-national coffee chains and chemists can be visited. Yet, simultaneously, family-run butchers, bakers, pubs and fishmongers can be visited: 'local produce for local people'.

During the day, area three is typically busy; particularly on Saturday and Tuesday (Market Day) afternoons, when many of Town A's older residents shop here, and use the space for meeting and greeting. Area three is also busy on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. For these are the allocated times that Town A's residents are 'permitted' to enjoy themselves, by ritually partaking in the heavy drinking culture that defines the leisure economy of Town A, and the North-East as a region. Observe for long enough during these periods and, inevitably, you will see examples of the huge 'working class', industrial, steroid-enhanced bodies I discussed in the previous chapter walking around between pubs, or even 'standing on the doors', as they help to regulate Town A's 'night time economy' (Hobbs et al, 2003; 2005). Town A's commercial centre is somewhat deserted during weeknights, however. Indeed, the only people to be consistently seen in the Town centre on weeknights are groups of bored, desolate, angry teenage 'chavs'<sup>38</sup>; and the tortured, twisted local heroin users (or 'junkies'). Helped by Orwellian style CCTV, Town A's police patrol the area each night and provide a visual, re-assuring presence as they regulate the space.

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<sup>38</sup> Who either sit around, seemingly aimlessly, in their tracksuits, while spitting, smoking and partaking in petty vandalism or walk around menacingly, in a gang-like fashion 'on the job' (thieving, fighting and partaking in impromptu deviant behaviour).



The scarcity of people in Town A's centre on weeknights is not just due to the presence of deviant, undesirables in the space who pose a threat to public safety, but also because Town A's residents can (on the condition they have access to a car) visit and enjoy nearby 'fantasy spaces' (Hannigan, 1998) in their leisure time. Thus, Town A's residents can drive to *The Gate*<sup>39</sup>, which opened in November 2003 in a popular and accessible part of Newcastle's city centre; or *The Metro Centre*<sup>40</sup>, which is an American styled 'shopping mall' that opened in the early 1980s as a result of the vision of Sir John Hall. Hence, a proportion of Town A's residents do not just leave the Town for work, but also for play. They ritually partake in a series of 'leisure migrations', whereby they temporarily leave Town A to visit, experience and consume in 'hyper realities' (Eco, 1986), without either risk (Nye, 1981) or inconvenience.

During which time, Town A's residents can 'get their kicks' by riding Disney styled rollercoaster having merely 'driven 20 minutes down the road' (as opposed to flying to Florida or California). Residents can swagger to Brazilian music and drink *Cube Libras*, after enjoying free 'dance Latino lessons' in mock Rio bars, without even going through passport control. They can play Las Vegas styled games of poker, drink 'free drinks' and ogle at silicon enhanced barmaids, and 'still be home by midnight' (probably with less money in their pockets). They can eat in 'downtown' themed restaurants, without confronting the homelessness, criminality and paranoia that most downtowns are characterised by. Town A's contemporary residents can, therefore, undergo very different leisure experiences to their Town's predecessors by definition of their ability to frequent 'heterotopic spaces' (Foucault,

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<sup>39</sup> *The Gate* hosts an array of leisure facilities behind its giant glassed entrance, such as themed bars and restaurants; a *Tiger Tiger Nightclub* ('just like the one in London where all the celebrities go'), a multiplex cinema and a late-licensed casino which has clearly emulated the 'Vegas model'.

<sup>40</sup> The *Metro centre* exists as one of the biggest spaces of commerce in Europe; and functions as an 'edge city' (Byrne, 2001: 162; Garreau, 1992). As well as its vast array of shops, bars and eateries, the centre also contains cinemas, bowling alleys, an indoor amusement park with a rollercoaster, and specialised, indoor entertainment facilities such as 'laser quest'.



1982: 25), cheaply and easily. No wonder Town A, and its 'rough, shit, dirty pubs' are quiet at night!

Fantasy Spaces are not 'real' or 'authentic', per se. Such spaces enforce a 'uniformity in which local initiative and identity is stifled' (Hannigan: 9). However, fantasy spaces do offer experiences that are 'real' and enjoyable *enough* to ensure residents migrate from Town A, and comparable milieus all over the North east, to spend time and money consuming in them. Residents of Town A who can't visit such spaces due to either a lack of transport and /or a lack of financial resources (e.g. the Drifters, and people of their ilk) find themselves subsequently excluded from the North East's 'new, 're-branded', urban economy; which manifests in such spaces. This adds to their sense of alienation, discrimination and 'otherness', as I consider in more detail later in this work.

#### Area four

Area four is referred to as 'the ghetto' by residents of Town A. Unless one lived in area four, one would generally not venture into it (other than to 'score drugs', as a number of my participant suggested).

Physically, area four exists as a collection of vandalised but inhabited colliery houses, which are physically similar to those which exist in areas one and two. Broken windows, graffiti, abandoned cars and a sense of foreboding epitomises the space. Social problems, delinquency, intergenerational unemployment, obesity and apathy have become synonymous with the area. The ethos' and existences of many who live in the area is epitomised by the phrase 'sex, drugs and on the dole', which is a phrase that is proudly spray-painted on various walls in the area.



Area four is talked about with fear and shame by members of Town A who reside in different areas of the Town. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those that live in area four are culturally stigmatised. For they exist as Town A's 'underclass' (Wilson, 1992; Massey and Denton, 1993), or Town A's 'ghetto poor' (Byrne, 1999); as this thesis considers in more detail later. This is conducive to residents of the area feeling victimised and discriminated against; as put by one of the Drifters:

'As soon as you tell anyone that you live here (area four) they look at you and you know they're thinking, scum! A thief! They judge you before they know you cause of that association. The thing is though that we're not all bad from here ... when people say to me about getting a job, I think, even if I wanted a job I couldn't get one cause if they knew where I lived, they'd like not want me there just cause of where I'm from. It is not on man! But that is how it always will be ... just cause I'm from here doesn't mean I'm going to smash your head in and twock (steal) your car!'

Ethnographically, it became clear that residents of the space feel acutely unwanted, rejected, and often complain of the boredom and perceived injustice in their lives. Their psycho-social depression is compounded by them being all too aware of their empty, meaningless futures. During my time in the field, I also found the following statement, made by Byrne (1998:118), to be highly empirically valid to life in the space:

'Traditionally ... criticisms' (of the UK's underclass) 'have been directed against male youths, but young women do also figure ... what causes difficulties ... is the behaviour of a minority of young, never married, female single parents whose dwellings have become the base for rowdy parties and publicly displayed sexual behaviour'.

Essentially, residents of area four exist as a separate stratum of working class culture to their Town A counterparts. They live radically different lives – particularly in terms of their labour



and consumption patterns, and cultural expectations - to other Town A residents, as I go on to show. Like the community Johada et al analysed and described (1972): 'People are living here who have been accustomed to owning less, doing less, and expecting less'. Area four, and the culture it contains and enables, complies with the disadvantaged, homogenous account of working class life given by Charlseworth (2000).

Wilson, 1987 (in Byrne, 2001: 127) demonstrates how 'the interaction of de-industrialisation and racism is creating a black poor' in the USA. This black poor 'are separated not only from whites but from the black middle class'. Similarly, it seems that the onset of globalisation and de-industrialisation is creating a 'white poor' in contemporary British working class society. This white poor are separated not just from 'middleclass', 'mainstream', media-purveyed culture, but also, I argue in this work, from other ('embourgeoised' and 'traditional') working class cultures. Unemployed – consensually or otherwise – Town A's white poor violate the very work ethic that working class life is founded upon; and also lack the commodities that are needed to assert ones' worth in our material, consumption-based society (Zukin, 2004). Useless and burdensome, they are rejected – even ignored - by wider, 'employed', 'respectable' society. They live in and from their ghetto-enclaves, as an autonomous and somewhat reviled sub-group. They are spatially as well as socially ostracised. Their reliance on unemployment benefits will have typically been 'passed down', or 'inherited' by them; for they are often products of inter-generational unemployment, and the 'begging bowl' mentality it fosters. Statistically, their social mobility is highly unlikely.

Four of the five 'Drifters' analysed in this work live in area four. They are somewhat stereotypically representative of the areas' perceived and actual culture. Yet, their physical frames differentiate them from the 'lazy', 'obese', 'worthless' stereotypical accusations that others who reside here are branded with. As I go on to show, the Drifters' bodies – which function as the only real commodities in their stigmatised existences – and interactions with



Gym D play a seminal part in their existences and identities, and go some way in alleviating the depression, anomie, alienation and (inverse) commodity fetishism they ordinarily endure as part of their stigmatised existences. None of the other taxonomies of working class life identified and analysed in this work reside in the space.

Six of the Traditionalist participants analysed in my sample were ‘brought up’ in the area (albeit at a time when its ghetto nature was being established, and had not then been fully formed to its current extent). These individuals are justifiably proud and relieved to have left the space. Interestingly, of the six who left, four are now millionaires or approaching being millionaires, having actually or ostensibly made money ‘from property’ (i.e. ‘doing up houses and selling them on’). All of these participants attribute their success to ‘having nout’ (nothing) when growing up; and view their childhoods in the area as important ‘journeys’ in their development. The fact that these individuals all migrated from area four once they had the chance to do so - rather than stay and re-shape their lives in the space - says much about the space’s stigmatised and unpleasant nature.

### Area Five

Town A’s hospital was opened in June 1993. The hospital ‘employs around 2,000 staff’; and ‘deals with some 24,000 inpatients, 21,000 outpatients, 14,000 day cases and 36,000 emergence attendees each year’<sup>41</sup>.

Area five is a derivative of Town A’s hospital, and consists of brand new, spacious houses that were built for, and are now predominantly occupied by the hospital’s medical professionals and paraprofessionals; who can afford to live in houses that offer a level of extravagance, luxury and space that is unknown to, and probably envied by, many residents in Town A.

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted from the National Health Service’s website: [www.northumbria.nhs.uk/page.asp?id=232794](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk/page.asp?id=232794).



Area five's houses are detached and offer gardens. They are as close to idyllic suburbia as one can get in Town A: white picket fences, expensive cars, smooth roads and a focused, friendly order define this space. The area also has its own security force. This ensures that residents of the space feel safe while practising their medical careers, and also re-enforces the spaces' elitist status.

The consensus among the participants I researched is that those living in area five are rarely, if ever seen in Town A's shops, bars, etc, and are completely absent from Gym D. It can be assumed that the residents of area five socialise in entirely different spaces to others in the Town; probably in and around Newcastle City Centre and the 'fantasy' postmodern spaces referred to earlier (Hannigan, 1998). It is also assumed by my participants that many of the medical professionals who reside in the area only use their houses on a temporary basis; i.e. to eat and sleep in between hospital shifts before returning to their 'real' houses in other areas. However, in reality, this space is not simply a 'sleeping area' for medics, but a place of residence for some of the hospitals' nurses and paraprofessional. As well as a place of residence - along with area eight - for a proportion of Town A's burgeoning army of post-industrial workers; who will become an increasingly significant part of Town A's embourgeoised, 'commuter town' culture and function in and over the next twenty years, as this thesis' conclusion considers in detail. None of the participants researched in this thesis live in area five (although the Changers' are representative of the culture and lived experiences that many other men of their generation adhere to in this area).

### Areas Six and Seven

Area six houses Town A's two high schools, and a small shopping district.

Area seven consists of some abandoned colliery houses, allotment spaces and playing fields. It is inevitable that area seven will, shortly, become part of Town A's rapidly expanding area



eight; and thus soon be used to house newly constructed houses, as part of Town A's ongoing cultural and architectural 'gentrification' and emergence as a commuter Town.

Apart from the teachers', school-children and retired allotment attendees who routinely frequent the area, the spaces are somewhat forgotten and abandoned; particularly in the evenings and during the school-holiday periods, when the few shops that exist in the space, which usually survive by 'selling food to schoolys' (school children), are temporarily closed.

### Area Eight

Area eight is a rapidly expanding collection of new, 'posh' detached or semi-detached, 3 -6 bedroom houses. The houses have all been built in a similar or identical style. The houses are replicas of each other: homogenous, standardised and 'McDonaldised' (Ritzer, 2000). The creation and expansion of area eight's houses began about ten years ago, and has been occurring consistently every since. Area eight is commonly referred to as 'the top end' of Town A; which is both a geographical and financial reference to the space. For the houses here are more expensive than anywhere else in the Town, apart from area five. Many current residents of areas one and two aspire to live here.

Area eight houses a new form of working class life: many of the houses' occupants work in the North East's post-industrial economy. Thus area eight essentially houses a post-industrial proletariat, who use their 'swanky' houses (as opposed to terraced houses) as places to commute from, so as to partake in their white-collar 'careers'. They are a direct contrast to the industrial proletariat that Town A was formed though, for and around. They are also a contrast to the 'ghettoised' and 'traditional' modes of working class life exemplified in areas one, two and four. Architecturally and culturally, this area represents Town A's physical 'gentrification'.



Metaphorically speaking, if the 'old', terraced, colliery housing of areas one and two represents the 'old fashioned' lives and ethos of those who live in them, while the neglect and marginalisation of area four reflects the neglected and marginalised existences of its residence, then the houses in area eight reflect the homogeneity, modernism and uniformity that defines many of their residents' lives and minds.

In terms of my sample, five of the seven Changers' live in area eight; none of the Drifters' do. Seven of the Traditionalists' live here. These Traditionalists' moved to the space within the last five years, having previously lived in areas one or two. Interestingly, all of the seven Traditionalists who have 'relocated' to area eight mentioned that life is 'easier' and thus, in a sense, 'better' in their new, bigger houses, but also expressed that their move had 'come at a cost'. For the sense of community that they enjoyed when living in areas one and two is absent here. There is, apparently, an element of snobbery implicit in area eight; as demonstrated in the following comments elicited from the wife of a Traditionalist participant, who recently relocated here:

'I don't like the people here as much as I did (in area two). The house is bigger and it's nice to have a garden, like life is easier and I suppose there is some status with living here. But that comes at a cost ... I often go back to where I used to live (area two) for a party or just to see some of the old people; and I always say, I wish I hadn't moved, this is my home really. They say, I'd love to live where you do, and I say, nah you wouldn't! This (area two) is where I feel happier ... around there (area eight) people are much snobbier. Where I used to live people would bring me washing in if it was raining. Here, they look at your washing to see what you're wearing! Some people here are not like proper (names Town A) people. I think they look down on me and some of the others who moved here; and like they're always having a go at me kids cause they're fucking wild. And they're just kicking the ball around outside in the street,



which is what all the kids do back home, all day, playing football and being kids. But most of the time they (her children) go back and play in (area two) anyway ... So, it is not like the family feeling we had there here’.

If terraced houses represent and are conducive to close, intimate ties between residents - as terraced houses were found to be in my research and Cohen’s seminal work on community in the East End of London in the 1960s - then detached houses appear to encourage detached, estranged human bonds. It seems that working class neighbours go from being extended kinship to competitors and rivals, when those neighbours live in detached housing.

We have seen that those who reside in Town A’s ghetto (area 4) are stigmatised and seen as Town A’s cultural ‘other’, primarily on account of their (often rightly) presumed anti-work ethics, dependency upon state-provided benefits; and subsequent position as Town A’s ‘true aliens’ (Merton, 1968). Interestingly, my data also suggests that a level of cultural stigmatisation occurs in area 8 of Town A, as I now consider.

In area 8, there are two kinds of residents: firstly, there are those residents who are ‘from’ Town A (i.e. those who were born and raised in Town A or nearby) and who have moved to area 8, typically from areas 1 and 2, as a result of their improved financial situations, and subsequent social mobility. Secondly, there are those who have not lived in Town A before finding themselves living in area 8, but who now reside in Town A to either ‘get on the property ladder’ or to take advantage of the areas’ lower house-prices. (Such residents know that they would have to pay a considerable amount more for a comparable house in a near-by, more ‘fashionable’ Town). It is between these two groups that a tension, which is specific to area 8, exists.

The latter of the two groups discussed above (i.e. those who are not ‘from’ Town A but who now live in area 8) have a tendency, according to my research, to ‘look down’ upon their



Town A native neighbours, who they seem to think of as having a 'lower human value' (Elias and Scotson, 1994: xxi) than themselves. Although the two group's incomes, houses, lifestyles, religious beliefs (or lack thereof), skin colours, accents and other indicators of 'class' are similar if not identical, the latter group – who are appraised by one of my Traditional participants living in area 8 as being 'posh bastards who read the *Daily Mail*, and look down on everybody else and act like the queen, all snooty ... but who are really just fucking sheep that follow the system and can't afford to live somewhere posh' - believe they are 'better' than the former. Hence, the area's 'new' residents have:

'developed as weapons an "ideology", a system of attitudes and beliefs which stress and justify their own superiority and which stamp' (others, i.e. residents of the area from Town A) 'as people of an inferior kind' (Elias and Scotson, 1994: 18).

According to the data I elicited, it seems that this stigmatisation is founded, primarily, upon the sort of employment one practices. In general those who are from Town A and who now live in area 8 as a result of their upward social mobility have made their money 'using their hands'. Their social mobility is a product of their performing artisan work in a post-industrial economy. In contrast, those who have migrated to area 8, perhaps reluctantly, from other places tend to perform 'office work' or service jobs, such as police work. Although both typologies of life are, in truth, part of a mass post-modern proletariat, it seems that those in white-collar jobs 'look down' on those who 'work with their hands', and who have afforded their houses and mobility through 'hard', 'old fashioned' graft (work), as opposed to post-industrial labour.

Elias and Scotson's (1994) work on social divisions in the Winston Parva area show that 'old, established' residents objected to newcomers ('outsiders') moving in to their community; to thereby secularise and dilute their customs. In area 8 of Town A, it seems that



the opposite is occurring. Those who are ‘new’ to Town A are eschewing the Town’s ‘older’, established residents, their ways of life and their identities. In my conclusion, I will return to this conflict, as part of my speculations regarding the future of Town A life.

### Area Nine

Area Nine is a business park, located on the outskirts of Town A. Area nine was constructed in 2004, having been ‘thought-up’ and funded by Wansbeck Council. The business park is built upon a former colliery. Its location is, presumably, meant to symbolise Town A’s switch from an industrial to a post-industrial economy and way of life.

The business park consists of ‘managed work space’; by which I mean office space and facilities that can be rented by external clients, who will conduct their business from the spaces. The excellent road links and proximity to Newcastle Upon Tyne, which is only fifteen miles south of Town A, acts as a main selling point for the business park.

A significant proportion of the park’s spaces stand empty. There is ‘simply no need for them’, according to a young lady who I met serendipitously one day to discover that her former job had been to advertise and let out the spaces. Seemingly, the business park was a speculative and hopeful, yet unsuccessful attempt on the part of the local council to create employment in the area, and raise the town’s profile as a ‘business environment’ suitable for entrepreneurial activity.

### Area Ten

Area ten houses a purpose-built (*Asda*) supermarket that is open twenty-four hours a day. It sells both food and clothes. A petrol station that boasts competitive fuel prices is also located here; as is a *McDonald’s* fast-food restaurant and drive-through. Two multi-national car ownerships have also opened ‘around the back’ of this expanding, modern space, which is



dominated and enabled by the huge car-park that exists between and for these places of commerce; and which allows visitors to partake in the 'park and shop' philosophy that suits mobile, contemporary consumers so readily. At night, the car park is monopolised by 'boy racers', who tend to eat fast-food from *McDonalds*, while listening to dance music in their vehicles before driving off to other destinations, presumably to race each other.

Area Ten can be seen as Town A's second place of commerce. By definition of the areas' newness, it offers a significantly more global, modern and 'McDonaldised' (Ritzer, 2000) shopping experience than the Town A's commercial centre, and the aged 'glocal' shops and facilities there.

### Chapter Summary

Chapter four has introduced readers to the 'urban geography' of Town A. It has been demonstrated that contemporary Town A consists of nine spatial areas. Town A's differing and essentially segregated spaces enable, house and even metaphor the three different 'modes' of working class life that have co-evolved, and now co-exist in Town A. Hence, Town A's 'underclass' are housed in Town A's ghetto. While Town A's 'traditional', mining culture is retained in its old colliery houses, in areas one and two; in which a sense of 'old fashioned community' and kinship is still exemplified. Simultaneously, a 'new' form of working class life in Town A - which has, as a rule, assimilated into the region's post-industrial economy, and who personify an 'embourgeoised' form of working class existence - exist in Town A's growing area eight, which contains 'modern', respectable housing.

While Town A changes sociologically, culturally and economically by definition of the onset of post-industrialism and globalisation changing the locality and its populace, it is important to recognise how the Town's urban geography facilitates and enables such change. Town A's contrasting spaces do not just contain their own forms of working class life, and create



divisions between them. They also impose a discernable ‘habitus’ upon their localised residents’, which condition residents’ lives, minds, paths and perceptions; almost to the point of stereotype. Thus, Town A’s spatially varied nature accounts for its cultural variegation.

The integral relationship between a de-industrialised areas’ changing human culture and changing urban culture has not been emphasised in literature ‘on’ de-industrialisation to this point. I hope chapter four has gone some way in highlighting how necessary the exploration of this relationship is, if a de-industrialised locality is to be analysed completely. One should not separate the cultural from the physical it takes place within. Accordingly, I advocate and encourage others to replace the sociological accounts provided by the Chicago school scholars, which rightfully treat and explore the ‘urban’ and the ‘cultural’ monastically.

Chapter four concludes the *Context and Problems* section of this thesis, which aimed to ‘set the scene’ for readers of this work, both *culturally* and *epistemologically*. Ideally readers will now have a sense of space relating to Town A, and understand what it is about depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism, body-modification and masculinity that this work hopes to investigate and elucidate. I now endeavour to ‘set the scene’ of this thesis further, in section two of this thesis, by explaining the *methodological* related issues and processes that I encountered and considered when researching this thesis (in chapter 5); before providing readers with an insight into the space and internal culture of Gym D in chapter 6.



## **Section Two:**

### **Methodological Related Issues and Processes**



## Chapter 5:

### Fieldwork: Interviews, Ethnography and Objectivity

#### Chapter Overview

Chapter 5 aims to discuss the ‘fieldwork’ that I conducted to support and inform this thesis. Chapter 5 considers how and why I induced ‘phenomenological data’ from my participants; and demonstrates the harmonious ‘fit’ that exists between my (field) research methods, and my (epistemological) research aims. Chapter 5 also introduces readers to the narrative, or story of my fieldwork; as well as the methodological issues, contradictions processes and ethicalities that arose by definition of my time ‘in the field’.

Structurally, I begin chapter five by defining what I understand the notion of phenomenology to be; and by illustrating how and why my research is a product of the phenomenological tradition. Chapter 5 then discusses the qualitative interviews and the ethnographic based research processes that I conducted ‘in the field’ in detail; before addressing the question of how objective the data that I elicited methodologically can be seen as being, given my ‘local’ links and affinity with Town A, Gym D and my participants. I complete this chapter by considering how ethical my research is.

Methodologically, this thesis is a derivative of the phenomenological tradition. It is, therefore, necessary to begin this chapter by clarifying what I, and others, understand ‘phenomenology’ to be.

Building upon the Germanic concept of *Erleben* (Van Manen, 2002), phenomenology was developed in the early 1900s by Edmund Husserl, who defined phenomenology as being ‘the reflective study of the essence of consciousness from the first-person point of view’. The phenomenological project thus began as a process and philosophical position that aimed to consider how people consciously attribute meaning to their world and existences. It sought to understand how individuals, or groups of individuals, perceive their own lives, or specific components of their lives. It is the ‘meaning’ that agents’ in society ascribe to their existences which represented ‘episteme’, or valid knowledge, for Husserl.



Alfred Schutz, having been influenced by the Weberian notion of *Verstehen*, advanced the ‘social-scientific’ (as distinct from purely philosophical) phenomenological tradition; via the infamous assertion (1972: 59) that:

‘The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not ‘mean’ anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist – social reality – has a specific meaning and relevance for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it ... it is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behaviour by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp their social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men ... living their daily life within the social world’.

Schutz’s position affirms the idea that ‘social reality’ – the very thing sociologists try and make sense of – is only ‘relevant’ and ‘meaningful’ when it is analysed and understood from the point of view of those actively embedded in the social reality being analysed. From this position, social reality is – phenomenologically speaking - whatever it seems to be for those in the cultural context in question (rather than what it seems to be, according to the social scientist). Social reality is thus not intrinsically ‘real’ or bound by necessary rules as the natural sciences are, but only ‘real in its context’; i.e. real according to the contexts, perspectives and attributions of meanings that its ‘free-thinking’ members consciously ascribe to it. Hence, culture and society - and the complexities such create - has to be understood from the perspective of its ‘free-thinking’ agents. (The job of the Sociologist is thereby to contextualise the views of those in society, in a way that constructs insights, arguments and empirically informed generalisations).

Phenomenology – having subsequently been discussed most notably by Luckmann and Berger (1966) – remains, concisely, ‘a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how



individuals make sense of the world around them' (Bryman, 2000: 14). As put by Rojek (1995: 104):

'phenomenological sociologists study everyday experience and ordinary life. They are interested in how people construct meaning and negotiate social interaction'.

The point of 'applied' contemporary, phenomenological investigation such as this thesis remains twofold. Firstly, it aims to elicit data from (the consciousnesses of) individuals 'in society', about how those individuals make sense of their lived experience, or a specific element of their lived experience. Secondly, it then aims to present arguments and findings 'on' the cultural anomalies in question, which are based upon and supported by the reflexive and subjective 'first person points of views' and experiences 'of others' (i.e. the consciousnesses of 'agents') in society.

As a phenomenologist, I researched this work on the premise that if I manage to elicit my participants' views on *their* depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishisms, body-modification and masculinities, then I would necessarily elicit 'empirically valid' data, or episteme, on those dialectics; i.e. data that reflects the subjective ways that these social phenomena are experienced and understood by the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' cross-comparatively. In turn, eliciting such data would allow me to present empirically informed arguments which are 'grounded' in my participants' relative experiences, habitus' and attributions of meaning. Accordingly, my participants' views 'on' the dialectics being researched here constitute 'the perfect type of sociological material'<sup>42</sup>. My methodological focus was, therefore, always upon eliciting my participants' first person points' of views (i.e. my participants' conscious opinions, experiences, life-histories, autobiographies etc) 'in the field'. Concurrently, my ontological focus expressed 'a commitment to viewing ... the social

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas and Znaniecki: 56.



worlds' (of Gym D and Town A) 'through the eyes of' my participants' ... 'rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world' (Bryman, 2001: 277). Hence, this research follows the *Verstehende* ontological position that several other contemporary, phenomenological ethnographers have adopted successfully, such as Fielding (1982) who researched the National Front and its politically far-right members; Taylor (1993) who analysed female heroin users; and Armstrong (1993) who elicited data on Sheffield United's 'football firm'. Like Fielding, Taylor and Armstrong's work, this thesis gives a sociological account that is impartially rooted in the perspective of its participants (i.e. those involved in the anomalies in question), rather than through the eyes of its researcher.

In an attempt to elicit and understand my participants' phenomenological, first person points of views and subsequently present 'grounded', informed arguments and findings, I researched this thesis qualitatively and dualistically: primarily through a series of qualitative interviews that I conducted on a sample of 42 participants who live in Town A and work-out in Gym D; and secondarily via an ethnographic approach, through which I observed and interacted with my participants in Gym D (see chapter 6) and some of the other spaces that they frequent in their leisure time (e.g. bars, nightclubs, strip clubs, shopping centres etc). It is to these two methodological approaches that this chapter now turns its attention.

### Qualitative Interviews

As stated, I conducted loosely structured qualitative interviews 'upon' each of the 42 participants analysed in this work, in the hope of understanding my subjects' points of view<sup>43</sup>, and the reflexive 'frames of meaning' they ascribe to their realities.

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<sup>43</sup> Guided by publications such as Maxwell, 1992; and Merton et al, 1990.



The qualitative interviews were ‘flexible but controlled’ (Burgess, 1982: 107) in that the interviews were ‘led’ and structured by a number of open-ended questions that I formulated and used during a pilot study between October 2006 and December 2006<sup>44</sup>; yet the interviews were not ‘led’ or regulated to the point that my participants’ replies and answers were rigid, suppressed and not ‘open’ or elaborative enough to be truly representative of their opinions. Indeed, there was a balance between ‘natural’, spontaneous discussion (given by my participants) and focused, topic-specific, open questions (asked by myself).

Before conducting my interviews, I realised that I must not allow my participants to ‘go off’ on unfocused rambles about their ‘depression’ and ‘gym lives’: both of which are topics that my participants would be happy to talk about at lengths if allowed in an unstructured manner. Instead – obviously - I wanted to gain insights/data from my participants that directly relate to this work’s epistemological aims. Thus, I ensured that all of the questions I asked were answered in a way that allowed me to elicit the type of data I needed (i.e. data on the topics in question). Yet I also encouraged my participants - not that some could be stopped from doing so - to ‘go off on tangents’, ‘within reason’, when discussing the issues in hand (flexible). This sense of freedom aided our rapport, and proved both insightful as a means of collecting data.

Hence, I asked my participants:

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<sup>44</sup> I had planned, before beginning this PhD in January 07, to make this research cross-comparative; allowing for a comparison between the cultural context of Town A and the Santa Monica and Venice Beach area of Los Angeles to be made. Consequently, I had asked these questions to body-modifiers in Southern California (before I asked them again to users of Gym D) between October 06 and January 07 in what can now be seen as a pilot study. I received positive feedback and ‘valid data’ in the pilot study, and did, expectedly, again in Town A for this study. The sheer amount of data that I received from my Town A and Southern Californian participants’ collectively meant that I could not present a cross-comparative account in this thesis, in mind of this PhD’s word-limit. Nonetheless, I believe such cross-comparative research would prove insightful sociologically, and I would like to be given the opportunity to conduct such research in the future, at the post-doc level.



‘a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but’ (I was) ‘... able to vary the sequence of questions’. The questions’ I asked were purposefully ‘somewhat more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a structured interview schedule’. As an interviewer I had ‘some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies’ (Bryman, 2001: 110).

As predicted and explored by Bryman (2001: 142), the main advantages of ‘researching’ this way included that:

- 1) My participants were able to answer in their own ‘terms’ and argot; and in their own time.
- 2) Often unusual (yet honest) responses were derived
- 3) My participants’ knowledge was qualitatively ‘tapped’
- 4) I saw my participants’ and their views as they are, not as I think they ought to be.

Upon completing the interviews, I had an abundance of phenomenological data which represents the ‘frames of meaning’ (Agar, 1986) that my participants’ assign to their everyday cultural realities as working class men in Town A and who use Gym D. Thus, methodologically, I obtained Schemata from the interviews (Agar and Hobbs, 1985). I elicited and considered the ‘folk model’ of my participants’ minds<sup>45</sup>; and made the sources of my participants’ depression, and the meaning of their bodies and body-modification ‘visible’ (Dabbs, 1982), explicit, comparable and analysable. I induced descriptive, primary ‘grounded’ data in a way similar to that articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Upon completing my interviews and receiving my participants’ reflexive views, I was able to analyse<sup>46</sup> the data that was ‘passed on’ to me (Miles and Huberman, 1994); and present cohesive arguments on ‘*depression, anomie, alienation, commodity fetishism and body-*

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<sup>45</sup> D’Andrade, 1987 in Holland and Quinn (Eds).

<sup>46</sup> See Miles and Huberman (1994); Wolcott, H. (1994).



*modification*’ in Town A which are based on ‘the concrete empirical experiences of real human beings’ (Bauman, 1997: 83); and which reflect the nature of life in Town A from the perspectives of its body-modifying members.

A template of the qualitative interviews that I conducted upon my participants is presented in *Appendix A* of this work. It is up to individual readers as to whether they want to look at this template now, or at a later point.

The qualitative interviews took place between January 2007 and October 2007. Every interview but one<sup>47</sup> took place in a coffee shop near Gym D. I arranged to meet my participants’ in the coffee shop either before or after their training sessions. Each interview took between one and two hours to complete. I recorded the homological interviews, and the ‘natural’, ‘primary data’ they yielded, on a Dictaphone with my participants’ verbal consent. Significantly, none of the participants’ whom I interviewed had any knowledge of the theories considered in this work: they merely had a localised, idiomatic understanding of the notion of depression; and reflexive views on their sadness and its existential causes (Eder, 1993). This meant that my participants answered the questions in a sociologically ‘raw’ and open way; based only on their first-hand cultural, phenomenological experiences; uninfluenced by the theoretical, epistemological model at play in this work.

Methodologically, I needed to gather a pool of participants to interview. In order to encourage users of Gym D to ‘come forward’ and ‘be interviewed’ I initially put up a poster on a notice board in Gym D, which encouraged body-modifying volunteers to come forward ‘to be questioned on life and training’, thereby giving me a sample of working class, body-

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<sup>47</sup> The other interview occurred in my house.



modifying males' to analyse. This proved fruitless, to the extent that I was concerned during this research's early stages that I would not retrieve any direct, voluntarily given data from Gym D's community. Eventually, to my relief, word of mouth spread in Gym D's tightly knit community (that 'we're being researched for science'); which lead to a snowballing interest in my research emerging in Gym D. This interest was directly aided by C's<sup>48</sup> insistence to his Gym's users that 'you should help the kid oot (out) and speak to him'. Within a month of the poster going up, I had plenty of people willing and volunteering, to be questioned. Most of whom knew me already 'by face if not by name'.

Upon completing my research, I still had users of the gym who I had not interviewed asking if they could be questioned. Presumably, being interviewed became fashionable and appealing. Some of the participants' I researched continued to contact me for up to a year after my interview period had elapsed, either to ask me for advice in light of their different problems, or insist that they be interviewed again ('in case I forgot anything last time'). My time in the field affirmed how much people love to talk about themselves and their experiences. Especially when the people in question are (often) 'pissed off' body-modifiers and the topic of discussion is their bodies, their gym training and what causes them to be unhappy.

My time in the field also demonstrated the extent to which 'social reality' is never real 'inherently'. Rather, social reality – I learned - is only 'real' from the perspective of its members'. Indeed, much of what my participants said to me 'in the field' is tinged with what I interpreted as 'imaginary' perceptions, and levels of exaggeration bordering on unintentional deception. Yet, my participants' understanding of life and body-modification is 'genuine to them'; or phenomenologically 'real in its context'. In this sense, much of my participants' reflexive views and comments are 'imaginary but not imagined' (Jenkins, 2002).

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<sup>48</sup> Gym D's owner.



The open-ended, phenomenological approach described above allowed for the complexity, subjectivity and ‘imagined’ nature of my participants’ ‘depression’ and body-modification to be appreciated and considered fully in this work. Before beginning this work, I had not realised just how subjective the causes and experiential nature of a person’s melancholy is; nor had I realised the extent to which different people view their bodies and body-modification relatively and contrastingly within Gym D. Had I not adopted a phenomenological approach in this research, I would have failed to appreciate such. My participants’ use of steroids illustrates this point well.

Steroid use can have somewhat dramatic affects on ones’ mood and well-being, as well as upon ones’ physical body. As put by Uzych (1999:23):

‘steroids may result in significant adverse psychiatric effects and behavioural changes (and) some of these effects may result in violent ... behaviour’.

Accordingly, the term ‘roid rage’ (see Monaghan, 2001) has, in both popular culture and body-modifying contexts, become a frequent way of referring to the short-temperedness and often violent outbursts that steroid users, with their elevated testosterone levels, typically display. As put by one of my participants:

‘when you have that much extra testosterone floating around your body’ (due to steroid use) ‘you’re not just going to feel good and horny and grow, you’re also going to want to fight and you find it hard to hold your tongue’ (keep quiet). ‘It is just natural. You think the cavemen were nice guys? Were they fuck, they lived on their testosterone, and this stuff (holds a Dinabol Tablet) makes me like those ... when they had fucking lions running at them, they didn’t say oh, well, I’ll die now. They thought fuck this, I’ll fight the bastard... don’t ever think we’re anything but animals running on what makes us men’ (testosterone).



I assumed, a-priori, that the ‘roid rage’ that exists among my sample of Gym D’s users would truly deteriorate the quality of their lives: from their fellow men; from their (species) selves and even from their commodity bodies. I also assumed that the (objectively) debilitating physiological effects of steroid - such as testicle shrinkage, loss of hair and acne – that some of my participants endure would also afflict their conscious states, and cause them a level of steroid induced, steroid specific depression.

Ethnographically, however, I found that ‘roid rage’ - and some of the other afflictions steroid use creates – is enjoyed by a proportion of my participants’. Instead of being seen as either a source of depression, or a ‘trade off’ for the physiological gains steroid use prompts, the ‘problems’ caused by steroid use are celebrated by certain members of my sample. Indeed, they perceive such ‘problems’ as indicative of the fact that the steroids they are using are of a ‘good’ standard; and of the desired quality. Indeed, if the steroids that some of my participants take do not induce such ‘depressing’ side-effects, then my participants will be disappointed, and may even ask for their money back; in the belief that what they have ‘scored’ is counterfeit. This sentiment is demonstrated in the following anecdote told by a Drifter. Although the anecdote is almost unbelievable, it does illustrate how many individuals in my sample essentially expect their ‘gear’ (steroids) to be strong, and thus conducive to behaviours and feats which are somewhat superhuman in their eyes (although, at best, deviant from the perspective of ‘civil society’):

‘I was in this police car the other night ... I got pigged (arrested) for scrapping (fighting) ... and they had the handcuffs on me ... cause it took four of the bastards to pin me down. I was wild off the gear (a mixture of steroids and ecstasy, which was taken on the night) and the drink (alcohol). I felt as strong as an ox. Like I could take on the world. The gear (steroids) had me knowing – not thinking but fucking knowing – that I could



rip the handcuffs off us. So I did. I just pushed with all I could and I snapped the chain on the cuffs. Bang, they came flying off. Strong as a fucking ox. But I was so raged up by that point that I thought, fuck this. The steroids had us mad, and I was feeling like a fucking gladiator. So I just started smashing the top of the car. Punching it and shouting. The coppers were fucking shitting themselves. They must have thought, who is this cunt? He's snapped his cuffs and now he's about to put his hands through the top of wor (our) car. (participant laughs and looks around to see who is listening). I was smashing the fucking van around ... telling ya, that gear was good stuff. Cause it made me mind strong as well as me arms ... I knew that this box (of steroids) was not fake stuff (i.e. not counterfeit), like some people sell, needles with vitamins in, instead of with gear (steroids) inside! But not that stuff'.

My research approach thus allowed me to elicit and consider data that takes the subjective nature of depression, and the relativity of its cultural causes into account. My approach also allowed me to understand how subcultural and subculturally 'informed' certain elements of body-modification are (e.g. steroid use); as well as the convoluted, overlapping relationship that exists between my participants' body-modification and wider psychosocial existences. Significantly, a quantitative, statistical and non-phenomenological research-approach would not have enabled this. I thus suggest that future research of this nature adopts a phenomenological approach at its core, and thereby emulates the phenomenological approaches established towards investigating body-modification (e.g. Klein, 1993; Drummond, 2004) and working class life (Charlesworth, 2000) that has been established by others'.



## Ethnography

In an attempt to methodologically ‘compliment’ the qualitative interviews I conducted and substantiate the quality of the data I elicited ‘in the field’, I conducted ‘impressionistic’ (Van Maanen, 1988: 103) ethnographic research. It is to this component of my fieldwork that I now turn my attention.

Because my ontological emphasis was, from the outset of this research, always upon eliciting the reflexive views and opinions of my participants through semi-structured interviews, my (polemically subjective) participant observations were of secondary importance within my fieldwork. I used my ethnographic data to support or affirm my qualitative interviews, rather than as a primary source of data collection. Hence:

‘my more informal fieldwork observations’ were ‘used to flesh out a study which rests largely on detailed interviews, in the way on ‘incidents’ and ‘excerpts’ from daily life’ (Pearson, 1993: ix)

Nonetheless, despite its secondary methodological utilisation, readers should not underestimate how helpful, enlightening or enjoyable the ethnographic component of this research turned out to be.

My ethnography meant that I spent an abundance of time in Gym D, where I trained at least once a day most days for a year and a half as an observer; and most days thereafter as a ‘normal user’ of the gym, albeit with my eyes and ears scanning the gym and its members for any sociologically relevant behaviours and insights during this work’s ‘writing-up’ phase.

Early on in my work, I realised that I had to train in Gym D at different times of the day to observe the different participant groups which exist in my sample: for, as I go on to consider, Gym D sees different strata of working class males utilise it at different times of the day.



Accordingly, I had to structure my ethnographic observations around the lives and movements of the participants I researched, and participant groups (the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists') I identified. My ethnography also meant that I frequented the places which my participants visit during their leisure time as 'one of the lads' (e.g. bars, clubs, shopping centres etc; and the other spaces where working class men find themselves). Doing so meant that I 'lived' this research firsthand. This was further conducive to me understanding my participants' and their contrasting existences 'from their points of views', in line with the notion of *Verstehen*.

The process of conducting my ethnography was enjoyable, straightforward, and in harmony with the below description:

'In the simplest terms ... participant observation is carried out when the sociologist enters the field to observe at close hand 'how it works'. He withdraws periodically to his research base to set down his observations and conversations and draw from them conclusions about the nature of the phenomenon he has been studying.' (Roberts: 244 in Hall et al).

I used my parents' conservatory - which is built on the back of a terraced house near Town A – as a 'base'. The conservatory acted as my residency during my fieldwork, and the space in which I wrote and thought about the majority of this thesis. The conservatory was also the space in which I consumed and 'loaded up' on the many carbohydrates and proteins that I required when conducting this research, so as to sustain my physique and energy levels in light of all the extra hours that I spent training/observing in Gym D. Physically, I gained over two stones of muscle while conducting my ethnography, and bulked up to be one of the biggest 'natural' (non-steroid) users of Gym D.



From my 'base, I was able to live something of a double-life. Only an hour away from Town A is the city of Durham, in which I lived my second life by teaching in the University, tutoring at *St. John's College* and touching-base with my PhD's supervisors. This second life prevented me from 'going native', and was conducive to me retaining ethnographic objectivity, and my sanity, during the course of this research. Thus, I straddled two very different social worlds during this research: my 'university life' and my Town A life. One Friday night, I ran to catch a late train back from Durham having spent most of the evening discussing politics with my students over a 'formal dinner', to meet some of my more volatile participants for a 'proper lashing' (drinking session) and some 'mackem bashing' (i.e. the intimidating of people who were merely suspected of supporting Sunderland football Club) in Newcastle city centre. It was on this night that I fully realised how truly caught between the two worlds of this research I had become. Yet, how did I become instated – or reinstated as the case was – within Gym D's community, and my sample of participants? I now turn to this question.

#### Access, rapport and 'Frasier fucking Crane'

As this chapter goes on to explain in more detail, I first used Gym D when I was a teenager. I continued to train in Gym D for a number of years before moving away from Town A, for the purposes of study, travel and work. When I moved back to Town A to complete this research, I knew that I had to become re-instated with Gym D's community if I was to elicit what I needed - namely, grounded phenomenological data - and if I was understand my participants' lives ethnographically. I could no longer be, as I initially was when I began my fieldwork, 'that lad who used to train here before ganning doon sooth (going down south)'. Instead, I had to become another 'everyday' body-modifier who used Gym D; another 'regular'; and thus someone who could be trusted. Yet I also had to be someone 'who was there to be talked to'. I had to become 'the lad that is writing the book about us who interviews us', as distinct



from another body-modifier ‘on the scene’ and part of the Gym D community. Over time, I managed to become all I needed to be: a local ethnographer (‘one of ‘us’) who ‘you could talk to about life’, but - crucially from an ethnographic perspective - one with enough ‘distance’ to research ‘us’ appropriately; for ‘distance is necessarily in order to be able to perceive’ (Plessner: 208) sociologically, and analyse culture impartially.

As I hoped, spending time with my participants’ in Gym D allowed me to (re-)gain rapport with them, and subsequently elicit truthful, heartfelt – sometimes even therapeutic – data from them in our interviews, and the spaces my ethnography took me. This rapport meant that over time, I became something of the gym’s counsellor! I heard secrets, received confessions, and got at times distressing insights into my participants’ melancholy, even when I did not ask about or want to know about such. I became perceived of and referred to as ‘the Frasier fucking Crane’ of Gym D. Accordingly, I could relate to Ditton’s comments (1977: 17), who stated that he ‘sometimes ... felt like I was doing research on my own family’; such was the nature of the ‘close’, family-like bond I experienced in the field.

As with all research, the question of how objective and scientifically rigorous the data that forms this thesis is needs to be addressed. Not only was I ‘close’ to my participants socially; I was also born in town A, and lived near the town until the age of eighteen. Further, I played football for Town A until the age of sixteen; and also became involved in a ‘serious relationship’ with a ‘Town A Lass’ during the course of this research. (She is now my fiancée). I was, therefore, and to a point still am a ‘product’ of Town A. My formative years were spent being moulded by the Town’s cultural norms, conventions and institutions; meaning that I was ‘conditioned’ by its (or more specifically one of its) ‘habitus’, which I understand, following Bourdieu (1990: 53) to be:

‘The conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed



to act as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively regulated and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules’.

It is a platitude sometimes forgotten in the social sciences that research must be conducted by a neutral observer, who can investigate an empirical context - and the voices which resonate from and about that empirical context – impartially, and without bias or emotive inclination. Given that I am an exigency of Town A’s habitus, and both a user and ‘fan’ of Gym D, it is, polemically, a methodological contradiction for me to conduct this research. If one ‘one must be alien to the zone’ (of analysis) ‘in order to be able to see it’ (Plessner: 207) and pronounce upon it with authority, one can legitimately ask if I am ‘alien enough’ to see Town A, Gym D and hear my participants’ voices impartially? Although the data I elicited in the field is phenomenological and reflexive in nature (i.e. the data derives from my participants’), the data has to be correlated with the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism ‘sociologically’ by myself, as part of this thesis’ account of contemporary Town A life and masculinity. Am I, in mind of my relationship with Gym D, Town A and my participants, impartial and objective enough to correlate, contextualise and present my participants’ voices in the required way?

According to Shields’ *Places On the Margin* I am not. For Shields suggests, perhaps naively (:13) that ‘Northern culture’ is something only a ‘Southerner’ – or an outsider - can read and thus analyse:

‘The authority to pronounce upon the “real” character of the British North is implicitly based on being not just a foreigner seeing the landscape with new eyes but also a



foreigner from “the South”. Significantly, being from the North would not give one the same sort of authority to pronounce upon the South.’

Despite Shields’ comments, and the apparently contradictory nature of a native ‘doing’ anthropology, I believe I can investigate Town A objectively and with authority. This is for two primary reasons. Firstly, I am no longer a ‘native’ of Town A per se. For unlike most of the participants analysed in this work who have never ‘moved on’ or away from Town A’s vicinity<sup>49</sup>, I have experienced an array of different social habitus’. By definition, this has given me ethnographic objectivity, and the ability to ‘pronounce’ on and write about Town A cross-comparatively, and in a style that at least resembles the accepted, ‘academic’ tone. I began this research nine years after leaving, or ‘taking a sabbatical’ from Town A. In that time, I completed degrees at the unequivocally ‘middleclass’ Universities of *Durham* and *Oxford*. If the habitus of Town A has an antithesis, surely it is that contained within the erudite environment of ‘DoxBridge’ (specifically *Hertford College, Oxford* and *Hatfield College, Durham*). Nightly dining in formal hall with individuals who emulated and reproduced the *Brideshead Revisited* stereotype ‘under dreaming spires’ was a far cry from the existence ‘up North’ that I had previously known. Subfusc, punting and croquet proved a sharp contrast to the cultural conventions of an ex-mining Town. Nonetheless, it was a contrast that allowed me to see Town A and its populace through neutralised, perhaps even ‘middleclass’ eyes upon returning to the locus.

I remained in Oxford after my graduation, where I taught Sociology at a private Tutorial College for almost three years before writing this thesis. My experiences of teaching in Oxford affirmed the new habitus and viewpoints that has entered my psyche further, and was further conducive to me ‘pronouncing’ upon Town A with objectivity in this work.

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<sup>49</sup> Apart from the routine fortnight away in a sun-quenched resort. Typically with other residents of the Town.



I also began this research having travelled somewhat extensively. I had lived in Australia, Thailand and Brazil during a gap year, and also lived in the United States of America for several months, where I was afforded the somewhat elevated title of visiting scholar at the *University of Southern California*.

Consequently, before beginning this research, I had been exposed to ‘different’ cultural habitus’ to the one I am from, and study here. In itself, this has given me objectivity as a researcher. My points of reference and basis of comparisons became diverse enough to re-enter and assess Town A, Gym D and my participants as an ‘outsider’. To borrow from Hobbs: ‘I avoided going’ (or returning) ‘native by going academic’ (1989: 15), and also by ‘ganning travelling’.

Secondly, as I came to realise when ‘in the field’, my local, ‘native’ links were advantageous to me methodologically. What Shields overlooks in his comments on the supposed inability of Northerners to ‘pronounce upon’ the North is that I – as a Northerner - have a rapport with my participants that simply can’t exist in this part of the world unless those being researched see you as ‘one of them’. For suspicion, even hostility to outsiders is and always has been characteristic of Northern life, especially in the North’s hardened post-industrial localities. In which de-industrialisation has functioned to affirm the deep mistrust of politicians, outsiders and ‘Southerners’ that already resonated here. This rapport was crucial in my receiving informed, and honest phenomenological comments from my subjects. Indeed, my position as a local researcher prevented a “Hawthorne Effect”<sup>50</sup> occurring in my research. For I speak my participants’ argot, I went to their schools, drank in their bars, share their jokes and spot them in the gym. I am, to all purposes, one of them then: ‘another working class lad trying to get by’ living ‘in this crap Town’.

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<sup>50</sup> Whereby my participants would have modified their responses to the questions I asked them in ‘the field’ (therefore skewing my data) by virtue of being not just ‘researched’ but researched by somebody they are not familiar with.



Hence, in the same way that the works of Hobbs (1998) and Armstrong (1998) were not just aided but enabled<sup>51</sup> by their familiarity and ‘belonging’ to the worlds in question (on football hooliganism in Sheffield and crime in London’s East End respectively), I believe this research was also fundamentally bolstered by my local links in and with Town A, and the ‘cultural competence’ such bring. As with Armstrong’s work ‘this was never going to be the wondrous journey of a middle-class student researching into the exotic (and violent) working class’ (19). Nonetheless, this is an account of the working class that is pragmatic, honest and a derivative of my ‘trust’, ‘authenticity’ and acceptance within the under-researched and potentially elusive community studied and accounted here. Had I not: ‘known how to drink,’ (or train, as the case is) ‘when and what to talk about, when to say the appropriate thing and, more importantly, when to say nothing’ (Armstrong: 19 in Hobbs and May, 1993) by definition of my familiarity with Gym D and its users, this work would – assuming it was completed – read very differently.

It is also the case that my own physique aided my research, and the rapport that I established with my participants. Russell’s unpublished ethnography on bodybuilding states that:

‘My largeness and muscularity was a vital blessing in the field in terms of gaining the trust and respect of interviewees – who saw my physique as a sign of commitment to their cause’.

Ethnographically, the same proved true for me. The fact that I have trained for over a decade illustrated further to my participants that I am ‘one of them’. Hence, my participants talked to me openly, and on the nuances of gym-culture, in a way they would not had I not been so

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<sup>51</sup> As put by Armstrong (:27 in Hobbs and May, Eds): ‘How anyone from outside of Sheffield, considerably older than myself or speaking with what would be considered a ‘posh’ accent, would have managed I do not know. I think the research would have been impossible, or at best superficial. While a few Blades might well have agreed to give interviews, these would not even have scratched the surface of events’.



obviously committed to our shared cause of body-modification, and a life that is committed to the production of a 'deliberately muscular body' (Aoki, 1996: 60).

#### Ethnographic Observations Vs Qualitative Comments: my methodological contradiction

We have seen that this thesis' epistemological and methodological emphasis was upon eliciting, presenting and analysing my participants' 'first person points of views'; which I established primarily through qualitative interviews, and secondarily through ethnographic research/participant observation. My research process then aimed to correlate the phenomenological data I elicited within the theoretical framework at play in this work, as part of its analysis and description of post-industrial life and masculinity in Town A.

While appraising my research process, I should add that I was often staggered to hear the comments and responses that I elicited from my participants' in the qualitative interviews I conducted with them. For these comments - made within the confines and privacy of the qualitative interview situation - contrasted heavily with the everyday comments that I heard my participants' make in Gym D, and the other public, social spaces that my ethnographic research took place within.

When talking to my participants about their training rituals and their modified bodies, and when observing my participants 'in the field' of Gym D, what became abundantly clear was the general levels of dissatisfaction and discontent that define my participants' gym-lives. For example, when I informally asked my participants 'how is your training going?', or questions of that effect on a daily basis during my ethnographic research, I would typically hear answers such as 'shite', 'it's a waste of time', 'I shouldn't bother' etc. At best, I would hear answers like 'it's plodding on', 'it's just about there'; often tarnished with apathy.



Truthfully, I don't remember observing or interacting with any one participant during my fieldwork who consistently claimed that he enjoyed his training, or who always appeared happy with the body he inhabited. Rather, below the camaraderie and solidarity that appears to define the culture of Gym D at the collective level, I found a general sense of self loathing to resonate in Gym D at the individual level. Thus, I totally expected Messner's premise that: 'through bodybuilding, more than any other sporting endeavour, men are ... alienated and oppressed through their bodies' (Klein, A. 1993: 280) to be affirmed in this research's qualitative interviews.

As an ethnographer, I heard seemingly endless complaints about how tired my participants are as a consequence of their training; and how training was debilitating my participants' family lives ('she says that if I train again this week, she's taking the kids and fucking off') and health ('me joints are aching – too many dead-lifts and squats heavy on me (my) knees, and me elbows and wrists are fucked from the heavy benching'). My participants' also complained about the physical 'plateaus' they inevitably reached, which Fussell (1991: 85) describes autobiographically in the following:

'... by September of 1986, two years after I had first embraced iron, something went wrong. I ignored it at first. After all, the Medco (weight scale) was frequently unreliable. I upped my food dosages and supplements, but without effect. The cruel fact was that my body had stuttered, then stopped growing ... Months passed without a gain of even 1/16 of an inch. In an agitated state I confessed my problem to Sweepa. He looked at me sympathetically then bit his lip. 'Plateau' he mumbled. It is the word body-builders fear most.'

Further, my participants' expressed discontentment and anger when they failed to lose or gain weight appropriately – depending on whether they were 'bulking up', or 'slimming down'.



Frustration about the financial cost of body-modification was also frequently communicated in the gym: eating the required amount of food, buying food supplements, and financing courses of steroids is a very expensive pursuit and process. Accordingly, I heard my participants' whinge about the cost of modifying their bodies daily. Whereas most forms of leisure offer their practitioners the chance to 'please' and 'improve' themselves, many in Gym D appear, at first glance, to be unhappy with their gym-based leisure lives, and resent their limited gym potentials.

Such complaints are so frequently expressed in Gym D that they have become normalised; so much so that I became desensitised to hearing them during the course of this ethnography. Even the extreme mood swings and displays of anger and aggression that are induced for some members of my sample due to their dieting and steroid use (Blouin and Goldfield, 1995) began to lose their 'shock factor' during my fieldwork, due to the consistency with which they were displayed. For example, one night I was in a car with three of my Traditionalist participants. We were all going to a bar, where we would meet other members of Gym D. I sat in the back of the car, while the front passenger mocked the driving skills of the driver. Eventually, the car's driver – sick of the good humoured mocking coming his way - punched the window next to him, smashing his hand and the glass, only to then look at his passenger and claim 'if you diven't shut up, I'll smash you next!' The driver then left the car to walk around, and 'cool off'. After a five minute period, he returned to the car and apologised. His passenger – the source of his anger - laughed: 'diven't worry about it son', he said, 'I threw a sofa at wor lass (his wife) the other night. Must be that gear we got from (names user of Gym) – strong stuff'. By the end of the night, the two were hugging each other on the dance floor and challenging each other to a tequila downing contest. Such mood swing and aggressive behaviour are not tolerated in 'normal', 'civil' society. Yet they are almost expected to occur in the lives of many of Gym D's community.



It also became clear early on in my ethnographic research, that many, if not all, of my participants suffer from what Pope et al 1999 describe as ‘the Adonis Complex’.

The Adonis complex, which in essence applies the concept of the ‘Barbie Complex’ to the situation of contemporary males, suggests that unrealistic ideals and images of the male body have been perpetuated in contemporary culture; as part of society’s commoditisation of muscular male bodies. Men, accordingly, feel obliged to display physiques that are unobtainable. Therefore men increasingly find themselves dissatisfied with their bodies, and depressed because they are unable to look the impossible way society specifies they should, as explained by one of my participants:

‘Am I satisfied with me body? Am I fuck. I hate it. I look in the mirror when I’m lifting and think, you pathetic, skinny stupid cunt. Look at how shite you look ... that should make me lift harder but eventually I have to admit that I’m not strong and look shite ... I thought that when I hit sixteen stone I’d be happy and have a good body, wey I’m passed that now, and I still look like shite ... when I think of how I want to be and how I am, like how the people in the magazines look compared to me, I think I’m fucking worthless.’

*Objectively*, most of my participants sport physiques that are highly impressive; and not much, if at all, dissimilar to the physiques they identified as being ‘good’ or ‘perfect’ in the qualitative interviews I conducted. However, *reflexively*, many of my participants do not think or believe they look as they ‘should’. Thus, many of my participants suffer from the Adonic Complex; or ‘Body- dysmorphia’ which I understand here to be:

‘an under-recognized chronic problem that is defined as an excessive preoccupation with an imagined or a minor defect of a lacialized facial feature or body part, resulting in decreased social, academic and occupational functioning. Patients who have body



dysmorphic disorder are preoccupied with an ideal body image and view themselves as ugly or misshapen'. (Slaughter and Sun, 1999).

Hence, many, if not all of my participants have replaced pragmatic views of their bodies with unrealistically paranoid and unhealthily negative view of their physique. They are apparently dissatisfied with and thus depressed through their bodies (Grogan, 1999; Peters and LeAddelle, 2001), despite their bodies' (objectively) obvious visual impressiveness. As put by one of my participants:

'I know I must be big. Everyone tells me I'm big. I measure me(my)self cause I'm so paranoid, I don't trust scales to tell me how big I am and stuff, so I measure meself before and after training. Everyone tells us I look good, and the measurements show me that I'm not losing size. But I'm always thinking I am small and loosing size. Like if I'm out and I don't eat, I get angry. I think, fuck, I'm losing six months of training doing this – like shopping with the lass or whatever; me muscles are being used by my body for energy cause there's nothing in me system, so I'll be shrinking while she looks at those shoes. I get angry, and think all that hard work and dieting for nothing ... but that is it, I know that, really, I am in great shape. But I just can't like accept it'.

Klein (1993: 242) observed that:

'The satisfaction that results from becoming more muscular ... also seems to be lessened by the continued frustration of trying to reach an unobtainable goal. Cultural ideals seem forever to outstrip the individual's ability to meet them.'

Drummond (1994) makes the point that:

'if muscularity is a major factor in the development of a man's self esteem, one would imagine bodybuilders to have a positive self-esteem as a consequence of their large physiques and the hyper-development of a perceived masculinity'.



Yet, significantly, Drummond's research finds that:

'This does not appear to be the case. The bodybuilders seems to be insecure about their physiques claiming that they do not have good bodies particularly in regard to size.'

In congruence with the above sentiment, my time in the field assured me of the dislike and dissatisfaction that defines my participants self-views. It seemed that all, if not most, of Gym D's users suffer from body-dysmorphias and Adonis complexes (Pope et al, 2000; Phillips and Castle, 2001; Hitzeroth et al, 2001).

I assumed that the Adonis complexes, the body-dysmorphias, the 'roid rage', the fatigue, the physiological pain and plateaus – and all of the other gym-related variables that apparently cause my participants' discontent on a daily basis – would, inevitably, be mentioned in the qualitative interviews I conducted. Accordingly, I expected that my interviews would elicit data that reflects the 'reality' of everyday life in Gym D. I anticipated that I'd find evidence of how my participants' involvement with Gym D constructs further depression and alienation in their existences. I was sure that training would prove, phenomenologically, to be a source of existential melancholy for my participants; just another reason for their 'low serotonin existences'. I suspected that my data would affirm the findings presented in Mishkind et al's study; in which 95% of the sample of body-modifying participants who were analysed expressed that they were unhappy with their bodies. I assumed this thesis would challenge and 'move beyond idealizations of gym life' (Crossley, 2006: 25); and be forced to present a phenomenological account of how sad Gym D, and the sport of body-modification, makes its practitioners.

Surprisingly, the intense self criticism and dissatisfaction that I witnessed on a daily basis in Gym D during my ethnographic analysis was never mentioned by my participants in the interviews I conducted. Somewhat staggeringly, my participants – normally so cruel and critical of their bodies and their training procedures – were no longer hateful of their



anatomies or their gym labour in the interviews I conducted. Instead, they talked about their body-modification at lengths and with passion and pride; even romance and nostalgia.

The hiatus between how my participants' behaved and the comments my participants make in Gym D daily, and the sanguine, apparently unrepresentative comments my participants made about their training and bodies in our interviews caused me bewilderment. I was frustrated by the apparent contradiction between my ethnographic observations, and my participants' comments. How do I account for this contradiction? In part, the contradiction is, I believe, a product of social pretence. The state of being unhappy is something many citizens in Town A feel obliged to be. In Town A, being or claiming to be happy is something of a social taboo. (Unless one is in a bar or a club consuming alcohol, in which case one is essentially allowed, or permitted, to 'be' happy and perform accordingly). Thus, many citizens in Town A feel obliged to *present* themselves as burdened beings: and thus, essentially *are* burdened beings. Eventually, the mask of pretence sticks: psychologically and socially life, indeed, becomes intolerable. The Town A stare, inevitably, becomes worn in a climate of not simply collective melancholy, but collectively forced melancholy. Even when ones' existence is intrinsically tolerable and happy, albeit temporarily – i.e. even when one is training – one still feels obliged to 'be' sad.

In congruence with Town A's culture of unhappiness and obligatory melancholy, my sample of body-modifiers choose, and perhaps even prefer, to present themselves as unhappy people when in Gym D. They thus talk negatively about their bodies (the product of their gym-labour) and their training (the processes of their gym labour) in front of other gym users. They focus upon, cite and extenuate the negative, unhappy elements attached to their body-modification when in Gym D, and are inclined to over-exaggerate – even invent – their gym-specific melancholy, in a typically self-deprecating manner.



As an ethnographer, I was exposed to this manufactured melancholy daily. Yet, as an interviewer, I was shown and told how my participants ‘really’ feel about their training. For in our interviews, my participants were not obliged to keep up the pretence of their gym-specific melancholy. Instead, they were allowed to speak freely about their training, without the burden or cultural obligation to be, or at least appear, unhappy.

I’m proposing here, then, that my participants’ negative behaviour and comments, which I saw as an ethnographer in the gym daily, are not inherently revealing or representative about how my participants, as individuals, ‘really’ feel about training and their bodies. (As I believe my interview data is). Instead, my ethnographic observations are those of an obligatory performance which stems from Town A’s intrinsic ‘cult of unhappiness’; as explained lucidly below:

Participant: ‘Everything about training, I love. It is the best thing in me life. I will never fall out of love with body-building’

Me: ‘Hold on. Today’ (when I was training with the participant) ‘,you were saying you were going to quit the gym ... that it nackers (tires) you out and that your body is not responding anymore. I heard you say that to five lads today when were training’

Participant: ‘laughs’

Me: ‘So, did you mean that? Like, that you’d had enough and hated training?’

Participant: ‘Wey no! Ne fucking way. Training it mint (great) man!’

Me: ‘So, can I ask why you said it, like I have to ask why you’d say all that? Why were you acting as if you hated training; and saying you hated it? Were you just pretending to hate it?’



Participant: 'I divent na! (don't know) ... We just do that ... you do that. You don't mean it. ... It's like you're just meant to say that sort of stuff ... it is kind of like you're pretending, yes, but every other bastard knows you're pretending. You say, oh fuck, I hate this but really you've been waiting all day for this'

Me: 'Aie, cause you're not the first one to say one thing to me in here, like at the interview, and behave in a different way in the gym ... all of the others say they hate training, or that it is a pain when they're in the gym, but then in here, they enthuse about it; telling me how great training is'.

Participant: 'That doesn't surprise me ... Look, people do what they like doing, people do things cause they want to. Everyone trains almost everyday and has for years. So if they say one thing but do another, then you must realise – like your study must know – that there is some reason for that ... but I haven't got a fucking clue for the reason ... I'll tell you how great training is now, and how great my body looks, but tomorrow, when I start training with (names other gym user) I'll have a face like a smacked arse. And I'll be ganning, oh no marra (friend), not another fucking day training in the lions' den (Gym D)!'

The manufactured unhappiness that my participants' exude when discussing and performing body-modification in front of each other in Gym D seemingly acts as a mechanism which hides their genuine love of training. This is not to suggest that concepts such as body-dysmorphia, the Adonis Complex, 'roid rage', physical plateaus, and other depressing gym-specific variables are not 'real'; and very much a part of my participants' lives. But it is suggesting that the extent which such (globally experienced) phenomena are experienced, displayed and communicated 'locally' in Town A is exaggerated by members of Gym D, when they're in the Gym and performing their 'roles' (Goffman, 1959). Thus, these variables



are not necessarily as alienating and depressing as they may, at first sight, appear to the observing, ethnographic eye.

### Gym D and my situation as a researcher

Before completing chapter five, by considering the ethicality of this research, it is necessary to say more about my relationship with Gym D.

I lifted my first weight in Gym D at the age of seventeen. I did so with four other (then) skinny teenaged males who had - before our introduction and indoctrination into Gym D - only ever lifted weights enthusiastically but unimpressively at a gym on the outskirts of Town A for a month or two in order to 'bulk up' for our purposes of playing rugby and performing in kick-boxing competitions. Gym D's somewhat mythical status attracted us to it. In truth, we neither needed the gym (our training methods were so simple that any gym could have catered for them), nor belonged in it (we were considered 'posh' by most in the gym, due to our accents, and the fact that we lived in a slightly more respectable area than Town A). Over time however, we found ourselves being increasingly liked and respected by users of Gym D. This popularity was, in part, due to one of my friends' freakish strength and build, which was so impressive that even established users of Gym D would neglect their sets to watch him bench, squat and dead-lift the weights he did.

Due to our collective physical commitment to body-modification and our obvious eagerness to 'share in the banter' that underpins Gym D's culture, my friends and I became cumulatively integrated within the Gym's community. Before long, we were going out with certain members of Gym D at weekends, and on bank-holidays; when a bus would take up to fifty users of the gym to an array of destinations.



I stayed in touch with users of Gym D when I left Town A; and trained in the gym whenever I returned ‘home’ from the life I forged in Oxford. Therefore, I had access to and familiarity with Gym D (my primary research setting) and its users (my participants) before formally beginning this research. My analysis of the relationship between depression and body-modification in Gym D is thus a highly personal one, which benefited from my situation as a researcher. In the same manner that Polsky’s work on *Hustlers* was facilitated by him being a pool player, and Becker’s (1963) work on Jazz music was aided by him being a pianist, this work is also a product of my life’s circumstances aiding my research; for right from the off, I was not simply a researcher, but effectively ‘one of the lads’ in Town A: the ‘Greek kid who gans to the gym ... with the big chest’. I have a personal interest and competence in the world and phenomena being analysed here.

### Ethics

Before advancing, it is necessary to say something about the ethicality of my research process, and the ethicality of thesis as a whole.

I believe that this thesis is ‘ethical’, and in line with the ethical framework provided by Diener and Crandall (1978), in that:

- 1) No harm was caused to any of my participants during the course of this research, or will come to my participants as a result of this research. I have not written anything that is either ‘sensitive’ or uncommon knowledge within Gym D’s close-knit community. All of the participants researched in this thesis have remained anonymous. Hence, no souring of relationships or criminal charges will occur as a direct result of this thesis.
- 2) Informed consent was obtained from all of my participants’. I explained to all of my participants’ who I am, and what I ‘am doing’ before interviewing them. During the



ethnography, if I saw or heard anything sociologically ‘juicy’, I asked if I could ‘talk about it in my book if I don’t mention your name’, or words to that effect. Every time I asked this question, I received a yes. Hence, consent – on the condition of anonymity - was always granted.

- 3) No invasion of my participants’ privacy occurred. I respected all my subjects – not that I’d have dared not to – and never asked disrespectful or invasive questions that compromised their rights to privacy.
- 4) No deception was involved; my research position was overt, and I was very open with all who I came into contact with.

The process of researching and writing this thesis provided little, if any ‘real’ ethical dilemmas for me. Because the subject matter(s) of this thesis are not, directly, illegal or necessarily immoral (i.e. peoples’ misery, labour lives, consumption lives, senses of ‘strains, and gym lives are not ‘ethically challenging’ in and of themselves), I did not have to think how the presentation of my research may affect or incriminate others (and possibly myself) in the way that, for example, Gary Armstrong and Dick Hobbs had to, when they gave their ethnographic accounts of football hooliganism and crime respectively (see Hobbs and May, 2003).

However, the nature of working class life in Town A means that even if one is not ‘looking for trouble’ and unethical conversations, such may still, inadvertently, come ones’ way. Hence, I observed and discussed ‘ethically challenging’ issues ranging from steroid use, racism/far-right political activism, violence, drug use, and alcoholism by definition of my being ‘on the scene’ in Gym D and socialising with my participants’, some of whose criminal credentials are unmistakeable and, frankly, frightening.



In the end, I decided to not talk about much of the ‘the serious’, ‘ethical’ ‘criminal stuff’ that constitutes Town A and Gym D life. This was both an ethical decision and an epistemological one. If I do talk about such, it is because the omission of such would have impaired the quality of ‘grounded’ data presented in this work. Further, when I do discuss such, I keep the discussions simple, and do not elaborate on the details. Because the criminal aspects of Town A life mentioned in this work are both common knowledge in Gym D’s community and – I assume – to the ‘undercover police officers’ that frequent Gym D, I do not see myself as unethically ‘letting the cat’ out the bag here. I do not put anybody ‘in the firing line’ in any way. Rather, I present such accounts as sociological information, for the academic community; as opposed to repeating them in Gym D among my peers, as my peers do. I have also omitted many of the humorous anecdotes and stories that I would have liked to have presented here. While such stories are undeniably entertaining, I did not want users of Gym D to think I am mocking them by reproducing accounts of their (sometimes unfortunate) experiences and views here. While such stories would have shown further how ‘unique’ life in Town A and Gym D is, I have omitted these stories out of a sense of respect to my participants’, whose at times innocent views would no doubt be mocked by some, and used to affirm Town A’s and the North-East’s maligned ‘backward’ stereotype.

All of the participants researched in this work have remained ‘anonymous’, as have the localities of Town A and Gym D. That said, it is obvious that anybody who wanted to know where Town A is could induce its location and identity, if they really wanted, from the background given in this thesis. (Indeed, any ‘local’ of south-east Northumberland will probably have guessed Town A’s proximity by the end of this thesis’ first paragraph). In turn, Gym D’s true identity is easily obtained. For this I make no apologies; nor do I feel any sense of ethical dilemma. I wanted to give readers background into Town A’s de-industrialisation and mining history (for such background epistemologically ‘frames’ this work), and do not



feel that the possibility of readers deducing where this research took place on the strength of that background is an unethical concept. If readers are so curious as to try and ‘uncover’ the ‘camouflage’ that I have given Town A and Gym D, so be it.

### Chapter summary

Chapter five has demonstrated that I conducted qualitative interviews and ethnographic research to elicit my participants’ ‘first person points of views’ on the dialectics investigated in this thesis, following the phenomenological tradition. I have suggested that the qualitative, reflexive approach utilised in this work is the only way to truly understand and document working class life, depression and body-modification; given its complexity, relativity and subjectivity. This work thus follows and builds upon the discursive, phenomenological based approaches to understanding ‘working class lived experience’ (Charlesworth, 2000) and body-modification (Monaghan, 1999, 2001; Drummond, 2005; Klein, 1993) established by other scholars.

Chapter five has considered and accounted for the methodological contradiction that emerged in my research, which is based upon the disjunction between what I saw and heard ethnographically, and what I was told by my participants’ during the qualitative interviews that I conducted with them. This ‘methodological contradiction’ affirms the need for those involved in participant observation to affirm and validate their (subjective) views and understanding of social reality with the views and understanding of social reality harboured by their subjects’ when and if possible. Qualitative interviews, when combined with participant observations, remain the most pragmatic way of doing this.

The need to conduct and present ‘ethical’ research has been highlighted in chapter five, and adhered to in this work overall; even if that has meant that I omitted some ‘juicy’ and



‘entertaining’ information from this thesis which, while amusing and insightful, could have potentially embarrassed, insulted and even incriminated my participants’ inadvertently.

Chapter five has also informed readers of the narrative, or story, of this thesis’ research process. I have considered how objective the data that this thesis is founded upon can be, given my ‘close’, intimate relationship with Gym D and my participants’. I have argued that my experiences of cultural habitus’ other to the one being studied here has given me, as a researcher, the necessary amount of objectivity to ‘pronounce’ upon Town A, my participants’ and working class life/masculinity in this thesis. I have also illustrated that had I not had prior knowledge of and social links and acceptance in Town A and Gym D, I would not have been able to complete this work. Hence - as the case was for other ethnographers (Hobbs, 1998; Armstrong, 1998; Becker, 1963; Chalresworth, 2000) - my ‘personal’ links in and knowledge of the place, people and phenomena being investigated here was advantageous to me methodologically. I would not have necessarily been able to complete this research safely, let alone empirically accurately, had I not had ‘cultural competence’ among the people and body-modifying practices analysed and documented in this work. Given the success of this work, and that of other ‘local’ ethnographers who returned to their native ‘working class fields’, perhaps it is something of a prerequisite for the contemporary social researcher investigating working class life to be familiar with the world and characters being analysed? Especially if the working class phenomenon being investigated is, due to its deviant or criminal nature, ‘closed off’ from outsiders (e.g. crime in the East End of London, or football hooliganism in Sheffield)? I am thus implying here that it is necessary not just for the contemporary ethnographer to ‘come down from his veranda’ in the Malinowskiian sense, but also know who and what lurks around the veranda, if his time in the field is to be fruitful and safe.



Now that I have discussed this thesis' fieldwork, I continue to give readers a level of 'thick' sociological context, by appraising the social space of Gym D in the next chapter, before presenting this work's *Findings and Analysis* discussions over chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.



## **Chapter 6:**

### **Gym D**

#### Chapter Overview

It has been demonstrated that Gym D is the space where the participants' analysed in this thesis ritually modify their 'commodity bodies' through their 'gym labour'. It has been made clear that Gym D functions as a 'hardcore' (Mansfield and McGinn, 1993) - as distinct from casual - gym in Town A, which attracts a collection of 'serious' body-modifiers who typically aid their body-modification through steroid use, dieting, and dietary supplement usage. Thus, Gym D has a distinct function, reputation and client base in Town A. Gym D provides an alternative approach to and culture of body-modification to the Town's 'other' fitness facilities.

Chapter six discusses Gym D and its 'internal culture' in detail. Readers will hopefully have a clearer notion of what Gym D 'is like' as an anthropological locus after reading chapter six; and ideally feel like they have visited the space and interacted with some of its characters and customs. Chapter six is committed to providing a 'thick', descriptive account of Gym D, which is where the pool of participants' analysed in this work ritually and sub-culturally 'belong' and work-out.

#### Gym D: an autobiographical insight

Two extravagantly coloured doors are placed between a sun-bed shop, and a vandalised supermarket. The doors illuminate a dead-end street, which is otherwise made-up entirely of colliery houses. Upon pushing open the heavy doors, a recently carpeted mountain of stairs will greet your eyes. Your ears will hear loud dance music: its euphoric rhythm contrasts against the metaphysical melancholy and apathy that drench the streets outside. By entering the doors – a potentially daunting task - your ascent into Gym D, and Town A's 'serious' body-modifying community begins.

Careered gym goers who have modified their huge, typically steroid enhanced muscular anatomies over the years - and in some cases decades - may pass you on your ascent. If not, you will see examples of them loitering at the top of the gym's stairs. The onus that such individuals assign to their body-modification must be highlighted here: every single



participant that I interviewed in this work rated body-modification as being in the ‘top three priorities’ of their lives. Some participants’ even claimed that their training was ‘more important’ to them than their wives and children.

In the gym tonight, I see two semi-professional bodybuilders who, in their words, train ‘for the challenge’ rather than ‘for money or fame’; both of which has and will always elude them on account of their genetic shortcomings. Not to be put-off, the two body-builders perfect the stances and routines that they will demonstrate to ‘the judges’ in a fortnight, when they will partake in a national body-building contest, having excelled in recent local competitions.

As part of their dualistic preparations, the pair both stare intensely into one of the gym’s many mirrors amidst harsh self criticism. If this is narcissism, it is tinged with self-loathing: they criticise their physiques, and speculate as to how badly they will be judged ‘on the big day’. Despite their temporary doubt, they will return to the process of ‘pumping up’ shortly. They will add to and subtract from their physical sculptures appropriately. After tonight, they face a week of dieting and dehydration (through the use of laxatives). This is necessary if every one of their muscles and veins are to be visually extenuated when they pose competitively.

Across from the professional bodybuilders are four skinheads; all of whom exemplify the ‘traditional image of large violent masculinity’ discussed by Hobbs et al (2003: 142). Thus, the four’s physiques, while not ‘honed’, ‘dieted’ and ‘competition ready’ like the bodies of their bodybuilding counterparts, are undeniable ‘large’, ‘big’ and – to the untrained eye – scary. Their six packs, if they ever had them, have been compromised for mass and size in their arms, shoulders and chests. Unlike the body-builders, who travel to Gym D from a nearby Town, these four are local lads: Town A born and bred. One of the four delights in looking at the large cobweb that he has recently had tattooed on his left elbow. It compliments, in his



mind, the swastika tattooed above it. The word 'Skins' completes his display. After endearingly mocking the body-builders amidst their poses, they get on with their training.

A profound fusion of urgency, hatred and excitement enters their gestures as the four bouncers' remember that they, and their commodity bodies, will be 'working the door tonight'. They had better hurry up. For, like many of the bouncers who train in Gym D, the quartet will venture into the near-by city of Newcastle upon Tyne to take advantage of the city's 'night time economy' and the employment it offers. Their gym labour, modified bodies and skill at fighting justifies their positions. In this sense, the four are entrepreneurs of bodily capital. Their physical competency comes at a premium in a night-time economy that is defined, above all else, by violence (Hobbs et al, 2003: 157). Tonight, once again, they will act as post-modern protectors and peacekeepers in an age where leisure life – for seemingly all strata of society - is defined by alcoholism, drug induced hedonism and displays of self-promotion. Tonight, the objective of their paid labour will be to 'secure a dance night' by 'checking IDs, keeping out the pissheads, and breaking up any trouble that might happen'; just 'another night working the doors and the floors' of a post-modern, city nightclub that attracts 'students', business people and other low lives' alike.

Beside the bouncers, DR looks on from the leg curl machine. His quads are still aching from the superset he just enforced on himself. DR is a tanned giant of a man, who recently returned from Africa, where he spent time 'training body-guards': a highly financially lucrative but dangerous career. DR is wearing bright pink Hawaiian shorts, which depict white palm tree silhouettes. Not many men could get away with wearing these shorts; especially in Gym D. Nobody will say anything to DR though. Before his next set, DR disrupts the bouncers' work-out further by delighting them with an anecdote of how he 'gauged a man's eyeball out', having earlier 'snapped the bastard's cruciate ligament' when last in Africa, altruistically 'protecting a client'. The bouncers get excited. They approve of his story. DR,



‘an ex SAS man’, is - even by Town A’s standards - considered a hard bastard: ‘more than a canny hand in a scrap’. DR’s tough status re-affirmed when he returns from far off places with such anecdotes to tell. One suspects that his choice of shorts, in a strange way, bolsters his hard-man status further.

Next to me is FI, a debt collector who has begun to bring his 16 year old son to Gym D. He proudly shows his son how to keep ‘good form’ on the cables, as the pair take turns to perform tricep pull-downs. Desperate to impress, FI’s son mocks his Father: ‘Pull harder you little cunt!’ he yells to the amusement of the gym. Mutually, they bestow masculinity; primarily through the demonstration of ‘hard’ gym labour, and the commodity of muscle it will yield; and secondarily through ‘hard man’ performances.

As with all culture, ‘gym culture’ is determined and governed by a social hierarchy that observably operates among and informally regulates a gym’s users. Levels of commitment to body-modification typically determine a gym’s social hierarchy; as affirmed in the analysis of a university gym given by Aycock (1992)<sup>52</sup>; who shows that ‘levels of seriousness’ established a ‘pecking order’ among its users, when they competed for facilities. In Gym D, a perceived level of seriousness and commitment to body-modification is a given. One would generally not be in this gym if one was not a ‘serious user’ (or an ethnographer). Casual gym users are not welcome here. Hence, the social hierarchy in Gym D is determined not by seriousness or even physiological size, but by another notion so important to men in Town A: ‘hardness’, or toughness. R is almost fifty. He is not a steroid user and at five foot eight is both physically smaller and shorter than many in the gym. But he, despite his lack of growth supplements, heads the gym’s hierarchy. WW, a six foot four bouncer – having just benched

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<sup>52</sup> Where ‘beefy built up trainers’ received the most respect; and got priority over machines and weights within the context of the university gym, for they are deemed the ‘most serious’ in the gym’s community. Athletes were said to come next in the order. Hence athletes freely ‘claim equipment over leaner clients and women’ (76), who were seen to be at the bottom of the Gym’s hierarchy; and perceived of as ‘the least serious’ of the gym’s users.



over two hundred kilograms – quickly acknowledges R as he enters, and indicates that the bench will be free if R wants it. The hierarchy is preserved. For R is tougher; therefore he is the alpha body-modifier who can claim weights and machines *when* he wants, and *from* who he wants.

The above description appraises a random minute in Gym D, and the social hierarchy that operates within it. The gym is, predictably, a bastion of testosterone, sexism, racism, homophobia and, of course, exaggeration. It is where Town A's big egos and big bodies strut. It is also where a proportion of Town A's criminal element (i.e. 'those whose livelihood for a period of at least five years has been based primarily on persistent criminal activity' (Taylor, 1998: 7)) choose<sup>53</sup> to visually enhance their *Badfellas* aesthetic masculinity (Winlow, 2001) upon their physical frames.

Gym D is a 'spit and sawdust' gym. Its users unashamedly train and swagger out of pride, ego and displays of hyper masculinity in an anachronistic, dirty and aged space. Gym D is *not* a 'luxurious' gym 'for a middleclass and female clientele' (Crossley, 2006: 26) as many of society's newly opened 'gyms' – complete with 'clean' weight rooms, Jacuzzis, massage rooms, CV areas and organised classes – are. Illegal, anabolic steroids are freely available, talked about and used in Gym D. Steroid use is, therefore, a defining feature of Gym D. Indeed, during my ethnography, a student I taught for a private tutorial company commented with surprise when I told him that I trained at gym D: 'Gym D? the only people who use Gym D are steroid freaks who look like they should be in prison!' According to the data that I elicited 'in the field', the only participants researched within my sample who do not routinely use/abuse anabolic steroids are the Changers'. This is due to the Changers' collective desire

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<sup>53</sup> Undeniably, a significant amount of criminals, or local 'villains', use gym D, which explains the array of luxury cars that are parked around the gym, as their owners modify their bodies.



to inhabit ‘athletic’, ‘defined’ bodies that conform to the ‘global masculine hegemonic’ discussed earlier in this thesis (which is exemplified through the physiques displayed on the cover of *Men’s Health* magazine), as opposed to them wanting to inhabit the ‘big’, ‘industrial’ bodies that the other typologies of Gym D life desire, and acquire through steroid use (as exemplified by the physiques displayed on the front cover of *Flex*). This sentiment is highlighted in the following extract, elicited from a Changer:

‘When I first started training, I wanted to be big, like Arnie and all that shit. But as you get older, you grow out of that. You realise that (being big) is just for nutters who have problems, or who are old-fashioned, and who want to give out a certain message, like I’m hard, don’t look at me ... to me it (body-modification) is about looking athletic and defined, like I was saying before, like how the superstar sports people and male models look, not like (names some Traditionalists), just massive steroid people basically ... so for me it is more about diet and keeping lean ... keeping my body weight down, rather than injecting to be a monster’.

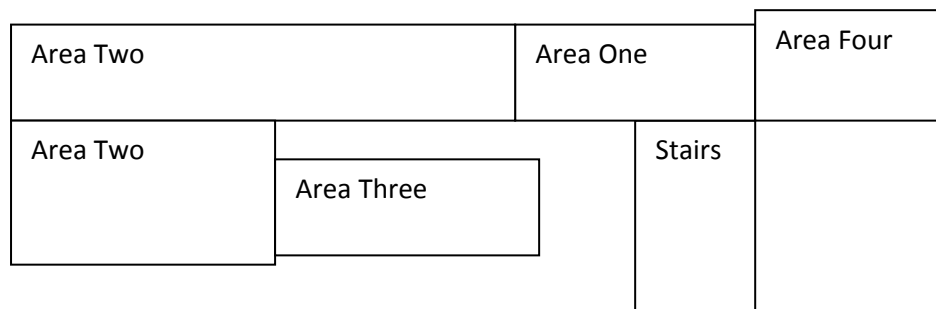
Observers of the gym will see and hear users of it challenge each other to lifting competitions. Their voices, fuelled by their steroid-enhanced egos, shout above the gym’s loud music, as ridicule, even humiliation, is exchanged between members ‘in the spirit of competition’. The entire scene is reminiscent of gorillas in the wild, parading for the status of alpha male. It is a prime example of ‘gender narcissism’, to borrow the phrase that Alan Klein aptly applied to the body-building community of Southern California in his 1993 ethnography. Yet, it must be emphasised that underneath all of the machismo parading and pretence, Gym D is an extremely tight-knit community, which is built around the notions of trust, benevolence and respect. Gym D, as I go on to demonstrate, functions in a central, cathartic way in the psycho-social as well as body-modifying components of its members’ lives.



## Spatial Segregation

Spatially, Gym D can be segregated into a collection of four areas; as illustrated in the following diagram:

*Gym D:*



I now discuss each area in turn.

### Area one

Area one is a small, typically over-crowded, energy filled and vocal space at the top of Gym D's stairs. It is here where the majority of Gym D's non-weight related interaction takes place. It is here that the gym's users:

- \* Pay, often begrudgingly, to use the gym: five pounds for a week's use or two pounds for a day session<sup>54</sup>.

- \* Chat, gossip and tell jokes. The more aggressive, humorous and misogynist the interaction is, the more it will, in general, be appreciated.

- \* Buy and consume post/pre work-out supplements.

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<sup>54</sup> This is especially cheap. C, Gym D's owner, claims that these prices are the cheapest in the area and are – along with the gym's weights and machines – the main reason for the gym's loyal, almost cult-like following in what is a competitive and saturated market. C, however, concedes that he will have to raise the prices of Gym D 'soon' (to seven pounds a week) to reflect 'inflation'. C is also thinking about abolishing the 'student and unemployed' discount rate that users of the Gym currently enjoy.



\* Wait for friends/training partners to arrive.

\* Sit and rest after a gruelling training session.

Area one's interaction is centralised around and orchestrated by the charismatic personality of C. C is the gym's owner and a former professional body-builder. C is one of the most likeable people I have ever met. He proved to be an excellent source of data collection 'in the field'. When C is not giving advice on the interrelated topics of diet and training, he spends his time amusing the gym's users/his audience with local gossip and jokes. Sometimes he may even entertain through impromptu songs and impressions. C stands behind a fanatically cleaned counter. An excessive range of dietary supplements and gym clothing is, in turn, displayed behind him. Haggle for a bargain, and you'll get it. This is, after all, a place of commerce.

It is rightfully said in the preface to Monaghan's study on steroid use that (2001: xi):

'many bodybuilders have a very sophisticated, highly nuanced and intricate grasp of chemical interactions and the body's response to them ... indeed this corpus of knowledge – entirely outside of formal pharmacopeia – can be described as a discrete 'ethnopharmacology'.

Any observer who spends time in area one will hear the ethnopharmacological knowledge of Gym D's users (see Korkia and Stimson, 1993: 122); and perhaps be surprised at the detail which Gym D's users will talk about complex, steroid related bio-chemical formulas. Observers may also be surprised to hear the extent that users of Gym D will go to so as to obtain the pharmacological products they desire, both illegally and legally. For example, one of my participants will routinely fly to Tenerife 'for the day', where he will obtain human



growth hormones<sup>55</sup> on prescription from ‘his doctor’. While another appraised his ‘steroid cycle’ as follows:

Participant: ‘in the Winter, I am all about getting mass and size, so I’m on the Dianabol, the Oxymetholone and some basic testosterone, like some Sustanon, but this time of year (Spring) I start cutting down that size and dieting ... so I’ve just got myself some Trembelone jabs, some Winstrol tablets and some propionate testosterone’

I ask: ‘Why do you use propionate testosterone this time of year, and not in the winter?’

Participant: ‘cause it’s faster and there is no water in it, so you look leaner, and I don’t want to hold water this time of year’

## Area Two

Area two houses the impressive, even if aged, array of weights and machines that Gym D offers its users. Area two’s walls are comprised of wooden panels, mirrors and old posters of body-builders, who smile down onto the gym’s users. Three windows run along the side of the area, which allow for an element of natural light and air to enter the space. Four fans hang from the roof. They are black with dirt; a good old fashioned inch of grime.

Apart from the grey carpet and the huge speakers that the gym has recently benefited from holistically, the décor of the area has not changed in twenty five years. Similarly, the facilities encased within it have ‘withstood the test of time’, or ‘failed to be modernised’; depending on your view. Thus, the space is something of a relic – even an anachronism - by the standards of the contemporary fitness industry. In this sense, Gym D is a facility and experience that directly contrast with the cleanliness, newness, ‘poshness’ and sterility that is offered by the homogenous, corporate, ‘chain gyms’ which have emerged in society, in response to

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<sup>55</sup> Human growth hormones are, apparently, cheaper to buy in Tenerife, and ‘medically easier to get hold of’ than in the UK.



contemporary cultures' burgeoning body-consciousness. Gym D is a place where the weights are old and the training is, for the most part, 'old-school'. Here, there are 'real men' (men formed through an industrial habitus) lifting 'real' (heavy) weights, and thereby getting 'real' ('overly muscular') bodies; and it is in area two that Gym D's users perform their 'gym labour'. The commodity bodies of bouncers, professional body-builders and plain old 'meat heads' are proudly displayed and modified here. We swagger from machine to machine. Stacking bars with more weight, and picking up heavier dumbbells so as to manipulate our muscles into completing forced reps. We train to 'failure' - the point when the body can't physically push or pull anymore weight – and then hear our spotter demand more. Growth is inevitable. We are happy, even if exhausted. This is true 'subjection' in the Foucauldian sense: self-disciplined, self-punished. All the while, we walk in that strut-like fashion that defines body-builders stereotypically, as observed by Fussell (1991: 45):

'take the distinctive and dramatic walk of the bodybuilder, that weightlifter's waddle of muscles on parade. With the elbows held wide from the body, thighs spread far apart, the walk is as stylizing ... as a model's flounce down the runway.'

The intensity of the gym-work performed in area two is revealed by the pain-filled noises that fly out of users' mouths, as they desperately push (or pull) weight. Totally focused and totally committed; bodies drenched in sweat, veins pumped to the point of explosion; united by the spirit of body-building. We exist as a community. We encourage each other, and share advice in an environment of fanatical observation, self-criticism and self-surveillance. To which Ayock's comments (1992: 349) are salient:

'the arrangement of machines, weights, and mirrors demands a supervision of oneself, and that of others, as actions are monitored continuously by users. Persons are not only the objects of a gaze, but the subjects of incessant surveillance.'



Typically, Gym D's users will return to area one after their work-out to consume a protein-shake and indulge in some 'banter', by gossiping, telling jokes and sharing advice. They may also buy steroids, or retreat to a quiet area to 'inject gear'.

#### Area Four

Users may conclude their gym visit by utilising area four, which consists of a bathroom and three sun beds. A tanned, as well as muscular 'presentation of the self' is seen as desirable in Town A. Meaning the gym's sun beds are very popular, as Town A's hard-men and bodybuilders ensure their tans remain permanent yearly. An array of creams and lotions that bolster one's tan and sun bed experience can be bought from C.

#### Area Three

Area three is a small space 'at the back of the gym' that harbours the gym's cardiovascular facilities, being two rowing machines, five running machines and three exercise bikes. The space is designed primarily for weight loss, muscle toning/defining and the strengthening of one's heart and lungs, rather than building muscle.

As a rule, the area is relatively unpopular. The space is sometimes used as a 'warm up area' by a small percentage of the gym's male members, who stretch here and increase their heart-rate on the CV machines in it, before they enter the 'serious stuff' of the gym's weight room (area two). The space is also by a small number of local female users<sup>56</sup>, who consistently use

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<sup>56</sup> Few of the female body-modifiers in Town A use the machismo, misogynistic arena of Gym D. During my research, I 'saturated' my fieldwork by discussing body-modification, and Gym D as a locus, with users of other gyms in and around Town A. Significantly, many of the female users of the other gyms who I spoke to informed me that they find Gym D, or believe Gym D will be, over aggressive and intimidating. Several female users who have used Gym D in the past believe that they have been 'ogled' and harassed in the space. Nonetheless, there is a small group of female users who use Gym D regularly at the time of writing: they attend Gym D at least three times a week. During which time they remain in area three to 'tone up'. These female users, who are all in their twenties and residents of Town A, are known among Gym D's users for wearing revealing clothes and 'making an effort with their appearances' when presenting themselves in the gym (i.e. the females' apply make-up before entering the gym and wear low cut-tops, shorts etc). These female users are – understandably - popular with the gym's male members, but are thought of as 'attention seekers' by most of my participants, who believe these



the area to 'tone up', in the early part of the evening. But apart from this use, the area remains unutilised – even stigmatised - during the day and in the early evening. Indeed, I have heard this space be referred to as 'the gay area'. Yet later in the evening, from eight pm until nine pm when Gym D closes, the Changers will be seen enthusiastically using the space. They will almost certainly be discussing their days at work, and checking themselves out in the mirrors as they pound the treadmills and down sugary sports-drinks, in between entering the weight room to perform toning, supersets with light weights. Their choice of gym-labour is, as discussed, indicative of the fact that they want to look like 'global men'. They want their bodies to resemble those displayed by the actors, sportsmen and models they see in the mass-media. They desire to display slim, 'defined', 'moderately muscular bodies', as opposed to the 'monster physiques' that other users in Gym D construct; and utilise Gym D's facilities accordingly. During the Changers' visit, C will typically turn the loud dance music that usually resonates in the gym down. The Changers then tune in to a music channel, which they watch on a television screen in area three. Global music is listened to by 'global', post-industrial citizens. The urban, dance anthems of the working class are temporarily suspended.

Given the Changers' desired embourgeoisement and subsequent rejection of working class life and identity, the obvious question that arises is why do the Changers' continue to utilise Gym D, a quintessentially working class gym and space? Why do they not train in another fitness facility; where their training is seen as conventional; and where their fellow gym users are their 'sort of people'? According to the comments I elicited from the Changers' on this topic, it seems that the Changers' continue to use Gym D, firstly, because it is cheap ('better value than anywhere else') and secondly, because in Gym D, they can essentially 'do what they want'. There are 'no rules' in Gym D; hence by training here in the evening, the Changers' essentially have 'a private gym': they determine the music that is played, they can

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females come to the gym 'to be noticed' and receive male 'attention'. As put by one Changer: 'they' (the female users of Gym D) 'are nice to look at but you wouldn't take them home to meet your Mother'.



wear what they want ('I wear flip flops here, but they are banned in other gyms'), thus they are happy to train in what is, for them, a private space. Further, it seems that the Changers' acquire a level of social prestige from other body-modifying men on account of them being users of Gym D, as affirmed in the following quote:

'the guys (at work) used to say I was in good shape, then I told them where I trained, and suddenly I was in excellent shape. Like cause of me being a member of this gym (Gym D); they probably think I am stronger and fitter than I am just cause I use this place, but that is fine by me! That is cause of the reputation of the gym.'

The Changers' affiliation with Gym D satisfies their vanity and pride. Hence, they remain committed users of the space.

#### Gym D: a revered but anachronistic institution?

Klein's (1993) ethnography describes 'Olympic Gym' – which is the pseudonym that Klein uses to refer to the 'elite' and infamous gyms he studied in Southern California - as:

'to bodybuilders what Mecca is to the Islamic faithful: the hub of spiritual existence, the centre of being. Many make annual pilgrimages to the shrine. One British pilgrim had saved his meagre wages for a year just to work out at Olympic Gym for a few weeks ... in that first day, I could hear half a dozen languages'.

Of course, Gym D does not have the same 'Mecca quality' to the world's bodybuilding community as the *Olympic* gyms which Klein analysed in Southern California do. Town A is not the glamorous, archetypical 'home of muscle'; drenched in sun, sand and the undertone of sexual gratification. Bodybuilders from other continents do not make pilgrimages to Town A, to use Gym D. Nonetheless, to its pool of committed, local users, Gym D is considered with



the same level of affection that *Olympic* commands from its users. Gym D is ‘our’ *muscle beach*, ‘our’ *Gold’s Gym*; and we’re proud to train here.

However, whether Gym D will continue, and be financially able to function in this way over and in the next twenty years remains to be seen. In Town A, a new gym has recently opened; while two other, older gyms have recently been ‘revamped’ and re-invented. One of these revamped gyms is a ‘woman only gym’; yet the other two gyms both offer much newer facilities than Gym D, and an array of body-modifying activities such as boxercise, yoga, and spin-bike classes. Surely, the appeal of these gyms will tempt some of Gym D’s current and future clientele away from it? Meaning future generations of body-modifiers in Town A will drop the heavy but worn weights of Gym D for the newer, shiny machines of its competitors. Which come complete with personal trainers, glitzy membership packages and flirtatious, ‘pretty receptionist chicks’; who are always ready to take the direct debit details of individuals in pursuit of a ‘global’ (rather than a local) body and body-modifying experience.

Gym D’s future is also threatened by its internal neglect. Every single participant mentioned the gym’s increasingly shabby nature in the qualitative interviews I conducted. One long-term user of Gym D stated that the gym and its facilities have not been ‘properly cleaned’ for at least ten years:

‘it is fucking filthy in here, loads of the lads have complained ... I’ve been here for ten years, and it has never been cleaned in that time ... there is fucking dirt and grime everywhere – on the weights, on the fans. It fucking stinks ... (names trainers’ name) left here cause he was getting a rash from the weights, that is how dirty they are ... and I don’t know why the fuck anybody drinks from that flask (in which C mixes protein shakes with an electronic whisk for the gym’s users) cause that is a fucking pit of



disease ... That is why some people are no longer coming here, just cause of the mess and the dirt’.

A small group of 16-18 year old body-modifiers have begun to frequent Gym D. The dissatisfaction that some of Gym D’s older, more established users feel towards the Gym is exacerbated by the presence of these younger users. Primarily because of the ‘wear and tear’ they put on the gym’s facilities; and also due to the inappropriately ‘cocky’, arrogant behaviour such individuals display. This dissatisfaction is elucidated in the following comments which were given by a participant who functions as something of a ‘cultural custodian’ in Gym D by always being quick to monitor and chastise the gym’s emerging ‘younger generation’, and preserve the gym’s existing rules, norms and standards:

‘the other main problem I think many of us have, like older people who have been training for decades, are all the new lads, like the younger lads ... not yee (you) and your mates, but the ones younger than you, like I’d say the new sixteen year old lads up to like the twenty year olds; but mostly like the schoolys (school students). They’re too fucking cocky, been lifting for five minutes and they think they’re fucking *Mr Universe* champion ... think they’re hard cause they have learned how to bench ... They come in here like they own it, and they start taking gear (steroids) and their egos are the size of a planet, it is those cunts that give us (bodybuilders) a bad name, like with their appearances and the way they go on, like bullies. I say to C, bar (ban) them – just say there is not room for them, cause we can’t get our weights for them – they take ages to train, spending ower (over) long in the gym, but he won’t ... But they are bad for the place, like they’re not the same as us lot; like we all get on; but I’d rather have a fucking pedo (paedophile) in the gym then that lot! They ruin the machines and weights, they throw weights around; they don’t clean their weights up when they finish,



like just leave them lying around and stuff, which is dangerous! I've had a word with them all like, and telt (told) them to start acting proper!'

Internal demise and conflict, as well as the potential lure of newer, 'other' fitness facilities in Town A may emerge to enforce Gym D's closure in the future. Ethnographically, this should be noted. For now, however, the Gym is in a very strong position financially, despite its shabbiness and inner-confrontations. It is considered the area's premier space for bodybuilding. Both local lads and hardcore body-modifiers from other parts of the region travel to this facility to sculpt their physiques. Despite the grime, Gym D must be doing something right. In part, I believe it is Gym D's ability to offer its users a level of psychosocial 'escapism' that preserves its popularity. (Indeed, I came to rely upon Gym D's escapist qualities while writing this thesis). Further, I believe Gym D's age and neglect – while being a source of conflict for some users – creates a strange sort of appreciation, solidarity and sense of comfort psychosocially among its users', as shown in the below quotation given by a Traditionalist:

'When you come in here (Gym D) you escape all the outside shit that happens in the world. There is no bad news in here, no crying babies or nagging fucking wife, do this or do that. Just the lads' and all the fucking banter and the chance to train and get fucking massive. I come here and switch off from the outside world ... it is good that there are no women here cause if there are women around I can't train cause I'm too busy looking at them ... you can train properly here as it is ... it's dirty and stuff but that is fucking great, all part of this place, ya na? Proper weights, proper training, all good lads, nobody gives a fuck; no fucking wankers posing around! I'd hate it if that changed and the gym was not what I expect it to be ... it is comforting to come here! I like the fact that (names user) had his leg dangling in the supermarket (located below Gym D) the other week (after a floorboard and the carpet that covered it in the gym finally gave



way having been precarious for several months) and that it took three years for the lights on the stairs to get sorted: that is all fucking great by me!’

Many of Gym D’s users sneer at other fitness facilities, in both Town A and society at large. Gym D’ users consider weight lifting ‘their’ sport; and are thus generally opposed to the fitness ‘craze’ that is gripping the western psyche, and the subsequent emergence of ‘new’ fitness facilities that cater for ‘bandwagon’ Gym users. As put by one of my subjects:

‘I’ve been lifting for fucking years, and I loved that I was the freak, that wherever I went people would look at us and go, look at him, what a fucking sight, like they’d love us or hate us, and me body, but they’d notice us. But now, I’m not like a big freak anymore. Everyone is on gear (steroids) – even people who don’t train. They have no idea what they’re doing, they just train cause it is a fashion, like a craze. Wey they should fuck off, cause this sport belongs to us, not them ... they took football from us, tickets are a fucking bomb now so we can’t go; but they’ll never take this from us, cause they’ll never train as hard, cause they’re fucking poneses and posers at the end of the day, and think training is about having fun in the gym and posing; but it’s not about that, it’s a hard fucking slog – they’ll train for a year, two years max, and then fuck off back to the tennis court, like they belong.’

In this way, the emergence of new fitness facilities in Town A has affirmed Gym D’s subcultural reputation, function and sense of community. It has also emphasised the belief and perception that users of Gym D are somewhat ‘elite’ body-modifiers, who are part of a ‘closed’, mythical institution. Gym D’s users have essentially created something of a ‘them and us’ situation in Town A: we (Gym D’s users) are ‘real’ bodybuilders who revel in and preserve our proudly dirty gym, and status’ as ‘hardcore steroid freaks’, while ‘they’ (users of new gyms in Town A and nearby) are just ‘plastic gym wannabes’. By so doing, Gym D’s



users go some way in preserving and protecting ‘their’ sport and gym culture from the commercialised masses, who - in Town A and countless other localities globally – are currently jumping on the body-modifying ‘bandwagon’ in response to the commercialisation of the male body.

Football’s ‘commodification’ has, as discussed eloquently by Giulianotti, 1999 (:34), alienated working class football fans. Many of whom understandably resent the loss of ‘their’ game, clubs and ‘match day customs’ to family and middleclass football supporters’.

Similarly, members of gym D are also infuriated by the perceived encroachment on ‘their’ sport’ by ‘new age’ body-modifiers: most of who would look as out of place in Gym D today as the new wave of ‘middleclass fans’ entering football grounds must have to the hardened, working class football fans who attempted to preserve their ‘ends’ and football customs up and down the country; as football stadia became fully seated, hooligan free, financially expensive, regulated and family/corporate friendly, post-Hillsborough. Concurrently, some users of Gym D provoke members of other gyms. Presumably they do so to protest against the perceived encroachment upon ‘their’ sport. Such provocation is exemplified in the following anecdote:

‘I went in there (names new, local gym) the other day with (names other Gym D user) cause I got a guest pass through the post, ganning come in and check out our new gym ... I was wearing me Gym D top (muscle shirt with Gym D on the back) and shouting as I was lifting the weights, like just little weights, but I was pretending to be freaked out. Had me arms all pumped, looking massive, tattoos out and everything. There were all these fucking little men looking at us, scared of us, thinking who is this freak? And some tarts like coming doon from their aerobics class. And (names friend) just pulled me pants down and gans, have a look at that! Like proper shouts. The entire gym looked, and I was there with me knob out, doing barbells and shouting like a nutter! The



manager asked us to leave. I gans, you're shit, your gym is shite, and these cunts have no right in a gym!'

The above account – fictitious or not - was highly approved of in Gym D. As was the following claim, which shows how users of Gym D feel about people who train but have not spent sufficient time 'training properly over years' to 'back up' their claims and pretensions of physical hardness and competence:

'I was in Newcastle the other day for the late night shopping, shopping with her (his girlfriend), and I popped in for a pint at the station before we went back. It was about seven o'clock, and there was these three lads in the bar, and they had fucking bags with training stuff in, like bags as if they were athletes. Posh fucking trainers, and all that, like tops with their names on the back and stuff. They were only about nineteen. They'd been to the gym and were going for a pint after, like, oh I'm the fucking man, I train and then drink a beer, and I have a fucking sports bag ... they had been training for six months top, just little spaghetti arms ... one cunt starts talking about men's' health and fitness, and how he loves being a fitness junky, and how strong he is; and how women notice him more now cause of his muscles. I couldn't hold me tongue anymore – I gans over and says, listen, fuck off! You haven't got a clue about weights. You're a fucking cunt, a fucking pretender. If I ever see you in a gym, I'll snap your fucking head off, I've got a fucking forearm bigger than your leg you stupid bastard ... they all left after that. The bouncer comes over and gans (said), nice one son, if yee (you) didn't say ought (anything), I was going to!'

Presumably, the bouncers' engagement in the above account symbolises how both the participant and the bouncer belong, by definition of their body-modification, to a 'big, hard



man' identity and taxonomy of masculinity; which these younger gym users are excluded from.

### Town A and its history of physicality

Town A boasts a long sporting tradition and history. During its mining days, it was said that if Newcastle United needed new players, all the club's scouts had to do was 'gan doon the mine', and a new starting eleven could be assembled. (On this basis alone, current Newcastle fans must wish the mines were still active). Accordingly, Town A has produced a disproportionate amount of 'world-class' and, to put it kindly, less celebrated footballers, such as 'Wor Jackie' Milburn (whose statue, which stands in the middle of Town A's commercial centre, provides hours of fun for drunk passers-by at the weekend), Jimmy Adamson, Jack Charlton, Bobby Charlton, Colin Ayre, David Thompson, Martin Taylor and, more recently, Peter Ramage. Cec Irwin, who played 363 games for Sunderland is also a product of the Town, but his 'makem' links make him something of a heretic in the locality, given the intense rivalry between Newcastle United (who most people in Town A 'support') and Sunderland AFC. Town A has also influenced the world of cricket, with the Harmison Brothers (Steve and Ben) being the town's most famous cricket alumni.

The disproportionate amount of professional athletes that Town A, and the North-East as a region, has produced shows that the area in question has always been a 'physical' milieu: sporting participation and success has always been a key feature of life and masculinity 'up here'. This fact illustrates how relevant Bourdieu's (1993: 127) comments on working class sportsmanship have been, and remain in Town A:

'the cult of sportsmen of working-class origin is doubtless explained in part by the fact that these "success stories" symbolise the only recognised route to wealth and fame'



Hence, those in Gym D are modifying their bodies in a town where physicality has always been celebrated, and sporting success is somewhat expected. Sport remains the most likely source of social and financial mobility for residents of Town A, other than ‘winning the lottery’ or ‘getting famous from the *X Factor*’. It is surely only a matter of time, given the dedication to body-modification and quality of physiques sported by many young men in Town A today, until Town A will also be able to add the name of a world-class body-builder to its sporting heritage.

### Summary

This chapter has given readers an insight into Gym D and its internal culture. It has demonstrated what ‘life is like’ in Gym D; and illustrated the affinity that many of Gym D’s users feel for the space, despite its internal neglect, and levels of inner conflict. Chapter six has discussed the spatial segregation of Gym D, and emphasised how different users of Gym D utilise the gym, its spaces and its facilities subjectively, and at different times chronologically. This chapter has contrasted Gym D and its internal, ‘local’ culture of steroid-use, excessive body-modification and exaggerated masculine displays with ‘other’, more ‘global’ or ‘corporate’ fitness facilities in Town A; and shown how some of Gym D’s users have rebelliously responded to the ‘fitness craze’ that is sweeping the western psyche at the time of writing (which, for them, represents an encroachment upon ‘their’ sport). By so doing, such users have affirmed Gym D’s mythical, subcultural and ‘elitist’ function and reputation in Town A. Chapter six has also emphasised the ‘cult of physiology’ that defines Town A, and has shown, following Bourdieu (1993), how sport remains a legitimate way for working class people to realise social mobility in the contemporary epoch.

Ultimately, Chapter six has illustrated how fundamental Gym D as an institution and the sport of body-modification is to the ‘working class lived experiences’ (Charlesworth, 2000)



of my participants; which is something that other discussions on post-industrial working class life and masculinity have failed to acknowledge and investigate. Chapter six has thereby given a ‘thick’ descriptive insight and account of a ‘closed world’ that is unavailable to many in the academic realm. Chapter six has affirmed the need, established by Klein (1993:22), to analyse and describe gyms’ as ‘dioramas’, and see the behaviours contained in them subculturally:

‘looking at small scale social units as dioramas helps one to grasp the object of study as a microcosm, as well as to isolate social patterns and functions, and aids in finding regular patterns of behaviour. The gym, street corner, or school can all be seen in this way’.

In mind of Gym D’s internal culture and my position in it ethnographically, this thesis will go some way in rectifying the fact that ‘on the whole ... relatively little work has been done on and in gyms’ (Crossley, 2006: 24); by providing a phenomenologically informed insight into Gym D life that correlates with and substantiates the wider account of working class life, masculinity and depression presented in this thesis. Significantly, by focusing its analysis upon body-modification in Gym D, this thesis gives a much needed insight into ‘committed’/semi-professional but not ‘elite’/‘world class’ body-modification; which is the level of body-modification analysed by Klein, through his analysis of bodybuilding in Southern California (1993). While Klein’s work remains the most cited and recognised ethnographic research into body-modification, it is necessary to point out that the elite level and culture of body-modification analysed by Klein is removed from the level of body-modification and gym culture looked at in this thesis, with reference to Gym D (and even further removed from ‘normal gyms’ where ‘normal’, ‘regular’, non-steroid using body-modifiers frequent). While there is no questioning the validity of Klein’s work or the cultural significance and unusualness of the ‘extreme’ participants’ Klein’s work focuses upon, it



should be noted that the ‘non-elite yet serious’, ‘unusual but not ridiculously unusual’ body-modification practiced in Gym D and similar spaces (Monaghan, 2001) must not be overlooked by sociologists aiming to fill the epistemological void that the lack of contemporary studies ‘on’ and ‘in’ gyms’ represent. Thus, this thesis expands upon the ethnographic project established by Klein by focusing upon the diverse body-modification practiced in Gym D, and hopes to illustrate some of the subcultural similarities and differences that exist between life and masculinity in Olympic Gym, California; and life and masculinity in Gym D, Town A. I will go on to suggest that Gym D acts as something of a glorified social club for many of my participants’; which manages to both act as a male preserve in an increasingly effeminate world, and refute the depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism that normally defines and impairs the ‘working class phenomenological experience’ psychosocially.

The analysis of Gym D presented above completes this thesis’ opening two sections. This thesis has now given readers an appropriate level of empirical ‘context’ and background about the places, people, theories, themes and anomalies explored in this work. Thus, I am now at a stage where I can present what this research has ‘found out’ through section three of this thesis, i.e. this work’s *Findings and Analysis* section.



**Section Three:**  
**Findings and Analysis**



## **Chapter 7:**

### **Typologies of Gym D life**

#### Chapter Overview

It has been suggested that three ‘forms’ or ‘typologies’ of working class males’ live in or near Town A, and routinely use Gym D at the time of writing; being the Drifters’, the Traditionalists’ and the Changers’. Chapter seven introduces readers to the three participant groups found and analysed in this research in detail. Chapter seven outlines what life is like for the groups’, both inside and outside of Gym D. Chapter seven also and illustrates how each of the three typologies have been ‘formed’ by definition of their cultural ecology and interaction. Here, I aim to highlight that each typology of Gym D life has essentially been ‘made’, ‘constructed’ and conditioned by the different social habitus’ that operate and define life in contemporary Town A. I will thus give an account of the Drifters’, Traditionalists’ and Changers’ that explains and sees the groups as being psycho-social derivatives of the culture(s) and contrasting cultural habitus’ they exist within and are anthropological products of.

Before giving a detailed account of the three participant groups found and analysed in this work, chapter seven summarises the main points and themes that have been made and discussed so far in this thesis, over sections one and two. This summary is presented so as to add cohesion to this thesis’ Findings and Analysis section.

#### A summary of sections one and two of this thesis

We have seen that this research is ‘about’ and takes place within Town A. Town A was physically and culturally formed through and defined by its coalmining industry. Town A’s last remaining coalmine permanently closed in the latter 1980s. Subsequently, Town A has become a ‘de-industrialised’ locus. Town A and its residents have consequently been forced to ‘adapt’ to a post-industrial economy, as well as an increasingly ‘glocal’ way of living and thinking (as this chapter goes on to consider) over the last thirty years.

We have also seen that Town A’s residents, like capitalist citizens globally, are susceptible to two cultural truisms. Firstly, Town A’s residents are necessarily ‘depressed’ by definition of them living in a ‘low serotonin society’, which has an inherently melancholic socio-



economic structure. Secondly, Town A's residents believe, or have been 'culturally conditioned' to believe that a 'modified', muscular male body is the quintessence of contemporary aesthetic masculinity. For muscular male bodies function and are perceived of as commodities and status symbols in the current epoch. Hence, my participants - in and as part of their melancholic existences - all utilise weights and resistance machines to alter the forms and proportions of their bodies in Gym D; which is a gym in Town A that is defined by steroid use and polemically excessive body-modification.

In mind of Town A's de-industrialisation and the two cultural truths stated above, it has been made clear that this thesis will:

- 1) Consider the extent that my participants' labour lives (the jobs they work, or fail to work), consumption lives (the things they buy) and senses of social 'strain' (or the hiatus between my participants' desired realities and actual realities) accounts for, or 'explains', their depression. This thesis aims, in its first instance, to give an count of how empirically valid the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism are to life in post-industrial Town A today, from the perspective of those living in it.
- 2) Analyse how my participants' bodies - which, I've argued, function as 'commodities in my participants' lives - and 'gym labour' relates to my participants' cultural depression, and experiences of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism.  
  
Dichotomously, I explore whether my participants' involvement with Gym D extends or alleviates their depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism.
- 3) Suggest how my participants' bodies function semiotically in their existences; as physiological 'symbols' that denote cultural meaning about my participants and their identities to others in society, on behalf of my participants; and help to negotiate the particular crises that the groups' face.



Readers have also been shown that this thesis is a product of the phenomenological tradition; meaning that this work's pursuit of 'valid knowledge' is rooted around the notion of how my participants reflexively understand their lives, their depression and their body-modification.

In expansion of the 'background' information and context that sections one and two of this thesis has presented to its readers - as summarise above - section three of this thesis aims to inform readers of what my research has 'found out' in its pursuit of episteme. Hence, chapter 8 discusses how and why my participants subjectively experience anomie, or strain, in their lives. Chapter 9 discusses my participants' alienation through labour, while chapter 10 considers my participants' commodity fetishism. Chapter 11 analyses my participants' body-modification; and considers how my participants' bodies relate to their depression, existences and identities.

Perhaps the most salient finding that this research made 'in the field' is that working class existence - in Town A, Gym D and, one can presume, other working class milieus - is not a homogenous, singular, fixed concept and process. As working class existence apparently was in earlier epochs<sup>57</sup>; and as I had expected Town A life to be when I began this work, following my experiences of living in Town A and the account of working class life in Rotherham given by Charlesworth (2000). Instead, contemporary working class life in Town A is experienced in one of three distinctive ways. This assertion is based on the fact that I was able to identify three distinctive groups or categories of working class life in my sample of participants, being *the Drifters*, *the Traditionalists* and *the Changers*. Hence, if culture

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<sup>57</sup> According to past studies on working class life (see Hoggart's *Use Of Literacy* 1957, Roberts, 1975; Burnett, 1974; Downes, 1966; Hall and Jefferson, 1975; Jackson and Marsden, 1966; Willis, 1977; Brown, 1987; Bulmer, 1975; Fraser, 1968, 1969 and Benyon, 1973) most working class people in any given working class locus from the 1950s to the 1970s lived similar lives, worked similar jobs, lived in comparable, if not identical houses, harboured the same ideals, received the same education, worshipped the same God, bought the same 'things' and thus experience existence predictably, rigidly and monastically. Working class culture, and the *phenomenology of the working class experience* (Charlesworth, 2000) was a somewhat static concept and process, before working class society evolved to be characterised by post-industrialism, glocalisation and – I argue here – cultural, phenomenological and masculine diversities.



is, as it was for Williams (1965: 57): ‘a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour’ then in Town A and Gym D, there are three types of working class cultures co-existing at the time of writing; thereby demonstrating the ‘tripartite’<sup>58</sup> nature of working class life and culture in Town A today. Each of the three typologies essentially act as ‘tribal groupings’ (Maffesoli, 1991: 12), in that the groups all have different attitudes towards work and consumption, live in different spatial areas of Town A and harbour contrasting existential ideals, as this chapter goes on to show. Yet, the groups all ‘come together’ in Gym D, when they share a common commitment to body-modification, and the acquisition of muscle. Chapter 9 now evolves to discuss each of the three typologies of Gym D life that my research discovered. I introduce readers to the concept of what ‘everyday’ existence is like, in terms of ‘systematic generalisations’ (Burawoy, 1991) for the three participant groups. I also demonstrate how the three different participant groups were ‘made’ (Thompson, 1963); i.e. I examine how the groups came into being as ‘cultural products’ or exigencies of Town A’s different cultural habitus’. I do so in the belief that ‘persons at their most personal are essentially the personification of exigencies actually or potentially inscribed in the structure of the field’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 89). Hence, I consider how the groups have been culturally constructed by their social structure, or ‘field’. Chapter 9 begins by discussing *The Drifters*.

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<sup>58</sup> See Cohen, 1972, who also suggested that working class existence can be divided into a tripartite model.



## The Drifters'

Five of the forty-two participants that I researched for this thesis belong to the *Drifter* taxonomy<sup>59</sup> of working class life: BL, TS, GH, JW and RB.

All of the Drifters' are unemployed, and have been for most of their lives. In the qualitative interviews that I conducted, all of the Drifters' stated that they intend on remaining unemployed for the foreseeable future. I have labelled the Drifters so on account of their apparent willingness to 'drift' through their lives, while they claim and survive on state-provided benefits.

BL, at 32, is the eldest of the Drifters. He currently lives alone in a house that is subsidised for him by the government. After leaving school at the age of sixteen with 'no qualifications', BL experienced nine months of unemployment before he found work in a factory located in Town A, which 'made electrical circuits'. BL worked in the factory from the age of seventeen to twenty-one, before he became 'unable to work for medical reasons', which I later learned meant mental health problems. BL has never worked since his experiences of labouring in the factory. BL is considered something of a fraud by other users in Gym D, who are sure that BL 'pretends' to be mentally unwell so as to avoid work.

BL never knew his Father, and his Mother died a year ago. As an only child, BL now has no immediate family. BL is the only participant that I interviewed who admitted to using antidepressant medication to help him with his 'shit, very fucking lonely situation'.

Two of the other Drifters' live with their Mothers, at the ages of 19 (TS) and 18 (GH). Their choice to remain 'in the nest' is not based solely on financial convenience, as TS explains:

I ask: 'Would you like to move out of your Mum's house?'

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<sup>59</sup> The statistically low number of Drifters analysed here is representative of the fact that few people 'like' the Drifters work-out in Gym D, or any other fitness facility, owing to the laziness associated with their lifestyle.



TS: 'Move out of hers' (his Mothers')? Fuck that. She (my mother) washes me clothes, cleans the hoos (house); gives us money if I need it. I would never leave that setup.

Plus, she needs us there with her. She feels safer with me around! So try getting all that I get for no rent: you'll be looking a canny time!'

TS and GH were best friends throughout school, and remain very close today. GH began to train as a chef after leaving school at the age of sixteen, but purposely burnt himself one day when at work, and has not worked since. TS, who also left school at sixteen, was on his way to becoming a mechanic but got 'laid off'. TS claims his 'forced' layoff was due to 'the garage not being able to pay' him; but I learned from GH that TS's constant lateness and 'bad attitude' was the reason for his (allegedly self-mediated) exit. As my time in the field evolved, I realised that both TS and GH are involved in selling marijuana, ecstasy and cocaine in Town A; and have also been known to sell steroids to people in nearby areas.

JW, 24, was employed as a 'casual gardener and builder' by a private landscaping firm that 'went broke'. At that point, JW – who had worked diligently for almost five years - was made redundant, and decided to 'retire on the state' ( become dependent upon income support). JW now lives with his girlfriend, in a house that his girlfriend owns.

RB, lives with his second wife, and with his three children. He is 21. After leaving Town A's college at eighteen, where he completed a 'two year qualification in sport studies', RB worked as a bouncer for a year and six months at a notoriously rough bar in Newcastle's city centre. However, RB lost his door licence, and therefore ability to work legally as a bouncer, after an 'incident with some customers' that resulted in him being stabbed. RB now carries a scar on his face as a result of the 'incident'. RB proudly claims to have narrowly avoided prison on three occasions for episodes involving drinking ('I was fucking hammered and the pigs pulled me over, that is all'), vandalism ('I was lashed and I decided to smash this car in,



and I was caught') and fighting ('I hit this posh cunt in the Toon (Newcastle's city centre) one night, but there was no witnesses, thankfully').

All of the Drifters' were born in Town A, attended schools in Town A, and have lived in Town A for the entirety of their lives. The average age of the Drifter is 22.4 years. The Drifters' are the youngest typology of working class life to be researched here. It is worth noting that, in time, all or some of the Drifters' may abandon their anti-work ethics, and 'go straight'. For now, however, the Drifters' apathy, laziness and low self-esteem ensures that they are truly rooted in the somewhat countercultural way of living and thinking that 'drifting' brings about psycho-socially, as shown in the below:

'I am not proud of myself, being a bum, being lazy, but I really don't care. It's not just that I don't believe that I'm good at anything, like my Mam says, but I'm not, so it's not just cause I'm as thick as fuck, it's like, sometimes I think, oh well, that is it, time to get a job and follow the rules and go straight with life, but then a moment later I think, oh fuck it, I can't be arsed, I'll watch telly instead or whatever and that night think back and think, what was I thinking, I'll keep on going, who gives a fuck?'

The fact that the Drifters' are unemployed does not, in itself, make them distinguishable or unique among my sample of participants. There are members of my sample - i.e. members of the Traditionalist taxonomy - who are unemployed and have been for some time, but who do not belong to this group categorically. What *does* make the Drifters' unique is that they have no *intention* of working. They are unemployed by choice. Unlike other unemployed users of Gym D who 'want' to work but can't get a job, or plan on returning to work after sabbaticals of various kinds, the Drifters' plan to live their lives claiming and existing on income support. It is the Drifters' anti-work ethos, as summarised below, which defines their existences:



‘Work? Fuck work. My routine, like me normal day, might be boring, like I keep saying, but it is better than the other choice. I wake up, I train and then I can do what I want. I have learned to live without money really; but that is hard. And I have learned to block out all the shite you hear, and the crap other people try and give ya ... So, I can eat. I have me house. I have me lass (girlfriend) and a couple of mates and I know that will be there like forever. And that is fine by me. There is always a new film to watch, a new fucking computer game to play. Another bottle of vodka or bag of pot to smoke come around at the weekend. And I would rather live like this to be honest with ya Yazz. I am not cut out for all that shite (I ask what shite) ‘like getting up every day at the same time for rest of me life, and doing some shite job with a bunch of fucking wankers’.

The Drifters’ represent a radically different view and approach to labour from other working class people then, both in Town A and other working class milieus. The Drifters’ are comparable to the Brooklyn longshoremen analysed by Difazio (1985)<sup>60</sup>: they can, but won’t work. Other, employed users of Gym D are typically angered by the Drifters’ anti-work ethic. Their localised anger is typical of contemporary Britain’s wider, macro view of its ‘dole dependents’; as Bauman (1998: 36-37) reminds us:

‘those who claim welfare state in British society today are, as a general rule’ vilified ‘for being a drain on “taxpayers’ money” and are associated in the public mind with sponging, reprehensible negligence, sexual laxity or drug abuse ... they turn ever more into the contemporary version of the wages of sin ... which we not only “cannot afford”, but for which there is no moral reason why we should try to do so.’

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<sup>60</sup> After years of unemployment, the Drifters’, like the longshoremen analysed by Difazio, ‘have lost the lingering desire to perform labour. They regard the prospect of putting in a day’s work with some dread’ (Aronowitz, 1992: 235).



The collective anger that many of my employed participants feel towards the Drifters' is made explicit in the following comments, given by a Traditionalist:

'the way they (the Drifters') take the piss is shocking. We live in a place where we help those who need it, but these days I get pissed off with lazy cunts and foreign twats coming and taking the piss: shocking! But then again, if it was not for the fucking politicians who are as thick as pig shite, they wouldn't have the chance to take the piss. Starve the cunts. Then they'll work! But those stupid cunt politicians don't know their arse. They just think oh we'll give them money, everything will be ok. Wey it's not ok!'

Before chastising the Drifters', other users of Gym D would perhaps do well to remember that the Drifters' anti-work ethic, and the somewhat countercultural lifestyle that comes with it, is sustainable *because* of governmental policy. As the Drifters' themselves articulated to me during the course of this research, if it was not for 'jobseekers' allowance' and the other income support policies that are offered to working class residents in the UK today, the choice 'to work or not to work' would not, existentially, be there for the Drifters' to polemically take advantage of.

Another factor that is often unrecognised by society's judging masses – themselves so quick to vilify the Drifters', and people of their unemployed dispositions - is that, in some cases being unemployed is financially *advantageous* to members of contemporary working class society; as shown in the following:

'when People start giving me shite for being on the dole – for being a fucking beggar who claims benefit – I think, fuck you. You're the beggar. You're the slave. You're the stupid cunt. You should realise that you'd be better off on the rock n roll (income support). See, like with me lass, she gets money for the kids right. And then, all of a sudden, her mate gans, here, I've got you this job. Like, working in a tea shop or some



shite like that, you can hold your head up again, and the fucking sun will shine! But then, it turned out that if she took it (the job), we would be a fiver a week better off. Only a fiver! She would work six hours a day to have five quid more a week! So, she gans, fuck that. I'll just keep getting the benefits ... so when those cunts act like they do, I think, if you knew the half, then you'd be ganning wild! Call me lazy, at least I'm not a twat. I'm better off this way; this is the better option for us!'

Contemporary culture is one where unemployment financially represents 'the better option' for some working class citizens. Little wonder then that the Drifters', and countless others like them around the country continue to 'drift' through their lives: actively rejecting the employment opportunities that come their way, thereby taking advantage of an unemployment system that is laughable in its ineptness, despite the financial and social marginalisation that comes with unemployment:

'Wey, I had this job like a few years ago. It was fucking shite. Working as a chef in this fucking awful kitchen, up at (names restaurant). I came out of school and thought, I had better get a job. Like, all me mates are working, some had gone in the army. I had no money and me lass (girlfriend) at the time was giving us shite: get a job ya lazy bastard! I gans yee haven't got a job you stupid slag! ... so I end up in the kitchen. It was the hottest fucking place I have ever been. Peeling tettys (potatoes) all day. Getting shouted at like a slave by the boss: do this, do that! I wanted to plant him, he was a proper bully ... if I saw him now, I'd fucking plant him ...and after a month or so ... wey, like three weeks ... I decided I have had enough of this. I can't tell you how much I fucking detested it and those cunts I worked with. I was meant to be doing a chefs course ... I ended up pouring boiling water all over me leg! I was on the sick ... doctor gave us a note, and they said, oh, shit son, just have some time off, and we'll pay you! Canny good eh? They paid us. They said, just diven't tell anyone about your burn – cause it



was a fucking bad burn. I made sure of that ... then, when I had to start claiming again, I went down the job shop and said I was sacked and I can't work ... they gans, whey what do you want to do? I gans, not a chef, I wanna work with animals. Which was just a joke but she puts it in the computer and gans, right, I'll let you know if anything comes up; here is your eighty four quid... see you next time. I was fucking laughing. And have been ever since. I gans in, she goes, there are no jobs, I gans right. See you in a fortnight! I'm thinking, you'll be looking for a canny while petal! There aren't no zoos around here! (Laughs). I get home, put me feet up, have something to eat and watch the fuckers coming back from work in their cars and buses. Thinking, thank fuck I'm not in the kitchen. I'll put a DVD on and maybe shag me lass! Or gan and find the puma<sup>61</sup>. Canny good eh?; put that in your study!'

Accordingly, the Drifters' see their unemployment as 'a voluntary choice ... the result of government policies that provide incentives to workers to remain unemployed' (Byrne, 1999: 18).

Hutton (1996) proposes that a 'them and us' situation has arisen between society's employed and unemployed members'. Hutton's sentiment was affirmed in my research. The Drifters' choice not to work makes 'them', in the eyes of 'us', lazy and even immoral. The Drifters' are thus perceived of and referred to as a 'waste of space' by many of my employed participants', who consider the Drifters' to be 'thieves ... living off taxes' that 'we' (society's employed) 'work hard to pay'. Therefore the Drifters' have become vilified, 'uglified' (Young, 1990), and seen as the 'other' by the employed working majority of Gym D and Town A. This sense of vilification and 'otherness' is also levelled at unemployed immigrants living in the North-East, as the below quotation taken, from a Traditionalist, affirms:

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<sup>61</sup> At the time that this comment was made, Town A was on 'red alert' after it was believed that a Puma was 'on the loose' in the area. The Puma was said to have escaped from a residents' house; who had reared the Cat since its birth. The resident was thought to have acquired the cub through the internet auction *EBay*.



‘I was in the shop the other day<sup>62</sup>, and some gyppo was outside (a refugee who sells the *Big Issue*). And the woman serving us gans, ‘oh, isn’t it a shame that she has to come over here and do that just to feed her family’. And I gans, ‘you’re talking to the wrong bloke petal’. And she gans, ‘what do you mean?’ Wey, she had boiled me piss (made me angry) by this point. So I thought, right, I’ll tell ya what I mean; you’ve asked so I’ll tell ya. So I says, ‘if it was up to me, she’d be sent home. Or gassed. And it is the same with the fucking beggars from this country, and it is the same with those lazy cunts on the dole. They make me sick ... ya divent come here and sponge off us! ... people who claim make me fucking sick. I have never missed a day (of work), neither did me fatha (Father). So why should they? Gas the cunts!’ I got me pasty and left’<sup>63</sup>.

The Drifters’ and ‘others like them’ are not just (consensually) excluded from postmodern ‘working life’ and consumption patterns by definition of their anti-work ethics. They are also (non-consensual) excluded from postmodern leisure life. The Drifters’ lack of monetary and cultural capital, and associated ‘Chav’ masculinities means they can’t partake in their region’s growing ‘night time economy’, which manifest itself most readily in the city of Newcastle’s ‘fantasy spaces’ and ‘fringe cities’. This exclusion compounds the Drifters’ sense of ‘otherness’, and ensures that they - and others of their ‘Chav’ typology - constitute the North-East’s ‘disconnected youth’, as analysed by Nayak (2006), who shows (820) that:

‘Although some working class men were able to revel in the new corporate leisure spaces of the city’ (of Newcastle Upon Tyne) ‘others could not. A number of young

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<sup>62</sup> A chain Bakery near Gym D that sells cakes, pies and pasties.

<sup>63</sup> Although successful in portraying the anger that people feel towards the Drifters, such quotes cannot denote the smug, conceited, sanctimonious sense of superiority that many employed people adopt when talking about the Drifters, and ‘others’ of their non-contributory ilk. Their premise seems to be based on their belief that because ‘we’ support ‘them’ (in the form of taxes) we are not just ‘better’ than them, but also, somehow, their owners and keepers. Hence, ‘we’ can judge ‘them’ as we want.



men from long-term unemployed families found themselves to be more marginalised and isolated than ever before. Economically, these ‘disconnected youth’ (MacDonad and Marsh, 2001) had been priced out of many of the new drinking venues where bright lights, glitz and silver chrome predominated. Known locally as *Charvers* (and nationally pillared as *Chavs*), they further found that their particular style of clothing, which included tracksuits, trainers and baseball caps were banned from these establishments. Indeed, I collected a number of fliers from bars and clubs that explicitly stated that certain venues were ‘*Charver free zones*’ and employed doormen to regulate their clientele.’

All of the Drifters’ purposefully conform to the aesthetics and conventions of ‘Charver culture’ identified above, by ritually and proudly wearing trainers, tracksuits, baseball caps, an abundance of gold jewellery. All of the Drifters’ sport tattoos on their necks. (A tattooed neck, I learned ‘in the field’, is the height of contemporary Chav chic). The Drifters’ also behave in a ‘Chav way’ kinesiologically: the Drifters’ accents are more exaggerated than my other participants’, their walks are also more menacing or ‘strut like’; and they spit more, especially when in groups in public spaces. The Drifters’ have thus ‘learned’ from and copied the same stigmatised model of ‘hard masculinity’ that their urban ‘Chav’ counterparts in the city of Newcastle Upon Tyne have, as described by Nayak (2006: 822):

‘By adopting the outward manifestations of street style – baseball caps, tracksuits, trainers, heavy gold jewellery - and accompanying this apparel with a pronounced walk, *Charver* lads were engaged in the body-reflexive technique of ‘hard’ masculinity ... Similarly, *Charvers* ... affect a loping stride and exaggerated, rough ‘Geordie’ accents. The *Charver* walk, ‘head down with an arched back’ became emblematic of their supposed subhuman, animalistic tendencies ... to symbolize the stunted evolution of the ‘knuckle-grazing’ *Charver* youth ... the class distinctions used to demarcate



*Charvers* are evident in a web discussion board (which shows) stereotypes surrounding them (include) broader associations of crime, violence and unemployment’.

The Drifters’ are aware that they ‘dress and talk differently’ to others in society, and appear to enjoy – to a degree - the negative reactions that their rebellious Charver images and lifestyles induce. The Drifters’ are therefore part of the ‘Chav ... illiterate underclass’ identified by the *State of Nation* report (see Collins, M. 2006), and are apparently proud to be so.

Except for JR - who lives in area one – all of the Drifters’ reside in area four of Town A, which is Town A’s emerging ghetto. The high levels of intergenerational unemployment that the Drifters’ have grown up knowing – by definition of them being born into families who live in area four - will have perhaps normalised, and even legitimised their current unemployed positions, and attitudes towards labour. The Drifters’ association with area four – itself a stigmatised space – compounds their exclusion, ‘otherness’ and stigmatisation.

I now say something about the Drifters’ use of Gym D.

The Drifters’ routinely use Gym D in the mornings. This is for three primary reasons. Firstly, the gym is quieter in the morning. Hence machines and weights are freely available, and can be acquired by the Drifters’ in a way that they can’t be later in the day, when the gym is busier. Secondly, and crucially, the lack of people using Gym D in the morning – ‘as most people are at work or in bed’ – means that the Drifters’ can train and simultaneously avoid the verbal ‘slating’ (ridicule) that they would otherwise get from users of the gym on account of their anti-work ethos’, as explained below:

‘If I gan (go) in (the gym), or if me and (names best friend) gan in when it is choka block (very busy), like in the night time, we’ll get a fucking slating off the lads. Some



of it is good banter, but I know that there is some like nastiness also. Like I'll gan in and they'll all start, wehey, it's the fucking tax dodgers. Giz me money back ya lazy cunts! And then they'll be like, the fucker is lifting weights in here, so let's get him grafting on the building sights! We'd better call up the DSS ... So, fuck that, I'll just gan when it is quiet'

Thirdly, training in the morning ensures the Drifters' days are structured, disciplined and 'constructive' in a way they would not be, without a session in the gym:

'It's easy to lose your way when you have all this time, like wasting time just drinking or smoking or whatever. But that is why training is a big part for me. Like, if I get up and train hard, then all day I'm eating, doing me stretches, getting me protein in. Thinking about tomorrow's training. I won't go and have a pint or a smoke (of marijuana) or out like that cause I've done me gym in the morning and I don't want to spoil it, see? That is why it keeps me right, not just how I feel but how I live as well. Training drives me and keeps me sleeping right, eating right, stuff like that. Plus I am knackered after a sesh (gym session) so I stay out of trouble'

Jahoda et al's 1972 study of an unemployed community shows how time and routine becomes blurred and confused for unemployed people. Grint (2005: 42) asserts that 'employment facilitates and unemployment tends to debilitate social routine and the rhythm of social life'. It should be noted that Gym D appears to prevent the lack of routine and rhythm that ordinarily impairs the lives of unemployed people materialising in the lives of the Drifters. Indeed, the Drifter sees his body-modification as his lives' vocation. Although the Drifter does not earn money for his body-modification, his 'gym labour' is diligent, committed, professional; and essentially 'paid' in and through the 'currency' of muscle (as



this thesis evolves to consider). Hence, body-modification has taken on the form and function of labour for the Drifters', within their otherwise labour-less existences.

All of the Drifters' sport large 'bodybuilding' physiques which resemble the 'industrial body types' discussed earlier in this work. They do not display the 'slim', 'defined' bodies that are glamorised in society's mainstream mass-media (as the Changers' do), which the Drifters' see as being 'soft' and 'gay'. Thus, in terms of gym labour, the Drifters' lift heavy weights for a low number of repetitions so as to construct physical mass and size. Interestingly, the small amount of 'spare cash' that the Drifters' have is, I found out during the course of this research, generally spent on gym-related commodities, such as protein-shakes, steroids, and gym clothes. This illustrates the importance and prioritisation of the Drifters' body and body-modification to him further.

Significantly, the bodies that are inhabited by society's 'ghetto poor' are - stereotypically and empirically – extreme; i.e. extremely obese or 'skinny'. This is due to lifestyles and cycles that society's ritually unemployed, ghettoised classes endure. Which are generally defined either by idleness and predominantly fast-food based diets; or drug-use and a subsequent neglect of one's' health. The Drifters' involvement with Gym D means that their bodies are significantly different from others of their 'Chav' ilk, however. Indeed, the Drifters' bodies are among the most impressive in Gym D. I will go on to argue, later in this thesis, that the Drifters' modified bodies challenge the 'lazy tags' which are levelled at them. I will also suggest that the Drifters' muscles act as the only form of capital in their existences, which are otherwise void of commodities and respect. I propose that the Drifters' gym lives give them a sense of purpose and solidarity that is, ordinarily, lacking for contemporary culture's 'ghetto poor'. I suggest that the Drifters' muscles are as integral to their 'Chav', 'hard' identities, semiotically, as their tracksuits, gold sovereign rings and tattooed necks.



Now that I have described the Drifters' lives, their positions as cultural exigencies, and their 'everyday presentations of the self' (Goffman, 1959), I go on to introduce readers to the Traditionalists'.

### The Traditionalists'

The *Pitmen Painters* began to document mining life and culture around the mid 1930s, through the medium of art. The Pitmen Painters' work now proudly hangs in a museum in Town A. The paintings provide visitors of the museum with an intriguing, somewhat nostalgic insight into Town A's industrial 'yesteryear'. I dare suggest that individuals who want to experience the mining mentality and stereotype of the past 'firsthand', and in a non-still way would only need to meet and observe some of my Traditional participants briefly to understand the mining psyche and culture poignantly. For the Traditionalists' are exigencies and constructs of Town A's past, 'localised', mining habitus. Hence, within the climate of post-industrialisation and globalisation - and therefore cultural change – that Town A and its residents are living in and experiencing, a Traditionalist manages to retain a lifestyle, identity and (Pittmatic) accent which resembles the sorts of lifestyles, identities and accents that men in Town A exuberated during Town A's industrial era. The Traditionalists' are seen in this thesis as 'the last of the miners'. They are bastions and products of an industrial culture and ideology; which is increasingly obsolete in 'post-industrial' Town A.

Let us consider mining culture more specifically. Bulman (1920: 2) appraised the stereotypical Miner<sup>64</sup> as:

'not always an attractive individual on the outside, but an uncouth and unprepossessing exterior often hides a strong and resolute character, and a kindly disposition.

Accustomed to face stern and disagreeable realities in his daily work, he is real and

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<sup>64</sup> See Benson, 1980 for further information on the (stereotypical) miner.



genuine in his feelings and conduct, and has a robust individuality of his own. Self-reliant and independent, he is no respecter of persons, but his respect, once gained, is sincere and lasting’.

Burgess (1975: 169) states that:

‘The brutalized conditions of the miner was reflected in the dirt, neglect and habitual drunkenness prevailing in many mining villages ... violence was never far from the miner’s life, either at work or leisure. His basic needs remained simple ... habitual drunkenness led to ‘irregular habits’ and drained the miners’ ... income.’

As I realised having spent less than a month in Town A as an ethnographer, most, if not all, of my Traditionalist participants fit the stereotypical descriptions of miners provided above. They are undeniably ‘real and genuine’, ‘robust’, ‘strong and resolute’ in terms of their self-presentations. (Indeed, anyone who is not this way is often seen as unusual, a deviant; or even ‘wrong’ by the Traditionalists). Further, many of the Traditionalists’ appear innately predetermined to partake in the violence and drunkenness that Town A’s miners once indulged in. This is especially true during the weekend: those two days and three nights of hallowed time that appears to make many of Town A’s residents’ lives tolerable. During which time, the more a Traditionalist drinks, the harder he may prove to be in a fight; and the more women he ‘pulls’ and ‘shags’, the more he is generally considered to be a ‘good man’; and ‘one of the lads’. Accordingly, on weekend evenings, Town A – like many commercial spaces in the North East - is reminiscent of the Manchester city centre of industrial times, which Engels (1987: 152) describes; and it is the Traditionalists’ who revel most of all in such conditions:

‘On Saturday evenings, especially when wages are paid and work stops somewhat earlier than usual ... the whole working class pours from its own poor quarters into the



main thoroughfares ... intemperance may be seen in all its brutality. I have rarely come out of Manchester on such an evening without meeting numbers of people staggering and seeing others lying in the gutter’.

Hence, the ‘hard case, cobblestone’ (Morton, 1993; Winlow, 2001) industrial model of masculinity that defined working class life in earlier epochs lives on in Town A, and continues to guide the lives and minds of the Traditionalists. Sexism, homophobia, racism, and inverse class elitism create thematic solidarity among the Traditionalists’, and formed the basis of many conversations and jokes I heard the Traditionalists’ share ‘in the field’. A pride in being a ‘Town A lad’ is also highly evident among the Traditionalists’; many of whom are highly conscious and celebratory of their Town and region’s distinctive history<sup>65</sup> and identity. Therefore, the ‘role’ of the miner – the hard drinking, scrapping, racist, homophobic womanising man who puts up with a ‘shit life and a shit job’ out of a sense of honour, local pride, the promise of the weekend and the belief that a man’s existential purpose is to ‘make money and provide’ - is a role that many of Town A’s residents still embrace, dramaturgically (Goffman, 1959). Real life versions of Andy Capp and Sid the Sexist (whose behaviour is idolised and often cited in Gym D) – the cloth-capped, chain smoking, beer swilling, sexist cartoon character - are still in abundance in ‘wor parts’ (‘our parts’), as are versions of ‘Gazza’, the characters from *Auf Wiedersehen*, *Pet* and other, somewhat maligned Geordie stereotypes. Significantly, as this chapter’s summary explores in detail, such individuals are not ‘postmodern citizens’; they are not products of, or compliant to what Hannerz (1992) terms as ‘the global ecumene’. Rather, they are localised, ‘proper’

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<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, I have heard many of my Traditionalists affectionately refer to themselves and their peers as ‘Vikings’ or ‘modern day Vikings’. For, like the Vikings who terrorised the North East Coast, my Traditionalists are also, they believe, ‘scared of nobody’, ‘ready to battle anyone’, ‘as hard as nails’, ‘invaders’ and ‘hungry for food, fights and women, just like those warriors and gladiators of history’.



Town A people: ‘the salt of the earth’; and constructs of a mining habitus. Thus in Town A, as the case also is in Newcastle according to the work of Nayak<sup>66</sup> (2006 :820):

‘Despite changes to the manufacturing base ... the spirit of white masculine excess is very much alive’ (and displayed through) ‘nostalgic affection for the region; the emphasis on male drinking pursuits; ‘industrial’ language and physical humour; the smattering of stories about fighting and sexual exploits; the abundant parochial conservatism which coloured much ... opinion on gender, sexuality and ethnicity’;

and in Gym D, it is the Traditionalists’ who exemplify this ‘spirit of white masculinity’ most obviously and readily, both in their lives and ‘on’ their bodies, as I shall go on to consider.

Statistically, thirty out of the forty two participants’ interviewed and observed as part of this research belong to the ‘Traditionalist’ taxonomy<sup>67</sup>. The high amount of Traditionalists in my sample reflects the high amount of Traditionalists who use Gym D: Gym D is essentially the Traditionalists’ gym. Therefore a sample of Gym D’s users will reflect their predominance numerically.

The Traditionalists’ education levels are, as a rule, very low<sup>68</sup>: all but four of the Traditionalists left their local high schools at the age of sixteen. At which point, most of them went on to do job-specific apprenticeships, or ‘straight into graft’ (employment). The data which I elicited on the Traditionalists’ points to the fact that a Traditionalist will probably

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<sup>66</sup> Nayak’s research identifies the existence ‘*real Geordies*’ (as opposed to Chav Geordies). These ‘real Geordies’, who are preserves of working class masculinity, represent a parallel to the Traditionalists, identified in my research.

<sup>67</sup> Twelve of the Traditionalists are between thirty five and forty five years of age; eight of them are between twenty five and thirty five. Two are younger: eighteen and twenty one respectively. Eight are between the ages of forty nine and fifty nine. The average age of the Traditionalist is thirty nine years of age, meaning that many members of this group are representative of a different generation of working class men, and were conditioned by a different cultural apparatus to the other two groups of working class life researched in my sample.

<sup>68</sup> An exception to this rule is HG who read history at the *University of Newcastle* and worked as a librarian for a period of time, before going on to form his own kitchen fitting company having decided that ‘the pansy life (i.e. working in a library) is bad for your heart; it will make a mouse out of a lion’.



have been born in Town A, and will have lived in Town A for all of his life<sup>69</sup>, unless he has served in one of ‘the forces’, meaning that will have proudly left Town A, temporarily, in military service to his ‘Queen and country’; as seven Traditionalists have. Morbidly, a Traditionalist will probably die in Town A. For leaving the Town is not on the Traditionalists’ agenda, as shown in the following quotation:

‘If I won the lottery, I wouldn’t leave here (Town A). Would I fuck, this is the place man. Like, when you were saying you went to Brazil and Australia and America and lived there, I was thinking, what the fuck would you go there for? Are you mental? There are foreigners everywhere, it is dangerous. It is ower (over) hot. The food is different. Who did you know there? (‘Nobody’ I say). Ne (no) one, so what is the point? This is great here man, what do you want to leave it for? Ask anyone, they’ll all say we are the best people in the world – stuff anywhere else ... you’ve got the Toon (Newcastle upon Tyne) up the road, the beaches over there, the hills that way and lovely countryside, and the Gym up there – what else could you need? I wouldn’t even go on holiday; was there a *Metro Centre* there? Was there fuck’.

Hence, as a typology of life, the Traditionalists’ can be seen as being satisfied with and settled in the cultural ecology of Town A. I will return to this point later in this thesis, when considering the Traditionalists’ comparative lack of cultural anomie.

Although the Traditionalists’ do not, as a consequence of Town A’s de-industrialisation, work ‘doon the mines’, the Traditionalists’ do perform what they classify as ‘proper work’; i.e. they engage in the limited amount of blue collar labour is available in and around Town A; which characteristically involves one working with his hands in a physically challenging, often highly skilled way. Thus, the Traditionalists’ work as builders, joiners, mechanics,

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<sup>69</sup> Only two Traditionalists were born elsewhere: one in Glasgow, the other in Durham. Both moved to Town A at the age of five.



electricians, scrap metal workers etc. There are also a lot of bouncers in this group (fourteen of the Traditionalists are full-time bouncers or ‘in security’<sup>70</sup>, which demonstrates how ‘blue-collar’ labour has evolved from the ‘traditional’ artisan workplace, into places of leisure in the era of post-modernity. Crucially, the Traditionalists’ do not perform the white collar, office labour which the Changers’ practice; which the Traditionalists’ see as being ‘puffy women’s’ work’<sup>71</sup>. Nor would a Traditionalist ever ‘live on the state’ as the Drifter does. As put by one of the Traditionalists’: ‘I speak for us all when I say we’re too proud to do that, like begging off the state, we’re not that type’.

45% of the Traditionalists’ in my sample are ‘casually employed’. By which it is meant that their employment, and therefore their income, is not fixed or assured. Such participants are forced to work sporadically: ‘when the graft is there, when it (labour) ‘comes up’. There is no guarantee or assurance of work for such individuals, as the below quote, given by a casually (self)employed metal worker affirms:

‘The demand for the (scrap) metal is like I’ve never seen it before! I was skint (out of money) for ages. Had nothing coming in! I had to live off me chickens for a while. (Participant owns several chickens). I used to go thinking, ya better have laid some eggs cause I’m hungry. If ya haven’t I’ll stretch ya necks. You’ll have the longest necks in Town A (laughs)! But then the demand started again for the metal. So I got meself the new truck ya saw us in. And it’s been great, cause I’ve got me licence back (having been banned from driving for six months) ... so basically you make hay while the sun

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<sup>70</sup> Many of the Traditionalists’ have worked ‘the doors’ in the past; and several may work as bouncers today sporadically to bolster their incomes. This is especially true around Christmas time, when the demand for bouncers is increased (‘everyone goes on Christmas nights out, like office parties and that’). However, the requirement to have a ‘door badge’ if one wants to legally work as a bouncer now means that sporadically working on the doors is not as simple as it once was; i.e. before the job became ‘professionalized’.

<sup>71</sup> Indeed, even if the Traditionalists did want to partake in such jobs, they could not. For they are representative of the ‘white working class males’ who are ‘out of step with an economy that values flexibility, keyboard proficiency, telephone communication skills and personal presentation’ as identified by Nayak (2006); and thus excluded from society’s information and knowledge economy and employment opportunities.



shines. I'm working like a nutter, filling up the van four or five times a day, then melting it down and selling it on. But I have to while I can. Cause that might dry up, but when it does, I'll have me stash from all this. Woohoo, pleny of raps in the bank! (Rubs hands together). And then I'll not be relying on me chickens again!'

A casually employed Traditionalists may, therefore, work in different job at different times so as to 'make ends meet', and thereby live as a professional 'Jacks of all trades'. He may also partake in undeclared 'fiddly jobs'; or even criminal activity to bolster his financial situation. To reiterate, he would not 'live on the state' as the Drifter does; for he sees 'the experience of unemployment as ... one of great personal shame and guilt' (Grint, 2007:41). As put by one casually employed Traditionalist: 'I am a working class person, my entire background are working class people ... I'd sooner die then become a beggar, and not work like a lazy bastard, me Fatha (Father) would turn in his grave at the thought'.

In contrast, a second taxonomy of Traditionalists' are employed in consistent, 'long-term', 'steady' jobs. Such participants thereby enjoy the security that comes with contracts, reliable monthly payments, agreed holidays, pension schemes and insurance schemes.

Simultaneously, a third taxonomy of Traditionalists' are affluent, having - perhaps ostensibly - made great amounts of money from redeveloping and building houses.

The fact that I have categorised millionaires and casually employed workers in the same category of 'Traditionalist' Town A life may seem strange - even arbitrary - to those sociologists whose definition of class is based upon monetary and occupational levels. Such sociologists, like David Rose who attempted to clarify the notion of social class - 'the perpetually contested idea' (Wright:1) within sociology - by stratifying society's members into class 'groupings' based on variables ranging from ones' employment to ones' willingness to experiment with technology, may ask: how can 'casually employed' people be



grouped with multi-millionaires, and be seen as being the ‘same’ sociologically within my sample? My answer, in short, is ‘ideology’.

To clarify, in this thesis I used the theme of labour life as the original and primary way of differentiating, categorising and stratifying my sample. Hence it is the post-industrial labour of the Changers’, the manual/‘hands-on’ labour of the Traditionalist’ and the Drifters’ lack of labour which accounts for the tripartite model of working class life proposed in this thesis, which splits my sample of Gym D users into three groupings, or modes of working class life.

I found that after I split my sample into three sub-groups of working class culture (based on my participants’ labour lives) what emerged was not just three sub-groups with different labour styles and labour attitudes, but – more importantly - three sub-groups with contrasting lifestyles, ideologies, attitudes, bodies and ‘masculinities’ from each other (i.e. *between* the Changers’, Drifters’ and Traditionalists’ comparatively); but with remarkably similar internal views (i.e. *within* the Changers’, Drifters’ and Traditionalists’). In other words, what became more important than the generalisably different jobs and incomes that my participant group’s perform and command is the generalisably different lives, ideologies and identities that my participant group’s experience, harbour and exemplify; both in relation to and independent of their labour lives.

Accordingly the Traditionalists’ must be grouped together as a distinctive type of Gym D life, regardless of the differing financial situations (i.e. ‘casually employed’, ‘steadily employed’, ‘affluent’) members of this group experience and personify. For the Traditionalists’ shared ethos’ – i.e. the collective, shared ways of being and thinking that all of the Traditionalists’ share, regardless of their economic situation – makes them all ‘one of the same’ class and stratification.



While ‘class’ to some: ‘connotes lifestyle and tastes, the wearing of tennis whites while gardening ... and to others it is mainly about social status, esteem and respect’ (Wright:1) to my Traditional participants’, their class is fixed and permanent. Their class is governed only by their ‘backgrounds’, upbringing and ideology. It is not governed by their subjective economic situations. For my Traditional participants’, regardless of what economic and life changes may occur in their existence, their class will remain the same.

Hence, the Weberian and Bourdieusian traditions and view of ‘class’ - which see a person’s class change through their lifespan, depending upon the variable amount of financial and cultural capital they may generate or lose; the fluctuating relationship a person may have with a culture’s ‘distributional location’ (i.e. ‘how people are objectively located in distribution to material inequality’ (Wright: 180)); and the ability for one to become culturally ‘emancipated’ (i.e. a cultural transformation and ‘progression’ which ‘eliminates oppression and exploitation within’ ones’ existence (Wright: 181)) - do not apply to the definition of class shared by the Traditionalists’, and which the Traditionalists’ apply to themselves (even if such views of class do apply, acutely, to the Changer’s). Therefore, the Traditionalists can justifiably be discussed and thought about as one singular typology of working class life in this work (based on their fixed, singular collective consciousness), in spite of their contrasting monetary levels. For, what all of the Traditionalists’ have collectively in common – whether ‘skint’ or ‘loaded’, whether unemployed or ‘successful’ - is a shared, collective ethos’; i.e. a rigid set of beliefs about what is ‘right’ and ‘real’, and how they, their lives and their Town ‘should, ideally, be’. Their economic situations will not change their ideological outlook. They will remain a ‘status group’ who share a common lifestyle and collective consciousness that is independent of their employment situation, and who thus belong to the same ‘class’ in the most fundamental, non-superficial sense of the term. While my Traditionalist participants’ acknowledge that income may change the ‘path’ of their



existences by definition of the materialistic changes it brings, it will not change their class, class stratification or sense of self; as explained below:

‘The only difference between my life now and how it was before (becoming a millionaire) is that I spend more money on alcohol and protein now, and my car is faster ... I am just one of the lads, like, I just happen to have shit loads of money and a Jacuzzi in me garden and jet skis and stuff, like all my toys (his expensive commodities)! My politics and me are still as they were. I still have the same mates and all that! I would rather die than change.’

Social mobility and improved financial success does not determine or change ones’ ‘class’ according to the thoughts of the Traditionalists then, as shown in the below conversations; the latter of which is given by a vastly affluent, known criminal in Town A:

Participant: ‘you are born working class and you stay working class, you can’t be born posh and end up working class, or be born working class and end up posh’

I say: ‘well, that is interesting because some people who study what I do say that your class changes in your life. So, for example, if you’re poor and from a council estate and end up being very rich, like you become a footballer or something like that and live a very glamorous life, or even if you end up becoming a judge or something, then your class changes because of the money you have, and where you come to live, and who you come to be and hang-out with ... also, if you’re rich and end up poor, like living on the streets because of alcoholism or something, your class changes. They may say your occupation, where you live and your accent all determine your class position’

Participant: ‘wey they are wrong! You are always who you are, you stay where you’re born like in terms of class. Money does not change who you are. Having money does



not change your background. You might say end up marrying some posh bastard and being loaded if you're a lass from here, but you'll still have the values and experiences that you got from growing up working class! Like listen to that Cheryl Cole off the telly ... she is still a proper lass from the Toon (Newcastle Upon Tyne), even though she is loaded and on the telly and in magazines and all that shite!'

'I was on a fucking posh boat once ya na? It was when all (refers to criminal related incident participant was involved in, that became local news) had just ended and I needed to get away from it all ... I was there in the middle of the sea on a fucking boat with some posh prostitute I hardly knew. The sun was shining and I was on this boat, looking at the sea and eating crabmeat which is my favourite food of all, and there was this sexy tart I was with and her mates and they were posh as fuck, and there I was with all that and all my money and in the middle of it all I started to miss home, and I thought what the fuck has happened to me? (long pause) I've become a twat. I wanted the lads to be there so much, I wanted my mates around me ... my people, people I trust and like our sort of people (participant shouts and becomes very animated and emotional) and then I thought I'd rather be in (names nightclub in Town A) or on my way home pissed and eating a kebab then here living this life ... So I thought I can come home and be with my people but might go to prison, or stay here. It was the point in my life when I realised who I am and what I am. It was a turning point like ... you talk about class, wey even when you're living the dream, or the so called dream, you can't teach a dog new tricks, like you can't teach a proper Town A lad like me to be a fucking boater with all the toys, I am as working class as they come below all the shite, like me car and cocaine. Don't be fooled by people's attempts to disguise themselves!'

The above illustrates further the 'fixed' view of class and ones' position in society shared by the Traditionalists'; and the subsequent need to see and discuss the Traditionalists' as one



collective typology of working class life; in spite of the financial variation that characterises the lives of the Traditionalists’.

The data that I elicited ‘in the field’ also suggests that some of my Traditionalist participants’ have become what I’m terming here as ‘re-born’ Traditionalists’. I now clarify the notion of a ‘re-born’ Traditionalist, and emphasise the importance of these individuals, in terms of understanding the evolution of working class culture, life and masculinity. Before so doing, it is necessary to point out that working class men in Town A have traditionally married at a young age. They have typically married women who are also residents, or ex-girlfriends of Town A, and near-by areas. (Some Traditionalists in my sample married girls who were in their classes at school). By their early twenties, men in Town A are often, or have historically been, performing the sort of job that they will go on to perform all of their lives. At this point, men in Town A are in a position to acquire a mortgage, or joint-mortgage on a house with their partners, which they will pay for over the next fifty years or so. Upon this ‘model’ of life materialising, the Town A man finds himself ‘socialising as a couple’ during weekends, as opposed to ‘with the lads’. A holiday abroad once a year or so – often with other people/couples from Town A – is looked forward to. All the while, an accepted patriarchy and sense of conventionalism prevails.

The scenario outlined above has been considered as the ‘ideal model’ of existence in Town A historically. Indeed, several younger users of Gym D, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, have settled into this mould already. Significantly, nine of the Traditionalist participants analysed *were* living out the model of life described above, only too then mediate a divorce; and thereby become what I am labelling as a ‘re-born Traditionalist’. In itself, this is not *quantitatively* remarkable. In fact, their divorces are statistically likely given today’s



divorce levels, both nationally<sup>72</sup> and in Town A as a specific locus. What is remarkable *qualitatively* however is the style and motives of these divorces. For these Traditionalists had reached a point in their lived experiences when they reflexively decided to ‘turn their backs’ on the life outlined above. They left their wives, houses and children ‘behind’: not because their marriages were necessarily unhappy or unhealthy, but simply because they believed that they could be *happier* by living a different style of life. These Traditionalists’ divorced so as to abdicate themselves of the constraints, responsibilities and ‘boredom’ that comes with marriage, or ‘adult life’, and experience a level of existential freedom either previously unknown or lost, as shown in the below quotation:

‘I just got fed-up (of married life) son. The same shite for years, I got sick of it, sick of adult life. Every penny you earn goes on the family. You have no space, no time; someone always telling you what to do. And you see all these other women, everywhere. And you just wanna fucking nail them, but you can’t. You’re tied down. It’s boring. So I thought, nah, I’m not living like this anymore, I got me own place and started having parties. Living like a teenager again. New clothes, new life, the lot. Magic. I just woke up one morning and thought, I’m living like I want to ... shag who I want, eat what I want, watch what I want. Now, no one tells me what to do!’

The ‘re-born’ Traditionalist thus escapes the chains of working class adulthood that once bound him. He rids himself of the apparent monotony of monogamy, and the boredom which comes with existential predictability and routine. Once freed from the structure that smothered his psyche and life, the re-born Traditionalist enters ‘me time’: he rediscovers his enthusiasm for life, and views his post-divorce, solipsistic existence as something of a resurrection:

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<sup>72</sup> ‘In 2007 the provisional divorce rate in England and Wales’ is ‘11.9 divorcing people per 1,000 married population’ (national statistics online).



‘I had a lass (girlfriend) for years. I got married at eighteen, had two kids and then thought, nap. I’ve had enough. So I said, right, I’m leaving. I left (names an area close to Town A, where his ex-wife that he lived with was from) after ten years and moved back here (town A). Great, I have all me mates around again, I m living here again. I was ganning (going) out loads with the lads, training when I wanted, just having a fantastic fucking time. And then I meet (names wife) and then next thing, I’m back in with a wife and I have two new kids. Ten years later and I’m ready to go on me own again. I’ve had lasses (women) all me life, but it is me time now. Time to have fun: ganning for meals, taking loads of different girls out. Spending me money on me. Nee worries or stress. (At this point he receives a text message). “That is her, me wife”. (Participant shows me a text message from his wife who, aware of his intentions, pleads: ‘I will always love you and want you, please don’t leave us all’).

‘Look, she loves you’ I say.

‘She can’t have us! It is time for me!’ he shouts.

As well as frequent ‘nights out with the lads’ - which typically involve excessive alcohol consumption, going for meals, dancing in nightclubs and, for some, unorganised fighting - training in Gym D and women chasing becomes a central part of the re-born Traditionalists’ existence. Hence, the re-born Traditionalist ‘goes out’ to pubs, bars and clubs not just to ‘have a good time and meet women’, but, specifically, to seduce younger women (this is an act that his modified, commodity body undeniably helps him with):

‘when I think about women ... it’s like a car basically. You drive one for years, but the car gets old and you want a new faster one. So you go and test drive some faster, better models. Then if you want you buy one and drive it for a while. Or you just keep test-driving them like me. You don’t want to eat the same meal every night do ya? I love



chicken, but now and again I want a steak or a burger, or something different. So, I eat what I want – I screw who I want! And I like the young ones. So when I'm out, and I'm with the lads, I'm having a good old knees up, but I'm looking for targets, for women to try me luck with! I go over, pull a pose with me bicep, and go, I'm fucking massive, what's your name honey? (at this point others listening in area A laugh hysterically; one cheers)'.

The existence of the re-born Traditionalists' demonstrates how narcissistic and self-orientated values and patterns are coming to replace the 'traditional', 'family-based' ones that previous generations of working class men 'enjoyed', in Town A and elsewhere. As an ethnographer, I believe that more participants' in my sample will follow in the trend set by the re-born Traditionalists in the future. Indeed, there is a belief among all of my participants' that 'most men' want to 'live like' the re-born Traditionalists currently do; and that the only thing that 'prevents them' from doing so is 'fear', and a sense of conventional obligation. Many of my participants' also expressed that the nature of 'modern life' means that the traditional 'model' of life that once predominated in Town A has become obsolete and burdensome for 'men like us':

Participant: 'Everyone want to be like that!'

I ask: 'Like what, exactly?'

Participant: 'Like going out with the lads every weekend and having a laugh, meeting new women and getting pissed, not having someone moaning at you, telling you what to do, kids, bills, all that shite – just being how you want ... Everyone wants that but they have fear, it takes balls to be who you want, so they go on through their life taking orders from their wives and kids like slaves, handing out money for this, paying that bill, pretending that their not wanting to have sex and stuff just to suit the family'



I say: 'In the past, people didn't get divorced. Do you think those people felt like you?'

Participant: 'They had to live like that, with the wife all their lives, cause they had to come in and have food on the table. So they needed a wife to cook. But now? You can go out and get a meal for cheaper than it is to buy it from the supermarket! So there is no need for a wife: go out, have fun, eat, it all gets washed up there, come home and that is that – no need to put up with for some old bag just to get a meal like the old days! This isn't the fucking sixties now pal!'

I now consider the Traditionalists' gym lives.

As we have seen, all of the Traditionalists train in a way that is conducive to them acquiring and displaying 'big' physiques that are defined by mass and strength. The Traditionalists' collectively look like bodybuilders or 'strongmen', as opposed to like the 'slim', 'defined' men glamorised in the mass-media, particularly through publications like *Men's Health*. The Traditionalists thereby lift heavy weights for a low number of repetitions. Steroid use is prevalent among the Traditionalists: all of the Traditionalists admitted to using steroids either 'at the time of research', or 'at some point in their lives'. I shall go on to demonstrate that the Traditionalists' 'working class' bodies metaphor their working class roots and ideologies. I suggest that the Traditionalists' bodies function in their lives semiotically, by denoting their artisan, mining identities and ethos' to other citizens, in a post-industrial epoch and culture. I also argue that the Traditionalists' bodies act as a form of 'resistance' (Hall and Jefferson, 1973) against the changes to 'their' Town and lives, which have been brought on by the narratives of Town A's post-industrialism and globalisation.

Now that the Drifters' and the Traditionalists' have been discussed, I go on to consider the third typology of life that my research found to exist in Town A and Gym D, being the Changers'.



## The Changers'

The Changers' are aged between twenty five and twenty nine years of age, at the time of writing. They are representative of a 'new generation' of men who were born and raised in Town A or near-by who, I'm suggesting here, have become collectively 'embourgeoisied'. By which I mean that they exhibit 'a willingness, indeed eagerness, to accept bourgeois social values, life-styles and political ideas' (Goldthorpe et al, 1969: 7), rather than a willingness to accept the 'traditional' working class values, lifestyles, political ideas and 'model' of masculinity which predominated in Town A during its industrial era; and which still defines and 'constructs' the Traditionalists' lives and identities today. The Changers' can thus be seen as an intermediary working class/middle class category of Gym D life.

The Changers' cultural embourgeoisiment and positions as class intermediaries in Town A is not a product of their financial situations however (even if financial mobility was the reason for the embourgeoisiment of the working class individuals that Goldthorpe et al's seminal study focused upon<sup>73</sup>). Instead, the Changers' embourgeoisiment is a result of them:

- 1) Trying to emulate and replicate a 'middleclass' model of life and masculinity in their lives. This embourgeoisied model of life and masculinity has been purveyed to the Changers' via certain components of the mass-media.
- 2) Working in different sorts of jobs to their Town A and Gym D counterparts: the Changers' work in white-collar, IT based 'careers'.

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<sup>73</sup> Goldthorpe et al's study, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, identifies and focuses upon a sub-group of working class life that *existed*, physically and geographically, in and as part of 1960s and 1970s 'advanced, industrial' working class society, but who had become '*not of*'. For the populace in question had prospered financially. And, as a result of their affluence and financial mobility, Goldthorpe et al's samples' 'working classness' became 'diluted'; as their 'old ways of life, old modes of thought and belief tended to disappear' (12) as part of their 'progressive embourgeoisiment'.



3) A result of the educational experiences that most of the Changers' have undergone, which contrast heavily with the educational experiences their Gym D counterparts underwent.

I now consider these three themes in order. It is necessary to begin this discussion by defining the notion of hegemony, which I understand as follows:

'Hegemony works through ideology ... it works primarily by interesting the subordinate class into the key institutions and structures which support the power and authority of the dominant order.' (Clarke et al: 39).

Hegemonic ideology – i.e. ideology that subordinates working class people into believing and following the prevailing thoughts and desired lifestyles of society's ruling institutions and members - is, according to neo-Marxist thought, contained in most if not all facets of 'popular culture' (films, game-shows, adverts, soap-operas, pop songs etc); and is purveyed through several mass-media mediums, such as television stations, magazines, and radio stations<sup>74</sup>

I am suggesting here that when the Changers' view, listen and consider the 'hegemony' that is implicit in the films, TV shows, music videos, adverts, and radio stations that they interact with, the Changers' are exposed to manufactured, embourgeoised, 'global' lifestyles, personalities and associated ways of living, looking, thinking and being. The Changers' are not just *impressed* or seduced by the (typically consumption based and 'middleclass') lifestyles that hegemony didactically manufactures and promotes to them. More than this, the Changers *act* upon what they see; and attempt to replicate such existential ideals in their own lives. They align their own personalities and 'presentations of the self' with those they see in

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<sup>74</sup> Thus, when contemporary citizens are, apparently innocuously 'watching the TV', 'flicking through' magazines and newspapers, 'seeing a movie' etc, what is happening, according to Gramsci's seminal discussion on hegemony (1992), is the ideological subordination of their lives and minds. Whereby recipients of hegemony are manipulated into living, thinking and acting as society's dominant social order would want them to, rather than how they would perhaps live, think and act without ideological prompting.



hegemonic, mass-media purveyed ‘entertainment’. Through the mass-media then, the Changers’ – and countless other working class lads and lasses like them in micro localities all over the world – are exposed to new, ‘global’ cultural ideals and ways of being, which they emulate. Inevitably, these ideals ‘clash’, contrast and differ from Town A’s past, ‘industrial’ lead cultural ideals and ‘masculine hegemonic’. In turn, the Changer, his lived experience and his ‘style’ of masculinity is no longer ‘unique’ - as the Town A man and his life was according to Campbell (1984), who writes about him archetypically in *Wigan Pier Revisited*<sup>75</sup> - and as the Traditionalist remains. Instead, the Changer and his learned way of thinking, living, expecting and presenting himself has become almost if not totally identical to that of other males who have also emulated ‘global’, hegemonic ideology and principles in their lives; thereby becoming homogenously and ‘authoratively masculine’ in the contemporary sense of the term; as explained by Connell (2000:44):

‘the growth of the global mass media, especially electronic media, as an obvious vector for the globalisation of gender. Popular entertainment circulates stereotyped ... images, deliberately made attractive for marketing purposes ... international news media ... also ... circulate ... definitions of authoritative masculinity, criminality, desirability etc as places and times where local cultures are in flux.’

Thus men in contemporary Town A are conforming to a ‘global’, post-industrial model of masculinity and identity (as opposed to an artisan, mining model of masculinity) which they see and ‘learn from’ through the mass-media (see Benyon, Chapter 5; Mort, 1996, Nixon, 1996, and Edwards, 1997). This model of masculinity ‘says hello to the yuppie’ (and his

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<sup>75</sup> (The Town A man is) ... ‘the archetypical proletarian, the archetypical patriarch ... (In Town A) As in the Army and Stock exchange, men’s companionship did not produce social cohesion; it fostered power and privilege for men within their own class and community ... Miner’s clubs along the North East coast were the cathedrals of their communities, the space where men had their pleasure and their politic. Their homes, however, remained some of the worst in Britain’.



middleclass values, lifestyle, job and appearance) ‘and goodbye to the old industrial man’ (Benyon: 99). This model deploys men to be ‘narcissistic ... self-confident, well groomed, muscular’ (although, as I discussed in chapter three not too muscular) ‘and sensitive’ (Benyon: 104). This model thus encourages working class men in contemporary society to exuberate a very different style of masculinity to that which resonated in Town A during its mining days; when men were ‘made’, to quote one of my participants, to be: ‘as hard as nails, fond of a sup (drinking alcohol), and as honest as the day is long ... the sort of lad who finishes a good week at work, goes to the bar, drinks his skin-full, stays a gentleman, gets in a scrap (a fight) on the way home, and wakes up the next day with a sore head and fist, ready for it all again’. By so doing, this model encourages men in Town A to be ‘embourgeoised’; and thus assimilate into bourgeois society’s intended social order.

Accordingly, the Changers’ – as exigencies of contemporary hegemony - wear ‘trendy’ clothes that display globally recognised and respected labels, as opposed to ‘normal’ or ‘scruffy’ clothes. They do so because the mass-media has prescribed such garments to them. Further, the Changers’ sport ‘fashionable’, ‘celebrity’ haircuts, which have been crafted, upon request, at multi-national hair salons. For the Changers’ believe that such haircuts are ‘better’. The Changers don’t ‘just gan doon the barbers to get their noggins shaved’, as their counterparts do. Rather, the Changers’ resemble, as much as they can, the models that they see on the pages of the global magazines they read, such as *FHM*, *Loaded*, and *GQ*. They drink expensive beer and cocktails in ‘posh’ bars in the suburbs of Newcastle upon Tyne, instead of socialising in the unfashionable pubs of Town A during their leisure lives. Not content with being ‘just working class lads’ from and in Town A, the Changers’ endeavour to be ‘like the lads in *Entourage*’; and ‘like *James Bond*’; for these are the mediated ‘models’ of life and masculinity that ‘liquid society’ (Bauman), though its ostensible entertainment, has advocated and glamorised to them. Their conversations and opinions echo those they hear on



their radios, television sets and DVDs. My findings thus correspond with Aranowitz's assertion (1992: 102) that:

'mass culture and the mass communications media tend toward the destruction of traditional working class or popular cultures and the manipulative integration of the working masses into a bureaucratic consumer capitalism'.

The Changers' have thereby become more 'yuppie than coalminer'; they are more like the masculine stereotype played by Michael Douglas in the film *Wall Street* - whose life was defined by 'conspicuous consumption' (Mort, 1996: 172) and who is contextualised so lucidly below - than the 'mining stereotype' discussed earlier, with reference to the Traditionalists:

'The Yuppie was not only a product of the economic expansion of the financial sector, he was an advocate of the most striking conspicuous consumption since the second world war, posing, parading, and swaggering around the city in his pinstripe and power-look suits, ties and accessories ... talking animatedly on his mobile phone, endlessly flicking the pages of his filo-fax, slicking his hair and using every excuse to get into and out of his suit ... and, of course, his Porsche' (Edwards, 1997: vii).

As a by-product of their 'yuppieisation', the Changers display 'new age' masculine traits such as political correctness, social aspiration, and emotional sensitivity. The Changers are thus 'new men' - to employ Gill's phrase - as opposed to being 'new lads'<sup>76</sup>; as the Traditionalists are.

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<sup>76</sup> Who are, according to Gill (2003), characteristically 'hedonistic, post (if not anti) feminist and pre-eminently concerned with beer, football' (or bodybuilding, within the context of Gym D) 'and 'shagging' woman' (:37).



Earlier, I suggested that the Changers' labour lives are a further, secondary reason for their embourgeoisement, and positions as intermediary middleclass/working class users of Gym D. I now consider this proposition further.

All of the Changers' work in office 'knowledge-based' white collar jobs<sup>77</sup>. The Changers' gain a level of kudos from others in Town A because of the 'posh', 'responsible' privileged post-industrial positions they are assumed to have. This kudos is bolstered if a Changer works for a well-known national or multi-national company, such as SAGE; as explained below:

'Me auntie was really happy when I telt (told) her that I'd got a job at SAGE (where he spends eight hours a day selling IT products that SAGE produce), cause she knows all about the company and what it is to be there. Cause she is in business also. So she knows about deadlines and targets too. And that SAGE speaks for itself; my career is going well ... I'm going to work in a nice office all day in a shirt and tie, instead of in the cold all day freezing me balls off, like me uncle! ... but as I said before, it is fucking boring ... but everyone is always like, oh you work for them, that is really good; they're proper famous, they're like big hitters in business.'

If one considers the Changers' 'careers' objectively, one realises that the Changers' working days equates to him spending most of his time inputting data into databases; or selling products on behalf of the company which pays him. Although the Changers' would have you believe otherwise, they are not 'yuppie' city executives; or 'management consultants', as I've heard them insist they are in the past; especially to females in bars. Rather, the Changers' can be interpreted as a post-modern version of the demographic Wright-Mills describes; they

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<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, despite the kudos that the Changers' receive from some residents of Town A on account of their 'careers', it is the case that some users of Gym D mock the changers' jobs, which they interpret as being 'ponsey', 'girly' and an extension of school; as put, perhaps with a twinge of envy, by one of the Drifters': 'what is the difference between them (the Changers') now and when they were at school? They go to work every day in a uniform, do what they're told, follow rules, and wait for the bell to ring ... they probably have to put their hands up to ask to go and take a piss. They are just like school kids, but they get paid instead of asking for pocket money. They are still part of the system. They are far from being free and proper men.'



routinely partake in ‘the boredom and unrelieved subordination’ that their jobs represent, and perform ‘the endless volume of paper work required by modern corporations’ (Aranowitz, 1992: 292) as part of the lower echelons of the contemporary ‘white collar world’. Like the industrial proletariat discussed in Jaher’s (1968) work, the Changers are passive, alienated workers, who are subordinated by their all-powerful employers’ in an era in which ‘knowledge’ and conformity ‘has ... replaced brawn as the motor of the production process’ (Aranowitz: 74).

I will go on to demonstrate that the Changers’ are the most alienated of all the typologies of working class life analysed in my sample, as a result of their labour: their shirts, ties and pretensions do not alleviate the tragically depressing realities of their labour, and their lives holistically. Yet their shirts and ties are a central part of their ‘yuppie’ identities and pretences. The ‘corporate’, middleclass model of life that the Changers’ aspire to live is bolstered and substantiated by the jobs they perform. In this sense, their labour lives and embourgeoisiment are inherently linked.

Ethnographically, it was clear that the Changers’ lack the benevolent mentalities which the other typologies of life researched in this thesis generally display. The Changers’ personalities - as products of hegemony and the post-industrial workplace - have become somewhat contrived, predictable, competitive and clichéd. Accordingly, other users of Gym D refer to the Changers’ as being ‘boring’, ‘stuffy’ and ‘snobby’. In their quest for embourgeoisiment, it is as if the Changers’ have lost a key part of themselves. The Changers’ have become ‘wise’ in the following sense of the term:

‘by becoming wise about how things go in the world, such a man forgets himself ... finds it too venturesome a thing to be himself, far easier and safer to be like the others, to become an imitation, a number, a cipher in the crowd. This form of despair is hardly



ever noticed in the world. Such a man, precisely by losing his self in this way, has gained perfectibility in adjusting' (Weiss, 1961: 209).

As an ethnographer, I couldn't help but hypothesise that the Changers, ironically, think that they have 'found their place' in our global, post-industrial world; yet, in truth, the world – and its vanity, conceit and celebration of conformity and homogenisation – has found its place in them. Hostility, envy, jealousy and enmity is rife within the Changers' group, particularly in relation to the variables of money, appearance and whose job 'is the best'. Other users of Gym D have noticed the internal competitiveness that defines the Changers' social interactions, which contrasts with the sense of 'togetherness' that working class lads usually display. As explained by a user of Gym D who went through 'a phase' of socialising with the Changers':

'when they (the Changers') go out, they're looking at each other to see who looks the best, likes who's clothes are the best and the most expensive, who has the best haircut, which lad has the best girl on his arm or the most money in his account ... I hear them in the gym, you're not strong, you're looking fat, all this shite. It is not just banter with them, they are really trying to prove they're better than the others, like their egos are massive ... it is not like that with the other lads, like, who gives a shit who is the best, we're more about having a good time like as a group, not just like who is the best person, let's fucking worship the best person'.

I have suggested that the Changers' white-collar jobs and interactions with the mass-media accounts for them as embourgeoised, cultural constructs. It is also the case that the Changers' experiences of 'higher-education' explains their sociological predispositions as cultural constructs, as I now consider.



The *University of Northumbria* is located in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne. The *University of Northumbria* received its University charter in 1992, having previously been a polytechnic college, since its formulation in 1969. The University attracts a heavily ‘local’ student body. Hence, if a Town A school-leaver finds him/herself in higher education, he/she will almost certainly ‘end up’ at the University of Northumbria. Correspondingly, six of the seven Changers attended the *University of Northumbria* for a period of time<sup>78</sup>. All of the Changers’ who enrolled at the University lived in Town A during their time ‘at Uni’, and commuted to the University’s campus daily. The Changers’ were all the first generation of people in their families to attend university.

Readers must not underestimate the extent that the Changers’ experiences of University ‘conditioned’ them, both practically and socially. Practically, the Changers’ time at University prepared them for their current post-industrial positions, by ensuring that they learned the relevant IT and communication skills to ‘deliver’ in our knowledge-based economy. The ‘work placements’ that some of the Changers embarked on as part of their degrees resulted in them obtaining the jobs they now have, by giving them ‘a foot in the door’. Socially, the Changers’ experiences of University ensured that they came into contact with a ‘new’ form of life and masculinity, which they would have not otherwise encountered had they only known Town A’s habitus. This had important implications on the Changers’ aspirations, as expressed:

‘Life really began for me at *Northumbria* (University) because I realised that there is a bigger world out there, and that I didn’t have to be in Town A for the rest of my life;

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<sup>78</sup> Two of the changers completed degrees in ‘business administration and IT System design’, one completed a HND in ‘Computing for Industry’, two began but did not complete HNDs in ‘Computing for Industry’. Another Changer completed a degree in ‘Education’ after failing the first year of a Social Science degree. This participant then ‘stayed on’ at the University to complete a ‘law conversion course’ over a four year period on a part-time basis, while he worked, simultaneously, for a law firm as a clerk. He now claims to ‘be a lawyer’ for a small law firm in Newcastle, that ‘specialises in family law’. The other Changer left school at 18 and began working for a bank after ‘dropping out’ of school during his A-levels. He has subsequently completed bank-specific qualifications and training.



and that I could be someone. So there, I met people who were like quite inspiring. Like all the law students, who got really good grades at sixth form and had nice accents, like posh accents, and who were wearing like proper mint (expensive) clothes. At first, I saw them and thought, like typical Town A mentality, what a bunch of twats. I thought, I might just end up smacking these if I'm not careful, like they totally annoyed me and I was strutting around thinking I am the man. But by the end of the first week, I actually wanted to be like them and started hanging out with people like them. They were like aliens to me to begin with but over time, I thought, I want to be like that; and look like them and go to the places they go, and sleep with the sort of women they sleep with, like the posh blond ones with nice accents and fast cars'.

Studies on the relationship between education and working class society conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Cohen, 1955; Cloward and Ohlin, 1961 and Downes, 1966:

'almost without exception, interpret the daily experience of the working class teenager' (in education) 'as the total (and totally successful) manipulation of a potential proletariat into the very model of the capitalist consumer' (Corrigan and Firth: 232, in Hall and Jefferson, Eds. 1973).

It seems that in contemporary society, post 1992 university institutions are continuing to 'shape' working class lads, under the guise of education, by equipping them with the skills and desires to work in a 'knowledge economy', and thus gain the financial capital needed to spend as consumers today. I will return to the role of education in Town A today, in this thesis' conclusion.

Unlike the other two strata of Town A life that are researched in this thesis, who either don't want to leave Town A (the Traditionalists') or couldn't afford to leave Town A, even if they did want to (the Drifters'), the Changers' all aspire to leave Town A and live a 'new life' in a



different geographical area; preferably in Jesmond. Which is a suburb of Newcastle Upon Tyne. This move would ease the Changers' travelling constraints (travelling to Newcastle everyday from Town A is not ideal, as it is time-consuming and costly) and ensure that the Changers' embourgeoisement is complete at a physical/geographical level. For physically 'being' in the space of Town A is reflexively 'holding' the Changers and their social progression 'back', and limits their chances of experiencing a 'better' (i.e. middleclass) life:

'I've lived here (Town A) all my life, and I love training here (in Gym D) and I have to admit that the crack (atmosphere) is amazing in here (Gym D). But I have outgrown the Town. I need to be closer to work, and I need to have more choices about who I can hangout with and where I can hangout. This place is holding me back. I can't just walk into (names bars) after work, or just go and do something cool here, cause after training there is nothing to do (in Town A) except go home and watch TV, unless we go through there (to Jesmond) where there are better people and where there is a better quality of life'.

Yet, for the moment, all of the Changers reside in Town A; and have done for all of their lives; although most of their leisure or 'drinking' time is spent in Jesmond. Four of the Changers live with their families: BS, 27, is a 'family law specialist' for a small law firm in Newcastle. He lives with his Mother, Father and younger Brother in his family's house. LR, 28, inputs data/statistics into a computer on behalf of the Government as a 'data analyst'. He lives with his Mother, Father and younger Sister in a house his family owns. PM is 29. He works 'in IT, mostly programming' for a 'technology company' which is located in Newcastle. He lives with his Mother in her bungalow. IA is also 29 and works in a bank in Newcastle. IA moved back into his Mothers' house three months ago, where he lives with his Mother and his elder Sister. This is the fourth time that he has 'returned to the nest'; this time due to a breakup with his ex-fiancé. CL, 25, works for the sales department of SAGE.



Through which CL sells IT products to local businesses. He lives with his girlfriend of two years in a house that he and she rent. DF, 28, is a recruitment agent in Newcastle city, and also lives with his girlfriend; in his girlfriend's mother's house. NT, 25, who is 'in marketing' for a small company in Newcastle, remarkably, lives with his ex-girlfriend in a house they rent together. NT broke up with his 'ex' two months into a year's rental contract. They have been forced to reside together ever since, and now detest each other.

The fact that several of the Changers' live 'at home' in their families' houses means that some of the Changers' either don't pay rent, or do not pay as much rent as they would do if they lived in rented accommodation. Accordingly, some Changers' are in a position to 'save money' and 'pay off debts'; while also having access to a level of disposable income that they wouldn't otherwise, i.e. if rent was a continually pending payment to be made. This allows the Changers' to consume more rapaciously than other men of their age, and enjoy a higher standard of life:

'If I moved out, and rented somewhere, I'd be skint (broke), because I would be paying rent, all that I earned would go on rent. But here (in his family's home) I don't have to pay rent, so I can buy a nice four by four jeep and have a wardrobe full of Armani shirts. What I save on rent I can spend on me really, and I just chip in here and there for food and utilities ... So when I move out, I'll buy a house with all my money that I'm saving, then it will be my mortgage I pay, not some landlord's. All the money I've saved from living here throughout Uni (university) and working, like that I've saved on rent, is a small fortune in total '.

The Changers' living situations are also conducive to them experiencing distinctive 'sorts' of commodity fetishisms, as this thesis goes on to consider.



In terms of gym utilisation, the Changers typically use Gym D in the evening, between 7:45 pm to just before 9 pm, when the gym closes. So doing allows the Changers to return to Town A from Newcastle city, after their white-collar working days are over, and eat appropriately before training. Training at this comparatively later time also means that the Changers are free to work-out in the style and at the pace they please in what is essentially their 'private gym'; for Gym D is at its quietest from 7:45, having experienced the 'rush' - and subsequent demand for weights and machines - that occurs in it earlier:

'If I go straight to the gym after work, my entire routine is fucked. I feel tired cause I lack carbs. And then if I have a *Red Kick*<sup>79</sup> at the gym, I tire too early. Cause it is all sugar energy, not proper food energy ... then, I can't get any of the weights I want. There are queues for things like the squat cage and the bench. So you have to share. Then you end up talking and maxing out, instead of training hard. So by going later, you can train harder. And better. And it is like having your own private gym. You want to dead-lift, you can. You want the forty k (kilogram) dumbbells, they are there. Ne problems. You don't have the likes of (names an infamously big Traditionalist) going I want that weight, so you can fuck off'.

In the past, the Changers' trained in a way that was conducive to them acquiring 'big', bodybuilding, 'working class' physiques. They lifted heavy weights for a low number of repetitions. Indeed, it was a collective desire to 'be massive' that acted as the Changers' initial motivation when they begin to modify their bodies; and undoubtedly influenced their decision to train in Gym D as opposed to another, less 'hardcore' (Mansfield and McGinn, 1993) gym. Several of the Changers experimented with steroids in their first few years of bodybuilding.

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<sup>79</sup> Carbohydrate based energy drink.



In and over the last three years however, the Changers' bodies and bodily ideals have changed drastically: all of the Changers' now want to inhabit slim, toned, 'muscular but not overly muscular' middleclass bodies; the sorts of which are glamorised in the mass-media. The Changers' identified the bodies of sportsmen David Beckham, Fredrik Ljungberg, Danny Cipriani, Dan Carter and actor Matthew McConaughey as 'ideal' and worthy of emulation in the qualitative interviews that I conducted. They mocked the bodybuilding physiques displayed in publications such as *Flex*. The Changers' physiological ideals and 'motives for working out' (Crossley, 2006: 25) have essentially evolved over time. Their increasingly middleclass bodies reflect and metaphor their increasingly middleclass dispositions. Accordingly, the Changers' now lift lighter weights than they used to – and in comparison with the other typologies of Gym D life – and for more repetitions. The Changers' also perform CV activity in area three of Gym D, so as to display anatomical 'cut' and 'definition', having been influenced by contemporary society's mediated notion of 'middleclass' aesthetic masculinity:

'If you speak to girls about what they want, most of them will say cut abs, good definition, nice tone, but not massive muscles ... wey, the slags around here (Town A) might want steroid boys, but classy girls don't! The ones in Jesmond, or the ones I spoke to on holiday (in Puerto Buenos) want you to be cut and look good, not like a fucking thug ... so I have started to train for higher reps, trying to get me abs nice and me arms toned, not just big'

'I used to look at people like (names bodybuilders and men in Town A with similar physiques) and think, aie, that looks mint. I want to be like that. So I took a bit of gear and got like this, but then I've stopped thinking that. I think I am big enough; look at David Beckham and that lad that used to play for Arsenal that does the modelling now, the Swedish lad (referring to Frederick Ljungberg) - women love them, they are like the



best people, but they are cut, small really. So I started to think, wey I might look good here but really I look like a bit, maybe like a bit stupid, like I'm starting to think, I'll just get totally cut and stop trying to get bigger'.

As a matter of counterpoint, it can be noted that the 'homosexual hegemonic aesthetic' – i.e. the 'ideal' gay male bodily form – as it existed between the 1960s and the 1980s was known as 'the Clone'<sup>80</sup>. The Clone constituted a 'mesomorphic body type, with a V-shaped torso ... with noticeable pectoral muscles and defined arms ... body hair was accepted, and indeed expected as part of this look' (Filiault and Drummond 2007: 176). A 'new' gay masculine ideal emerged after 1980<sup>81</sup>. The emergence of which rendered the 'clone look' obsolete. This 'new' (and current) western gay body ideal is said to be 'smooth, with little to no body hair'; and representative of 'a subdued muscularity, indicative more of a swimmers' type of body than a weightlifters' physique' (Filiault and Drummond, 2007: 177), as the Clone look was. Thus, two radically different bodily ideals – one of which promoted total muscularity, the other subdued muscularity – have both existed as the gay hegemonic aesthetic within a relatively short space of time.

In the same way that the mesomorphic 'clone look' fell out of fashion in the context of homosexual masculinity in the late 1980s, only to be replaced a new (sleeker and less hairy) type of masculine beauty in the latter 1990s, 'a thin, slightly muscular body type ... smooth with little to no body hair' (Filiault and Drummond, 2007: 178) has, it seems, come to be seen as desirable in 'mainstream', straight working class, post-industrial culture today also. This 'new look' has been mediated by the mass media, and has emerged at the expense of the mesomorphic, 'industrial', 'working class' body, which is increasingly being presented and recognised in post-industrial society as an obsolete, deviant and freakish body type. Which is

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<sup>80</sup> See Levine, 1997; Levine and Kimmel, 1998

<sup>81</sup> In part, as argued by Levine (1997) and Cole (2007), this replacement was due to the 'HIV image' that clone bodies came to signify.



promoted only in a niche, sub-cultural and marginalised bodybuilding market; and which smacks of ‘unhealthy’, ‘abnormal’, ‘extreme’ and ‘unnatural’ training techniques, lifestyles and identities (Aoki, 1996:67).

The fact that the Changers’ exemplify and desire the ‘sorts’ of bodies that constitute ‘wider’ or global society’s ‘hegemonic aesthetic’ (as distinct from Town A’s past, industrial hegemonic aesthetic) shows how lives and bodies in the locality of Town A are increasingly being shaped by a ‘global’ as opposed to a local cultural habitus’. It also demonstrates that the contrasting masculine ideals and identities withheld by the three typologies of life identified in this research are essentially being ‘negotiated’ on the typologies’ physical bodies. Which function as semiotic metaphors in Town A today, that tell us much about changes to working class lives, identities and notions of masculinity in a post-industrial locus that is undergoing cultural flux; as this thesis goes on to consider.

### Chapter Summary

We have seen that three different typologies of working class life use Gym D: being the Drifters’, the Traditionalists’ and the Changers’. The tripartite model of working class life proposed in this thesis challenges the singular, homogenous account of contemporary working class culture proposed by Charlesworth (2000); by drawing attention to the varied nature of life and masculinity in contemporary, post-industrial Towns in the UK.

Chapter seven has sought to *account* for the existence of the three typologies of working class life identified in this work, by locating and perceiving each typology of life as being a ‘cultural construct’, or exigency, of the different cultural habitus’ and social conditioning that operates and guide life in Town A today. I have shown how Town A’s past, industrial mining habitus continues to define the lives, minds, identities and aesthetic masculinity of the Traditionalists’; while Town A’s ‘ghettoisation’, coupled with the ‘Chav’, ‘hard’ model of



masculinity that exists in contemporary Town A accounts for the Drifters'. Simultaneously, I have argued that the emergence of a media-purveyed 'Yuppie' masculine ideal in Town A has – along with the Changers' educational experiences and white-collar jobs – 'made' the Changers' into the embourgeoised form of life they currently represent. This finding illustrates that multiple cultural habitus' are able to operate simultaneously in the same locality. Thus, the populace of contemporary cultures are shaped by multiple social influences, which are both 'global' and 'local' in their derivation. A localities' populace is no longer shaped by a sole habitus, as they were in the industrial epoch (Dennis et al, 1956). In this sense, Town A's current cultural habitus is 'glocal': i.e. a combination of global and local culture; a fusion of its past mining habitus and a post-modern, media purveyed one; as I now consider.

Hannerz (1992: 218) points out that:

'It' (is) 'now ... more difficult than ever ... to see the world ... as a cultural mosaic, of separate pieces with hard, well-defined edges'. (Because) 'Cultural interconnections increasingly reach across the world. More than ever there is a global ecumene'.

The concept of 'a global ecumene' suggests that the continual spread of 'global', 'networked' capitalism (Castells, 2000) that is occurring in post-modernity means that places like Town A have lost, or are losing, their sociological essences, identities and 'well defined cultural edges'. From this perspective, the sociological nuances, idiosyncrasies and particularities that made Town A and its populace unique and distinguishable from others in the past have been, or are being eroded, and lost to a 'world' (Meyer et al, 1997) or 'global' culture (Featherstone, 1990). This loss is not simply a by-product of Town A's de-industrialisation, and the subsequent eradication of the coaling habitus and employment opportunities that Town A was built and founded around; but also, simultaneously, due to how a 'global



ideology' has entered Town A through the mass-media with the effect of fundamentally changing Town A's residents' minds, ethos', lifestyles, desires, presentations of the selves, cultural expectations and 'concepts of the real' (Dudley, 1994). Indeed, the Changers' – as we have seen – are personifications of this media-lead, globalised ideology. In this way, contemporary lived experience, in Town A and elsewhere, has become standardised, homogenised, 'Americanised' and 'McDonaldised' (Ritzer, 2000); and no longer locally specific, as it was in Town A's mining heydays.

If we take this sentiment to its conclusion, Town A exists as 'just another' victim of 'cultural imperialism' (Schiller, 1969; Hamelink, 1994, Barber); a mere extension and component of a world in which there is 'only one culture and one civilization on the entire surface of the earth' (Levi-Strauss, 1978: 20); whereby 'the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world, global society' (Albrow, 1990: 9) that compresses 'the world and its consciousnesses' into a singular way of living, thinking and doing (Robertson, 1992: 8).

Despite the fact that a 'singular kind of society' and masculinity 'has become so widespread' today (Hannerz, 1992: 5), and such a polemical, relevant point in contemporary cultural theory, I believe that it is misleading to claim that a total, monistic homogenization of culture and masculinity has occurred in Town A. Indeed, there is a 'mythology about globalization', both at large and in places like Town A, which microcosm global culture. The current empirical context of Town A should, I'm suggesting in this work, be seen as a 'hybrid' or 'creolization' (Hannerz, 1991: 96) of both 'global' and 'local' cultures, and cultural habitus.

Thus, while the Changers' represent how a 'global', media-purveyed culture has entered Town A; the Traditionalists' illustrate how the Town's 'local' culture is retained and cherished. Simultaneously, the Drifters' illustrate how a dependency on income support has also created another form of working class, 'Chav' culture in Town A; which is neither global



or local; but rather indicative of an imported, 'ghettoised' habitus that exists in Town A and other abandoned spaces globally. Hence, this thesis takes place at a time when Town A's 'glocal' culture and cultural habitus' is being negotiated; and in an epoch when residents of Town A are responding - as cultural exigencies - to their Town's ongoing cultural transitions and evolutions. This thesis will elaborate on the many works that consider society's globalisation/glocalisation by drawing attention to how the physical bodies of a populace metaphor and respond to their society's 'glocal' changes, with reference to Town A. This work will also highlight that Town A's 'globalisation' is, thematically, as central to understanding Town A and the 'lived experiences' of its members as its de-industrialisation. It also affirms the need to 'read' people as cultural products of the society and culture they live in; in congruence with the notion of habitus' and the anthropological ontology of 'cultural constructionism'.

Now that each of the three typologies of Town A and Gym D life that I found in to exist 'in the field' have been discussed, this work advances, over the next four chapters, to consider how depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism is experienced and constructed, relatively, for the different participant groups analysed in this work. This thesis will also explore how my participants' bodies and body-modification relate to their experience of depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism, as well as their visual identities and masculinities.



## Chapter 8:

### Constructions of anomie

#### Chapter overview

In the previous chapter, I introduced readers to three ‘types’ of working class life and masculinity which were found to exist in Town A and use Gym D. In this chapter, I demonstrate how and why the theory of ‘anomie’ manifests itself in and as part of the participant groups’ contrasting existences. As discussed in chapter two, by ‘anomie’, I am referring to the ‘depressed’ conscious mindset that arises in a person’s psyche because of the hiatus, or ‘strain’ that exists between a person’s *actual* lived experience and cultural reality and *desired* lived experience and cultural reality. Hence, in chapter 8, I consider how the three typologies of life researched in this work are depressed by the (subjective) ‘strains’ in their existences. I begin my analysis by considering the anomie of the Changers’, as a specific typology of Gym D life.

#### The Anomie of the Changers’

We have seen that the Changers’ collectively aim to live and look like ‘middleclass’, embourgeoisied, ‘Yuppie men’. Indeed, it is the Changers’ rather ruthless quest for middleclass life and identity which differentiates them from the other typologies of life which were found to live in Town A and use Gym D. We have also seen, concurrently, that the Changers’ have had the concept of ‘middleclass life’ defined - prescriptively, homogenously, and materialistically - for them by society’s mass-media and entertainment industries. Mass-produced, mediated images and concepts have thereby constructed the ‘model’ of embourgeoisied existence and masculinity that the Changers’ try to emulate and mimic in their lives. Accordingly, in the interviews that I conducted, the Changers’ – when discussing their cultural ‘aims and expectations’ with me - stated that they want to live in ‘Malibu houses on the beach in California’ or in ‘a mansion in a proper cool city’, as oppose to the modest houses located in Town A; where other users of Gym D claimed they want to live. The Changers’ also expressed a collective desire to ‘drink in glitzy bars that you have to be on ‘the list’ to enter’ in ‘places like New York City’, instead of socialising in the ‘rough’



pubs and clubs' in their locality. Further, the Changers stated that they want to 'date supermodels', 'drive fast cars'; and to wear 'expensive, trendy' clothes. They do not want to 'settle' for the 'second-rate' alternatives that other working class people do, and are apparently satisfied with. The Changers were found to reflexively desire to 'live' (and look) 'like the guys in the TV show *Entourage*' and 'be like *James Bond*', as opposed to merely being 'normal Town A lads' and in congruence with the mining stereotype discussed earlier in this thesis. For such aims, although highly ambitious, 'lofty' and representative of either 'selling out' or 'dreamland' for other working class citizens, have been 'manufactured' (Herman and Chomsky, 1994) to and interpreted by the Changers' as being 'realisable', 'possible' and even 'normal' goals 'for lots of people all over the world with money'.

This finding shows that the Changers' do not interpret the 'entertainment' industry as being 'just entertainment', or even an exaggerated form of life which 'should be taken with a pinch of salt'. The Changers do not realise that:

'television, movies, and popular music, like sports, must be understood in the dimension of their significance as forms of life activity as well as ideological apparatuses' (Aranowitz, 1992: 100).

Instead, the Changers' perceive the 'make believe reality' conveyed in the mass media as being the benchmark to measure their lives around. They see such mediated, 'false' (Marcuse, 1964) ideals as being the way their lives 'should' be; the model of life and masculinity they want to replicate. Thus, in line with Hall's 'Reception Theory' (1973), it is clear that contemporary society's mass-media is not 'passively' received by all of its audience. Rather, the media's cultural ideals are 'acted' upon and interpreted by some men in Town A as being a prescriptive insight into a 'better' way of living, looking and being.



However, the Changers' do not live in the way they 'want'. Inevitably, the Changers can't afford to do so financially (as I consider when considering the Changers' commodity fetishism). Even if the Changers' could afford to live such an existence, the 'middleclass' and 'lofty', media prescribed opportunities and lifestyles they desire do not typically exist in the North East of England. Where, as I discuss in more detail later, there are few, if any, supermodel girls 'to snag' ('all the good looking girls live in the south'); couture clothes shops to spend in ('you see things in magazines but can't buy them here (the North-East region), until like a season later or something), genuinely exclusive bars to be seen in ('anybody can go into any bar around here, I would like bars where only good people can go, like exclusive places'); and even less Malibu beach apartments to be had. Herein lies the Changers' daily anomie; herein lies the discrepancy or 'strain' between the Changers' actual world - as post-industrial office workers living in the North East of England - and the fictitious, impossible manufactured 'promised' world that has been mediated to the Changers' through the mass-media; which the Changers' want to inhabit.

By definition of the unrealistic nature of the Changers' ambitions, there will always be a hiatus between the Changers' desired and actual existences, which will cause the Changers a depression born of frustration and social anxiety. Until the Changers' realise that the mediated lifestyles and symbols they chase are fictitious and unobtainable - which will, surely, happen in time - their psyches will continue to be depressed by and suffer from the sense and cultural construction of anomie described. For there will always be - on account of who, what and where the Changers are - an irrevocable discrepancy between the Changers' idealised life, as mediated *to them*, and actual life, as *lived by them*. As a working class lad living in Town A today, I can also - upon seeing, reading, hearing and considering hegemonic media ideals - ask questions, to echo those asked by the Changers', like: where are the supermodel girls I want date? The truly beautiful ones who smile so perfectly on the screen?



Where are my personal Playboy Bunnies? Where are my loyal friends who will always 'be there for me'; who I can drink coffee with in our shared apartments overlooking the park? Why do the existential gambles I take not pay off like the gambles do 'in the movies'? Why do I not look like those male models? Why is there such a hiatus between the social 'reality' portrayed through the mass-media, and my social reality? By asking such questions, I realise the anomie of the Changers'; and the daily, cultural strain which contributes, significantly, to their low-serotonin existences. I also found that the Changers' suffer from a 'geographical anomie' in their existences. It is to this notion that I now turn my attention.

The data that I elicited on the Changers' anomie indicates that the Changers' cultural aims - even when pragmatic and simple (e.g. when as basic as wanting to buy 'our sorts' of clothes, or visiting 'our sorts' of bars) - are hampered by definition of the Changers' living in a geographical locus that is, phenomenologically, 'behind the times'; and thus socially contrary to the embourgeoised existence they crave. Unlike other empirical locus, such as 'London and Paris', the North East is not, according to the Changers, as quick to provide the consumption and leisure opportunities that other 'more fashionable and up-to-date places' do. This causes a secondary, geographical-based anomie in the Changers' existences; based on the incompatibility between the Changers' desired cultural ecology and actual, 'out of date' cultural ecology. Even Newcastle's well publicised 're-branding' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2001) has not resulted in Newcastle as a city being sufficiently embourgeoised or 'trendy enough' so as to prevent the Changers' experiencing this geographical anomie, or even regret their 'Geordie' roots and identities; as demonstrated in the following quotation:

'It is a lot better through there now (Newcastle City, since its regeneration) and there are some good shops and bars, but it is not quite right. It is not quite trendy enough for me and my mates. Still a bit behind the times, still the old Geordie mentality. Like there is not a *Harvey Nicks* or a *Harrods* ... there are good shops, but not your best ones.



Newcastle is still not a real city like London or Paris. You can buy some good stuff, but not the best stuff in the magazines, that goes to London and even Leeds before we get it ... it is way behind the times really ... There are some good bars also, but not as good as elsewhere, like say in Ibiza or Miami where ... it properly goes off. You still get that old north-east mentality, like the shaved heads and the fighting. And that is ok for Town A, like par for the course around here, but I expect better through there in those places (Newcastle's bars). Jesmond is different for a night out, it is proper cool, but one day you might get all the scum coming through more and more there also. So even Jesmond might end up being like the Pig Marker (referring to Newcastle's *Bigg Market*); see like the Quayside when it was first done-up was great for us, it was expensive and exclusive and more like how I want my nights out to be, but sure enough, over time, all the scum hear about it being this and that and they come down and we must move on. Because it is not what we want it to be, it loses its cool. But proper places for people like us who are educated and fashionable like Jesmond are rare here and could be taken over. That is why this area lacks exclusivity, you know? ... so yes, there is a gap or like a strain like, between this area and how I want my area to be. It is better now but not complete. It takes more than some new buildings to change people's minds, which is what a lot of people around here need, a change in attitude ... when I go on holiday and I meet people, or like when I meet important people in Jesmond, they'll say – 'where you from, up north?' And I say, near Newcastle, but get to know me first before you judge me, I'm not a typical Geordie, thankfully'.

In an attempt to 'bridge' the geographical-based anomie in their lives, the Changers' are involved in a 'Bourdiesian struggle' (Bourdieu, 1984), which sees the Changers disassociate themselves from their geographical and cultural 'roots', and socially align themselves with the class fractions and identities they want to be associated with, and 'belong' to.



The above quotation given by a Changer refers to the space of Jesmond; which is a suburb of Newcastle upon Tyne that has become popular with affluent, middleclass students of Newcastle's two universities who reside and socialise in the space. Consequently, Jesmond currently exists as a rare bastion of middleclass life in the North East of England, in which genuinely middleclass students – complete with public school accents, habitus and appearances - socialise in the pubs and restaurants of an area which would not look entirely out of place in London's fashionable, upmarket West End.

The closest that the Changers' get in their lived experiences to the embourgeoised life they revere is when they visit the space of Jesmond; which they do with frequency, most Saturday evenings and Bank Holiday weekends. Inevitably, the Changers - inspired by their middleclass pretences and mediations - 'feel at home' when they're in Jesmond; and collectively aspire to live in the suburb one day, upon relocating from Town A, as shown through the following quotation:

'People go on about being where you belong, like where you fit in and like being and feeling comfortable. Wey (well) that is me in Jesmond. I feel safer, like around the sort of people I want to be around, and in better places. Like I feel more excited there, like anything might happen. That is where I belong .. even the buildings are what I'd call proper, good looking buildings ... and I need that because I rely upon my surroundings to be happy.'

A significant part of the Changers' wider quest to be accepted and seen as embourgeoised beings is to be accepted within Jesmond. During my ethnography, it became clear that being 'recognised', 'liked' and 'respected' by other people 'in' Jesmond is something of an existential obsession for most of the Changers'. The truth, however, is that the Changers' – despite their best efforts - are not accepted in Jesmond; for they are not, themselves, seen as



‘middleclass’ by those who constitute Jesmond’s culture. In the same way that the Changers’ reject Town A for its working class nature, the Changers – as products of Town A – are, ironically, rejected in Jesmond for their only superficially disguised working class ways of being; and general lack of what others refer to as ‘refinement’. Although the Changers do work in office jobs, do buy and associate themselves with middleclass commodities, and do attempt to present themselves as middleclass beings as opposed to Town A lads - and thus although the Changers’ are middleclass to an *extent* – the Changers’ are not middleclass *per se* or absolutely. Middleclass culture and identity - as I realised during this research and when living in the contexts of the Universities of Oxford and Durham - is more complicated than ones’ job, what one buys and ones’ ‘presentation of the self’. Middleclass identity is also about ones’ education, ones’ accent, ones’ connections; and ones’ ‘social capital’, which I take to be, following Bourdieu (1977: 249):

‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’.

Being middleclass is also about being elitist; and excluding others in the spirit of snobbery. True middleclass ideology is founded upon elitism and excluding others who are less fortunate.

The Changers’ lack cultural ‘breeding’, refinement and ‘capital’: accordingly, they are socially eschewed in Jesmond. Those who are genuinely middleclass in Jesmond are, in the spirit of middleclass snobbery and solidarity, quick to avoid the Changers’, and people of their ilk. Simply, the Changers’ imitation of middleclass life does not, in itself, make them middleclass *enough* to be accepted in Jesmond. The Changers’ are not really part of the supposedly elitist social scene of Jesmond; in which they become lost and socially ‘out of



their depth' among law and medical school students, reminiscing about their boarding school days; and local bankers, businessmen and lawyers. When in Jesmond, the Changers' impinge upon an embourgeoised space that they are not welcome in. Somewhat embarrassingly for the Changers', as I discovered during this ethnography, citizens in Jesmond's leisure economy often mistake the Changers' to be an array of things that they are not, such as bouncers, 'squaddies' and even football hooligans. The Changers' exclusion in Jesmond means the 'best' they 'can hope for' when they're in Jesmond socially is to 'bump in' to those individuals who act as their 'bosses' and 'superiors' at work. For these people have also, typically, 'transcended' their working class roots in the way that the Changers' have, and are now – by definition of their age – 'further down' the socially mobile road that the Changers' have embarked upon.

In this way, a secondary geographical anomie is constructed in the lives of the Changers'. While the North-East as a whole is not 'embourgeoised enough' for the Changers' – and thus interpreted as being an anomic region by the Changers' – the Changers' themselves are not 'embourgeoised enough' to be accepted in Jesmond; which is the one space that the Changers' do identify as being 'suitable' in their geographical locality.

In the qualitative interviews I conducted, four out of the seven Changers' indicated that they suffer from a 'facial anomie' in their lives. I now turn my attention to this finding.

Four of the Changers' are convinced that their self-presentations, and levels of phenomenological happiness, are debilitated 'because of the way their faces look'; as expressed below, somewhat self-depreciatively:

'The truth is that no matter how much money I spend on clothes or how good I look, there is always a level that I can get to but not past. Like, the sort of person I want to be is not just rich and powerful or wearing nice things but also like a person with style,



you know? With a really good face and face structure. Like the way some people go in a room and everyone looks at them ... they look good in a bin bag ... just style and class ... that can't be bought and I will never have it. You're either born with that or not, and I don't have it. That is your DNA and there is fuck all I can do about it, I am just an average looking lad really, my face is just ok, if you take away my clothes and car and stuff, I am a nobody, just a normal lad with a good physique, but far from the complete package like, but the models in adverts and stuff, they are a different league, those lucky twats look great facially ... so even if I was to go to Los Angeles like you were saying, and then be in the places I'd like, I'd still not be complete because I don't look the part, only to a point, which is why I guess people start having surgery ('what do you mean?' I ask) like my teeth, I'd need them whitened for one and I don't have enough hair now so I shave it, but I'd need a hair transplant to be taken seriously there as a big-hitter, and I'd need better skin and a face like a model... you can wear lovely clothes and get a great body in the gym, but you can't do fuck all if nature has not wanted you to look right ... you can try and compensate by getting more cut muscles or spending more money, but it just don't work like that, if your face is like mine, then it is like mine for life.'

The facial anomie discussed above is specific to the Changers' as a typology of Gym D life: no other participants identified anything similar to this form of 'strain'. The fact that four of the Changers' identified this facial anomie is significant. It illustrates how image-conscious the Changers' are collectively; and the extent to which vanity and the analysis of ones' aesthetic self is a defining feature of embourgeoised (as opposed to lazy or traditional) working class life. Interestingly, the Changers' believe that their 'facial strain' is a product of their class. The Changers' asserted that 'people like us' (working class lads) can't 'look right', by which they mean 'handsome with rosy cheeks and blonde hair and delicate features,



like Prince William ... because ‘we are not bred like the posh people are’ ... ‘our noses are always pointy’, whereas ‘rich peoples are rounded’. For the Changers’, then, their working class roots account for their anomie at a genetic level; as well as at the cultural level.

I summarise what we have learned about the Changers’ anomie at the end of this chapter. I now consider how the concept of anomie impairs the lived experiences of the Drifters’.

### The anomie of the Drifters’

We know that the Changers’ collective *raison d’être* is to ‘be’ middleclass. However, the Changers’ are not middleclass. This fact forms the basis of the Changers’ anomie, as described above. Nonetheless, at least the Changers’ have an existential purpose. As opposed to the Drifters who, to borrow from Bourdieu, exist ‘without a reason for being’ (1990:196), unless one counts ‘training’ and ‘chilling’, while avoiding work at all costs, as legitimate existential quests; as explained below:

Drifter: ‘Look Yazza (referring to me), you’re asking us about me life but there is nothing more to it than what I keep telling ya. I wish there was – for me and for the book you’re writing! But I get up, I eat, I train and then I chill. That is pretty much it; and twice a month I go and sign on at the job centre so that I can get me benefits’

I ask: ‘So what do you mean by chilling?’

Drifter: ‘Wey, just doing the normal stuff. Ya na what we do. Listen to music, watching TV or a film. Drinking protein ... that is it really. Having a few tins (of lager) now and again like. Maybe do a bit of fishing and hunting in the season. I guess like I waste time and try and find people to waste time with, ya na. Basically, as long as I keep my Mother happy, and stay out of trouble, I can keep chilling and training; and as long as I can keep getting me benefits, I am laughing and living like I want!’



The point of anomie, as the notion is understood in this thesis, is that there is a discrepancy between ones' hopes and aims and ones' actual reality. It is also assumed that this discrepancy is a product of one's social structure.

Importantly, the Drifters' have chosen to drift through their lives without, or at the expense of, any 'real' existential aims and hopes (e.g. at the expense of 'having careers', experiencing social mobility etc). So much so that my qualitative interviews showed that the only cultural expectations that the Drifters' withhold are of having their most fundamental, survival-based aims satisfied: the Drifters' 'expect' and 'need' to eat and to have shelter. The Drifters' also 'want' to 'train', or modify their bodies, which they can do in Gym D at discounted rates, on account of their unemployment. These somewhat primitive expectations are met for the Drifters', despite their anti-work ethos, *by* society.

In this sense, there is no direct discrepancy between the Drifters' hopes and their societal realities at the *macro* sociological level. Rather, the Drifters can eat, and exist with a roof over their heads *because* of society. In essence, the Drifters' lives and expectations are facilitated by their cultural superstructure - the very structure that Marxist philosophy, and the notion of anomie, critiques. The Drifters are, thus, effectively charity. They exploit 'the system', and the very notion of democracy by making 'the (tax-paying) people' work 'for them', in a strange reversal of utilitarian principles. Thus, the Drifters', as a category of life, represent an *inverse macro* anomie. Economically, society must provide for the Drifters'; while the Drifters' contribute nothing directly to society. They provide a 'strain' for society, rather than society providing a strain for them.

Nonetheless, it must be recognised that while the Drifters' do not experience a macro, sociological anomie by definition of them being reliant upon society's welfare system, the



Drifters' do experience a reflexive, micro anomie within their daily existences, as I now explore.

In the qualitative interviews I conducted, all of the Drifters' emphasised that they want to be 'accepted' as part of Town A's community. The Drifters' crave to be seen and treated as legitimate, respected members of the society they live in. They want to be loved. They do not want the 'leper tag', or sense of otherness, that their anti-work ethos has created for them. They resent – even if they understand - their Parsonian 'abjection' (Parsons, 1951), and daily cultural exclusion; which is demonstrated in the quotes given below by three different Drifters':

'Wey, you've asked us what makes me depressed, like what it is in my life that makes me feel so upset, and I'm saying that there are a few things, like unhappiness is proper overlapping and stuff like you were on about, but the thing that is the worst to me is the way people who don't know us (me; singular) look at us – like they hate me cause of how I look and the way people who do know us talk to us. Like they talk to me like I've done something wrong. Like I'm a fucking criminal. Like I shouldn't be alive.

'I was in the supermarket the other day and I heard some posh woman gan (say) "get us some tuna for the dog" to her husband, like proper bossy. And so he gans over and picks up some tins of tuna – for the dog! And then the old snob gans, "oh no, not that tuna, that is the cheap kind. The dog won't like that". But that is the type of tuna that I'm buying. She saw that that is the type of tuna I'm going to buy. And I knew she thought, ha, my dog eats better than you, you dole scum'.

'I gans down the pub the other night, and it was the first time for ages that I went doon to (names pub). I'd just sold some weed so I thought, class I'll have a pint (of lager) and a gan on the gambler (gambling machine). And I saw a few people I knew from way



back, who are my Mothers' friends like her age, and they're usually alright to me ... Like, I'll say hello to them and stuff; they know me ... So, I went to the bar, ordered a pint, and sat among them all. One by one, they all fucked off. One even pretended not to know me. Like, oh, I can't be seen to talk to him, he hasn't got a job! He is a fucking shitbag. And I just thought, you bunch of fucking snobs. Who the fuck do you all think you are? You live in council houses not far from me, you'll be as nice as pie to me Mam (Mother) yet you're so fucking into yourself and what people think of you that you'll just leave me there to have a pint like in total isolation so not to be associated with the likes of me'.

Hence, a *micro* sociological strain exists in the lives of the Drifters'; which is based on the hiatus between how other (typically employed) citizens treat, talk to and think about the Drifters', in comparison with how the Drifters' – and, by extension, others of the Drifters' ghettoised, 'Chav' ilk - want to be treated, talked to and thought about by mainstream society.

It became clear, while conducting my ethnography, that the Drifters are quick to 'hit back', or reject, the society that has, justifiably or not, rejected them. They do so by indulging in an array of 'deviant', often violent behaviour; which violates society's accepted moral codes. For example, one day I ventured into Newcastle City Centre with TS, RB and one of RB's children. As we came down the bus' stairs, ascending from the bus' top-deck to the lower deck from where we would exit, the driver – presumably unintentionally – slammed on the bus' brakes. This caused RB and his child to stumble, but not fall, on the bus' stairs. At this point RB ran down the stairs and shouted threats and obscenities at the driver. Once things had cooled down, I asked RB if he thought he had overreacted. He replied:

'Did I fuck. The only reason he slammed on the brakes like that is cause it was us. If we had been in suits, or if we had been going to or from work, he would have treated us



with respect. He would have driven properly. But he knew what he was doing. You have to stand up to people like that – the way police speak to us, shopkeepers, everyone, don't let them think they're better than ya just cause they're working. Eye for an eye ... if they hate us, we'll hate them back. They look at us and because of our clothes, they think we're scum and think they can take the piss.'

The sociological tendency for an individual, or group, to partake in 'criminal' or 'deviant' behaviour as a result of their perceived and actual cultural strain is well-founded (Durkheim, 1952; Merton, 1938; Cohen, 1955). This sociological correlation was empirically affirmed within my research in relation to the Drifters'; whereby the sort of behaviour described above functions as a way for the Drifters' to 'hit back' at the society and societal structure that has rejected, and rejects them daily. However, while the Drifters' deviancy may well exercise the 'sense of inadequacy' (Bourdieu, 1993: 24) that has been transmitted on to them by the culture they live in, their deviancy also functions, paradoxically, to predicate the negative way in which wider society collectively views the Drifters'. In this sense, the Drifters' are involved and complicit in a 'deviance amplification spiral' (Cohen, 1972): the Drifters' are pilloried by society. They respond to their vilification by adopting a 'deviant' identity and standpoint towards 'mainstream' (i.e. employed) society; though their action affirms and justifies their vilification (and deviancy) further.

The Drifters' are exposed to the same didactic, hegemonic mass-media that the Changers' are. Our global 'entertainment' system reaches, and has the potential to seduce the minds of the Drifters' in the same way that it has seduced the minds, and changed the lives of the Changers'. Yet, the Drifters' perceive and react to the mass-media in a fundamentally different way to the Changers'; and, therefore, do not attempt to emulate the media's ideals in their own existences, as their embourgeoised counterparts do. This general rule is made clearer by examining the different comments made by a Changer and a Drifter when they



were shown an advert for the film *Oceans 13* during a qualitative interview, and then asked 'how the advert makes them feel'. The Changer commented that:

'I see that advert and I feel kind of inspired. I think, maybe I could get me hair like that, or maybe I should get a suit like that. I wish I looked like that. ('They are actors though' I say; 'you don't look like them'). They are actors, but are real people as well. Like there are people like the people they are pretending to be in the film; and they are real people themselves. They're dead cool. And that is a cool film ... I would like to be as cool as they are, in the film and in real life ... but aie, I feel sad cause I am not like that, and probably, if I'm honest, never will be'.

In contrast, the Drifter said:

'ha. I saw the advert for that in Woollys (Woolworths) the other day, and I remember thinking that if you walked around (Town A) dressed like that, you'd get the shite kicked oot of ya, and mugged. They look like a load of queers to me to be honest. Like a bunch of pretty boys ... all that is is something to watch when you get back from a hard night out, pissed and stoned, ya put it in to chill out - if ya start taking that seriously, you're a fucking Muppet. ('Would you like to be like them? I ask). Who the fuck are yee like, me shrink? (Laughs). I could never be. Look at me. I am ugly and I have a scar on me face. Look at Brad Pitt. See the difference, mind I am stronger than the little bastard. But he is shagging that Angelina Bird, I struggle to nail (names infamous girl in Town A) ... all that looks like too much bother and effort for me anyway, like looking like that and stuff. I'd rather wear me tracksuit and keep me head shaved. Imagine combing that hair every morning! You'd be knackered ... I could get ya that film if you wanted for two quid (pounds)'.



Sociologically, it must be asked why working class lads from the same Town, and from comparable habitus' do not respond to the media's ideals in the same way: why do the Drifters' not replicate the embourgeoised lives, ideals and mediations implicit in the hegemony they see, as the Changers' do? For the Drifters', after seeing such should also, in line with Hall's Reception Theory (1973), harbour lofty and fundamentally anomic, mediated existential ambitions; and thereby ask questions, as the strained Changers' do, such as 'why is my life not like the way my heroes' and heroines' are'? Where is my fast car, big house and beautiful wife, or string of lovers? Where is my yacht, my second home 'in the hills' and my suaveness? Where are my contacts, my friends, and my ability to travel? Why does my life lack the commodities and symbols of 'success'; why do I not have access to the seemingly unlimited resources and happiness that the men in hegemony are shown to have?

According to my data, there are two reasons for this. Firstly, the Drifters' do not ask such questions within their lived experiences as, by their own admission, their apathy prevents them from doing so. As put by one of the Drifters': 'I have never asked that sort of question of myself cause I don't give a fuck about the answer'. When the Drifters' are encouraged to answer such questions - i.e. during our qualitative interviews<sup>82</sup> – the Drifters' answer such questions dualistically, in a way that is both defeatist and honest. Firstly, they answer such questions while repeating the cruel rhetoric of capitalism's apparatus state, which takes the form of the voices of their teachers, parents, former employers; and, even, other gym users'. Hence, the Drifters' repeat sentiment around the premise that they lack 'that (media-manufactured) life' because they 'don't have money; the thing that buys that life'; and also explain that they lack the talent, education, motivation and gumption to 'make money'. Thus, in their apathy, the Drifters' are resigned to the fact that they're idle, and neither clever nor compliant enough to be live as the media advocates they should. Secondly, the Drifters'

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<sup>82</sup> During which time the Drifters were pushed to elaborate on their conventional, somewhat automated responses to questions, being either 'I don't know' or 'who cares'.



answer such questions while hearing a remarkable voice of reason; and subsequently display a pragmatic interpretation of hegemony that is not far removed from the objectivist ontology of the Frankfurt School. This is shown in the following comments, which sees one of the Drifters' compare the didactic mass media to 'hypnotism':

'all that is (referring to the notion of society's media ideals, as depicted in a copy of the magazine *FHM* and the numerous adverts its 'readers' are shown) is way of capturing your mind; of hypnotising you. It is just a way of making people feel shit about themselves – like, oh, I haven't look like him; or oh no I haven't have that or this so I'd best buy it. Like, a quick fix ya na, a way of tricking people like us to spend our money on shite we don't need. This is like a hypnotist doing fear. Lasses (women) are the worst ... That is why they spend like they do. Like me lass always says, she says I dress for other girls, not for lads. Cause there is so much pressure to look a certain way if you're a lass - and that is why they look at each other like cats, like bitches – what is she wearing, what is she looking like? They have been hypnotised proper by all that shite like adverts and people like Jordan. Fucking nobodies, disgusting, horrible nobodies with bad manners. They are the worst, cause they are the ones that do it to people like us. They get rich off our fear! But all that (hegemony) is a load of wank. You gotta see it for what it is. It is made for people like us to hypnotise people like us'.

Therefore, the Drifters' - unlike the Changers' - have come to realise that the model of life advocated in the media is a model of life that can't, pragmatically, be emulated by 'people like us'. This prevents the Drifters' from replicating such ideals in their lives:

'I was watching this show on the telly (television) with me lass (girlfriend) the other night – *Sex and the City*. What a pile of shite! There was some Russian or French cunt, I haven't na, and he was nailing one of the main lasses in the show. And he picks her up



in his limo and takes her back to his house, like his flat. And his house is massive, like the best house you can imagine. And he wears proper mint (expensive) clothes. And then the cunt buys her some dress worth like a million quid and then he shags her. Then the next morning, he wakes up and cooks her breakfast, like a proper boyo, millionaire playboy and nat. Me lass gans, oh – that is so sweet. I gans, is that real life like? She gans, wey not for me! I gans, not for anyone ya daft slag. Who the fuck lives like that? Diven't be so blind. It is a television show. Ya flick on the movies and you'll see a load of aliens being shot at. That is not real either, for fucks sake! Get yourself back to planet earth, and get your head out the clouds'.

Merton seminally describes and categorises the notion of anomie in the following passage:

'Just as Adaptation I (conformity) remains the most frequent, Adaptation IV (the rejection of goals and institutional means) is probably the least common ... people who adapt (or maladapt) in this fashion are, strictly speaking, *in society but not of it*. Sociologically, these constitute the real aliens. Not sharing the common frames of values, they can be included as members of society only in a fractional sense ... which ultimately lead him to "escape" from the requirements of society' (Merton, 1968: 153-154).

If we apply Merton's comments on anomie to the sorts and derivations of anomie experienced by Drifters' and the Changers' comparatively, we see how both Adaption I and Adaption IV exists in Town A today, as I now illustrate.

The Drifters', as we have seen, do not 'act' upon the hegemony they are exposed to - practically or ideologically - as the Changers' do. By not doing so, the Drifters' avoid the anomie that comes with conformity to society's goals and standards, as suffered by the Changers (Adaptation I). Yet, ironically, the Drifters' come to experience a human based



anomie in their lives, on account of their unwillingness to replicate society's ideals, as purveyed through and mediated in hegemony, within their own existences (Adaptation IV); and thereby come to constitute society's 'real aliens'. Simultaneously, the Changers' (Adaptation I) anomie stems directly from their conformity to hegemony (society's reigning goals and standards); and their inability to replicate the impossible existential aims and desires advocated through hegemony within their own existences. In this sense, Gym D's younger, either embourgeoised or unemployed users, will inevitably suffer from anomie in their lives. The issue is whether their anomie will be constructed via their conformity (Adaption 1) or non-conformity (Adaption IV).

I have now illustrated how anomie manifests itself in the lives of the Drifters' and the Changers'. With the above discussions in mind, I now consider the anomie, or cultural strain, of the Traditionalists'.

### The anomie of the Traditionalists'

The data that I elicited on the Traditionalists' 'cultural aims' shows that all of the Traditionalists' aim, primarily, to financially 'provide' for themselves and for their families (if they have a family) by them performing 'proper', 'hands-on', manual work (as opposed to them performing 'ponsey' post-industrial labour<sup>83</sup>, which they see as 'girlie'). The majority of the Traditionalists' also expressed that when they're not at work, they generally desire to 'have good fun' in their social lives. The Traditionalists' thereby routinely take advantage of the leisure time, or 'freedom', that they are afforded. Particularly at the weekends, when the Traditionalists' will ritually drink to excess with 'the lads' (i.e. other Traditionalists'); to whom loyalty is displayed, and belonging and affirmation is desired. Many of the

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<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the ability to financially 'stand on your own two feet', without financial 'help' or aid from anyone else, was mentioned by every Traditionalist as being central to their lives, hopes and concept of masculinity. The Traditionalists' made it clear that, in their collective view, a man is not 'a real man' - and is said to lack self-esteem and pride - if he has to rely on others, especially for financial assistance.



Traditionalists' also expressed that they desire to 'go on holiday in the sun' (at least) 'once a year or so'. They also aim to appear 'hard and tough' in fights, should the necessity to 'prove oneself physically' ever present itself. Being 'respected' and 'liked' in Town A, and within Gym D's community, was also emphasised as being a desirable aim by many of the Traditionalists'.

Thus, if the Changers' existential ambitions can be read as 'lofty' and media-lead, while the Drifters' ambitions can be interpreted as somewhat primitive, deviant and born out of apathy; then the Traditionalists' ambitions can, comparatively, be seen as 'simple', 'old-fashioned' and somewhat stereotypical of 'respectable' blue collar working class life, as distinct from consensually unemployed working class life or embourgeoised working class life.

Significantly, Town A remains the ideal empirical milieu for the Traditionalists to 'live out' their 'old-fashioned' existential ambitions, and 'be' the sort of men they want and have come to be. There is, simply, a natural fit between the Traditionalists' cultural environment and the Traditionalists' everyday cultural aims. Thus, apart from the lack of work that a proportion of the Traditionalists' endure for periods of time - i.e. those casually employed Traditionalists' who are forced to go through sporadic labour and cash related 'strains' and anxiety when they are not certain when their next period of work and pay will be encountered - there is no generalisable hiatus between Town A, and Town A's ability, as a cultural structure, to sociologically provide for the Traditionalists' relative cultural aims. For the Traditionalists' - as products of Town A's mining habitus - are, metaphorically, as culturally 'at home' and content in the current context of Town A as the proverbial 'fish in water', in line with the following sentiment:



‘when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world itself for granted’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127).

Therefore, for the moment, the theory of anomie can’t be seen as applying to the Traditionalists’ on a daily-basis as readily as it does to their Gym D counterparts. There is a harmony between Town A as a culture and social ecology, and the Traditionalists’ cultural aims and expectations. However, according to my research, this will not be the case for much longer.

Town A and its habitus is, as we have seen, currently evolving; from being a ‘local’, industrial, patriarchal culture (in which white, working class men ‘ruled’) into being a ‘glocal’, post-industrial locality that adheres to and mirrors the political correctness, equality and supposed egalitarianism that defines post-modern, global capitalism. This cultural evolution does not ‘suit’ the Traditionalists’. For this evolution challenges the Traditionalists’ positions of dominance and supervisory in Town A, which the Traditionalists’ - as white working class males - have enjoyed by definition of birthright in Town A since its amalgamation. Hence, the Traditionalists’ identified three specific themes in our interviews which are linked with their Town’s evolution; which the Traditionalists’ discussed passionately yet ominously and forebodingly. These themes are as follows:

1) The rise of the ‘new’ Town A woman.

Town A’s (especially younger) women are now able to take advantage of opportunities that they would not have been presented with in earlier epochs, and are subsequently enjoying a new found sense of freedom and social success. Town A’s younger generation of ‘lasses’ are now attending universities, migrating from the area, forging successful careers and even dating men ‘who are not like us (Traditionalists)’. Further, a proportion of Town A’s women



are partaking in the 'ladette culture' (see Jackson and Tinkler, 2007) that has emerged in the UK, which sees them socialise in the leisure spaces, and partake in the 'drinking practices' that were once somewhat exclusively for white working class men, as put by Nayak (2006: 818):

'working young women are no longer marginalized participants (in our society's 'drinking practices') but are culturally situated in student cultures, hen nights, 'lasses nights' and in media representations of 'ladettes'.

Accordingly, the Traditionalists' infamous misogynistic and patriarchal views are challenged. The Traditionalists' once accepted social 'dominance' over Town A's women is no longer a platitude, as it was. Thus, a sociological hiatus between how Town A's women - according to the Traditionalists' - 'should' live and act and how Town A's women are living and acting has therefore emerged. The success of Town A's women, especially in terms of them finding jobs in a post-industrial society, renders Town A's traditional men insecure and somewhat unnecessary. As put: 'they (women) can type, so they are the ones bringing home the bacon and enjoying a good piss up at the weekend while lads like me are down the jobcentre twiddling our thumbs'.

## 2) The theme of immigration.

The racism that many of the Traditionalists' characteristically display and harbour is agitated by the manner in which, as a consequence of immigration, 'foreigners' are living in 'our' region, and apparently 'taking the piss' by living on ('our') income support, using 'our' public services and 'stealing' the limited amount of 'proper' (blue-collar) work that is available in a post-industrial society from 'us'. For the building, plumbing and other manual labour that 'should' be available to Town A's Traditional males is being performed – at a



cheaper cost and, one may dare venture to a higher standard – by the immigrant ‘other’.<sup>84</sup>

This causes further strain for some of the Traditionalists and their counterparts in Town A, which I consider later in this chapter, with reference to the growing importance of the *British Nationalist Party* in Town A.

### 3) The nature of work today:

The majority of available work in post-industrial Town A and its near-by areas is IT, office-based labour. As put reflexively: ‘if you go and try and get a job today at the job centre or recruitment place, they say, ‘can you use a computer?’ not ‘are you good with your hands and at grafting?’’ However, the Traditionalists can’t partake in post-industrial work. For they have not been ‘trained’ to do so, as the Changers’ have as a result of their university experiences. Many of the Traditionalists are illiterate in terms of IT, and struggle to perform basic mathematical and English written skills. This fact, understandably, was found to depress the Traditionalists’ further. In essence, ‘working men’ are excluded from work in Town A today: they can’t assimilate into a post-industrial economy and labour market; and find the work they can perform not just sparse, but sparse because of the ‘immigrant other’.

Inevitably, the above three themes - and the strain such themes create for the Traditionalists - will intensify with time, by definition of Town A’s sociological evolution. This intensification will ensure that the Traditionalists’ will face not just a ‘cultural crisis’, but also the prospect of cultural obsolescence in the near-future. For there is no place for Traditionalists – culturally, ideologically, professionally or even visually – in a post-industrial, global,

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<sup>84</sup> During this research, it became clear that the Traditionalists’ perceive ‘immigrants’/‘foreigners’ as being over-sexual beings who ‘can’t be trusted around women’. This reputation is levelled, especially, at men of African descent. Who, many Traditionalists are convinced, will rape ‘their’ women given the chance. Hypocritically, the constant jeering, wolf-whistling and groping of women that is ritually practiced by the Traditionalists – especially in bars and clubs at the weekend - appears to go unnoticed by themselves when they make such statements.



multi-cultural society, in which they will not be able to hang 'on to a disappearing industrial empire they have yet to relinquish' (Nayak, 2006: 826), despite their best attempts to do so, in part through the construction and presentation of 'industrial' bodies, as we'll come to.

During my time in the field, it became clear that the Traditionalists' have a tendency to cite the theme of 'political correctness' as being the singular reason for the above three sociological themes manifesting themselves in 'their' Town, and in their lives. So doing ensures that, from the collective perspective of the Traditionalists', 'the reason' Town A's women and immigrants are apparently 'thriving' is not due to the intrinsic merits of women and immigrants, or due to any failings on the part of the Traditionalists, but is, *instead*, due to an (imagined or actual) bias, or conspiracy 'in the system' that works against 'lads like us' (white, working class men), and in favour of women and immigrants (the once 'other'). As explained below:

'if a woman goes for a job now, and a lad like me goes for it, she – the woman – will get it. No questions, it gans to the woman. I'm not talking about some sexy tart ganning into an office with big tits and high heels and saying I want a job and getting it cause all the fucking auld (old) managers want to bend her ower (over) the photocopier. I'm talking about everything – like police, bouncers, jobs that are Men's jobs, that women can't really do, they (women) get cause of political correctness. If some black lesbian women in a wheelchair wants a job, she'll definitely get it! Divent (don't) even apply if she is ganning for it (laughs). Women, blacks, gays, give them all the jobs in case they complain of discrimination, people like us? Well, fuck us! We can wait til all the fucking minorities take the piss first! ... political correctness and human rights? What a bunch of fucking shite! That is my attitude towards them.'



The above comments are echoed in the below quotation, which makes the Traditionalists' sense of 'them against us' and victimisation even clearer:

'whoever makes the laws have forgotten about us, like white, straight lads, and have basically made us second class citizens. They let any fucking cunt in here, give them houses and jobs. And give us nout. They have forgotten about us cause they're so busy giving (uses a strongly racist comment) money that should be for us and our kids ... You can't say nout to them (foreigners) cause you'll be done for racism, but they'll fucking blow us up at the drop of a hat. What a fucking joke. They get our jobs, our money; and we're meant to smile in the name of multi fucking culturalism ... give it a year son, and we'll be fighting a civil war.'

Thus, a political anomie - which has its roots in political anger, helplessness and mistrust – was identified by several Traditionalists, who are alarmed by the hiatus between how things 'are' politically and governmentally in comparison with how they believe things should be. Convolutedly, the Traditionalist' political strain is compounded by the fact that there is not, in their view, a 'proper' political party to 'protect' and 'represent' them. In turn, somewhat alarmingly, the *British Nationalist Party* (BNP) finds itself increasingly popular in Town A; as this work's conclusion considers further. The BNP's popularity is based upon the party's rhetorical promise to re-instate 'old fashioned' white, working class British values within society, and bring back (industrial) 'British jobs for British workers'. In this sense, the BNP is providing an answer to the Traditionalists' political anomie, by promising to ensure 'the system' acknowledges them; and oppose the changes in the social order which are making them obsolete and apparently victimised. The BNP also provides a level of social identity for a proportion of Town A's misguided youth, as it does for those individuals analysed in the excellent work of Goodwin (2008). Consequently, a growing proportion of Town A's younger men are having BNP related tattoos inscribed on their bodies, and repeating the BNP



political slogans that they are becoming indoctrinated into. A growing number of young men in Town A have also ritually taken to riding scooters<sup>85</sup> on a Sunday with other BNP supporters from and in near-by towns.

The data that I elicited also suggests that two, interlinked ‘biological’ – rather than sociological - themes are causing the Traditionalists’ a further, collective anomie. These two themes are ageing and death. These themes were not cited as sources of depression by the other typologies of life researched here; and are thus specific to the Traditionalists as a typology of working class life, in the same way that the identification of facial anomie is specific to the Changers. In relation to the theme of ageing, every single Traditionalist participant mentioned that the concept and actuality of ageing, or ‘growing old’ depresses him. This fear is based on the fact that with time, the Traditionalist will inevitably lose his ‘looks’, his mobility; and will therefore be unable to partake in the lifestyle he wants to live. The Traditionalist knows, depressingly, that he can’t ‘womanise’, ‘fight’, ‘graft’ (work), ‘train’, ‘get lashed’ (drunk), and do all of the other things that provide him with happiness when he is old; ‘like a fossil’:

‘Imagine getting ... (women) when you’re an old bastard, you can’t even get it up then man! You can’t train, you can’t fight – even if some little bastard attacks you, you just get a kicking cause you can’t defend yourself. You can’t work – if ya fix a light and make an egg, you need a sleep. And you could just end up alone, with a cat like an old witch, just watching telly all day – fuck that!’

However, the fear of ageing harboured by the Traditionalists’ is positively tame when compared with the, at times hysterical fear of death that this group collectively feel. As put:

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<sup>85</sup> Their scooters - often VESPA’s – are adorned with nationalist stickers. Ethnographically, I heard that the *Newcastle Gremlins* (being one of Newcastle United’s ‘football firms’) are linked with the activity of these youths. Which is something of an inevitability, given the relationship between far-right politics and football violence (see Buford’s *Among the Thugs*, 1992).



‘I just don’t want to die, ya na. It is not just ageing and ending up like, I don’t know, pissing me pants or being a vegetable, it is being nothing. It is facing up to the fact that I’m going to die. Like that is fucked – what happens to me. I rot like a fuck in a box. Oh, I don’t want to talk about that ... Where do you go? Try thinking about that. Of course I get depressed. I will be no more, like, I will no longer be here. It will have all been for nothing, I will just be gone ... eaten by worms in the ground!’

I have now discussed how anomie manifests itself, relatively, in the lives of the Changers’, the Drifters’ and the Traditionalists’. This chapter now summarises what has been learned in these discussions, and locates my finding within wider cultural thought.

### Chapter Summary

The Changers’ anomie stems primarily from the discrepancy between who, what and where the Changers *are* (i.e. ‘office working’ lads who live in Town A and represent an intermediary working class/middleclass typology of Gym D life) and who, what and where the Changers’ *want to be* (i.e. ‘embourgeoised’, yuppie men who conform to the ideals of hegemony, and who live ‘fashionable lives’ in a ‘fashionable’ locality). Significantly, the Changers’ anomie is a derivative of the way they interact and interpret contemporary society’s didactic, hegemonic purveying mass media: for it is the mass-media that has specified the ‘false’ needs and ideals that the Changers’, paradoxically, try and emulate in their lives. This demonstrates the fundamental way in which certain components of contemporary society’s mass-media ideologically ‘seduces’ and manipulates some working class males today, by essentially ‘brainwashing’ them into identifying ‘unobtainable’ cultural goals and notions of masculinity, which they try and emulate in their existences. Inevitably, when these goals are not met, a post-modern form of the Adaption I ‘type’ of anomie discussed by Merton manifests itself.



It has also been shown that the Changers' anomie manifests itself at a geographical level: while the region that the Changers' live in is not embourgeoised 'enough' for them (and is thus interpreted as an anomic social context), the Changers' are not embourgeoised enough to be 'accepted' in Jesmond; which is the one micro space they desire to be seen and accepted in locally. This shows that the Changers' anomie – like the Drifters' anomie - is linked with social exclusion. In the same way that the Drifters' are 'strained' by their lack of acceptance within wider society, the Changers' are 'strained' by their lack of acceptance in Jesmond. Hence, the well-cited relationship between the notion of anomie and the concept of exclusion has been affirmed in this research, with reference to Town A culture and masculinity. Further, it has been argued that the Changers' suffer from a 'facial anomie' in their lives: the Changers' do not 'look' as they wish 'facially', and feel psycho-social strain accordingly. This illustrates how image conscious and self-analytical embourgeoised working class life and masculinity (as distinct from 'Traditional' and 'Chav' masculinity) in Town A is today; and illustrates how an image-based anomie - which presumably escaped men in the locality of Town A in previous, less image-conscious epochs – has come and will continue to cause 'strain' for men in Town A.

In terms of the advancement of capitalist society at a macro level, it is understandable as to why the mass-media, and its all powerful owners', create embourgeoised 'ideals' and 'goals', which are glamorised and essentially 'marketed' to young men in micro localities, like Town A today. For by attempting to replicate media-constructed and purveyed hegemonic goals in their lives, society's post-industrial proletariat essentially become docile consumers and workers, who are more than willing to follow the ideological and professional 'conventions' of a post-industrial society, as set out in the mass-media, without question, and in the belief that they become 'better men' by doing so. What better way for post-industrial society to advance, then to have its young 'working' men conform to its 'Yuppie' ideals, by playing on



their vanity; and by creating an apparently self-induced pressure for them to emulate an embourgeoised form of life in their existences; whereby they work only to spend and show; in spite of the anomie and unhappiness that form of life creates? In this way, the global mass-media and the homogenous 'Yuppie' form of embourgeoised masculinity it purveys and glamorises can be seen as a means of social control, which ideologically 'seduces' potentially volatile, angry and rebellious males in a forgotten Town to live a form of life that is anomic in reality, but is highly advantageous economically to those in power; who benefit from embourgeoised working class males' labour, taxes, consumption and sedateness. Hence, the mass-media has been found to function in this research in line with the way George Gerbner assumed it did, as set out in Gerbner's cultivation theory (Gerbner et al, 1976; 1979; 1986); which shows that 'viewers of television' (and, by extension, post-modern media sources) 'hold beliefs constant with the dominant ideologies, beliefs and portrayals of the television world' (Damers et al: 31), rather than 'unconventional' beliefs that may threaten society's order; and global, post-industrial capitalism's cultural and economic development.

While the Drifters' do not suffer from a *macro* anomie in their lives as a result of their dependent positions within society and upon society's welfare system, and while the Drifters' are not victims of the media's 'cultivating' and seductive nature due to their laziness and lack of conformity; the Drifters have been found to suffer from a *micro* anomie in their lives. This micro anomie stems from the social exclusion and vilification that the Drifters' endure daily: the Drifters' are depressed by the 'strain' between how they are treated and seen in society (i.e. as the 'workshy', immoral, ghettoised 'other') in comparison with how they want to be treated (i.e. as 'accepted', legitimate citizens). The Drifters' micro anomie means that they are involved in 'deviant spirals'; which see the Drifters' 'hit back' at the society that has rejected them. Hence, the Drifters' 'response' to their anomie is typical of the responses



displayed by other members of society, who have also felt victimised by their inherently 'strainful' lives and societies, and the exclusion they endure (Cohen, S. 1972).

The Drifters' anomie is a post-modern version of the Adaption IV 'sort' of anomie discussed by Merton. Hence, while the Changers' suffer from an anomie that is born out of their conformity (adaption I) to post-modern society's cultural ideals, the Drifters' anomie stems from their lack of conformity to society's established labour and consumption based 'goals and standards'. This illustrates the inevitable yet relative nature of cultural anomie for many men in Gym D today: both 'embourgeoised' and 'Chav' forms of contemporary Town A masculinity will suffer from anomie in their lives, regardless of their conformity or non-conformity to society's ideals. This also facilitates a cross-comparative insight into why one form of working class life (the Changers') attempt to replicate hegemonic ideals in their lives, while another form (the Drifters') do not, despite both forms of life being exposed to the same didactic, all-encompassing, ideological-purveying mass-media. This comparison went some way in illustrating that the ideological homogenisation of a locality because of the influx of the mass-media in that locality is not a fixed inevitability, given the way different strata of the same community will interpret, respond, replicate or reject the ideology that is purveyed and 'spoon-fed' to them. Thus, while cultivation theory explains the anomie of the Changers', it can't explain the anomie of the Drifters'.

Currently, Town A has been shown to be the ideal sociological milieu for the Traditionalists' to achieve their stereotypically 'blue collar' and 'old fashioned' cultural aims and ambitions. As products of Town A's habitus, the Traditionalists are essentially 'at home' in contemporary Town A, in that they are able to live, exist, achieve and behave in the locality as they wish, without the cultural strain and sense of exclusion that the other typologies of Gym D life endure daily. Hence, the Traditionalists' current levels of cultural anomie are comparatively low. However, as part of Town A's sociological evolution from a



quintessentially industrial locality into a 'glocal', post-modern one, three themes have emerged to define Town A's sociological constitution and cultural habitus. These three themes are 'the rise of the Town A woman', immigration, and the nature of (post-industrial) work available today. All of these themes are challenging the Traditionalists' current position as Town A's 'dominant' culture; and will develop to cause the Traditionalists' not just cultural strain but also sociological obsolescence in the near future, as these themes intensify as part of Town A's sociological progression. (So much so that I believe I'm documenting the 'last of the miners' in this work, in that the Traditionalist typology of life described in this thesis will be the last of its kind; and will come to be replaced as Town A's 'dominant' culture by either an embourgeoised or ghettoised form of working class life, as this work's conclusion considers further). For there will be no room for 'traditional' Town A men in a post-industrial, 'global' society, in which they are obsolete, both ideologically and professionally.

Concurrently, a political anomie has become evident among the many of Traditionalists'; who feel that there is a lack of political representation for them today; and thus a lack of political 'protection' against the 'loss' of their culture and Town. This illustrates that the burgeoning popularity of the British Nationalist Party in post-industrial working class localities like Town A is not necessarily due to an intrinsic sense of fascism or nationalism in working class communities (Goodwin, 2008; Ford and Goodwin, 2010), but rather to do with a desperation to 'protect' oneself and way of life from a political system that has not just 'sold out' but essentially forgotten employed, white working class people: the one marginalised, minority in British society who receive little if any 'help' from 'the system'. Little wonder then that the BNP's ostensible commitment to 'protect' and preserve white working class culture and jobs in localities like Town A is proving so popular among



residents. The emergence of the BNP should thus be read as a response to working class anomie and the loss of 'traditional' working class culture.

The above discussion has shown how anomic life is, or will come to be, for all strata of Gym D life. Although the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' anomie is experienced and created relatively, it is nonetheless very 'real' reflexively. Anomie is thus a significant intellectual and empirical notion that goes far in explaining the low serotonin nature of existence in Town A today. The fact that the theory of anomie has been shown to be malleable enough to identify and contextualise the different sorts of 'strain' that is experienced by the three groups of masculinity identified here illustrates the theory's applicability and relevance to contemporary society, and psychosocial investigation. Accordingly, the theory should not be abandoned theoretically and empirically, or be seen as a hackneyed notion that is not 'relevant' to contemporary, post-industrial culture. Rather, I would urge others to apply the notion to other social contexts and populace phenomenologically; particularly given its pertinence within changing cultural contexts.

Now that I have presented what my research has 'found out' about the construction of anomie in the lives of my participant groups, this thesis advances to discuss what has been 'found out' about my participants' alienating labour and consumption lives, in chapters nine and ten.



## Chapter 9:

### Alienation through labour

#### Chapter overview

The previous Chapter illustrates how the three groups of working class life analysed in this thesis experience anomie, or cultural strain, subjectively in and as part of their ‘low serotonin’ existences. Chapter 9 advances this thesis’ findings and analysis section by demonstrating how the Changers’, Drifters’ and Traditionalists’ are ‘alienated’, in the Marxian sense, by and through their labour lives, or lack of labour lives.

For clarity, I begin chapter nine by summarising the four principles of Marx’s theory of alienation through labour, and emphasising how the typologies of life analysed here all work (or fail to work in the case of the Drifters’) in categorically different sorts of jobs.

The Marxian assertion that the capitalist labourer is necessarily alienated through and by their work is founded upon four premises, being:

- 1) that the capitalist worker is alienated from the actual *product or service* their work creates, represents, fashions and amounts to;
- 2) that the capitalist worker is alienated from the *acts and processes* that constitute their work;
- 3) that the capitalist workers’ ‘*human relationships*’ are ‘alienated’ because of their work; and
- 4) that the capitalist labourer is separated or alienated from their ‘*species being*’, by definition of their job.

This thesis has demonstrated that the three types of working class life analysed in this thesis work - or fail to work, in the case of the Drifters’ - in categorically different sorts of jobs. The Traditionalists’ work in non office-based ‘hands-on’, ‘blue-collar’, ‘practical’ manual jobs



while, in contrast, the Changers work in ‘office-based’, post-industrial, ‘white-collar’ jobs, as part of contemporary society’s ‘knowledge’ or information economy (Castells, 2000; Webster, 2006). It has been suggested that the Traditionalists’ identities as ‘real’ men are affirmed by them working in ‘real’ jobs; in the same way that the Changers’ identities as ‘Yuppie’, embourgeoised men are bolstered by their office jobs. Simultaneously, it has been shown that the Drifters ‘get by’, despite their anti-work ethics, by claiming state-provided benefits.

When I analysed the data that I elicited on how the employed participant groups (the Changers’ and the Traditionalists’) identified and researched in this thesis reflexively ‘view’ their jobs, it became clear that unequivocal variation exists phenomenologically. Every single Changer explained that they ‘hated’ or disliked their post-industrial jobs in the qualitative interviews that I conducted with them; and demonstrated that they are, indeed, alienated by and through their labour on the four accounts that Marx’s theory stipulates. In contrast, every Traditionalist stated that they find their work at least ‘tolerable’. Half of the Traditionalists admitted to ‘enjoying’ or ‘liking’ their work; while one even claimed to ‘love’ his job; and believed his labour functioned as his ‘self-confirming essence’, in congruence with the somewhat idealistic view of labour Marx’s philosophy propagates.

In light of this general finding, and given the specifics of Marx’s theory, I now considers how and why the Traditionalists’ work – their blue collar, manual, industrial ‘proper graft’ – does not collectively depress and alienate them, as a group, in the way the Changers’ work does them; as they ‘slave away’ in post-industrial knowledge, sales and IT-based jobs as part of the lower echelons of the white collar hierarchy. I begin this consideration with reference to the first part of Marx’s theory, being the idea that the capitalist worker is alienated by and from the actual *product, object or service* his work creates, represents and amounts to; as put by Marx (in Coser, 1977: 50):



‘The object produced by labour ... now stands as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer’ (the labourer). . . The more the worker expends himself in work the ... the poorer he becomes in his inner life, and the less he belongs to himself’.

As a rule, a Traditionalist work equates to him constructing a product/object or delivering a service that is defined by physicality. Accordingly, a Traditionalist has something actual and tangible to ‘show’ for his work, upon his works’ completion; e.g. the Traditionalists’ labour has constructed the *actuality* of a house; helped to fit the *physicality* of a kitchen; contributed to the servicing of a car’s *physical* components etc. Based on the reflexive data that I elicited, it seems that the *physical* and *tangible* nature of what a Traditionalists’ work *produces* means the Traditionalist does not, typically, finish work in an angry or resentful state; thereby alienated from what his labour has amounted to, and convinced that his laborious efforts were, ultimately, ‘a meaningless waste of time’ (as the Changer does, as a consequence of the intangible nature of his labour’s product). Rather, the Traditionalist receives a sense of phenomenological satisfaction and achievement by definition of the physical product his labour has created. The Traditionalist can ‘see’ the fruits of his labour - his work’s product – at the end of his labour process. It is the visibility and tangibility of what a Traditionalists’ work produces, I’m suggesting here, which accounts for the sanguine view that the Traditionalists’ have for their labour’s products.

It was also found that the Traditionalists’ typically believe that their work amounts to the construction of a product or service that is ‘relevant’ and ‘necessary’ to ‘the real world’. This means that the Traditionalist considers the physical product(s) that his labour has fashioned with pride and altruism; and often give thought to how other citizens will benefit from his labour’s product(s), as shown in the following quotations elicited from a builder and a mechanic respectively:



‘I finished work the other day, and the sun was oot (out), I’d had a laugh all day, and a good laugh like the whole time that I was building it (a housing estate) with all the lads – like over two years nearly. And I thought, get-in. Job well done. Everything was ready. Everything clean, everything safe. The gas, the water, the entire lot was done; and I could see all of our work that the lads had done. So I looked at the houses and remembered when it was just a field, but now it is posh new houses, and they (the houses) will be there for years, cause of our work; cause of our efforts ... That (satisfaction through labour) is more than the bricks we put down. Like, it is people having Christmases in the future, people having a life in what we did. That is proper good that see, so yes, when you start deconstructing work like the way you’re saying, then you see that work is more than just a job; like it makes a difference. When I pass-on, like a part of me stays, like a memory of me and the time with the lads building everyday for that time.’

‘Look, I am proper into cars, and engines and stuff. So when I fix one, or when someone comes in with a problem, I like looking at it, and fixing the bastard. Like there is this posh tart that comes in the garage. Now she’s come for years, why? Cause she knows I’ll not rip her off, and that I’ll fix her car. So she came in with her big silver Mercedes the other day, I fixed it, and off she went. She can gan to work, and pick up the kids, and I enjoyed that. So aie, I do enjoy my work ... I do not feel separated from what me work does, to answer your question; definitely not. I know me clients and I know their cars; and I love working with me hands and sorting out cars, for them and me.’

In this sense, the Traditionalists’ see their labour and their labour’s product as something of a selfless communal duty. They work ‘not just for a pay packet’ but ‘for other people, that pay us to help them through our graft (labour)’. They ‘believe’ in and enjoy what their work



produces. They can visibly see what their labour culminates to. Accordingly, the Traditionalists' are not 'alienated' from what their work produces.

Further, because the Traditionalists' are generally paid to 'do a job' for 'someone else ... on someone else's stuff' (i.e. someone else's house, car, kitchen etc), the Traditionalists' understand that their work means they act as *intermediaries*, rather than creators in the labour process. Thus, the Traditionalists' do not 'own' what their labour amounts to per se (i.e. the product of their work), but are typically paid to enhance another person's/owners' belongings through their skills (e.g. a mechanic does not own the car he is paid to 'fix', but is responsible for fixing the car he is entrusted with). The Traditionalists' unique labour position – as intermediaries rather than creators - appears to prevent their alienation from and through their work's product further: because the Traditionalists' are commissioned to labour on behalf of someone else on someone else's product (rather than being commissioned to produce a product through their labour, only for that product to be then taken away) they don't suffer from the alienation that the artisan's of Marx's day allegedly did<sup>86</sup>; for their work's product is not 'theirs' to lose or be alienated from in the first place.

The first premise of Marx's theory – being that the capitalist labourer is alienated from the *product* of his labour - does not genuinely apply to the Traditionalists and their experiences of labour therefore. Instead, the Traditionalists' receive a level of satisfaction from the physical, visible, altruistic and relevant products their intermediary labour represents and delivers.

The Changers' labour equates to them either:

1) inputting, analysing and producing electronic based 'data sets';

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<sup>86</sup> As, for example, 'the potter ... who put his sweat and soul into the pot' only for 'his pot to be taken away is'; as explained by Professor Alan Macfarlane, in a lecture at the University of Cambridge, 5<sup>th</sup> week 2001 (available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoZp177HDJ8&feature=channel>).



2) passing on 'information', typically in a rigid way (e.g. the passing on of legal advice and information), or

3) selling intangible products (e.g. insurance, bank accounts, IT software) for and on behalf of the 'faceless', bureaucratic organisations they work for, in contemporary society's knowledge economy.

The Changers' post-industrial labour does not amount to the production or servicing of anything 'physical' or tangible. The fact that the Changers' fail to produce anything 'physical' through their labour means that they, simultaneously, fail to produce any products or services which they, reflexively, consider 'worthwhile', 'interesting', 'satisfying' or even slightly altruistic through their labour. Hence, unlike his Traditional counterpart - who sees his labour as something of a communal duty and the physical, product of his work as inherently worthwhile - the Changer does not value the objective of his information and communication-based job; which amounts to 'pointless', 'unreal', annoying', 'pitiful', 'irrelevant' and 'unreliable' products. Inevitably, therefore, the Changers' feel alienated from what their work produces, or fails to produce. The fact that the only recipients to benefit from what the Changers' labour produces are the 'greedy' coffers of the national and multi-national conglomerates they work for compounds the Changers' sense of alienation, from both their product and their employers'.

The lack of product that defines the Changers' labour causes them to suffer from a daily sense of monotony and frustration, and leads the Changers' to question the 'point' of their work. This has established a collective resentment among the Changers' towards individuals who do 'genuinely enjoy' their jobs, and 'who make and do things that matter through work and with their lives'; as put:



‘I know we’re all meant to pretend we love our jobs and stuff but to be honest, the way I see it is that some people go to work and design rockets to go to the moon and what they do helps mankind, we can explore space because some bugger is designing a rocket, or some people go to work and cure cancer, how fucking cool would that be? Lucky bastards, they do something that matters ... even people that build houses all day at least make something real, like that is what I built! But me? I sell shit. If it wasn’t for the money, I’d say fuck off to them. Because ... there is no purpose to my work, I don’t make anything, I am just a link in their chain, a pawn on the fucking chessboard’.

I now consider how the second part of Marx’s theory of alienation - being the idea that the capitalist worker is separated from the *processes* of his labour - relates to the Traditionalists’ and the Changers’ relative experiences of working.

As discussed, the Changers’ typically perform IT and communication-based *processes*, so as to produce the intangible services that their labour culminates to. According to the data that I elicited, the nature of the Changers’ labour means that they are not just collectively alienated by definition of *what their work produces* (or fails to produce), but also entirely alienated by definition of their labour processes. The Changers’ describe the laborious *processes* and *acts* that they perform on a daily basis at work as being ‘meaningless’, ‘mundane’, ‘boring’, ‘soulless’ and ‘soul-destroying’, as put succinctly:

‘I just sit for hours all day, putting data into a computer. Staring at a screen like a twat. A trained monkey could do this shite. Totally meaningless. I sometimes sit and think, is this it? Is this all it will ever be, an IT whore?’

Working ‘with’ electronic data through highly repetitive IT and communication based processes is not the ‘self-confirming essence’ that a person’s labour should, for Marx, ideally



be. Rather, where satisfaction should occur, exhaustion, frustration, repetition and even ill-health manifests for post-industrial, white-collar labourers:

‘It takes it out of us, just sitting there all day. It shouldn’t, but it does. Sometimes I come out feeling like a robot: knackered, and pissed off like. That is why I love to train (in Gym D), it just makes us feel good and alive again, like connected with me body again. But in that office, all day, with the air and stuff in there, I get stressed – cold sores and anxiety and stuff. What I do is boring. Just selling stuff on the phone all day ... of course I am separated from the product, cause I didn’t make it, I don’t understand it – I’ve never even used it. I just try and shift it and hit me targets, and doing that all day everyday, fuck it is bad’.

The Changers’ receive little, if any, sense of ‘challenge’ or ‘vocation’ from their labour’s processes. This is partly due to the alienation they feel from their work’s product (because the Changers’ do not value, or feel ‘any passion’ for what their labour amounts to, they, consequently, feel no affinity to the processes they go through to deliver their labour), and predominantly due to the reflexive ‘ease’ and subservience ‘to technology’ which characterises their jobs:

‘The job is just so easy. It is the same every day. Once you learn ‘the system’ as we call it ... you do the same thing all day long, everyday. But really it is the computers that do it all. You just basically do things to help the computer. It is like the computers are the bosses, and we are just there to help the computers – I saw a cartoon once, and it was about aliens coming to earth and they see an office like mine with computers, and it says in a caption ‘this must have been a torture chamber for humans’, and that is what it is – my job is torture.’



In contrast, the ‘hands-on’, ‘practical’, *applied processes* that the Traditionalists ‘go through’ or perform when they’re at work were generally found to be considered ‘enjoyable’, ‘challenging’, and ‘worthwhile’ by the Traditionalists’; and therefore not alienating in the way Marx’s theory implies. There are, seemingly, three primary reasons why the Traditionalists’ enjoy the processes of their work.

Firstly, the Traditionalists’ enjoyment is linked to their labour’s product: because the Traditionalists’, as we have seen, generally value the eventual, physical-based *product(s)* or *service(s)* their labour amounts to, they, consequently, perceive and consider the labour *processes* – i.e. the means they go through so as to deliver or fashion their work’s product - as implicitly ‘worthwhile’, ‘relevant’ and valuable. Hence, the Traditionalist will ‘do all he can, with a smile on his face’ when he is at work; for he - unlike his white-collar counterpart - ‘believes in’ and values his work’s ultimate goal. Accordingly, the Traditionalists’ were found to conduct the processes of their labour with a sense of challenge and vocation (‘I want to be as good at my job as I can be’). They will ‘take time’, ‘be patient’ and ‘do the best I can’ when ‘on the job’; as shown in the below quote given by an electrician:

‘I really believe in what I do (electrician) because it is to do with safety. So because I have a proper aim with me graft (work, being the production of ‘quality electricionship’) I feel happy and important, because if I fuck up people can’t eat or be warm or even get burnt to death, I really pay attention you know. And if I am doing the night stuff, like I was telling you about (whereby the participant fits electrical circuits for road lights and signs) then I am like, yes, I have to properly do a job here cause there will be thousands of cars using this road ... If you don’t think, right this is why I do what I do ultimately, and get a buzz from that, then of course you’ll hate your job cause you’ll think, wey what is the point of me working like this? But I can see the point of my work, totally. That is why I have to take exams for me electricians’ licence.



Being a sparky (electrician) is not a job, it is a responsibility, which means other people depend on you. So your head is on the job, not in the clouds because there is a point to it, big-time ... I take my time and do the best I can when I'm wiring and whatnot'.

Consequently, the only time that the researched Traditionalists' claimed to not enjoy the processes of their work are on those 'slow' days, when there is a scarcity of work; during which time the Traditionalists' have to 'twiddle their thumbs' because of the 'boredom' they ensue.

A second, and perhaps more important reason which accounts for the Traditionalists' positive views of their labour's processes is linked to the fact that the Traditionalists interpret their professions - and therefore the laborious processes that constitute their professions - as being 'real', 'proper', and 'manly'<sup>87</sup>. Hence, the Traditionalists' identities as 'real', 'proper' men are affirmed by and through what they 'do' and 'make' professionally. There is a natural harmony between the Traditionalists' view of themselves (as working class lads), and what the Traditionalists' 'do for a living' (blue collar work). The artisan model of masculinity which the Traditionalists' adhere to is substantiated by and through the artisan labour that the Traditionalists' practice. As put by one Traditionalist who is a builder: 'we are proper men with proper jobs and proper attitudes ... look at my hands, all blistered from my proper work, that is a proper mans' hand' (not to mention 'proper men' with 'proper' working class bodies, as I'll come to).

A third, further reason which ensures that many of the Traditionalists are not alienated from their labour's processes is due to the fact that their labour typically takes place 'outdoors'. Consequently, many Traditionalists enjoy 'fresh air', an affinity 'with nature' and a 'sense of the seasons' by definition of their labour and their laborious processes; all of which adds to

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<sup>87</sup> As opposed to their jobs being 'ponsey' or 'girly'; as the office work which the Changers practise is seen to be.



the Traditionalists' relatively upbeat views of their labour-lives. The Traditionalists' work is also mobile: a Traditionalist will regularly go to different physical sites to build, fit, fix etc. This diversity of labour place was found to keep the Traditionalists' labour 'interesting' and 'fresh' reflexively. Notably, an affinity with nature does, comparatively, manifest itself for the Changers', whose 'stuffy' and static office environments are interpreted by them as being 'totally unnatural', on account of their 'fake lights', 'fake air' and 'fake colleagues'.

The third premise of Marx's theory suggests that the labourer who works within the confines of a capitalist society necessarily becomes alienated from those he works with:

'A direct consequence of man's alienation from the product of his work ... is *the alienation of man from man* ... What holds true of man's relationship to his work, to the product of his work, and to himself, also holds true of man's relationship to other men, to their labour, and to the object of their labour ... man is alienated from one another just as each man is alienated from human nature' (Marx: 64 in Simon).

Contrary to Marx's assertion, every Traditionalist that I interviewed said they 'liked all' or 'most' of the people they worked with; and claimed that they did not feel 'alienated' or estranged from their co-workers. Some Traditionalists' went so far as to claim that their relationships 'at work' are, along with their gym relationships, the 'best in their lives ... better than with my own family'. According to my research, there are two primary reasons for the non-alienated nature of the Traditionalists' working relationships. The first of which is the theme of teamwork: the Traditionalists' jobs are, as a general rule, 'team-based', or group-orientated. Thus, when a traditionalist, for example, builds a house or fits a kitchen, he builds or fits respectively as part of a collective. Rather than being alienated from his co-workers (as the Changer is), the Traditionalist relies and depends daily upon his peers, by definition of the



‘team’ nature of his work. The Traditionalists’ own success, as an individual worker, can’t be differentiated from the success of the team he is a part of.

The team nature of traditional labour is conducive to a level of solidarity, dependability and trust existing between Traditional workers. Accordingly, interpersonal relationships founded upon trust, loyalty, co-dependence and respect were found to define the Traditionalists’ working relationships, rather than estrangement and alienation. This sentiment is illustrated particularly well by looking at the comments made by the bouncers who I interviewed; whose lives – never mind job success - sometimes depend on ‘the other lads doing their jobs’; i.e. on the team working; and on solidarity between co-workers existing:

‘Working on the door is fucked up. There are some real nasty bastards out there, and when you’re on the door, you’re a target. It is as simple as that. If some bastard has a gun or a knife, or fancies being a hard-man for the night, you can end up dead. Like, I knew a lad that worked on the door once and he ended up with a blade through his throat! Dead, young lad in all. Just like that ... and it can be harder also cause if you hoy (throw) some punter out one week, he might come back with his mates the next week and prove a point – like I say, there are some bastards out there ... in this game, you’re only as good and as hard as the lads you stand with, as the other lads on the door ... if you’re in a scrap and you need help, and the other lads are in the toilets shagging some tart, or taking coke – hiding or whatever, you’re fucked! And if you give someone a good kicking, you need their words (the other bouncers) to back you up, to boss, in court; whatever. So you ask me if I’m with the people I work with ... I have to be, and them with me. Cause if not, I might not wake up the next day, ya na?’

Secondly, my research found that all of the Traditionalists’ acknowledged that it is important to ritually ‘have fun’ (‘banter’, ‘a laugh’, ‘good crack’ etc) when they’re at work. In the same



way that the ‘working class lads’ analysed by Willis in *Learning To Labour* (1977) were quick to ‘act up’ in their classrooms as part of their inadvertent preparation for manual work, it seems that working class lads today are – by extension of their educational ‘preparation’ - quick to ritually partake in high-jinx and other ‘anti-authority’ shenanigans within their everyday labour lives. Consequently, many of the Traditionalist see – or have been conditioned to see - their time at work as ‘boy time’, by which they mean ‘free time away from the wife’, when they ‘can act like proper men’ by ‘playing jokes and pissing around ... having good fun; and best of all get paid for it’, through everyday antics such as ‘whistling at women, talking about football and playing tricks, like hiding each others’ tools or getting each other in trouble’, and ‘putting bets on stupid things’. Thus, the ‘banter’ that I heard and saw ritually occur in Gym D as an ethnographer is not just indulged in, but expected by the Traditionalists’ during their working hours; as explained below:

‘proper graft (manual work) man, it is great ... like, the best thing about school was the laugh. All day just messing about with the lads, having as much fun as we could. Wey now, we have even better crack than that, but the work is great, unlike doing Pythagoras and stuff, and ya get paid for it. So anyone that says the schooldays are the best are wrong. Grafting with the lads is great crack man. And that is the same on any sight (building sight) even if you’re with lads from (names places) that you’ve never met before, it is still the same crack – playing tricks on each other, having fun. Pure belta man’.

What this equates to is the fact that divides, or alienated relationships between Traditional workers are unlikely: for ‘the Lads’ will ‘go out of their way to get on with the other lads’ while they perform their enjoyable ‘hands on work’ as part of a co-dependent team that ritually emphasises the importance of having fun and camaraderie.



When one works 'in an office' - the quintessential post-industrial work place - so as to 'do a 9-5' or 'perform in a graduate job', the act of having 'good crack' or 'a good laugh all day' with ones colleagues, as one ritually will have on a building site, on the nightclub door, and the other places where Traditional labour happens is both a taboo and an impossibility. For, according to the Changers' comments, the hierarchies, structures and conventions that guide and mediate post-industrial labour actively *discourage* post-industrial workers from 'forming bonds' with their co-workers, 'unless those' (bonds) 'are strictly professional and businesslike'. Thus, if one is to 'comply' and succeed in the white-collar world, and conform to the 'corporate', 'Yuppie' 'business image' that white-collar work is founded upon, then one, by definition of the culture of the post-industrial work place, is forced to reduce their working relationships to being solipsistic, narcissist, competitive, business-like and individualistic.

Alienation from ones' fellow worker is an inevitability for the Changers, as contemporary, embourgeoised office workers: for alienated human relationships are, in essence, interwoven into the structure of their post-industrial labour situations and working relationships. Hence, the Changers – as 'victims' of the rigidly structured and alienating white-collar world they inhabit and conform to - described their working environments and working relationships as being 'rule-bound', 'stuffy', 'strict', 'boring', 'cold-hearted', 'snake-like', and 'unhealthy psychologically'. The below two quotations, given by two separate Changers, go some way in expressing their contempt for their working relationships:

Participant: 'You can't go to work and piss around like we do in the gym, or have crack and a laugh. You have to be seen as responsible and hard-working, like as mature. And I guess that means being boring, aie I've never thought of it like that, you have to be boring. It is strict. But if you were not, you would be embarrassed, or people would have a problem with you. And that would be awful, like throwing it back in their



(employers') faces ... I even speak differently at work, like not just the words I use, but I try and make my accent more like theirs, like peoples' in the Toon (Newcastle) rather than like ours (referring to the hint of Pitmatic accent left in his voice) ... it's an image thing and I have to be part of it.

I ask: 'But what are the affects of that on you?'

Participant: 'Devastating ... I hate it, and who I work with and who I become, and feel lost, and sick, and alone at work with all those cunts.'

'I hate everyone I work with, but I don't know them if you know what I mean. If you start to talk to anyone they're like, what the fuck you talking to me for, we don't do that here – it is more like a school – people with their heads down all day, not talking, like in exams, waiting for the bell to ring. It drives me mad. It is not good for my mental health, just working like all day by myself in the quiet, if you spill a drink people look at you with dagger eyes.'

It is also the case that because the Changers work with people who are 'not like them' in terms of their background or habitus, further alienated human relationships are encountered by them daily at work. This alienation stems from class conflict:

Participant: 'Me, and all the lads (other Changers) who I've talked to about this agree that there is a class problem in the office, in general, in that a lot of people who work there (the law firm that the participant works in) are a different class from us, and that can cause problems, and like a feeling that I'm not good enough ... especially if I'm dealing with barristers.'

I ask: 'Tell me more about that.'



Participant 'Well, where I work there are solicitors and they're proper posh ... they have really posh accents and are like snobby basically.'

I ask: 'So, going back to this idea of alienation, it would be ok to say that you're alienated from them because they are from a different background to you'

Participant: 'Yes, because I am kind of intimidated by them and would not want to get close to them, or I would, but they would not give me the time of day sometimes... but they are not just different from me, they look down on me ... so alienated is exactly the right word'.

Consequently, the Changers' collectively 'miss out' on the fun-loving, benevolent, close-knit working relationships that their Traditional counterparts apparently enjoy daily and ritually. This happens by definition of the Changers' conformity to the office-environments they inhabit, and the austerity, 'coldness', classism and solipsism that their post-industrial organisations and human-relationships are necessarily built upon. Accordingly, the Changers' sit behind their desk daily, totally estranged from their co-workers, or 'competitors' (who the Changer knows are also 'competing' for the limited number of promotions and kudos that post-industrial organisations can offer); while they perform 'empty' labour only to produce 'meaningless' products.

The final aspect of Marx's theory of alienation proposes that the worker who labours within a capitalist society becomes *separated from his species being*, as put by Marx:

'Alienated labour hence turns the species existence of a man ... into an existence alien to him ... it alienates his spiritual nature, his human essence ... from his own body' (Marx: 62 – 64 in Simon).



Logically, in order for one to be ‘alienated’ (and hence ‘depressed’ as a result of that alienation), one must be alienated *from* something or someone<sup>88</sup>. The first three components of Marx’s theory of alienation - being that the capitalist labourer is alienated from the *processes* of their work, the *product(s)* of their work and *other humans* as a result of their work - are somewhat self-explanatory; and proved to be relatively easy concepts to elicit reflexive-based data ‘on’ in the qualitative interviews that I conducted. However, the notion that one is alienated from their ‘species being’ by definition of their labour requires further clarification, which I now aim to give.

As put by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* during an epoch considerably less secular and ‘scientifically rationale’ - although not necessarily less ‘enlightened’ - than the present:

‘This world is a spiritual entity. It is essentially the fusion of ... spiritual individuality with being’ ... (which forms) ‘existence ... self-consciousness’.

Building upon the above Hegelian assumption, it is ontologically assumed in this thesis, and latently within the philosophy of Marx, that:

- 1) Humans do indeed have a ‘spirit’<sup>89</sup>; and that Marx’s use of the term species being is a way of referring to a human’s spirit.
- 2) That a human’s spirit – or ‘species being’ – enables a human’s phenomenological existence; or conscious lived experience to take place<sup>90</sup>; and

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<sup>88</sup> As referred to via the Germanic term *Entfremdung*, which Marx himself used.

<sup>89</sup> This spirit – or ‘soul’, ‘being’ ‘essence’ etc as it has also been referred to – is described by Lewis (1952: 159) as *Zoe*, by which he means ‘spiritual life’ ... i.e. ‘spiritual life which is in God from all eternity’; as distinct from *Bios* (biological life) ‘which comes to us through nature, and which (like everything else in nature) is always tending to run down and decay so that it can only be kept up by incessant subsidies ... in the form of air, water, food etc’. *Zoe* is a derivative of the Greek language. There is no direct translation for the concept in English.

<sup>90</sup> It does so in congruence with the biological (or ‘bios’) elements of existence, that makes ‘life’, in the dualistic, Cartesian sense, possible.



3) that ones' spirit, or species must be 'satisfied'. If ones' spirit, or species, is not 'satisfied', then it will, inevitably, become impaired and quashed, as represented, neurologically, via the reduction of serotonin in the brain.

Thus, to be clear, the Marxian concept that one is separated from his species being as a result of his labour is being understood here as a synonym for the notion that one is separated from his 'soul' (or *Zoe*) because of his labour.

According to my data, the enjoyable labour processes, the somewhat altruistic labour product(s) and the positive, 'team orientated' relationships that are ritually enjoyed and constructed by the Traditionalists' 'at work' means that the Traditionalists' are not alienated from their souls on account of their labour. The Traditionalists' labour does not quash their species beings. This is not to say that the Traditionalists' work was found, reflexively, to be the 'self-confirming essence' Marx proposed one's work should be! I do not mean to romanticise the Traditionalists' experiences of work here; or suggest that any deep, spiritual meaning or satisfaction is gained by the Traditionalists' from their jobs. Indeed, every Traditionalist but one admitted that they would 'quit' their jobs, if they were in a financial position to do so. However, it is the case that the Traditionalists' are not alienated from their species selves by definition of their work, in the way that Marx's theory suggests. The Traditionalists' labour does not cause them any deep spiritual 'turmoil', anguish or loss of *Zoe*.

In contrast, everyday, the Changer 'loses himself' when he is at work; and, consequently, denies and becomes separated from his species self as part of his labour processes. This daily separation is not simply due to the empty, meaningless *processes* and *products* that define the Changers' labour lives; nor the estranged work relationships that characterise the Changers' office experiences culminating to erode the Changers' souls and happiness daily. It is also,



centrally, due to the way that the Changers are forced to ‘perform’, or ‘act’ in a ‘phoney’ way when they’re at work so as to appease the people and policies of the organisations they work for; as I now show.

A rigidly strict model of expected behaviour has been mediated for and specified to the Changers’, by the organisations they work for. Hence, the Changers’ ‘pretend’ to be ‘emotionless robots’, who are ‘neutral’ in terms of opinion, and ‘predictable’ in terms of their daily, micro emotional and behavioural displays when they’re at work. For that is what the Changers’ employers’ demand of them. In order for the Changers’ to present themselves in the way that their office environments specify, and subsequently appease the ‘hand that feeds them’, the Changers must *not* act in accordance with their inner impulses and needs (i.e. the impulses and needs of their species selves). Rather, they *must* act in a ‘standardised’, one-dimensional (Marcuse, 1964) and rigid way, which is contrary to the true nature of their species beings; but in line with the wants of their employers’; as put:

‘it is nobody’s destiny to work in an office and act like a wanker, but that is what my life has become. You grow up wanting to be a footballer or a movie star, that is what your soul wants, and you end up answering a phone and e-mailing some twat’.

When at work, the Changers are forced to ‘perform’ by exuberating ‘fake’ and ‘phoney’ personas and personalities which ‘cover up’ their true feelings and natures. It is as if both the formally written and unwritten ‘contracts’ that the Changers have acknowledged as part of their jobs demand that they alienate and deny their ‘species selves’. The Changers’ alienation from their species selves is, in essence, a prerequisite for their monetary payment. The Changers’ are forced to dilute and even deny their species selves – their inner, most true thoughts, impulses, emotions etc – daily, so as to conform to ‘company policy’:



‘At work, we all pretend to like each other, but we don’t even know each other. The bosses make you act a certain way, and say, oh, don’t ever talk about politics, or your personal life or anything like that. Just be professional and neutral all the time. Don’t get involved in peoples’ lives at the office, it is a place of work and you’re expected to be professional ... so we pretend to be one thing, but really we all want to say, when people say how ya doing, that life is fucking shite, that I am coming down off coke and my ex-lass (girlfriend) is a whore, but I have to say very good, and you, how are the sales? Phoney! ... that is company policy! ... the way I act at work is as standard as my shirt and tie, just another part of me uniform, just another part of who I am at work, or pretend to be at work ... my heart maybe saying one thing, like stand up for this or tell the truth about that or go and see the world in a camper van and learn the guitar, but no – we go on as we must; yes we are lying, and denying ourselves, but we are made to lie for our pay.’

The Changers’ performances at work, which sees them ‘act’ and ‘become’ people other than their ‘true selves’, are not limited to their working environments. It became clear during both the ethnographic and qualitative interview based components of this research that the Changers consistently and consciously ‘perform’ different roles in their lives, in different places; and to different audiences. The Changers’ many and varied cultural performances causes him to legitimately ask the question ‘who am I really?’, as his own sense of self and purpose become existentially ambiguous; and lost to the different dramaturgical (Goffman, 1959) worlds he straddles and acts in; which include the working class world of Town A, the machismo arena of Gym D, the embourgeoised context of Jesmond; the post-industrial labour environment; and his ‘personal’ life – all of which demand different ‘performances’, in the Goffmanesque sense, and ‘versions’ of the Changer:



‘At work, I have to be this man who is always in control. Who will do what I’m told. Who is seen as, like, as someone who really cares about his job. But all I really care about is getting paid and fantasising about the one fit lass that works where I do ... Then, with me lass (girlfriend), I am meant to be this soft person who looks after her and makes her feel good. Then, with the lads, I am meant to be this fucking legend that is a cunt basically ... with me Mother, I am meant to be her baby. But I get lost in all that, and sometimes I have to think, who am I really? Am I that guy at the photocopier? Or am I the one drinking shots with the lads? Cause Yazz, they are different people. I don’t think they even look the same!’

Because the Changers’ live unnatural lives and are thus unnatural entities - as they skip between versions of themselves to ‘fit in’ to the different cultural contexts they encounter ‘like human chameleons’ - the Changers are not humans with true, constant ‘spiritual natures’ or ‘essences’. They do not act upon their free-will, or in line with the desires of their *Zoe*’s. Instead, the Changers are robotic actors. This compounds the Changers’ sadness; and is conducive to the Changers’ experiencing a psychological ‘alienation’ in the modern (non-Marxist) sense, as well as in the Marxist sense of the term (during ‘working hours’).

#### The Changers’ and Marx’s theory of alienation: a summary

I have shown that the Changers’ are alienated from and through their labour, in all four of the ways that Marx’s theory foretold: the Changer finds his information and communication-based labour *processes* ‘mundane’, ‘repetitive’ and ‘pointless’. Simultaneously, he considers the (intangible, non-altruistic) *product* of his work with disdain and frustration. The stifling, panopticon-like, rule-bound labour environment that the Changer works in ensures he is alienated from his *fellow workers* (who he sees as his competitor); as well as his own *species self*, or soul. Money acts as the only motivation for the Changer. Thus, the Changers is:



‘... alienated from the very activity that is central to being a fully realized human. A sense of meaninglessness, a lack of true flourishing, and a difficulty in establishing truly human relationships with others follows’<sup>91</sup>.

The Changer, void of his ‘self-confirming essence’:

‘Experiences life as meaningless and empty, filled with frustration, and devoid of real satisfactions’ ... ‘without meaningful and purpose fulfilment’ (Simon: xxiv)

The obvious questions that I posed to the Changers’, in light of their labour-alienation, is why do they not change their jobs? Why do the Changers’ remain ‘atomized’, unlike other young people, who refuse to endure unhappy working hours<sup>92</sup>? The answers I received to this question demonstrate how interlinked the Changers’ alienating labour is to their (anomic) quest for embourgeoised identity, as I now show.

If the Changers’ are to replicate the media-produced and purveyed ‘model’ of Yuppie life and masculinity they desire, then the Changer must not merely make money, but, specifically, make money in a ‘white-collar’, non-traditional way. For white-collar work is glamorised in the mass-media that the Changers see and read, at the expense of industrial work and the ‘peasant image’ it apparently signifies<sup>93</sup>:

‘If I think of who my heroes are on the telly, then they are power people in suits who make decisions, like corporate people. They are the ones that I like, they are the ones who are glamorised, if you want to put it in those terms. So, anyone coming through

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<sup>91</sup> Simon, 1994: 55.

<sup>92</sup> ‘One of the most interesting reflections of the attempt to deal with alienated labour is the tendency among some young people to return to the land, or, alternatively, become mechanics, artisans, and small proprietors. These are the people who refuse to remain atomized’. Aranowitz. *False Promises*:132

<sup>93</sup> The Changers consider white-collar, office work to be ‘better’, ‘posher’ and more appealing than ‘traditional’, blue-collar work; which the Changers, in their snobbery and austerity, dismiss as being ‘common’, and not for ‘ambitious, educated people like us’.



today and looking at the world realises that if you want the big plasma screen TV and fast cars, then it is the business world you need to be in, not digging fucking holes or driving a van like a fucking peasant’.

The Changer will therefore continue to practice his post-industrial labour, regardless of the Marxian alienation it brings about, as well as its relatively low-paying nature, so as to substantiate his middleclass pretences. The Changer is aware that he receives no intrinsic satisfaction from what he does ‘at work’. Yet the Changer, paradoxically, remains ‘in the office environment’, enduring his ‘meaningless’, white-collar job and the misery it brings so that the one-dimensional vision of middleclass life that has been prescribed to him can be emulated, albeit only superficially and tentatively, in his own existence. His image and identity is contingent upon his office work and his affiliation with the (preferably national or multi-national) post-industrial organisation he works for. Thus, the Changers’ alienation is entirely and tautologically linked to the imagined respectability, security and ‘image’ that office work constructs, as demonstrated in the following discussion:

Participant: ‘wey, my job is steady; and it shows people that I am respectable. People are happy that I work there and do what I do. I like leaving work in me shirt and tie, it is the sort of image I want’

I say: ‘yeah, but you hate your job. It makes your life miserable you said.’

Participant: ‘Aie, but I could never leave it. It is me future’

I say: ‘but then your future will be miserable!’

Participant: ‘but ... it is a steady job! It pays alreet (alright), and it is respectable, I am inside and I wear a tie; and it is the image I want; if I went to work on a building site it would be no good for me.’



I ask: ‘even if you enjoyed your job on the building site?’

Participant: ‘But, I wouldn’t because even if I liked it, I’d see someone walk by in a suit and then I’d think, I want to be that man’.

### The Traditionalists’ and Marx’s theory of alienation: a summary

Comparatively, none of the four components of Marx’s theory of alienation apply to the Traditionalists’ reflexive experiences of labour. Rather, the Traditionalists’ generally enjoy the ‘hands on’, entertaining *processes* they practice at work. The Traditionalists’ also enjoy the physical *product(s)* or service(s) that their labour amounts to, which they often see altruistically. The Traditionalists’ *human-relationships* at work, with their ‘team’ of co-workers’ are affirming and rewarding. The Traditionalists’ *species being*, or soul, is therefore satisfied, rather than estranged, by his work. The Traditionalists’ blue-collar labour cannot be seen as alienating in the Marxian sense.

Undoubtedly, the sense of gratitude which most of the Traditionalists feel for ‘the opportunity to work’ adds to their sanguine views of their labour. In a locus where ‘proper’ work is sparse, the chance to labour is appreciated by the Traditionalists; unlike the Changers, who see their jobs with a sense of entitlement. Further, the fact that the Traditionalists’ identities and ‘masculinities’ as ‘proper men’ are enhanced by them performing ‘proper’ work adds to the lack of alienation their labour represents.

Despite the relatively sanguine way in which the Traditionalists’ interpret their work - and, therefore, in spite of the way in which Marx’s theory of alienation does not apply to the Traditionalists – I do not want to overstate how enjoyable the Traditionalist’ find their work; or idealise the Traditionalists’ reflexive labour experiences in this discussion. It would be sociologically inaccurate to suggest that the Traditionalists’ collectively ‘love’ their work; or



propose that the Traditionalists' labour resembles the 'self-confirming essence' that Marx proposed ones' work should function as. Indeed, all of the Traditionalists except one stated that they would quit their jobs 'if they won the lottery'. Further, all of the Traditionalists suggested their formal, paid work impairs their 'chosen' gym work<sup>94</sup>.

#### A note of the alienation of the Drifters'

The notion that Drifters' are alienated through their labour is, in essence, a contradiction in terms: the jobless can't be alienated by their work in the four ways that Marx's theory specifies. Therefore, I was unable to discuss the alienation of the ritually unemployed Drifters' – who have no laborious products, processes or co-workers to be alienated from - in the above prose. Epistemologically, however, it is interesting to note that the Drifters' - in spite of and because of their lack of work - do suffer from one of the four components of Marx's theory in their lives, being the notion that the capitalist citizen is alienated from his fellow man; as I now consider.

The anti-work ethos which defines the Drifter's existence means that he faces a limiting existential choice which reveals the inevitability of his depression<sup>95</sup>. Namely, the Drifter can work (assuming he can get a job, and 'hold it': this is polemical and not a given); yet he must then work under conditions and within circumstances that, as he knows from experience, will *alienate* and depress him. Alternatively, the Drifter can choose to not work and have his basic

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<sup>94</sup> While conducting this research, it became clear that the general consensus among my sample of (regularly employed) Traditional participants is that time and energy spent working – although, relatively, enjoyable – could, and ideally would, be utilised in the gym in a more positive way. All of the Traditionalists claimed that they would quit their jobs if they could be paid to 'train and eat' in the way professional body-builders and athletes are; and see their jobs as a barrier to their training and physical growth. This demonstrates how the Traditionalists' 'gym labour', as opposed to their paid labour, is more in congruence with the idealised vision of labour that Marx proposed. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

<sup>95</sup> Simply, the Drifters will be depressed if they *do* work (through their alienating labour, as they were when they were employed); and, simultaneously, depressed if they do *not* work (via the anomie that their anti-work ethic creates).



needs met by society, but be culturally stigmatised, excluded and vilified by other humans as a consequence of his anti-work ethic and dependence upon state benefits; and thereby suffer from an anomie born out of social exclusion, as discussed earlier. The Drifter chooses not to work, and exist as society's 'true', reviled 'alien' (Merton, 1968). For he believes that not working is 'better' (i.e. less depressing) than working, despite the vilification it creates. Yet, by so doing, the Drifters' (inverse) alienation and (self-imposed) cultural anomie becomes symbiotic.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has argued that the Changers' are entirely alienated through their post-industrial labour, in all of the four ways which Marx's theory of alienation stipulates. Simultaneously, this chapter has highlighted that the Traditionalists' are *not* alienated through their 'manual work', in the ways or to the extent that Marx's theory of alienation presupposes. Chapter nine has also considered how the Drifters' are alienated from others in society, precisely because of their *lack* of work.

The fact that the Changers' are entirely alienated through their post-industrial work, while the Traditionalists' are not alienated through their non-IT based labour is relevant. For this finding suggests that as labour evolves to be increasingly 'technological' by definition of it taking place in a post-industrial society, labour also becomes inherently more depressing and alienating to those who partake in it. Hence, the notion that the more 'technologised' a job is, the more de-humanising and alienating it will be – as proposed seminally in the work of Blauner, 1964 and Chinoy, 1955 - has been affirmed in this research. If post-industrial labour is, as my research suggest, intrinsically more alienating than non-IT, non-office based labour, then it can be reasoned that as Town A and the labour opportunities offered in and around it becomes increasingly post-industrial (and thus less 'industrial' and physical), then levels of



alienation will also arise among men; as more males are forced to partake in office work and the estrangement it creates (as endured by the Changers' now), rather than the 'proper', non-alienating work that is increasingly sparse but still available in contemporary working class society. Town A's post-industrialism is conducive to its increasing 'low serotonin nature' (James, 1997) according to this premise.

As part of this summary, it is necessary to emphasise that Marx's theory of alienation through labour - like the notion of anomie - has proven, in this research, to be empirically and theoretically malleable enough to phenomenologically understand and investigate how the diverse ways in which residents of Town A labour (or fail to labour) today affect their lives psychosocially. I would thus encourage others to 're-visit' the theory - despite its age - in their attempts to understand contemporary, post-industrial labour, and how ones' labour relates to their lived experience.

The intrinsic relationship that exists between my participants' labour lives and their masculinities or 'masculine identities' (as well as their depression) has been highlighted in this chapter: the Traditionalist' 'real', 'proper' labour essentially drives and justifies their identities, ideologies and lifestyles as 'real', 'proper' working class men. Similarly, the Changers' office jobs inform their 'Yuppie' lives and identities; while it is the absence of work that defines the Drifters' 'Chav', stigmatised identities and existence (and their particular anomie and inverse alienation). Hence, a person's labour life, it has been affirmed in this research, is an integral part of a person's lifestyle, identity, ideology, psycho-social condition and thus 'working class phenomenological lived experience'. This is not simply a result the income a person's labour generates, or the subsequent social stratification a person's labour facilitates, but due to the way ones labour drives ones' sense of self and identity at a deeper, everyday, micro and reflexive level.



Before I present discussions on how the theory of commodity fetishism manifests itself in the lives of the Drifters', Changers' and Traditionalists', it is necessary to complete this chapter by addressing the potential tension or ambivalence that exists between the 'theory' of alienation, and the 'methods' I used in this research to investigate it.

A person's psychosocial 'alienation', from the perspective of Marxian thought, is absolute. Yet a person's absolute, objective alienation will not necessarily be recognised as being 'alienation' by that person, for two reasons. Firstly, that person may - indeed most probably will - be unfamiliar with Marx's theory; and will therefore not be able to identify the 'unhappiness' (i.e. the objective alienation) their work creates as being alienation in the Marxist sense. Secondly, that person may not be aware of their intrinsic 'alienation', because they are existing with a psychosocial 'false consciousness' that has itself been created by the capitalist society they live in. This false consciousness stops the person realising their intrinsic alienation. In this sense, interviewing people about their alienation is somewhat contradictory: for people will not necessarily see or understand their alienation phenomenologically. Thus my elicited data – based on my participants' comments regarding their 'alienation' – will not necessarily reveal or represent empirically relevant information about my participants' objective alienation.

To be clear, the questions I asked my participants' were designed to probe their alienation; thereby making my participants' objective alienation – even if not recognised by them – clear to me as a phenomenological researcher. This meant that I was able to correlate my participants' highly reflexive and communicative comments regarding their alienation with Marx's theory psychosocially and anthropologically; despite the potential methodological tension of me doing so. As things turned out 'in the field', all of my participants' were interested in Marx's theory of alienation, and the other theories discussed in this work; and were very happy to talk about and consider in-depth how they believe the theories relate to



their lives. Indeed, many of my subjects' saw such as a somewhat therapeutic process; and a chance to 'learn', as one of my participants' put it, 'about how life fucks us up according to deep thinkers'.



## Chapter 10:

### Commodity fetishisms and the ‘two other’ depressing variables

#### Chapter overview

The previous two chapters have demonstrated how and why the participant groups analysed in this research experience anomie and alienation, relatively, in and as part of their ‘low serotonin’ existences. Chapter 10 advances this work’s *Findings and Analysis* section by doing two things. Firstly, it considers how the Changers’, Drifters’ and Traditionalists’ experience ‘commodity fetishisms’ in their lives, because of their consumption patterns, philosophies and rituals. Secondly, chapter 10 analyses the ‘two other’ depressing variables that were consistently identified reflexively by my participants’ as being sources of their psychosocial depression; being the variables of ‘women’ and ‘the weather’. I begin my analysis by considering the commodity fetishisms of the Changers’ as a specific typology of Gym D life and masculinity.

#### The commodity fetishism of the Changers’

The Changers’ understand that ‘commodities are ... cultural signs’ (Clarke et al, 1993: 55) or, as Marx proposed, ‘social hieroglyphs’. In turn, the Changers’ consumption patterns are rooted around them owning and displaying embourgeoised commodities that communicate middleclass identity on their behalf hieroglyphically, or ‘by association’ in a ‘sign economy’ (Baudrillard, 1981) in which ones’ identity can be constructed and denoted semiotically and materialistically, as shown in the following extract:

Participant: ‘If you get out of a sports car, and you’re wearing nice clothes and are talking on a top phone, say in a good area, then people will see you totally differently to if you get out of a banger (old car) and are in scruffy clothes. Like, what we buy and own tells people about us, and who we are ... and I make sure that what I buy speaks for me and gives out the right message.’

I ask: ‘And what message is that?’



Participant: 'the message that I'm not some scum bag from a council estate, and that I have money and am respectable and look the part because of what I own'.

The Changers' do not struggle to find meaning and identity through their consumption in the way Jameson (1991:3-54) suggests many contemporary citizens do. Rather, the Changers' consume in a calculated, meditated way which supports and bolsters their middleclass aspirations. Nonetheless, by so doing the Changers have, I will argue here, simultaneously 'bought into' a level of avarice, and become susceptible to a postmodern 'type' of commodity fetishism that is specific to them as a typology of life, and which, in part, is due to their unrealistic expectations of what they buy, as I now consider.

The Changers', unlike the majority of their Gym D counterparts, buy commodities in the belief that the act of 'spending money' will, or should, 'buy' the purchaser a level of joy within their existences. Thus, the Changers' collectively rely upon commerce, or 'shopping' (Zukman, 2004) to 'fill' the existential voids that their alienating white collar labour and anomic personal circumstances create. The Changers' reliance on commerce is paradoxical nonetheless: for their spending does not – contrary to the myths and 'false needs' (Marcuse, 1964) propagated through advertising – ensures the Changers' reflexive happiness, as the below conversation illustrates:

Participant: 'By the time the weekend comes, I feel empty, like I've been raped at work. But I wake up on a Saturday and spend: I get (pay for) my week at the gym, go shopping with the lads then go out and get pissed, probably wearing my new clothes ... that fills the hole, that is why I do the work ultimately ... I hate not having a girlfriend as well, I buy to get over how I am with her (the interviewee is living with his ex-girlfriend)'.



I ask: 'But does shopping make you happy, does owning these things help you feel good?'

Participant: 'No, not at all'.

I ask: 'So, why do you do it every weekend, like as a routine?'

Participant: 'I just do ... I see the adverts and think, class, I'll buy that – what else is there to do really but spend? I think, oh that will make me happy, I'll buy that so I spend and am happy, but just for a bit (short period of time)'.

The Changers' conspicuous and ritual commerce only fills their existential voids temporarily (if at all). The Changers' consumption may buy them a level of middleclass Yuppie identity and masculinity in a tentative superficial way, but it does not rectify their unhappiness. In truth, the Changers' consumption functions as a source of what Benjamin (2002) labelled *phantasmorgia*: it is a temporary distraction from their discontented existences and positions in society; rather than a source of happiness per se.

Further, my data indicates that when a Changer either buys the commodity he once desired in his cupidity, or 'lives out' the 'commodity' experience he was once desperate to replicate (e.g. when he buys an expensive cocktail in a posh bar, wearing designer clothes having had such a scenario glamorised to him), dissatisfaction and 'a need to buy/do something else' – rather than satisfaction (as a result of consumption) – enters his psyche. Thus, as soon as 'that latest CD' is bought and heard; the moment that 'really fashionable jacket is worn'; the second 'those trainers' are laced up; the instant at which 'the night out we've waited for all week is over', the commodities that were once revered to the point of fetish by the Changers' suddenly lose their appeal after the *Point of Purchase* (Zukin, 2004). Subsequently, new 'things' are identified as 'must buy' items by the Changers'. This creates a paradoxical and



addictive spending pattern and cycle in the Changers' lives, which is founded upon anti-climax, and the Changers' false-belief in the notion that his next purchase will assure happiness and completeness:

'You go to Town (Newcastle) and think, class, I've worked hard all week at work, doing that fucking shite, so now I will treat myself. So you get that CD you've wanted, buy that jacket and trainers. But you listen to the CD a couple of times, wear your stuff, and then you think, fuck, I liked that other jacket. I'll buy that next time; it is like more trendy and cooler. Or you hear a better song ... then back to work to pay for it all ... I guess I'm trying to find something in all the things I buy, but I don't know what that is ... yes, I'm greedy for stuff and yes I'm trying to buy happiness.'

Thus, Bauman's views of consumption (1997: 40), which he uses to substantiate his thesis on *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, can be seen as being particularly pertinent to the Changers', and their distinctively postmodern commodity fetishisms:

'the lid has been taken off ... human desires; no amount of acquisitions and exciting sensations is ever likely to bring satisfaction in the way that 'keeping up to the standards' once promised ... the finishing line moves forward together with the runner; the goals keep forever distant as one tries to reach them'.

As a by-product of the Changers' consumption lives and philosophies, heavy debt has mounted on many of their credit cards. In turn, a debt-related depression has come to define several of the Changers' lives:

'we've all (the Changers) got huge debts. Fucking thousands pal. We've all lived well above our means. I mean, spending a couple of hundred here, a grand there – a holiday here, some clothes there. Lots of nights out. It takes it toll. And when you have



to pay it back, the crunch as they call it, that is scary. I am in real debt. But then I think that the credit card company gave me a card when I was eighteen and at uni and said, have a good time so what do they expect? And I have to meet me minimum payments ... debts is definitely a part of depression in my life. But I got myself in it, I'll get out of it ... So, I guess that is one of the reasons I go back to that shite job every week, cause if I don't, I can't pay me debts. Fucking depressing that! I get the bank calling me every night going 'when you going to pay us back?' I can't sleep thinking about it sometimes'.

Earlier, I demonstrated that the Changers' buy expensive, embourgeoised commodities so as to substantiate their middleclass aspirations and identities semiotically. My research shows that that the Changers' are aware that most, if not all, of the ostentatious 'things' that they buy are 'rip offs', and do not represent 'good value for money' economically. Yet, staggeringly, the Changers' are all too happy to admittedly 'waste' money on the 'expensive but classy' commodities that they crave and, convolutedly, in terms of their image, need. This demonstrates how the Changers' perception of commodities and use of money is radically different to the other typologies of working class life analysed here; i.e. the Traditionalists', who are prudent with their money, and advocates of 'good' economic value; and the Drifters', who struggle daily to 'make ends meet' in their humble commodity lives. It also shows how contingent the Changers' identities as embourgeoised, yuppie beings are upon their consumption lives: in the same way that the Changers' will continue to work in jobs they hate so as to bolster their yuppie images, they will also continue to partake in ritually depressing spending patterns to bolster their pseudo-embourgeoised identities. Interestingly, when the Changer can't afford to buy 'the real thing', he - and his 'image' - will fetish over and acquire 'replica' middleclass commodities:



‘See this *Rolex* (points to his watch) – it is a fake! So is this shirt, the stick (on the shirt’s logo polo player) is pointing the wrong way! But it doesn’t matter, cause people still think it’s the real thing, see, so it is still the right image. Look at this (gets out a fake wallet) *Louis Vuitton* ... Canny (good quality) rip ... same difference though. To the untrained eye, I am the real deal’.

The above discussion has shown how the Changers’ commodity fetishisms stem from their attempts to ‘buy’ middleclass identities through commodities; as well as their paradoxical, unsubstantiated beliefs that spending equates to happiness. With this in mind, I now consider how the theory of commodity fetishism relates to the Traditionalists’.

#### Commodity fetishism and the Traditionalists’

The sort of commodities that the Traditionalists’ were found to desire are being termed here as ‘practical commodities’, by which I mean ‘useful’, often expensive commodities which hold their monetary value, and which function to bolster or enhance the Traditionalists’ lived experiences in a ‘practical’ way. For example, Traditionalists’ want, and often buy and drive fast, extravagant cars. Indeed, all of the Traditionalists identified ‘proper’, ‘fast’ cars as being desirable commodities in our interviews; which explains why the backstreets surrounding Gym D often resemble a car show in the early evening, when many of the affluent Traditionalists’ park their *Porsches*, *BMW*s, *Mercedes*’, *Range Rovers* etc while they train. Crucially, however, the Traditionalists do not buy ‘proper’, practical cars so as to make a culturally semiotic point: the Traditionalists’ consumption is not based upon superficial, image-conscious sentiment such as I drive this commodity; I can afford this car; therefore I am this ‘sort of person’. The Traditionalists’ collective views of commodities (and themselves as men) are not, for the most part, as one-dimensional or advert-lead as the Changers’. Rather the Traditionalists’ buy their ‘proper’ cars because driving such a car



intrinsically and practically improves the quality of their lives. The process of ‘getting from A to B’ is ‘practically’ improved for the Traditionalist by definition of him owning such a car. Practicality and gumption, as opposed to status, is the primary motive for the Traditionalists’ commerce. Enjoyment through the ‘thing’ bought and owned, rather than enjoyment because of the cultural connotation that the purchased ‘thing’ signifies characterises the Traditionalists’ consumption patterns and ethos’; as demonstrated in the following quotation:

‘some lads drive fast cars cause it makes them feel good ... To pull up to a light and speed off like a tosser. Fuck that ... with me, I like to sit in me comfortable car, have ya seen it? It is a huge big jeep ... a *Range Rover*. Cream leather seats on the insider. As comfortable as an arm chair! I put on me radio, listen to the stereo system. It is fucking luxury that pal. Go slow, enjoy me(my)self. And I am safe as houses. If I crash, I’m safe. It’s like being in a tank with airbags. Getting from A to B in style ... not cause I want to pose around in me car. Cause I’d buy a different car for that – for less money in all! But cause this one is a pleasure to drive. I look forward to driving in my car.’

Similarly, my research illustrates that a Traditionalist will desire and typically obtain the ‘practical commodity’ of a ‘nice house’. Inside the Traditionalists’ houses, internal ‘practical’ commodities such as ‘massive plasma TVs’ and ‘yarking (big) HI FI systems with bastard speakers’ are available for utilisation. For the more affluent Traditionalists<sup>96</sup>, extravagant commodities such as a ‘Jacuzzi in the garden’, ‘a billiard rooms’, and ‘an indoor cinema’ are enjoyed.

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<sup>96</sup> The extravagance of some of the affluent Traditionalists’ houses should be emphasised here. It is not uncommon, as I found out during my ethnography, for the affluent Traditionalists’ to have over five en-suite bedrooms in their mock-Tudor mansion houses, which also feature billiard rooms, bars, and huge gardens.



Crucially, the Traditionalists view their houses ‘practically’: they see their homes as ‘bases’ from which to locate their ‘traditional’ life and lifestyle within and around. The commodities in the house function to *enhance* the Traditionalists’ life; rather than *denote* lifestyle.

Commodity function comes before commodity form and connotation:

‘With me, I think, wey (well) I need a house, and I need a TV and a stereo, and *Sky* and all the other things. So instead of buying a shite house with average stuff and having money in me pocket for other things’ (i.e. status commodities) ‘I spend it all on me pad (house). Why not? I’m going to spend most of me life in there and doing things like watching films and listening to music. So I may as well have the best I can have of it! If I can’t go out with the lads at the weekend, so what? I can sit in me lush house, cause it is fucking lush just being in there. People will come around to me house cause it is so nice! So fuck all the gimmicks, I’ll spend stuff on my house ... plus you spend money on a hoos (house) and you’re laughing. It is safe. Bricks are a great fucking buy son, cause they hold their value. If I need to sell this, I can. It is worth putting the focus on your house and living a good life, don’t you think? This way, my house is always gaining money, like its worth ... I’d rather be in my house than anywhere else in the world, honest; and away from bad people who will see me as a target.’

According to this research, the ‘practical’ nature of what a Traditionalist buys ensures that he avoids the theory of commodity fetishism manifesting itself in his life. The Traditionalist does not consume so as to ‘buy identity’ – as the Changer does – instead he consumes for function.

Although a Traditionalist may spend a significant proportion of his money on practical commodities like cars and houses to improve his life, it must be emphasised that he will practice financial pragmatism and economic prudence in his everyday life and spending



patterns. Indeed, in the interviews I conducted, and during the ethnographic components of this research, it became clear that a Traditionalist would be ashamed if he were to ‘waste money on gimmicks’; and buy commodities that are not practical, and do not hold their value. Consequently, many Traditionalists refer to people who are financially imprudent as ‘mugs’; and will mock individuals who are ‘bad with money’ on account of their inability to exercise financial skills and be ‘smart enough to realise a scam when it comes along’. This is the case for all of the Traditionalists; whether they are affluent, steadily employed or casually employed. For prudence is a seminal part of the Traditionalists’ collective ethos’. Hence, economic prudence and pragmatism can be seen as a fundamental theme and part of the cultural habitus that has been ‘transmitted’ to the Traditionalists’ generation and classification of Town A men; and a defining feature of the Traditionalists’ ‘class’ as the notion is understood here. The Traditionalists’ economic prudence, I’m suggesting here, further prevents the theory of commodity fetishism entering their lives.

The contrast between a Traditionalists’ tendency to buy expensive, practical commodities yet practice financial prudence daily caused some humorous experiences for me in the field. For example, one night when having dinner with some of the Traditionalists’, I saw one participant - having recently spent over three-quarters of a million pound on a house - refuse to pay fifteen pound for a steak in a restaurant, on account of the fact that a comparable piece of steak can be bought for ‘three pounds from the butchers’. Another Traditionalist, having recently flown over to Tenerife to spend a fortune on human growth hormones, spent twenty minutes mocking a user of Gym D who had spent one pound on a bottle of mineral water, given that ‘water is free out the tap’. One Traditionalist, who is a known multimillionaire in Town A, boasted about how he can use one shaving razor for up to four months, so as to ‘save money on razors which are rip-offs’.



My research also shows that debt is viewed as a total existential faux pas by the Traditionalists', who have no sympathy for people who have failed to 'cut their clothes to measure':

'you work hard for your money, you have to. And I remember having ... nothing ... so I know what money is – what it takes to get it, and what it is like if you don't have it. So if I'm buying ought (anything) – like a commodity as you say – it has to be worth something always, so I can sell it if I need. Like I have to enjoy it but then get a gain from it if I need to. It must work for me I guess ... wasting money on shite, what a load of rubbish, wasting money on gimmicks ... Drinks, clothes, all that. You need them, but not expensive ones. You can buy a cheap pair of jeans and they'll do just the same as an expensive pair. A cheap pint will get you pissed just like a posh one, but a hoos (house) or a car is different. Not all houses are the same, not all cars are the same – you want a big house and a fast car - so you get good ones of those cause they'll hold their value and make a difference in your life. But a fucking shirt or whatever is only just that ... the worst is these stupid cunts that get themselves into debt for shite they don't need, living beyond their means, getting cars and clothes on the tick (credit) '.

This means that the debt-related depression that impairs the Changers' lives and composes a significant part of the Changers' commodity fetishisms does not impair the Traditionalists' lived experiences.

My findings highlight that many of the Traditionalists' (particularly the affluent Traditionalists') will 'hide', rather than 'flaunt', their money; and thereby avoid displaying commodities that would suggest or reveal the extent of their affluence in our sign economy. They do so partly for safety ('if you're rich, you're a target, and you could get stabbed for your watch, so I wear cheap clothes, so nobody knows I have a grand in my pocket all the



time, that way I am not a target'), partly to avoid 'embarrassing' themselves by exuberating a lack of humility ('when you come from a council estate and end up a millionaire, you can't be seen as forgetting who you are and where you came from and embarrassing yourself by showing off'); and partly for 'tax reasons' ('the less they know I have, the less I have to worry about paying tax'). I'm suggesting here that the Traditionalists' general reluctance to 'flaunt' 'their wealth, or 'prove themselves' through their commodity lives - combined with the economic prudence that they display; their commitment to buying 'practical' commodities, and their reluctance to get into debt - prevents them, as a typology of life, collectively experiencing and suffering from the notion of commodity fetishism, in the way their Gym D counterparts do. The Traditionalists' do not feel the need to 'prove themselves' through their consumption lives: this alleviates their consumption anxieties. Accordingly, the only time that the theory of commodity fetishism appears to truly debilitate the Traditionalists' lived experiences is when the spending patterns and ideologies of their family members<sup>97</sup> - whose consumption patterns are more media-led, 'irresponsible' and thus in harmony with those displayed by the Changers' - frustrate them.

While the above discussion suggests how and why the Traditionalists' manage to avoid the theory of commodity fetishism manifesting itself in their lives, it should be noted that there is a sub-group of seven Traditionalists<sup>98</sup>, who I'm labelling here as 'Wannabes'<sup>99</sup>, whose consumption patterns and views deviate radically from those outlined above; and who subsequently suffer from an acute 'gangster' form of theory of commodity fetishism in their lives, as I now explain.

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<sup>97</sup> Especially the Traditionalists' wives and daughters who, allegedly, 'spend like it's going out of fashion' and who 'don't know the value of money or a days' work'.

<sup>98</sup> I.e. their backgrounds, everyday ethos', labour lives, bodies etc are categorically in congruence with the other Traditionalists' and their 'stratification' as this thesis understands and applies it, even if their consumption patterns and views are not.

<sup>99</sup> As other users of Gym D do, also.



The Wannabes' have all either 'worked on the door' in the past, or currently make a living 'from door work' as bouncers. The Wannabes' range in age from 25 to 49. LE is the eldest of this sub-group. He heavily influences, and sometimes bosses his younger peers. In Gym D, the Wannabes are reputedly associated with Town A's criminal underworld, albeit in a rather tentative and 'small time way'. The Wannabes function as a close-knit, insular group both inside and outside of Gym D. So much so that it was not until I 'befriended' LE in the gym one day in the latter stages of my fieldwork, having took part in a bizarre discussion on 'who is the best boxer ever?', that LE, and by extension LE's Wannabe peers or 'followers', agreed to be interviewed. The Wannabes' are all affluent, or 'cash rich', both relatively (in relation to their Gym D counterparts) and absolutely (in relation to civil society); although they are considerably less cash-rich than the affluent Traditionalists', who the Wannabes' once somewhat sycophantically admired<sup>100</sup>.

In terms of their commodity perceptions, the data that I elicited suggests that the Wannabes' –in contrast to the other Traditionalists', but in harmony with the Changers' - see the (many) commodities they own as extensions of themselves. They believe that a man's identity and masculinity is denoted through what he owns and buys; and that a man's worth is measured, in part, by his ability 'to spend big'. One Wannabe went so far as to state in his qualitative interview that those in society 'with the most money' and 'status symbols' are the 'best people'. He suggested, somewhat eugenically, that those 'without money and status symbols' ... 'should be put-down ... to help the world'. It was odd to hear his impassioned, social Darwinian view of consumption; which equated 'survival of the fittest' with 'survival of the richest'.

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<sup>100</sup> Since this section on the Wannabes was written, the Wannabes have begun to train in another Gym in Town A.



The Wannabes' use their consumption lives to affirm and bolster their criminal images. They buy 'criminal'-associated commodities and status symbols so as to 'buy' criminal identity, association and masculinity in our sign economy semiotically, in a comparable way to how the Changers 'buy' middleclass identity through their spending. Thus, the Wannabes' purchase and parade in expensive clothes made by 'labels like *G-Star*', *Fred Perry*, *Stone Island*, *Burberry* and other 'street' or 'football causal' styled clothes. Further, the Wannabes' have all bought and now drive 'gas-guzzling', four-by-four cars; which they see as insignias of not just criminal identity, but also criminal success ('every successful lad drives one of these'). The Wannabes' also spend obscene amounts of money socialising; and like nothing better, as I found out during the course of my ethnographic research, than to go to bars and spend money conspicuously and in view of the general public; mostly 'on fast women', strippers, 'champagne and cocaine'. The Wannabes' also believe – unlike any other individuals in my sample – that a person can assert their superiority over others by 'outspending them'; as put:

Participant: 'If I have more money and a better car than someone else, I am better than them; I have out-spent them'

I ask: 'do you really believe that?'

Participant: 'Yes, I am more of a man, I have more money. The best people today are the ones with the best stuff'

I ask: 'what about kindness, decency and stuff – are those things not more important'.

Participant: '(laughs) you must be joking. See where they will get you!'<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> It should be noted that the Wannabes' apparently blasé use of commodities may not singularly represent attempts on their part to buy levels of visual criminality, but may also amount to attempts on their part to



As part of their spending patterns, and convoluted attempts to align themselves with a 'gangster' image and form of masculinity, the Wannabes' exuberate notably high levels of brashness and arrogance in their self-presentations, as they 'strut', menacingly, through their existences, constantly 'showing off' their commodities and wealth at any opportunity<sup>102</sup>. The Wannabes', unlike the majority of their Gym D counterparts, pay almost fanatic levels of attention to their 'commodity appearances'. The Wannabe's nails are manicured, their teeth are whitened, and their tans are permanent; they are fans of 'exfoliating and face creams'. One Wannabe spent thousands of pounds improving his teeth. He now delights in carrying a dental mould around with him, which he uses to illustrate to people how different his 'teeth are now' having 'spent a fortune on them with the best dentist in the North East', in comparison with how they were, after years of 'abusing my teeth and getting punched in the mouth'. All of this causes a strange aesthetic ambivalence in the Wannabe's masculine identities; between the 'Gangster', tough man image the Wannabes exude, and the effeminate, 'modern man', 'pretty boy' sort of masculinity that other users of Gym D and Town A see them exemplifying.

The Wannabes' are generally disliked in Gym D, where they are seen as 'show-offs' and 'bullies'. The Wannabes' use of commodities adds to their unpopularity, and allegations of homosexuality. The Wannabes' consumption is seen as being 'over the top' by many other users of Gym D, especially the affluent Traditionalists; who – perhaps more so than any other

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reflexively (over)compensate for their backgrounds, and the apparent shame that their backgrounds, defined by 'poverty' and 'shame', ensued. As put:

'When I grew up, I grew up on a council estate and had nothing, but poverty and violence and shame. So I learned to be tough, and to fight violence with higher levels of violence ... my focus came to be on being rich, and getting away from that life. That is why I spend like I do now I guess, to prove and show others.' Interestingly, the same Wannabe that made the above comments extended this sentiment to apply to his muscles, also:

'My muscles are part of that ... I can hide behind my muscles, and show others that I am the big, rich man now and that I have made it, and not to mess with me cause I'll bury you.'

<sup>102</sup> As I learned when I discussed the Wannabe's wealth with them in a coffee shop during this research, during which time they boasted, embarrassingly, of their riches and spending capacities at the tops of their voices.



typology of life in Gym D – consider the Wannabes as ‘clueless’, ‘only small time players’ ...who ‘have probably watched too many films’.

The Wannabes’ views and uses of commodities results in unhealthy levels of ‘pride’ and competition manifesting itself in their consumption lives. The Wannabes’ desperation and need to both ‘keep up’ with each others’ spending styles, and replicate those of their more affluent (and more criminal) peers causes them an acute, anxious, rather desperate sort of commodity fetishism. It is as if their ‘worth’ (as humans and criminals) depends upon them being able to spend appropriately, as hinted at below:

‘Sometimes, when people look at all I’ve got, they think he is lucky, but it is not as good as they think, cause I have to make so much every day, or I’ll lose my friends and car, and girlfriends. I know they’re with me cause of who I am and what I provide, if I lose it I am nothing, back to square one, so with this comes a lot of pressure ... to maintain the manner me and the others in my life are used to ... I would be ashamed if I was seen as unable to provide and buy what is fashionable and what the other lads are buying ... heavy is the head that wears the crown’.

Thus, although the Traditionalists’ essentially escape the theory of commodity fetishism on the whole due to their practical and prudent commodity lives and ethos’, the consumption patterns and views of Wannabes, as a sub-group of ‘traditional’ Town A life, adds complexity to this finding. The Wannabes do suffer from the theory of commodity fetishism due to their attempts to ‘buy’ criminal identity; and their assumptions that their ‘worth’ – as criminals and men – is measured by their spending patterns and potentials.

In this sense, there are direct parallels between the commodity fetishisms experienced by the Changers’ and the Wannabes’. Despite the typologies’ fundamental differences in terms of their ‘class’, aspirations, identities and lived experiences, both group’s by in a rather



desperate manner, and in the belief that what they buy will help them to assert and project the images they want to as men (being images of ‘gangsters’ and ‘Yuppies’ respectively). It is worth taking into account that the Changers’ and the Wannabes’ are of a similar age cohort: both typologies of life are, on average, in their late twenties. Perhaps it is the group’s comparatively ‘younger’ age which makes their members ‘believe’ in commodities and commerce in the way they do, and adhere to the (imagined or real) relationship that exists between their consumption patterns and their identities? Hence, perhaps it is also the groups’ younger ages and assumed naivety that allows society’s advertising medias’ to manipulate the groups’ into buying what they do and how they do, in spite of the consumption misery such patterns reflexively bring about.

Now that I have discussed the Changers’ and Traditionalists’ commodity fetishisms, I consider how the theory relates to the Drifters’.

#### The commodity fetishism of the Drifters’

The commodity lives and consumption patterns of the Drifters’ represent ‘a battle to make ends meet’. Rather than trying to ‘buy’ middleclass or criminal identity via semiotic brand association, or enhance their lives through the acquisition of practical, expensive commodities - as other taxonomies of working class who use Gym D do - the Drifters’ consumption is a matter of ‘making it from day to day’; and ensuring that they have the ‘basic commodities’ they need to survive, such as food, drink, heating and shelter:

‘I’m not sure what people mean when they say ‘the real world’. But my real world is as much about making ends meet – eating, being warm and stuff – as anything else. I am poor, so I have to make it from day to day ... make ends meet. For me, the real world is not a camera phone and a thirty quid shirt ... I am not Alan Shearer ... my diet is where



most of my allowance goes, like obviously with me training, I have to spend money in the right way, and eat like any human ... survival is the name of my game'

As the case was for the unemployed community analysed by Jaheda et al, 'dole day' (the day that state benefit is issued and 'picked up') governs the Drifters' consumption lives. As a general rule, the Drifters' will spend most, if not the entirety of their 'dole' on the day they receive it on 'basic commodities'. Making dole money 'stretch' is, I learned in the field, a valuable skill. As one Drifter informed me: 'you have to be talented to live on what we do ... you have to make sure you get enough to last all week or you'll be eating like a king for one day, then starving like a tramp the next'. My research demonstrates that the Drifters' will often pool most of their dole money with the money their partners receive (assuming they have partners on income support). So doing ensures the Drifter 'stretches out' his limited financial allowances, and utilises the alleged superior 'shopping skills' and 'eyes for a bargain' that female partners are said to have. Any 'spare money' which is left over once basic commodities are acquired is then, upon the approval of female partners, spent on 'luxury goods' by the Drifters', such as alcohol, gym passes, protein and other gym-related supplements, computer games, and DVDs.

The humble spending patterns that the Drifters' were found to exhibit during the course of this research emphasises how financially marginalised and deprived the Drifters' are in comparison to their Gym D counterparts. While the Drifters' poverty is, in essence, self-imposed and a derivative of their anti-work ethic, the extent of the Drifters' poverty, like the vilification their poverty ensures, must not be underestimated.



When I asked the Drifters' what commodities they *would* buy if a lack of money was, hypothetically, not impairment to them acquiring 'anything they want'<sup>103</sup>; I was surprised to find that the commodities the Drifters' would like to own – and convolutedly the lifestyles the Drifters' would like to live – are those depicted in Rap videos. Unexpectedly, all of the Drifters'<sup>104</sup> identified the lifestyles and masculinity conveyed, and the objects flaunted by Afro-American hip-hop artists as worthy of fetish:

'That Hip Hop lifestyle is cool to me. Having a gun, loads of sexy women who I bang all day. Driving a car like that, all the bling ... like being away from all the shite in the world but being able to do what you want and getting respect for being like a hard-lad with money and stuff – like (names some Wannabe Traditionalists and affluent Traditionalists in Gym D).'

Importantly, I am differentiating the ideology promoted in rap videos and music - as admired by the Drifters' - from the white, embourgeoised ideology contained in the entertainment that the Changers' view and emulate. For even if rap-music has become 'mainstream', and is thus a form of popular culture that is open to hegemonic readings and influence upon its viewers in the Gramscian sense, rap music and videos promote a radically different set of ideals, and glamorises a very different type of life and masculinity to that which is glorified in white, 'mainstream' entrainment. These differences, as perceived by one of my Drifter participants, are made explicit in the following conversation:

I ask: 'are all music videos saying the same things, like is this (watching a Rap Video on the music station *MTV Rap*) saying the same as that video before (Chart music performed by an NME Band)'

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<sup>103</sup> in the form of the question of 'what would you buy, and how would you live, if you hypothetically won millions on the lottery?

<sup>104</sup> Even BL who, being six foot four, in his late thirties and noted for his ginger hair and pale-white skin is, physically and culturally, as unlike a rapper as one can imagine.



Participant: 'No.'

I say: 'But it is the same, like a music video with ideals, like saying live like this, look like this; which people follow and copy!'

Participant: 'No ... totally different ideals ... That (NME music) is for rich white kids looking for a reason. So they wear skinny jeans and have stupid haircuts cause they think that makes them different. It is bullshit. It is about being like other people, and following rules and being scared. This (Rap music) is about letting people know you're pissed off. It is about hating the other way of life. It's like about being you, and not caring what other cunts think. And not being scared to shoot someone or go to jail cause you're the sort of lad that takes no shit ... At least these darkies (black rappers) aren't afraid to be different and not just follow the same old shite ... but that other stuff is just pretend life, not real life'.

Seemingly, the Afro-American 'model' of masculinity that is glamorised in the Hop-Hop entertainment genre, as distinct from 'white', 'mainstream' masculinity and entertainment, appeals to marginalised, stigmatised white unemployed 'Chavs' in the North East of England as much as it does to the marginalised, black underclass of ghettoised 'hoods' all over America. Accordingly, the Drifters' - in light of their vilification and 'otherness' - feel they share more in common 'with black lads in America' than 'posh people down the road', even though the latter share 'the same colour as us'. This commonality is based on a shared sense of exclusion:

'I hear that people say that being black is a state of mind, wey I don't know about that – like I'm as white as a fucking milk bottle. But for me, being poor is a state of mind: black, white whatever. When I hear black people talk – like on TV or in their songs or in films and stuff, cause there is none live around here, I think – here man, he's speaking about me, about us. They say people look at them like they're shit. They say



they feel like they are victims, like animals. Not worthy. Wey so do I, and that is cause I have fuck all, just like them ... They say they are angry, that they feel things are unfair. That they'll never get a chance. So do I, I'm being serious now, so do I. And it makes me angry '

Yet, what does this tell us about the Drifters' sense of commodity fetishism? To answer this, it must be emphasised that contemporary capitalist society is, by definition, a materialistic and work-orientated society. In essence, to work and buy is to be a legitimate contemporary citizen; for labour and consumption 'interpellates' (Althusser, 1979) postmodern society's members.

The Drifters' lack of work and decision to 'sponge off' the Welfare state means that they do not possess 'real' commodities, however. For the Drifters', in their poverty, can't afford to acquire such. Thus, in the same way that the Drifters' suffer from an inverse form of alienation (they are alienated from and rejected by others because they do not work), the Drifters' also suffer from an inverse form of commodity fetishism (they are depressed through their commodity lives – not because of their consumption and conformity, as the Changers' are – but due to their *lack of* consumption; and their need to allocate their limited funds on 'the basics'). As a result, the Drifters' anomie, alienation and inverse commodity fetishisms are totally symbiotic: without commodities and jobs, the Drifters are 'true aliens' (Merton, 1968: 155); and are thus estranged and excluded from contemporary cultures' labour and consumption based 'reigning goals and standards' (Merton, 1968: 153). Hence, the Drifters' are vilified, excluded, ghettoised and depressed accordingly, and dismissed as 'strangers of the consumer era' (Bauman, 1997: 35) on account of them being:

'truly and fully useless-redundant, supernumerary leftovers of a society reconstructing itself as a society of consumers; they have nothing to offer, either now or in the



foreseeable future, to the consumer-orientated economy; they won't add to the pool of consumer workers, they won't lead the country out of depression, reaching for credit cards they don't have and empty saving accounts they don't possess – and so the community would be much better off were they to disappear' (Bauman, 2005: 101).

The Drifters' anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism is thus overlapping. The theories all depress the Drifters in an inverse, but nonetheless potent way; by emphasising and forming their marginality and deviant life spirals.

### Chapter Summary

Chapter 10 has shown that the Changers' ritually consume 'middleclass things' in the hope of 'buying' themselves a level of middleclass identity semiotically and materialistically, in a society that functions as a 'sign economy'. This, I've suggested, leads the Changers' to experience distinctively 'postmodern' or 'liquid' (Bauman, 2005) types of commodity fetishisms, which are characterised by consumption addictions, senses of anticlimax, and financial debt. This finding suggests that as working class males' become increasingly embourgeoised, they also become increasingly unhappy, due to the post-industrial, alienating jobs they work, the anomic cultural aims they create, and the depressing ways they 'buy' commodities, 'view' commodities and use commodities. The embourgeoisement of working class culture thereby makes working class existence more depressing comparatively, then it was in its earlier, purer, industrial form.

Chapter 10 has also illustrated why the Traditionalists' are not, on the whole, depressed through their consumption lives, patterns and ideologies to the extent that their Gym D counterparts are. I have suggested that the Traditionalists' comparative lack of commodity fetishism stems from the 'practical' sorts of 'things' that they buy, as well as the economically prudent and pragmatic ways they *perceive* what they buy. By the



Traditionalists' retaining the spending patterns and ethos' that their mining forefathers stereotypically did in the past, the Traditionalists' have managed to escape the commodity fetishisms that other forms of Town A life endure today. For they appreciate and 'own' the things they buy, in a society where commodities have essentially come to 'own' their unappreciative owners'. However, my discussions and finding relating to the Traditionalists' lack of commodity fetishism is complicated by the fact that a sub-group of seven Traditionalists', who I've labelled here as 'the Wannabes', exists. All of the Wannabes' suffer from a 'gangster' form of the theory, as a result of them trying to 'buy' criminal identity through their consumption lives.

Hence, there is a parallel between the consumption patterns, beliefs and melancholy of the Changers' (who try and buy Yuppie identity and masculinity) and the Wannabes' (who try and buy criminal identity and masculinity). This parallel is probably a result of the Changers' and Wannabes' similar ages: the Wannabes' and Changers' are representative of the same generation of Town A life, even if not the same habitus' or class-stratification. This shows that the 'new generation' of Gym D's users – as distinct from the Traditionalists' generation – believe that one's' worth and identity is inherently linked with ones' consumption lives. This belief, which is inevitably a product of postmodernity and its advert-led culture, causes a profound sadness in the working class lived experiences of younger men in Town A today, that did not exist for residents of Town A in the past, and does not exist for older users of Gym D at the time of writing. For it seems that Gym D's younger users do not buy commodities for their intrinsic qualities (or thereby gain intrinsic happiness from their purchases, in the way the Traditionalists' do). Rather, they buy for the culturally defined, symbolic value their commodities boast; and the vicarious associations they gain by aligning and displaying their commodities. This causes an irrational 'unfreedom', in the Marusain sense (1964), for Town A's younger men, who find misery, rather than phenomenological joy



and acceptance through their materialism and consumption. This depression and fetishism is bound to intensify and increasingly define Town A consumption, as the Town's new generation(s) deviate from the rational view and use of commodities that once existed, and emulate this new form of buying; which represents, in praxis, 'the conquest of the unhappy consciousness: Repressive Desublimation' (Marcuse, 196; chapter three).

Chapter 10 has also highlighted that the Drifters' consumption patterns are orientated around the notion of 'making ends meet', and governed by their limited financial resources. I have suggested that the Drifters' lack of consumption creates an inverse form of commodity fetishism in their lives: in the same way that the Drifters' are vilified, excluded, inversely alienated and made anomic as a result of their lack of work and labour conformity, the Drifters' are also vilified, excluded and alienated due to their lack of capital and consumption conformity. By giving a 'thick', descriptive account of the Drifters' lives and consumption here, I hope to have shown how similar the psychosocial poverty and exclusion that is experienced by unemployed men in Town A today is to that which was experienced in Marienthal in the 1920s, according to Jahoda et al (1972). I also hope to have illustrated the extent to which work and consumption 'interpolates' contemporary society's members; and how the lack of work and consumption can be used by 'mainstream' society's to justifiably ostracise and vilify non mainstream (i.e. non-employed) society.

The theory of commodity fetishism - like the theory of alienation and the notion of anomie - has, despite its age, been shown to be highly empirically relevant and applicable to contemporary Town A life, depression and masculinity. The theory has proven anthropologically malleable enough to sociologically account, document and understand the effects that consumption has on men in Town A today psychosocially, in spite of the diverse ways that those men consume, and think about their consumption at the time of writing.



It has been shown that contemporary working class male visually assert the notion of ‘who they are’ and what sort of ‘men’ they are through the things they buy, and accordingly display. Thus working class males’ are involved in aesthetic, semiotic relationships with the ‘things’ they buy and consciously display as part of their ‘self-presentations’. The participant groups’ analyse here essentially distinguish what type of men they are (‘traditional’, ‘embourgeoised’ or ‘Chavs’) through the consumption, ownership and displaying of commodities in a sign economy. Hence, in the same way that my participants’ modified bodies play a seminal part in communicating and affirming their (relative) identities as ‘Chavs’, ‘Yuppies’ and ‘the last of the coalminers’ respectively (as the next chapter of this work considers in detail), my participants’ contrasting consumption (and labour lives) also define their masculinities, and how the group’s convey their masculine identities in society. Significantly, the extent to which working class culture and identity is mediated and projected at a ‘visual anthropological level’ (Banks and Morphy, 1999) has not been acknowledged in other works produced in the paradigms of working class sociology, the sociology of de-industrialisation, masculine studies or visual anthropology itself. I am pleased to have gone someway in highlighting that visual relationship here; and to have illustrated the integral relationship between the contemporary ‘presentations of the self’ and contemporary consumption: for it is through their consumption that social actors are able to affirm and communicate in their dramaturgical (Goffman, 1959), micro performances today.

The four chapters that have been presented so far in this thesis’ *Findings and Analysis* section have functioned to introduce readers to the three typologies of working class life that use Gym D; and have demonstrated how the three typologies experience:

- 1) cultural anomie in their existences,
- 2) Alienation through their labour lives, and
- 3) Commodity fetishism as a result of their consumption patterns.



The next chapter of this thesis, which acts as the final chapter in this work's *Findings and Analysis* section, explains to readers how my participants' 'gym labour' and 'commodity bodies' relate to their 'depressions', identities and experiences of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. This thesis is then concluded in its twelfth chapter. However, before advancing, it is necessary to highlight that 'two other' variables were consistently identified by my participants' as being sources of their depression in the qualitative interviews that I conducted. Neither of these 'two other variables' are referred to via the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism i.e. neither variable is 'to do' with my participants' cultural strain, consumption or labour. Nonetheless, the frequency<sup>105</sup> and passion with which the overwhelming majority my participants' discussed these variables in our interviews means that they should be mentioned in my work, if its analysis on how cultural depression is reflexively constructed for men in Town A today is to be complete.

#### The 'two other' depressing variables.

The first of these two variables is the theme of 'women', or 'lasses'. Perhaps surprisingly, it was not my participants' wives and girlfriends that were predominantly identified by them as being the primary sources of their 'woman-based' conscious misery<sup>106</sup>. Instead, it is the role that Mothers ('Mams') and Grandmothers ('Nans') play, and have played, in my participants' lives that appear to cause the most distress among my sample. Many of my participants' feel their Mothers and Grandmothers have tried to 'tame' them in the past; and are depressed by the fear, jealousy and selfishness that their Mothers and Grandmas are said to display:

'Me Mother, in fact all that generation of women, are gripped by fear and hate ... look at how jealous they all are of their sons' wives and stuff. Selfish, old fucking cows.

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<sup>105</sup> 100% of my participants mentioned one or both of the variables when being interviewed.

<sup>106</sup> Although, predictably, a proportion of my participants' wives and girlfriends – both ex and current – were identified as sources of depression; as were the teenage daughters of some of my older participants.



(mocks a kick), get oot me wy ya old slag! And Nans (Grandmothers) are even worse.

They are even more fucked up and critical – who do you think me Mother learnt off? I say, stay out of my life, don't pass on that fear and hate to me!'

Because many of my participants are not, reflexively, the way their Mothers 'want' them to be, they feel that their Mothers manipulate them, and use the emotion of guilt as a means to control them, and impair their self-respect and confidence:

'whatever I do is wrong. Whatever I do, I get criticised for. If I have a drink, she gans you're drinking too much. If I stay in, she gans you're boring and old before your time ... I reckon she hates me. She knows I am soft. And if she makes me feel bad or scared, I'll do whatever she wants. She throws tantrums like a kid until I do what she wants. It's fucking stupid'.

A proportion of my participants blame their Mothers and Grandmothers for the 'depressing' and paranoid thought cycles, or cognitive tendencies, that they experience in their lives now:

Participant: 'When I was growing up, my nut job Mother would always see the worst in every situation. She always wanted people to feel sorry for her, and she always felt sorry for herself do you know what I mean?

Me: 'Yes, self-pity. In America, they call it attending the pity party!

Participant: 'Aie, bang on! So, whatever happened, she would focus on the worst. And whatever you said, she would criticise and say why it was wrong or dangerous ... Like, I'll give you an example, if I was to say, I'm off on holiday with the wife and kids, she'd say, no! The kids will get kidnapped, the food will be shite. The plane might crash, that is a waste of money! Wey, when you grow up with a fucking head job like that, you end up being fucked as well. Like I always think in a paranoid way now. Here



is me always thinking that the worst things that could happen will ... I don't do things cause I hear her witch voice in me head, my life is spoilt cause of her. Fucking disease she gave me, Like me ex wife used to say, she poisons your mind! She is no good! Who the fuck does she think she is?'

It is almost comical to think of my participants, with their huge, modified bodies, being bullied and manipulated by frail, old ladies. Yet, the extent that Town A's mothers depress their sons – and the extent to which many of my participants resent their maternal links - must not be underestimated.

The second 'other variable' that was consistently highlighted by my participants as being a source of their depression is the weather: all but two of my participants specified that the North East climate is a source of their melancholy; as shown through the following quotation, which I elicited from a Traditionalist:

'how can you be happy living in this climate? How can you be happy when you wake up and its dark, and then you get back from work and its dark ... fucking freezing and miserable all day ... ne wonder I feel like I do. You get one or two days of summer, and everyone feels mint, and then back to the North East wind. That is why we are all so fucked off. The weather is shite.'

The relationship between feeling depressed and living in a climate that lacks sun-light, as Town A's climate does, has been popularised by the notion of Seasonal Affectiveness Disorder (SAD), and formalised in publications such as Lam et al (2006) and Johansson et al (2001). Accordingly, in Scandinavia in general and Finland in particular - where 9.5% of the Finnish population are diagnosed with SAD (Avery et al, 2001: 268) - SAD is 'treated' medically and seen as being a genuine, bio-chemical reason for citizens' melancholy. Given that Town A's latitude is remarkably similar to Finland's (which exists at 64 degrees North),



it is probable that my participants comments, which suggest a correlation between the climate they live in and their sadness, are not merely grumbles; but astute self-phenomenological observations. Just because SAD is not given the same medical onus in Town A - or indeed the British medical profession as a whole - as it is in Finland does not mean that my participants do not suffer from undiagnosed SAD, in the same way their Finnish counterparts do, in a diagnosed way.

It is not only the case that the North East climate intrinsically depresses my participants' moods, but also the case that my participants' *lifestyles* are impaired by definition of the 'doom and gloom' climate they exist in:

'when you gan on holiday, you're outside all day. Eating, drinking, on the beach. Enjoying yourself; the sun on the face. Here, you have to run home cause it's so cold. And then you can't do ought like have a barbeque, or just be outside enjoying the air and eating pasta ... Instead, inside, watching TV for hours with the heating on, scared to gan outside in case some cunt knives ... cause of the weather, you live in a box waiting for a box. Like in the summer, people laugh more cause we get a bit of sun, and everyone is up for it. But most of the year, it is this fucking shite all day long. I mean I would love to train outside, like they do abroad. Imagine ganning and training on the beach here! You'd end up with pneumonia ... so, you can breathe fresh air and have the doors open in the house (abroad, in a sunny climate) ... instead of sitting in the house, freezing, with it being dark all day and grey! ... the women are in shorts and small tops too, everybody is happy and in a good mood ... ne wonder people move to Spain!'

Thus the Town A climate depresses those who reside in it, by definition of the impositions of lifestyle that the climate creates; and the debilitations in mood that the climate induces.



Now that the 'two other' depressing variables have been discussed, this thesis advances to consider how my participants' bodies and body-modification relates to their 'depression', anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism.



## Chapter 11:

### Muscle ‘strain’, gym labour and semiotic, commoditised bodies

#### Chapter Overview

Over the previous four chapters, this thesis has introduced its readers to the three typologies of working class life that were found to use Gym D; and illustrated how the three typologies subjectively experience anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism within and as part of their ‘low serotonin’ existences. Chapter 11 completes this thesis’ *Findings and Analysis* section, by considering how my participants’ gym lives, ‘commodity bodies’, and ‘gym labour’ relates to their existences, ‘visual masculinities’, and experiences of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism.

Hence, in this chapter, I consider whether my participants’ body-modification and involvement with Gym D extends or alleviates their depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishisms. I also draw attention to the semiotic nature of my participants’ modified bodies; and consider how my participants’ bodies relate to their existences and identities ‘as men’ at an aesthetic level<sup>107</sup>. I thereby substantiate the notion that the three types of Gym D life analysed in this thesis use their bodies as semiotic documents in their lives, on which my participants’ identities and ethos’ are, in essence, inscribed upon and denoted through.

I begin this chapter by considering the relationship between my participants’ body-modification and the theory of anomie.

#### Muscle Strain

Anomie has been defined in this work as:

‘a breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural goals ... and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them’ (Merton, 1968: 162).

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<sup>107</sup> Readers may be interested to note that a paper I produced on how the participants’ analysed in this work use their bodies as semiotic commodities in their existences was presented at the *Working Class Studies Conference* at the *University of Pittsburgh* on the 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2009. (Giazitzoglu, 2009).



We have seen that existence in the locality of Town A is considered to be an anomic one from the perspective of my participants'. We have also seen that the notion of anomie manifests itself subjectively in my participants' lives: the Drifters' experience a collective anomie that is based on the 'disjunction' between how they *want* to be treated and perceived in society (i.e. as 'legitimate' citizens) and how they *are* treated and perceived (as the vilified, Chav 'other'); while the Changers' experience an anomie that is founded upon the 'disjunction' between who and where they are (office workers in the North East of England) and who and where they want to be (embourgeoised, 'Yuppie' men in one of the urban epicentres of globalisation and middleclass identity). Simultaneously, the Traditionalists' are cumulatively experiencing a collective anomie that stems from the fact that they and their values are becoming increasingly obsolete in a post-industrial, multi-cultural, 'politically correct' society. In turn, this causes them a cultural 'disjunction' which will inevitably intensify as Town A's social evolution continues. Hence, a depression that is founded upon feelings of cultural 'strain' exists in my participants' psyches, as a result of the disjunctions that exist between my participants' actual cultural conditions (as they perceive them) and my participants' relative cultural goals and aspirations. But what can be said of the relationship between the notion of anomie and my participants' involvement with Gym D; does my participants' involvement with Gym D extend their anomie?

All of my participants acknowledge that a man's body - by definition of its physiological predisposition or 'make-up' - has 'limits', in its physical strength and potential to look a 'certain way' aesthetically. Hence, there is a biological or natural 'limit' on the ability of my participants' to develop and inhabit a 'perfect' body, however that notion may be defined relatively; and achieve specific goals in Gym D (e.g. lift a specified weight that can't be lifted). Thus, there is an innate disjunction and strain between a human's anatomical design and 'physiological potential'; meaning that there is an innate disjunction between the 'sort' of



body that a human inhabits, and the sort of body a human may want to inhabit, as a result of that human's social conditioning and interaction.

In chapter three, we saw that contemporary society's mass media constructs 'idealised' images of the male body - typically with the help of airbrushing and other aesthetic 'tricks' that specify what male physical 'perfection' looks like - as part of its glamorisation and commoditisation of the muscular male body. It is these images – whether in 'mainstream' publications like *Men's Health* or niche bodybuilding publications like *Flex* – that guide and define my participants' physiological ideals, and notions of how their bodies 'should look'. Yet the body images that the mass-media produces, and that my participants' aim to replicate to varying degrees and proportions, are unobtainable for most. No matter how hard one may train and diet (or 'nurture' their body), one can't change their genetic ability to 'create muscles', 'lose fat', and thus look as society specifies they should; for ones' body and physiological potential is limited by ones' genetic constitution (or 'nature'). As put by a Traditionalist:

'nature does not let us look like we want, however much we train ... if we diet, we're too thin, if we bulk up, we're too fat ... even at the top level like in the magazines, you can only look good for a few minutes, cause as soon as you drink fluids again (having been dehydrated) you lose perfection, if you ever had it ... you think I want to look like this or that, but you have to realise it is impossible, those images are not real life, they're just tricks. If you're only meant to be ten stone genetically, or a fat bastard genetically, then you may train hard but you're battling against nature'.

Hence, a 'genetic strain' - which is founded upon the hiatus between my participants' culturally mediated anatomical aims and their genetic, anatomic abilities to embody those aims - causes a mass anomie within my sample. While body-modification may change a



person's body 'to a point', it will not necessarily change a person's body to the point of physiological 'perfection'; thereby making body-modification an anomic, paradoxical pursuit. This genetic anomie was found to apply equally to both those body-modifiers in my sample who aim to be 'monsters' - as the Traditionalists' and the Drifters' do - and those body-modifiers who want to be 'cut' and 'defined', as the Changers' do; as shown in the below quotations elicited from a Traditionalist and a Changer:

'I (a Traditionalist) want massive legs, wey I want to be massive all over, but I really wish I had massive legs, but that will never happen. My legs are naturally skinny. It is my genetics. My calves are the worst. Me back is huge, cause my genetics let that happen, but my calves look like I've never been in the gym before .... my genetics won't let my legs grow, but look around (points around Gym D), this is full of guys battling their genetics, like trying to make their bodies better even though God didn't make them that way'.

'when you're training like me' (i.e. to be 'cut' and 'defined', like all the other Changers') 'it's about being lean and cut so you've got definition and abs to show to others, like you want to be as lean and trim as you can, with hardly any percentage of body-fat ... but I am naturally a big lad, I naturally carry fat .... like my DNA is hardwired to do that like you were saying ... so there it is, I will never be what I want cause I am too fat, and the older I get, the harder it will be to be cut and lean ... I will never look like a footballer cause I am not made that way ... me Dad is a fat bastard also, it runs in the family'.

Most of the employed participants' in my sample made it clear that they can't 'train properly' and thus 'make proper gains' upon their bodies in the way they desire because



they're either 'too busy' or 'too tired' to train in the required way as a result of their paid, formal labour:

'When you're grafting all day like a twat it is hard to come in here (Gym D) and really train like you need to. You're already exhausted after lifting all day (as a builder) so the idea that you can come in here and demand more of your body is shite, but that is the problem, cause without training that way you'll never reach your potential ... it's hard to even motivate meself to come here after a hard day at work, never mind lift properly, but what else can you do, come here and train but make no money? Be realistic!'

Hence, the cultural need to 'make money' causes an existential strain for many in my sample, who expressed that 'time' and 'energy' spent 'earning money' could, and preferably would be spent training and 'earning' muscle in Gym D. Accordingly, the prospect of 'winning the lottery' and dedicating one's life to training and resting, without having to expend time and energy on paid labour, remains an ideal scenario for many in my sample. Similarly, when a body-modifier is 'out of action' with an injury - which often translates as a body-modifier being unable to train due to joint problems, particularly in the elbows, knees and shoulders as a result of excessively heavy weight use - he goes through a hugely frustrating, anomic time. For, time 'recovering' means time is not spent 'in the gym' and 'growing'. Rather 'years of muscle are lost in weeks, while you're sitting at home like a twat, and there is nothing you can do about it'. Thus the variables of a 'shortage of energy and time' due to work constraints and the prospect and actuality of being injured causes further anomie among my sample. Significantly, this anomie is a specific derivative of my participants' gym lives, and would not be experienced if it were not for their commitment to body-modification.

The necessity to 'diet', which is something that all of the questioned participants analysed in my sample have done at some point in their gym-careers - whether it be 'for the purposes of



competition’ and hence constitutive of ‘serious dieting’ or ‘to simply look good on holiday’ and hence constitutive of ‘casual’ dieting - was also identified by the majority of my participants’ as being a source of their gym anomie. This anomie was founded, primarily, upon the discrepancy between how a trainer *wants* to ‘feel’ and ‘eat’ and how a trainer does feel and eat when dieting; for dieting, reflexively, makes the body-modifier feel ‘as weak as piss’, ‘angry’, ‘dizzy’, and unable ‘to lift weights cause of the lack of carbs (carbohydrates)’. A small number of participants’ also mentioned that a strain that is based upon the need to balance ‘family life and gym life’ also exists. This gym strain is specific to those members of my sample who have younger children, and therefore ‘family needs’; as shown in the following statement:

‘I want to train but my wife wants me at home and helping the kids ... so I only train three nights a week, but I’d rather be here, in the gym. But if I’m here, I miss out on them growing up, and when I go in the kids and wife all have faces like smacked arses ... I am the bad Dad for wanting to train! But what they don’t understand is that before they came along, I had trained here nearly every night for twelve years, so they should think themselves lucky instead of ganning on like they do – pathetic!’

The majority of the participants’ analysed in this work buy and use steroids and growth supplements (e.g. L-Glutamine, Creatine, and protein). I will argue later in this chapter that the ability to buy and use steroids and supplements alleviates, for many in my sample, a significant amount of the gym anomie’ discussed above. I will also illustrate how ones’ anomic, biological and physiological limitations are used to phenomenologically ‘justify’ steroid use for many in my sample; as put:

‘my testosterone is too low now, cause I am fifty, so my body has changed, I can’t produce testosterone like I did, so I can’t grow like I did ... that is where the gear



(steroids) come in, it boosts me back to where I was when I was your age, in my twenties, and lets me grow like I used to when I was a young lad, on the door (working as a bouncer)'.

However, at this point it should be noted that if a body-modifier can't afford the steroids and growth supplements he 'needs' to improve his physique and overcome his gym anomie, then a 'money-based gym anomie' - which is founded upon the 'strain' between ones' actual financial situation and ones financial desires to 'fund' his bodily growth - is created.

Inevitably, it is the Drifters' and the casually employed Traditionalists' who experience this financial based anomie most readily within my sample; for their limited financial positions do not allow them to 'buy' muscles, and overcome their 'natural', physiological weaknesses to the extent they would like, and others do. As the below comments, elicited from a Drifter, demonstrate:

'I sometimes think that if I could buy all the stuff I needed, like the growth hormones that cost thousands, I could be like (names competitive bodybuilders in Gym D). But I just can't afford it. I get less than fifty quid a week. I can just afford the gym and some protein – imagine if I says to my lass (girlfriend) oh, no dole money from me for this month, I've put it all towards a course of steroids! But the gains that my body could make if I could afford it would be massive! ... that is why (names gym user) is sixty and still squatting 200 kilos, cause of the gear and cause he has the money to buy the gear!'

Based on the above discussion, it can be ventured that body-modification is a fundamentally anomic pursuit. 'Creating the perfect body' (Monaghan, 1999) is an activity that is defined by a disjunction which stems, primarily, from my participants' genetic limitations, need to work/earn and endurance of injury. My participants' gym anomie is compounded if they can't



afford steroids and growth supplements. Hence, my participants' pursuit of muscle causes further 'strain' in their lives; and is, in theory, another source of psycho-social melancholy.

However, it should be noted that according to the reflexive data I elicited, my participants simultaneously, yet apparently paradoxically:

- 1) Interpret their body-modification as being, *to an extent*, free from strain (in spite and in mind of the anomie discussed above); and
- 2) have found ways to both practically 'overcome' and relativise the strain that their body-modification produces and represents.

In this sense, body-modification is not an anomic pursuit phenomenologically, according to the interpretations and comments of my participants', as I now consider.

#### Body-Modification as non-anomic

All of my participants suggested that if they *want* 'big arms', 'ripped abs', 'the body of a God' etc - as they do - then they *can* physically acquire, or maintain, their anatomical targets 'to a point'; and 'on the condition' that they 'train hard enough', 'eat right', 'sleep enough' and often, but not always, are involved in steroid use; which, as I mentioned above, alleviates much of the 'strain' discussed above, by 'reversing' ones' genetic 'weaknesses' in a 'scientific' way, as the two quotations below show:

Participant: 'when I am putting steroids in my body, I am using science, years of science, like people in laboratories all over the world for years have been figuring out what I am putting in my body, and I am using all that experience against any problems my body have?'

'I ask: What problems?'



Participant: 'Like I am old now, so I don't have the testosterone I once had ... that will happen to you, it happens to us all, once you pass twenty you start losing levels and then when you get to my age, it has all gone ... and that is bad, you feel sad cause testosterone is what men need ... all I am doing with these (steroids) is keeping my levels natural, where I want them to be ... that is why people see me and go, oh, you look great, you haven't aged, cause I am on this and that keeps me young and training and growing'

'Steroids are unnatural and they do unnatural things to your muscles ... like I was saying before, I am not naturally muscular, I trained for years like a slave and gained nothing ... I was actually losing muscle from training so hard ... then I got the gear from (names gym user) and I thought, ah, so that is how comes they're all massive ... I got the sizes I wanted ... unnatural size from unnatural sources.'

Hence, even if the realisation of a 'perfect body' is an unlikely, anomic pursuit (largely due to ones' innate, genetic impairments), my participants' know that if they are 'patient', willing to train diligently, willing to 'take gear' and 'be disciplined out of the gym' for a long period of time, then they will acquire, at the very least, a 'good body'. By which I mean a body that is unequivocally more 'impressive' and muscular than it would be without the growth that is stimulated through body-modification.

In this way, the sort of existential variables that ordinarily pollute and prevent the realisation of working class dreams and desires – e.g. a lack of good looks, a lack of money, a lack of connections, not being born in 'the right place', the absence of a good education, the lack of cultural acceptance – do not pollute the realisation of a working class lad obtaining a 'good', 'sold' body that acts as cultural capital in his existence. Body-modification gives working



class men the chance to 'do something' ('train hard, look good and be known in the gym') and 'be someone' ('people are like, oh that lad there is one of the top boys at Gym D') in a way that little else does within a working class mans' existence.

My participants' are in charge of their physical, bodily destinies and constitutions, even if, by definition of their 'working classness', they are not in charge of their societal destinies. Accordingly, the act of body-modification, and the acquisition of the commodity of muscle is interpreted as a relatively pure and meritocratic act by members of my sample - particularly when steroids and supplements are used 'scientifically' to challenge the biological limitations of the human design - in an otherwise anomic culture and lived experience. Thus, phenomenologically and practically, my participants' have relativised the anomie their gym lives create.

The general consensus that was expressed by my participants, when I asked them about the discrepancies between their 'actual bodies' and 'desired bodies' is that if a body-modifiers' physiological expectations are pragmatic (e.g. such as 'I'd like to gain a bit of muscle this year at my own speed'), then the amount of gym anomie he experiences will be less, comparatively, then if his physiological expectations are hugely ambitious (e.g. 'I want to compete professionally and be the biggest in Gym D'). In other words, there is a correlation between body-modifiers harbouring 'healthy', pragmatic, physical desires, and experiencing low levels of gym anomie, while those with unrealistic physiological ideals experience high levels of gym anomie; as put:

'You have to be realistic. You're not going to end up like Arnie (Arnold Schwarzenegger) if you come in here and are 10 stone and don't train and eat ... even if you do that, you'll not end up like Arnie cause it's not in the DNA like we were saying ... I get pissed off when some twat comes in here and trains for a year and says, I am



not progressing! I don't look like so and so cause they never will, they don't train hard enough and they don't try gear (steroids) so what do you expect? ... and then you get some people looking great, putting on loads of muscle in a short space of time and they're still not happy and you think you've done great, you're well above where you should be, but you still complain – you've reached your potential, give yourself a chance, it's not your fault you'll never be bigger than that!

In this sense, body-modification's ability to create anomie in the minds and lives of its practitioners stems less from the act of body-modification and the pursuit of muscle being inherently anomic phenomena, and more from the unrealistic expectations many of those who are involved in the pursuit harbour. Accordingly, 'gym strain' – and related psychosocial notions like body-dysmorphias and Adonis Complexes - is a product of the unrealistic views and expectations a body-modifier has of oneself, rather than body-modification's inherent inability to 'deliver' muscles. Thus, it is the size of the muscles one desires, and the extent to which one allows the media to inform and define his physiological aims, rather than the acquisition of muscles per se, which causes gym anomie.

Many of the participants' that I interviewed are of the opinion that body-modification is considerably less elitist, 'more fair' and hence less anomic, than other leisure pursuits that working class men may find themselves involved in. Such participants argued that body-modification does not require the innate talent and financial resources that other sports do, such as golf, and yachting, as proposed in the following quotes taken from a Drifter and a Changer:

'With golf, you've got to be a posh cunt and rich (to play). Cause you need to buy all the stuff, and be loaded to do that, and be popular in the clubhouse to be a member, so by the time you buy the clubs, the bag, the clothes, the fees and stuff, you've spent



thousands – before you even hit the ball, and get lessons – whereas this (body-modification), you need a fiver a week and some protein’.

‘Anyone can lift weights – this is not something you have to be born good at – anyone can lift weights, like, but not anyone can surf or play chess or football, you have to be good at that by birth, but anyone can come in the gym lift weights and eat and get muscles, so that is what I mean about it (body-modification) being a good pursuit ... I tell everyone, do the gym ... you can’t fly jets or drive speedboats, but you can get a six-pack!’

Thus, the ‘anomie’ that is ordinarily so common to the contemporary ‘working class lived experience’ is not experienced through the act of body-modification in Gym D, where my participants’ are able to simply ‘turn up’, ‘train’ (without any skills or complexity) and (‘slowly but surely’) grow physiologically, in line with their predetermined desires to inhabit ‘commodity bodies’. Little, if any other component of existence offers working class males’ the realisable, achievement goals, and the purpose and solidarity that body-modification does.

At this point, it is worth noting - as some of my more observant participants did - that if body-modification did not present potentially anomic challenges to its practitioners, e.g. challenges like ‘being ripped’, ‘being massive’, etc, then a modified body would not be, reflexively, be ‘worth getting’:

‘if it was easy to get muscles, everyone would be walking around stacked and with great abs, just like if it was easy to make money, we’d all be living in mansions ... it is because having a body like ours makes you stand out and makes you special that is why I keep training, if I was to lose these muscles, I wouldn’t be special anymore, I’d just be an ordinary bloke! It takes a special person to train like we do, and a special sort of person to push his body to theses levels’.



From this perspective the very same challenges that cause body-modifiers' a sense of anomie also gives body-modifiers' motivation, purpose, a sense of challenge; and the ability to differentiate themselves from 'normal men' with 'normal bodies' and aesthetic masculinities. Thus, without its anomic potential, body-modification would be a worthless pursuit, without the 'real reward' and sacrifices that constructing a commodity body represents and demands.

For the above reasons, I'm suggesting that body-modification represents a unique 'sport', activity, and 'way of life' for my participants'. Although body-modification is inherently anomic (due to the biological inabilities of its practitioners'), my participants' have relativised the amount of anomie that their gym lives create (by using steroids, by reminding themselves to harbour 'realistic' physical expectations and by comparing the pursuit with other, less meritocratic facets of their existences). Hence, body-modification has been affirmed here as:

'an acceptable means of doing something about yourself ... The dead-end job, unfulfilled relationship ... may continue, but you can feel better about yourself by controlling the last vestige of your ever-shrinking empire, your body' (Klein, 1993: 40)

for all three strata of working class males, using Gym D today. Despite body-modification's inherently 'strained' nature, body-modification does not compound or add to the anomie that ordinarily pollutes the 'working class lived experience' of my sample, phenomenologically.

Now that this chapter has considered the relationship between my participants' body-modification and the notion of anomie, it evolves to analyse how my participants' 'gym labour', and the modified, 'commodity bodies' that my participants' have constructed in Gym D relate to their experiences of alienation and commodity fetishisms. It is necessary to begin this analysis by emphasising the extent to which my participants' 'gym labour' follows the



conventions and practices of 'normal', 'paid' capitalist work. It is also necessary to re-affirm why the modified, muscular body is being viewed in this work as a 'commodity'.

### Gym Labour as capitalist labour; modified bodies as commodities

My participants' body-modification is tantamount to a structured routine which emulates the strict, repetitive, mundane patterns of capitalist work. Far from being capricious or sporadic, my participants' gym-work is scheduled and organised, almost to the point of bureaucracy. My participants' will not deviate from their established gym routines, which see them stringently exercise specified parts of their bodies (i.e. their backs, arms, legs etc) on specified days (day one, day two etc). Consequently, my participants' bodies and body-parts receive the maximum amount of rest and 'labour' they require for optimum physiological enhancement to occur upon and in them. Hence, the specialisation, or *Division of Labour* (Durkheim, 1947) that is so prominent to capitalism's political economy has entered the gym routines of my participants'. All the while, quintessentially capitalist notions like 'competition' and the 'hitting of targets' guide my participants' gym labour ideologically:

'I used to just come for the crack, like because of the fun we have with all the lads together in here, and to try and get in some shape. But as the years passed, I realised what the gym does for me, and me body. That's when I thought, right, I'll get as big as I can. That's when I got targets in me mind; like how much I should lift, how big I should get. So, that is when I started putting this pressure on myself. To perform in a way in the gym ... by lifting so much, and weighing so much, and looking such a way. I have to deliver now! That is when I started the dieting and the steroids, and basically dedicating me life to my body'.

Thus, ideologically and practically, my participants' gym lives can be seen as extensions of their jobs; and metaphors of capitalism's philosophies and principles. Training is orchestrated



by *The Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1930). My participants merely trade their work clothes for their ‘gym uniforms’ when in Gym D; and substitute the tools and processes of their formal work for the weights and machines of gym D, whereby the anatomies they work upon become their labour’s ‘products’ (and commodities, as I come to). My participants’ ‘work-out’ in a non-ludic, structured way, inspired by the capitalist principles of ‘hard work’<sup>108</sup>, ‘self-improvement’ and ‘achievement’. Underneath Gym D’s jocular culture, there is a profound seriousness and commitment that guides its users’ training. Their gym work is organised, scheduled, and even quantified into analysable ‘data’. For many of my participants’ meticulously record the ‘progress’ of their gym labour and gym careers in ‘logbooks’, which gives them the opportunity to consider how capitalist notions like (physiological) ‘progress’ and ‘gain’ relate to their body-modification longitudinally; as exemplified in the case of TP (a Traditionalist), and his ‘little black book’:

‘When I first started keeping me (log) book, the lads would rip us. What the fuck’s that, they’d say? I telt (told) them I was keeping a record of me progress and gains: how many reps, how much weight I was lifting. I measure myself before and after the gym, and weigh myself. All that information goes in here. This is me third book now. I won’t come to the gym without it. I left it at home once, I turned around and went for it! Wey they (other users) used to say like, how – giz some numbers oot ya book! Like I just had women’s phone numbers in and stuff! Hey, Cilla Black, let’s have a look at ya book they’d shout; where the fucks Gary with a quick reminder? They’d say it was full of crayon drawings; that I just joined the dots and drew animals and stuff in it! Ha ya noticed, they all keep log-books now? ... In fact, I heard that (names user of Gym D) has a spreadsheet and a fucking database on his kids’ computer, and he makes graphs

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<sup>108</sup> Inspired by the gym cliché ‘no pain, no gain’.



and stuff and puts them on the wall and goes, ok look, I gained an inch there, and lost a bit here and stuff!’

The above illustrates that the capitalist culture and ideology that has ‘conditioned’ my participants’ lives ‘outside’ of the gym, has also penetrated and governed their approaches to training inside the gym; where my participants’ treat and see their body-modification as labour: albeit ‘chosen’ labour that occurs in their leisure time.

For Marx, money is the ‘most alienable’ of all commodities<sup>109</sup>. The acquisition of money – and, convolutedly, the ‘safety’ and commoditised items that money buys – remains the fundamental incentive and reward for contemporary society’s working masses (the postmodern proletariat) who, like the proletariat of Marx’s day, are obliged to ‘sell themselves’ so as to exist within a capitalist society, and experience ‘money-alienation’:

‘Proletariats ... are obliged to sell their own vital activity’ (their energy and time in the form of labour) ‘to feed, like cannibals, on the product of their own blood and sweat in the abstract shape of a medium of exchange. The money-alienation is the most complete inversion of the natural order of life’ (Kolakowski, 2008: 92).

It is important to recognise that it is the commodity of muscle – rather than the commodity of money – which acts as the reward and inspiration for my participants’ gym labour. The embodiment of muscle is the reason for the ‘blood and sweat’ my participants’ expound while ‘labouring’ upon themselves in Gym D. In this way, muscle becomes to the body-modifier what the ‘pay packet’ is to the worker (and what ‘dole day’ is to the Drifters). Simply, muscles come to constitute *currency*. In economical terms, muscles - not money - represents gym labour’s exchange and value processes.

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<sup>109</sup> ‘Money is the absolutely alienable commodity, because it is all other commodities divested of their shape, the product of their universal alienation’ (Marx, *Capital*. 252 in Simon).



Epistemologically, It can be assumed that *if* labour alienates and depresses its practitioners ordinarily in a capitalist society – as Marx surmise labour will, and as this thesis has, to a point, affirmed - then gym ‘labour’ should also depress those who perform it, *if* that gym labour follows the principles and practices, or ‘spirit’, of capitalism and capitalist work (as my participants’ gym work does). Further, it can be reasoned that *if* commodities cause a ‘fetish’ for capitalist citizens - as Marx proposed commodities do, and as this research has affirmed to some extent, most saliently in relation to the Changers’ and the Wannabes’ and their pursuits of middleclass and Gangster ‘things’ respectively - then it follows that my participants’ ‘commodity bodies’, which are adorned with the ‘cultural capital’ of muscle, should also act as a source of depression and ‘fetishism’ in my participants’ lives.

*Theoretically*, then, my participants’ body-modification should extend their experiences of cultural alienation and commodity fetishisms.

*Phenomenologically*, however, in the qualitative interviews that I conducted, *all* of my participants claimed to ‘like’, ‘love’ or ‘adore’ their gym labour: the body-modifying processes which result in my participants pulling, pushing and lifting weight on a frequent basis in Gym D, in the pursuit of muscular currency. Further, *all* of my participants let it be known that the ‘commodity bodies’, or muscular anatomical ‘products’, which they have fashioned through their gym labour have improved their lives ‘considerably’ or ‘substantially’. *None* of my participants ventured that their training, or modified anatomies, act as a source of depression in their lives, regardless of the physical fatigue and soreness, plateaus or genetic anomie that my participants experience, relativise and accept as part of their gym lives. (Although, as discussed in this work’s methodology chapter, the validity of this finding can be questioned empirically, in light of the contradictions between what my



participants' said in their qualitative interviews, and what my participants said –or felt obliged to say - on a daily basis in Gym D).

Hence, the proposition that my participants' body-modification extends their depression, alienation and commodity fetishism was not affirmed in my research reflexively or empirically; in spite of this relationship being probable theoretically. Similarly, Messner's statement that 'in bodybuilding, more than any other sport endeavour, men are ... alienated and oppressed through their bodies' (in Klein, 1994: 280) was refuted by the data I elicited. Rather, it seems that my participants' 'gym labour' and 'commodified bodies' can be read as an alleviation, rather than as an extension, of their cultural alienation and fetishisms.

I will now endeavour to explain why gym-labour is, apparently, immune to the principles of Marx's theory of alienation manifesting itself in the mind of the body-modifier, despite the parallels between gym work and capitalist labour. I then consider why my participants' commodity bodies do not impose a fetish for my participants in their existences, as other commodities do.

#### Gym Labour as non-alienated labour

It is necessary to begin this process by acknowledging that gym labour biologically alleviates a person's melancholy. Klein, in his ethnography of the Southern Californian body-building autobiographically comments (1993: 41) that:

'Appearing at the gym entrance worn and weary after a work day, not fully awake, you initially follow the routine mindlessly. Within a few minutes ... your body begins to react, and soon the fatigue or mood lifts as you are rooted in the present.'



The ‘lift in mood’ identified above will be experienced by anybody who exercises. For, during exercise, endomorphines<sup>110</sup> are ‘naturally’ produced in the exercisers’ body and brain. The production of endomorphines is associated with a sense of sometimes euphoric phenomenological well-being. One ‘feels good’ during and after a work-out consequently. Regardless of what may be happening within a person’s societal existence to ‘depress’ them and afflict their psyche, that individual becomes – albeit in a temporary and unfixed way - alleviated from their depression at a neurological level during and after a work-out, by definition of the endorphins their gym labour releases. Indeed, it is exercises’ ability to release endorphins which, along with the idealised images of bodies purveyed in the mass-media, accounts for contemporary society’s burgeoning gym culture according to Shusterman (1997: 33):

‘somatic interest’ (in body-modification) ‘is not all directed at representational beauty but instead at the quality of immediate experience: the endorphin enhanced glow ... the slow savouring awareness of improved, deeper breathing’.

All of my participants – whether aware of the correlation between exercise and endorphin release or not - identified that they experience a ‘lift in mood’ when they train in Gym D. By doing so, the neurological enjoyment that my participants gain from their gym labour became phenomenologically affirmed.

Marx’s theory of alienation stipulates that the capitalist labourer will be alienated from the *processes* of their work. However, the laborious *processes* that my participants go through in the gym - when they physical lift, pull and push weight – creates, as we have seen, a

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<sup>110</sup> Endomorphines – or endorphins as they are commonly called, and referred to from here in this thesis - are biochemical compounds (polypeptides) that are produced through the pituitary gland in response to exercise. The body fuses glycogen and oxygen together as part of the release and use of endomorphines, resulting in analgesia.



neurological, natural ‘high’ for them. Simply, the body-modifier can’t be alienated from his laborious processes in Gym D – as he may or may not be from the processes he undergoes when performing paid labour – for his gym labour is fundamentally beneficial to him biologically and consciously. His lived experience is intrinsically improved because of the endorphin-releasing effect his exercise, or gym ‘processes’ have upon his psyche. In this sense, gym labour refutes Marx’s theory’s first presupposition.

A second premise of Marx’s theory of alienation stipulates that when one works in a capitalist society, one is necessarily separated from their ‘*species being*’, as explained:

Alienated labour hence turns the *species-existence of man*, and also nature of his mental species-capacity, into an existence *alien* to him, into the *means* of his *individual existence*. It alienates his spiritual nature, his human essence, from his own body and likewise from nature outside him.’ (Marx: 62-64 in Simon).

It is possible to consider the loss of one’s ‘soul’, *Zoe* or ‘Species self’ as Marx referred to such as being represented, bio-chemically, in the reduction of serotonin in ones’ brain. When ones’ serotonin is low, ones’ ‘species being’ – or, to put it another way, ones’ ‘human essence’, ‘spiritual nature’, happiness, creativity etc - is impaired, and ones’ lived experience is debilitated.

I’m suggesting here that my participants’ gym-labour, by definition of its ability to bolster the endorphin levels of my participants, helps my participants to re-associate themselves with their ‘species beings’; which they otherwise ‘lose’, to varying degrees, within their everyday experiences. As put by one of my Changer participants:

‘It is weird, cause I do feel totally different like before and after the gym. I come in and feel, wey haggard. Like really sad like the shit has been kicked out of me. But after a



few chins (chin-ups), and a bit crack with the lads I feel like myself again. I feel happy again. I know that I am a nicer person after training then before it. Like a different person, like the gym has refreshed me soul somehow’.

Hence, the ‘weeping well’ weeps less after working-out. By definition of their heightened serotonin levels, body-modifiers re-find their species selves, otherwise lost, through their gym labour. In this sense, gym labour is the ‘self confirming essence’ that Marx proposed – perhaps idealistically – all work should be.

As well as supposing that the capitalist workers’ are necessarily alienated from the *processes* of their work and their *species selves* as a result of their work, Marx’s theory also assumes that that capitalist worker is necessary separated from his fellow-man:

‘(Capitalist) ‘man is alienated from one another just as each man is alienated from human nature’ (Marx: 64 in Simon).

The premise that men in Town A are estranged from, and thus depressed by their fellow men has been affirmed in this research; most notably in relation to the socially vilified and ostracised Drifters’, who feel and are treated as ‘true aliens’ in their deviant life-cycles. However, it seems that the human relationships that define Gym D life are *not* susceptible to alienation and estrangement, as human relationships are, ordinarily, outside of Gym D’s walls. Instead, a sense of brotherhood, solidarity and ‘family like’ belonging was fondly identified by all my participants’ when they discussed the gym’s internal culture with me in our qualitative interviews. My participants’ clearly feel very close to other members of the gym: particularly their training partners. Indeed, as an ethnographer, I also - at the risk of ‘going native’ - enjoyed being part of the Gym D brotherhood, and revelling in the ‘community’ that Gym D offers its users, during my time as an observer in the Gym. The



sense of solidarity that Gym D's human relationships are built upon means that the gym can function in a somewhat therapeutic way for many of its members.

As part of its closely-knit, communal function, Gym D provides a 'network' of fellow trainers and 'friends' that its users can turn to in times of existential crisis to discuss and negotiate their problems with in a way that they can't normally, within the machismo context of Town A:

'if I need to talk to someone, like if I have a decision to make or a problem or if something is on me mind, I wait until the gym to sort it. I know that I can talk to people here and they feel like I do. They have the same problems, or are in the same situations. So they can relate, how? They are also men living today, and with that comes, like, things that only men living today and here can understand ... So I talk things over, hear opinions, and then I feel better. I can also take me trouble out on the weights. Like if me lass is pissing us off, I go on the bench press and think of her as I rep oot (out) – it's amazing how many more sets I get deeing (doing) that'.

'Normally, like in life or society, you can't start telling people about your problems, especially other men. Cause that makes you weak, like people will see you as a fucking softy, like especially if you're massive. I mean, imagine me ganning into the bar and telling the lads about me feelings and stuff like that when we're oot on the hoy (drinking)! But, I don't know, like in the gym, it is ok to talk about what you're thinking and stuff ... like it's expected that you'll talk about your problems in here ... like a rule between us all that we can do that; although there is only so much you can say cause eventually you'll get the piss ripped oot of ya'.

Gym D's younger users' particularly benefit from the gym's close-knit relationships; as they consistently seek the advice of 'older, wiser' trainers when they need to - on matters of



training, love, finances, where to holiday, how to dress and an array of other topics. Gym D also provides an informal business network for its users. As a rule, members of Gym D will seek the services of other trainers. Such are the interlinked – as opposed to estranged - relationship in the gym; as explained by C (Gym D's owner), who often, benevolently orchestrates these relationships:

‘if so and so wants driving lessons, he will come to me and I will say, use (names a driving instructor in the gym); and that will mean it is a cheaper and better service than if he goes elsewhere. Cause he'll (the driving instructor) look after you, like, he is one of us. Then, to give you another example, if someone wants a plumber, or an electrician or a builder or a decorator or whatever, I will say use so and so, and that will be better than using some other bloke you've never met, who'll rip you off and be a cowboy ... and we all do favours for each other, and keep each other in pocket. You know what you're getting when you use lads in here, it is possible to do whatever you need with lads from the gym, so like if you need a van (at the time of eliciting this quote, I needed to hire a van so as to help my girlfriend move house), I will tell you who to borrow it from, if you need, like whatever it is, someone in here will be able to do it and it is better than getting some cunt out the *Yellow Pages*! ... holidays, kitchens, cars, women, you name it, there is some cunt in here who can do it and get it for you; and that is why now, if someone is applying for a job I'll say, ask Yazz (referring to me) cause he is good at spelling and writing (after I helped a user apply for the fire brigade by writing out his application form), and give him a tenner for his bother!’

Business cards which market the skills and services of various Gym D users are displayed on a small notice board in area two of Gym D. They tout for business within this localised, close-knit network. Services from discos to rental houses are advertised on the board; as is a now aged poster that I put up asking for participants to come forward for the purpose of this



research! All in all then, belonging to and training in Gym D is a somewhat sub-cultural experience that provides a sense of companionship, fellowship and network in a society that is otherwise void of brotherhood and solidarity. Thus, human relationships in Gym D are not, on the whole, characterised by alienation. Instead, relationships in Gym D are unusually honest, pure, human and ‘real’. Indeed, it is the non-alienated nature of the human relationships in Gym D which allows the gym to function as a somewhat cathartic ‘social club’ for many of my participants’, who essentially ‘escape’ from the outside world and the psycho-social depression and regulation it creates, by frequenting Gym D, as this work’s conclusion considers further.

When existence is characterised, chiefly, by a sense of rejection and ‘otherness’, as it is for the Drifters’, to ‘belong’ - even in a ‘limited sense’ - to the Gym D brotherhood is, according to my data, of huge phenomenological significance; as explained by one of the Drifters’:

‘most places I go, people look at me like I’m a piece of shite. They look me up and down, as if to say I’m not worth being alive. Like in the job centre. Like I was saying to you before, they make you feel like crap. Police, teachers, whoever else – like people in authority. They make you feel bad ... and you know that around here, even when people are nice to your face, they’ll go and say shite things about you behind your back. People around here are fucking scum man – they talk about their own families and judge them ... but the gym is totally different. I don’t feel like that in there. I feel like people respect me in the gym ... they talk to me, they want to know about me, what I do and how I train ... when I walk in there others know I am a serious trainer, otherwise I couldn’t look like this ... I feel like part of that family ... like that is probably the only place where I belong and would trust other people ... I like that it is always the same in there ... having a good laugh and doing things you can’t outside the gym.’



Even the marginalised; and those vilified in society find humanity and a sense of companionship in Gym D therefore: a ‘special place’ full of ‘special’ and ‘real characters’. Examining BL’s individual circumstances takes this sentiment further. We saw earlier that all of the Drifters except BL have a small but significant group of people in their lives (mates, girlfriends, mothers etc), who provide a network of emotional and social support in their lived experiences. BL, however, is ‘alone’: he ‘lives alone’, ‘eats alone’, ‘has no family’ and only a very small number of ‘fringe’ friends, all of whom are users of Gym D. To BL then, the Gym D brotherhood takes on a meaning that is particularly important, in light of the marginalisation he otherwise feels. For BL, Gym D singularly fulfils his ‘need for sociability’ (Simmel, 1980):

‘when you’re on your own as much as I am, even like a smile means a lot. Like if you’re walking down the street, and a stranger just smiles, or like notices ya, it means loads! I can go all day without speaking to someone, ya know? I mean people will say hi in the shops, or like giz a bit of crack, cause this (Town A) is a close-knit community ... I don’t know how people survive in a big city where ne body knows any other fucker ... but even here, in a small town, no one *really* normally speaks, ya na. Like outside the gym that is, no one really cares, like. I can’t relate to most people. But here (Gym D) that is totally different. It is comforting like, knowing who will be here, and when. Like C will be behind the counter, and (names users) will be here like clockwork everyday. And I can chat about training with these people. We know what is going on with each others’ lives cause every day we talk – I know he is shagging so and so, and that he is having trouble with whatever. And they know how I am ... I can make up some banter with them ... and if they’re free, like we might meet up at night for a pint, or a game on the *Playstation* ... that means loads to me. I go home, and think about the gym and what I did in it that day. Who said what, have a bit of a laugh with meself



really cause of what other people said. It means loads to us man. Just to say hi everyday and that sort of stuff. Cause if it was not for these boys, I'd be totally alone ... yes, I am completely alone, like alienated you say. And yes, being a part of the gym helps with that. Completely. That is how I think loads of us feel ...even the ones with kids and wives are that way (alienated), like alone, ya na. Cause like I was saying, ne body really cares it seems these days. But here, something changes ... in how we can act and think'.

Hence, for BL Gym D and its non-alienated community acts as the one link between him and total cultural isolation and estrangement.

Perhaps another reason that explains why relationships in Gym D are 'close-knit' as opposed to estranged is to do with the level of respect that exists between the gym's users. When an individual consistently trains in Gym D, he does not simply become integrated into a micro-community that witnesses a collection of body-modifiers regularly 'brought together' in a physical space for the purposes of training. More than this, he denotes his commitment to modifying his body in the excessive, intense way that separates Gym D, and its users, from other fitness facilities and trainers in the area. Other users of Gym D recognise that their fellow body-modifiers are willing to push their bodies to extremes daily; and willing to endure the physical and psychological sacrifices that body-modification requires. This creates a collective respect among users, that is absent in society ordinarily; where showing respect to others is something of a taboo, especially if that respect is unearned and unfounded. Hence, in Gym D, 'we' respect our fellow trainers for squatting X weight, benching Y plates, curling Z dumbbells, dieting in the season, and pushing out those extra sets. Even if a user may not be 'the biggest or hardest bastard here', the fact that he shows up and trains – 'while others are down a pub, watching telly or wasting time being ponses' - is enough to ensure his assimilation into the Gym D 'clan', and differentiate him from 'outsiders'. We all push and pull weight, share advice, spot each other, and have 'the laugh', but recognise that a spirit of



body-modification founded upon a common respect and mutual goal – the acquisition of muscle - unites us and our physical forms. Thus, the divides that exist between the different typologies of life that use Gym D are ‘bridged’ by definition of the typologies’ common respect for each other.

At one level, Gym D can be interpreted as a collection of (often ‘oversized’ and marginalised) men, flexing their bodies, and quenching the needs of their egos, as they obsessively try to sculpt their physiques; obtaining society’s quintessential commodity of muscle. At another level however, the gym sees the souls encased in those very bodies empathise, respect and relate to each other in a way that is rare – perhaps otherwise absent - in contemporary, alienated culture. The visible displays of affection shown by users of Gym D towards each other during a fancy dress ‘stag night’ I attended during this research epitomised these feelings: I dare say that straight, working class men will never be so intimate with each other as they were that night, when drunken displays of affection between the gym’s users surpassed even the intimacy that working class men share when their football team scores a goal during a crucial football match.

Bodybuilding has ‘always had the unfortunate reputation of being an oddball sport’ (Schwarzenegger, 1977: 86). Bodybuilding’s reputation is, in part, due to the fact that body-modifiers are typically ‘loners’<sup>111</sup>. This statement is quantitatively affirmed through the research of Sprague who, having used a *Cattell 16 PF* to test the psychologies of people using gyms, concluded that ‘bodybuilders were significantly more self-reliant and less group-dependant than’ (a random sample of) ‘the population outside the gym’ (Klein: 143).

The gym, and the act of body-modification can be seen as a place and a pursuit that offers something intrinsically appealing and seductive to society’s ‘individuals’ therefore. In turn,

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<sup>111</sup> See Klein, 1993; chapter six for a detailed discussion on the relationship between ‘the loner’ and the act of body-modification.



culture's 'loner' individuals - who typically reject and are rejected by 'team sports' and 'the popular crowd' - find their place in the gym; as put by Schwarzenegger (1979: 14):

'By the time I was thirteen team sports no longer satisfied me. I was already off on an individual trip. I disliked it when we won a game and I didn't get personal recognition. The only time I felt rewarded was when I was singled out at being best. I decided to try some individual sport';

and, less infamously, as articulated by one of the Drifters':

'I was always a big lad at school. Not that fast, skilful; but big. Fat to be honest. So they always had me play rugby. Put that fat bastard in the scrum, that's what they probably thought. He's hard and big, perfect! And I got sort of into it. But then I started lifting weights for the rugby. I was about sixteen, close to leaving school. And I was meant to be getting fit and strong for rugby. But I realised, fuck rugby. This (the gym, and body-modification) is where it's at. Fuck taking hits in the scrum, I'll just get in class shape, because we were playing Rugby League rules .... Even when we won the rugby, everyone was singing songs and being a team, but I was not really arsed. With training, if I fuck up, it's me that fucks up. And if I get massive, that is my glory ... I guess that means I'm not a team player then, eh? I mean, I was always one of the lads who was by himself ... or with others because they were by themselves also ... Never really totally in with what we used to call the 'coolies', like the fashionable people at school with all the sexy lasses ... it's strange like but now, in here (the gym) I see all the other people like me at school, the ones' who were on the fringes, ya na?'

We know that one of the four debilitating consequences of cultural alienation, as Marx's theory articulates the notion, is a separation or alienation of the self from others. Furthermore, we know that the 'individualistic personality' is more likely to modify his body than his



outgoing counterpart. It has also been established that, through body-modification, a sense of solidarity, community and togetherness is established in the psyches of Gym D's users. This solidarity contrasts with the estranged relationships that working class lads endure, ordinarily, in other facets of their existence (e.g. at home and at work).

With these three points in mind, what is being suggested here is that body-modification does not just alleviate my participants' alienation from others due to the spirit and bond that body-modifiers share, but – further – that Gym D alleviates alienation for a specific 'type' of person. This 'type' of person - because of his 'loner', independent, even autonomous personality - will be 'extra prone', if you will, to the alienation that characterises society and societal social relations; and extra prone to the depression that arises due to separation of self from others. Body-modification does not just rectify its practitioners' alienated relationships: it rectifies the alienated relationships of those individuals in society who are, by definition of their personalities, most susceptible to human estrangement<sup>112</sup>. Gym D does not merely unite Town A's body-modifiers; it unites a sample of Town A's most introverted, individualistic men.

So far, this chapter has suggested that my participants truly enjoy – and are thus not alienated by - the endorphin releasing *processes* of their 'gym labour'. This chapter has also argued that my participants' gym labour is conducive to them experiencing non-alienated *relationships* with others, and re-finding their *species selves*, which they otherwise lose, as

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<sup>112</sup> This point is demonstrated saliently with reference to Lou Ferrigno; who, as Klein points out, would ordinarily be particularly prone to marginalisation and alienation from others due to his deafness and learning disabilities:

'... the gym offers its members social acceptance. Thus, whereas someone like Lou Ferrigno (TV's Incredible Hulk) may be the object of ridicule on Wall Street or at Harvard Law School, he is venerated by members of this subculture ... despite its reputation, there is something Olympic shares with other gyms – it is comforting ... Things will always be in their accustomed places, the same faces will greet you, happy to see you, and take the edge off a hard day on the outside. These are treasured places in our lives' (Klein, 1993: 32).



part of their existences. The non-alienating nature of my participants' gym labour means that body-modification is not depressing in the way capitalist labour is surmised to be by Marx's theory of alienation, in spite of the direct relationship between body-modification and capitalist labour. With these arguments in mind, I now consider how gym labour relates to the final element of Marx's theory to be considered here, being the *product* of one's labour. Significantly, because the product of gym labour is a 'commodity body', I am able to discuss the final element of Marx's theory along with Marx's notion of commodity fetishism. Hence, in the same way that I can consider if the products of my participants' gym labour – their modified, commodity bodies – alienate my participants; I can also consider if their bodies are a source of fetishism in their lives.

#### Commodity bodies: free from fetish?

The data that I elicited suggests, overwhelmingly, that the 'commodity bodies' my participants' have constructed fundamentally enhance the quality of their lived experiences, and are in no way prone to fetish or Marxian alienation. My participants' made it clear that their bodies help them in a variety of cultural acts, such as 'getting jobs' and seeing/experiencing 'things that they would not otherwise' in their lives. My participants' commodity bodies also help them in acts that are specific to life, and the concept of masculinity in Town A and other working class contexts; such as fighting, or avoiding violence ('I saw these lad looking at us in the bar funny ... aggressively, like a group of them. I gans, what the fuck you going to do like? They looked at me frame and I knew they thought, fuck that. They left us alone') and womanising ('chicks love muscles, simple as that. You got muscles, you get slags. And if you're with a woman you're happy – at least for ten minutes or so'). Thus, my participants' bodies are socially advantageous to them. By definition of possessing 'the right' physiology aesthetically, dimensions of my participants' lives improve. Cultural variables that may otherwise depress working class males - i.e. a lack



of sex, the humiliation that may arise if one is considered to be 'soft' in a fight, the inability to work, a lack of belonging and 'identity' - are less likely to depress my participants because of the modified bodies they inhabit. My participants' bodies, adorned with the currency of muscle, are genuine commodities therefore. Their bodies function in the way Marx specified a commodity, ideally, should; i.e. as:

'first of all ... a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind'<sup>113</sup>.

My participants' are 'aware' of the extent to which their bodies receive cultural approval, and demand respect and attention. In turn, my participants' are not afraid to yield the cultural power their bodies bring them; and reap the rewards of being encased in a muscular anatomy.

The correlation between a man, or group of men, experiencing life in a more enjoyable way by definition of him/them being encased in a commodity body is not limited to the findings presented here, which are specific to the experiences of working class men in Town A, and the bodies they have been produced in Gym D. Rather, this correlation is also emphasised in other research. For example, Fussell's 1991 work, entitled *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder*, which explains how its authors' existence in New York city - which was once defined by a 'fear of others', and a sense of 'self-loathing' - was improved dramatically when he constructed a muscular, commodity body. Similarly, Drummond's 1994 work entitled "Muscles, Men and Masculinity" illustrates how masculine existence is enhanced for men in Australian culture as a result of their muscularity. While Schwarzenegger, through his analysis of his first months as a schoolboy body-builder, also articulates the extent to which inhabiting a muscular body can improve a man's life (1979: 25):

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<sup>113</sup> Marx, *Capital*: 220 in Simon.



‘Before long, people began looking at me as a special person. Partly this was the result of my own changing attitude about myself. I was growing, getting bigger, gaining confidence. I was given consideration I had never received before ... I’d walk into a room at school and my classmates would offer me food or ask if they could help me with my homework. Even my teachers treated me differently. ... this strange new attitude towards me had an incredible effect on my ego. It supplied me with something I had been craving ... I basked in this new flood of attention’.

Thus, the notion that a modified body acts as a ‘true commodity’ which bolsters the life of its owner is not, according to the above literature, limited to men living in the localised context of Town A, and training in Gym D. Rather, it seems that a modified body functions to enhance the life of men in a variety of cultural contexts. In an epoch when commodities so often function as a source of fetish, perhaps the modified body remains the only, non-alienable commodity for men globally today, working class or otherwise?

I now develop this chapter by suggesting how the three participant groups identified and researched in this thesis use their bodies as semiotic documents in their existences.

### Semiotic Bodies

It has been shown that in contemporary society, commodities have gone from being ‘things’ that humans use for the purposes they were designed for, to being things that signify a human’s identity and belonging. Hence, commodities are socially semiotic; or ‘culturally hieroglyphic’. They play a seminal part in how citizens construct their identities and confer information about themselves to others in contemporary society. By extension, my participants’ ‘commodity bodies’, like all other commodities, signify cultural meaning within my participants’ existences. In this sense, my participants’ bodies act as ‘logos’, or ‘brands’ (Klein 2000) in their lives, by denoting sociological information about my participants to



other citizens, in the same way that my participants' *Ralph Lauren* branded shirts, *G Star* jeans and four-by-four jeeps do. In other words, my participants' bodies are aesthetic, cultural 'spectacles' with their own aesthetic values and cultural connotations, as suggested by Featherstone (1991: 18-19):

'Whether trendy exercises in sensory isolation, or various forms of body-building, or jogging ... the body is being constructed as a value ... even in its most private aspects, the body is being constructed only in order to be seen ... the body is adorned only to be made into a spectacle'.

Yet, what is the cultural meaning of my participants' 'spectacle' bodies? If, as I believe following Connell (2005:46) 'the body is a more or less neutral surface or landscape on which a social symbolism is imprinted', then what social symbolism and meaning is imprinted 'on' my participants' bodies? If my participants' bodies have been constructed 'only to be seen', then what do my participants' visible bodies signify? In other words: how do my participants' modified bodies function as 'totemic mark's (Durkheim, 1915: 137) in their existences<sup>114</sup>? I now consider these questions. I begin by considering the Traditionalists' modified bodies.

Town A's switch from an industrial to a post-industrial, 'glocal' context, which has occurred over the last thirty years, has resulted in the Traditionalists':

- 1) as a rule, struggling to find 'proper', 'hands on' manual labour;
- 2) threatened by the emergence of 'modern men', whose habitus', lives, ideologies and self-presentations' are radically different to theirs;

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<sup>114</sup> See Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993, and Turner, 1996 for further theories pertaining to how and why the body is 'used' to project identity in contemporary society.



3) threatened by ‘modern women’ who – having attended universities, acquired post-industrial jobs and in some cases travelled the world - challenge the Traditionalists’ patriarchal views and dominant social position in Town A;

4) suffering from the supposed evils of immigration and multi-culturalism; which, the Traditionalists feel, have ‘put people like us’ at an empirical disadvantage:

‘You have to ask what it is to be a man today, or like a man like me today: white, poor, just a normal lad ... we are crap man. I can’t really read or do maths. So, there is not much opportunity for me. Like we were saying, like industrial work and stuff is not around today like it was ... so my options are low ... women have changed, they are liberated and we are left behind, no longer the bread winners and decision makers ... and it seems like foreigners take our things ... like we are left behind because men are becoming soft and like women ... so, yes, I do think me and you and people like us are in a crisis. A proper bad one. It is like, for us, change or die!’

We have seen that the above themes have resulted in the Traditionalists’ becoming and feeling increasingly cultural obsolete; and that the above themes are culminating to cause the Traditionalists’ a collective social anomie.

However, I want to assert here that the Traditionalists’ are currently using their modified bodies, and the sport of body-modification, to avert their anomie, and the cultural crisis that they are collectively enduring because of the above sociological developments. I want to suggest that the Traditionalists’ bodies and body-modification preserves their collective industrial ‘working class’ masculinity and ethos’ in a time when such is under threat. I want to propose that the Traditionalists’ involvement with Gym D should be read as a form of ‘resistance’ that allows the Traditionalists’ to visually and practically ‘resist’ the changes that are occurring in ‘their’ Town and to their culture, due to the onslaught of post-



industrialisation and globalisation. I also draw attention to the culturally metaphoric nature of the Traditionalists' bodies. Yet before so doing, it is important to recognise that the Traditionalists' are not the first males to 'use' sport in response to a cultural crisis<sup>115</sup>.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, white men in the USA faced a two-fold crisis in their cultural existences, which is similar to that faced by the Traditionalists' in Town A today. Firstly, a wave of immigrants entered and settled in the white American males' land; and became integrated into 'his' culture. Secondly, the rise of 'the new American woman' also occurred. The American ballot box, college classroom and work place was no longer limited, or exclusive, to the once dominant white male. Instead, the upwardly mobile, sexually active, educated and successful woman, as well as 'the exotic other', entered the cultural equation. Accordingly, white American men:

'were jolted by changes in the economic and social order which made them perceive that their superior position in the gender order and their supposedly "natural" male roles and prerogatives were not somehow rooted in the human condition' but 'instead the result of a complex set of relationships subject to change and decay'

(Hartman, 1984: 13; in Kimmel, 1987).

The white America male managed to avert his cultural crisis through the sport of baseball. According to Kimmel (in Messner and Sabo, 1990), baseball functioned to reconstruct and preserve the American males' quintessentially 'WASP masculinity'; and re-enforce the white American male's supposed cultural superiority, at a time when it was threatened.

Similarly, 'upper middleclass' Englishmen in the latter 1800s faced a debilitating crisis of masculinity; as appraised below:

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<sup>115</sup> For example, see Kimmel, 2005 (chapter five) which considers 'men's response to feminism at the turn of the century'.



‘Under the urban-industrial conditions that were coming increasingly to prevail’ (in 1800 British Society) ... ‘it became more and more difficult for traditional upper and middleclass norms of masculinity to find expression in the normal run of everyday life’ (Sheard and Dunning, 1973: 6).

The public schools and ancient universities of England colluded to ensure that the game of rugby emerged in this period. Rugby then functioned as a legitimate expression of upper middleclass desire and identities in a world where upper middleclass patriarchy and snobbery was threatened. Thus, as:

‘women were increasingly becoming a threat to men’ ... ‘men ... responded among other ways by developing Rugby Football as a male preserve in which they could bolster up their threatened masculinity and, at the same time, mock, objectify and vilify women, the principle source of threat’ (Sheard and Dunning, 1973:8).

‘the drunkenness and vandalism’ associated with rugby ‘represent a reaction to excessive controls, the singing of obscene songs – often to hymn tunes – becomes a parody of chapel hymn singing at school, and the vilification of homosexuals becomes an overt form of denial for heterosexual males who still apparently prefer an all-male setting based around a contact sport and communal bathing. The cultural forms permitted and encouraged the vilification of women during a time of apparent threat, and also allowed the re-creation of simple school day values such as comradeship and sportsmanship’ (Donnelly and Young, 1985: 22).

In the same way that men used rugby and baseball in different epochs and different localities so as to avert their subjective cultural crises, I’m suggesting that the sport of body-modification, and the aesthetic, tangible ‘industrial’ bodies it produces are being used, at the time of writing, to avert the particular cultural crisis that the Traditionalists’, as a typology of



life, currently face. The Traditionalists' body-modification functions as an activity that allows them to hold on to the 'spirit' of mining in a post-industrial society, in which the mining industry, and the behaviour and masculinity associated with the mining stereotype, has become sociologically obsolete. This happens at both a visual and practical level, as I now consider.

Visually, the product of the Traditionalists' gym labour – their big, strong, industrial bodies – denote and confer cultural identity and information about the Traditionalist's in their existences semiotically. People know what they're dealing with when they see and encounter Traditionalists' – for the Traditionalist' bodies 'communicate to other citizens on their behalf: expect us (the Traditionalists) to be hard drinking, hard scrapping, sexist, racist etc. For our mining forefathers – who we physically look like and act like- were those things; and if you have a problem with us, or look at us the wrong way, we – and our bodies – will 'knock you out'. Thus, while the industrial body is an anachronism in a post-industrial society, the industrial body continues to semiotically symbolise an 'industrial' ethos, mindset, lifestyle and form of masculinity. Hence, the Traditionalists' bodies preserve their identities and legitimise their positions as 'dominant', 'mining' men in a Town and culture that no longer needs miners. The Traditionalists' bodies also function to distinguish them from the lives, habitus', identities, and ideals of 'other' men in Town A and their region, who represent a working class/middleclass intermediary; many of who have or aspire to have 'media' approved bodies, as opposed to the steroid enhanced bodies of the Traditionalists' that subversively contradict mainstream notions of the 'perfect male body'. Hence, the Traditionalists remain 'real' men by definition of their 'real bodies'. The society around the Traditionalists is changing, but the Traditionalists' themselves are not changing, or 'adapting'. Their physical bodies are metaphoric symbols of this.



The following four statues depict images of coalminers'. Statue one is located near Town A. The statue depicts a heavily muscular male 'shooting' his mining tool away from him like an arrow, using a bow to do so. Presumably, the statue is meant to symbolise the end of Town A's industrial past; while also recognising the seminal part that mining played in Town A's history. Statue three and four was unveiled near Town A in November 2009. The statue is, according to the region's local newspaper, a 'tribute' to Town A's coalmining workers, who, through this statue, will 'never be forgotten'<sup>116</sup>. Like the miner depicted in statue number two, which exists in Nottinghamshire, the miner is heavily muscular; and almost eulogised in his sculpted form.



Statues 1, 2 and 3.



Statue 4.

The statues show that the common, contemporary perception of 'how a miners' body looked' remains a heavily muscular man. The statues thus feed society's collective view and conception of the miner as being a strong, artisan male whose body was physically imposing, powerful and visually impressive.

<sup>116</sup> *The Journal*. 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2009.



In essence, the bodies depicted in niche bodybuilding magazines such as *Flex* and inhabited by the Traditionalists' are steroid-enhanced versions of the bodies that miners inhabited and constructed in Town A in an earlier epoch, because of their physical labour. This affirms the cultural significance of the Traditionalists' bodies at the time of writing further, and illustrates how the Traditionalists' semiotically denote their coalmining identities and masculinities aesthetically today, through their physiques, by constructing bodies that burlesque and perhaps even parody themselves and the industrial habitus they are clinging on to. By the Traditionalists' retaining the bodies, or constructing exaggeratedly muscular forms of the bodies depicted in the statues above - often with the help of steroids - the Traditionalists' correlate their visual appearances with their mining forefathers'; and legitimise their 'industrial' identities, positions and ethos' in a post-industrial society.

The Traditionalists' body-modification is not merely relevant visually, given the way it affiliates the Traditionalists' bodies with their mining predecessors. Practically, training in Gym D ensures that the Traditionalists continue to perform 'physical' labour, as they pull, push, press and set-up weights in the Gym. Despite the lack of industrial work 'around here today', Gym D ensures 'hands on', artisan like activity can be practiced by the Traditionalists'. Thus, men in Town A no longer have to go 'underground' to perform artisan labour with like-minded peers: they can do it in Gym D, and 'sculpt' their own physiques, instead of hauling coal. Simultaneously, Gym D functions to provide the Traditionalists' with a close-knit community of other Traditionalists ('lads like me'; 'miners at heart'), who he can 'work out with', share 'crack with' and trust.

Sassatelli (2005: 286) suggests that:



‘The body is seen as the only area over which’ (some body-modifiers) ‘think they can keep control in an uncontrollable world, or the starting place to demonstrate their superiority in times of hard social competition’.

In expansion, it can be reasoned that the ‘uncontrollable’ affects that Town A’s globalisation and post-industrialism are having upon the Traditionalists are, to a point, ‘controlled’ by the Traditionalists’, psycho-socially, because of the ways in which their bodies denote information about them semiotically, and facilitate their ‘type’ of working class existence, ideologically and practically. Accordingly, in Gym D, when considering the Traditionalists’, I often thought their situation can be summarised through the phrase ‘you can take our mines, but you’ll never take our muscles’. The Traditionalists’ bodies and body-modification is subversive: it is a preserve to ‘their’ past (which they, nostalgically, don’t want to relinquish); and a form of resistance against an unsure future in which they are obsolete.

It is accurately observed by Nayak (2006: 813) that:

‘in an insecure post-industrial society working-class young men must forge new youth transitions. This entails rethinking what it is to be a ‘man’ beyond the world of industrial paid employment’.

It seems that in Town A, Gym D allows men – both young and older – to negotiate what it is to be a ‘man’ in the contemporary epoch; and this negotiation – on this basis of this research – is as much about retaining the past, as negotiating the future. As jokes are shared and weights are pushed in Gym D by the ‘larger than life characters’ who compose a close-knit, benevolent culture, outside Gym D, the world is changing fundamentally; and in a way that represents a social crisis to white, working class males’. Little wonder then that the Traditionalists’ ‘all love Gym D’ and consider it ‘more like home than my own house’. For it, and the behaviours encased in it, acts as a cathartic preserve.



Monaghan (2001: 8), having researched how body-building is used by men in South Wales to 'cope' with the loss of their mining and steel industries, asserted that:

'it is argued that bodybuilding ... provides men ... with an atavistic means of redressing their feelings of powerlessness through the pursuit of culturally valorised mesomorphic image'.

For the reasons argued above, I totally concur that Monaghan's suggestion applies to the Traditionalists' as a typology of life. The Traditionalists' bodies are all they have left of the mining world that forged them. Their artisan masculinities – themselves no longer necessary in a post-industrial world – are contingent upon acceptance in Gym D, and the aesthetic display of artisan, muscular capital.

I now consider how the Drifters' bodies act as semiotic documents in their existences.

We have seen that the Drifters' are seen and treated as 'the other' by mainstream (employed) society, on account of their anti-work ethics', assumed laziness and subsequent lack of cultural capital. This cultural vilification is the basis of the Drifters' symbiotic anomie, inverse alienation and inverse commodity fetishism. It has also been shown that the Drifters' all sport impressive physiques<sup>117</sup>; and that Gym D as an institution and body-modification as a pursuit gives the Drifters' a collective sense of belonging, purpose and solidarity that is, ordinarily, lacking in their lives.

Most of the bodies that are inhabited by Town A's ghettoised, deviant 'underclass' or 'Chav class' are 'extreme': i.e. extremely obese or extremely 'skinny, like a rat'; owing to the lifestyles and diets that Town A's 'ghetto poor' endure. The Drifters' bodies, in contrast, are adorned with the commodity of muscle. I'm emphasising here that the impressive physiques

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<sup>117</sup> Although, it should be noted, that the quality of the Drifters' physiques are impaired by their lack of financial capital, which limits the amount of steroids and growth supplements that the Drifters can acquire and use.



which the Drifters' display act as semiotic documents in their lives, by visually differentiating the Drifters' from others of their unemployed, ghettoised ilk. The Drifters' modified bodies are indicative of the 'hard work' which they have performed in Gym D. In turn, the lazy tag which forms the basis of the Drifters' vilification is challenged, as they drift through their lives, sporting the quintessential insignia of masculinity and physical sacrifice: the currency of muscle. (As put by one of the Changers: 'Perhaps they' (the Drifters) 'are not so lazy and useless ... after all, they are ripped to the bone'). Hence, the Drifters' bodies act as the one source of cultural capital that the Drifters have within their existences. The Drifters' may not be 'proper' men with 'proper jobs' and lives, but, undeniably, the Drifters' do inhabit 'proper' bodies and thus, aesthetically and superficially, 'look the part', as Town A's artisan habitus defined such. Accordingly, while the Drifters' may live stigmatized lives, they do not inhabit stigmatized bodies.

In this sense, the Drifters' use their bodies semiotically in a similar way to how the working class women analysed by Skeggs 'use the shape, styling and design of their bodies to resist or transgress class assumptions that rendered them inferior' (Gill et al, 2005: 40). The Drifters' bodies have 'bought' the Drifters' a level of respect, as men and citizens, in a body-conscious society; in which the Drifters' are otherwise seen as inferior.

In relation to boxing, Woodward (2006:77) proposes that while:

'the working class man who is attracted to boxing may have limited access to any other form of capital he does have a body which he might be able to use to his advantage, even if this is his only capital'.

In a similar way, the Drifters' have used the sport of body-modification to enhance their cultural capital through and upon their bodies semiotically. This allows the Drifters' to project the 'tough' masculine identity they desire, and perhaps need, in their lives; and feel a



level of phenomenological routine, solidarity, self-worth and confidence in their existences by definition of their body-modification, which they would not otherwise encounter.

It is interesting to note that the Drifters' have chosen to inhabit and construct big, mass-defined, 'industrial bodies'; rather than the 'slim', 'toned', 'middleclass' bodies that the Changers' have. This demonstrates how Town A's past habitus and hegemonic aesthetic – as opposed an imported 'global' habitus and hegemonic aesthetic – still defines what a man's body should 'look' like, through the eyes of Town A's ostracised males, who consider 'looking hard' and 'radge' (angry) more important than looking 'respectable', 'fashionable' and 'presentable':

'It is definitely more respectable to look lean and slim, like that is what is seen as presentable, big muscles and stuff are not presentable ... say like if you have a job interview ... it is like having either a friendly dog on a lead or having a vicious, massive dog ... most people would avoid the big dog, like most people will avoid a big lad with muscles and a shaved head cause of what that says ... but to me I want to look hard and radge, I want people to be scared of me ... I think a man should be big and strong, not skinny ... a real man is a big, strong man! ... like their bodies (the Changers) are fashionable like, not as in your face as me, but they look soft to me!'

It should also be noted that the Drifters' bodies help them to bolster their identities as 'Chavs', i.e. as deviant men, locked in deviant cycles, who display hyper masculine displays' that are often defined by pretences of toughness:

'When I hang out with my mates, we don't just think about fighting and stuff – especially like the younger lads just talk about that all the time– but (we also talk about) how someone might look the part, like how tough someone might look ... and if you have muscles, you get more respect around where I live and with who I live with ... if



you turn up looking good, like with the tattoos and stuff but don't have big arms, people are not going to take you as seriously ... or give you as much respect (as a Chav).... as if you turn up massive and stuff, like people look and think, fuck me, he is bigger, he has an aura ... like there was a lad the other day, little skinny lad, one of my mates, trying to scare this big lad who was just walking past with his girlfriend, now this big lad was a nice lad, no edge to him, but he was not going to stand there and take it, so he says, come here you little twat, and me mate shit himself and there was two others with him and they did too, cause this big lad would have fucking kicked him all over the street ... that is what size does ... size is like a warning, I am the top dog, you fuck with me, and I'll kill you ... and I let my body do the same'.

The idea that those who modify their bodies do so in an attempt to overcompensate for a level of self-loathing, or perceived failures and weaknesses in their lives is an undertone that is addressed in Klein's 1993 ethnography of bodybuilding in Southern California. In expansion of this point, during my ethnography, I couldn't help but surmise that the Drifters' essentially compensate, even apologise, for their unemployed positions in society by displaying the bodies they do, and by training in the diligent, excessive ways they do. With every scream and pain filled noise they project while working-out, it is as if the Drifters' go some way in redressing their vilification and exclusion; not just psychologically but also socially. By enhancing their bodies, it is as if the Drifters' go some way in atoning for their vilified positions in society. By not being able to afford steroids, the Drifters' have limited the growth and proportions of their muscles. Ironically, by so doing, the Drifters' bodies – themselves a fusion of the 'cut' that the Changers' bodies display and the power that the Traditionalists' bodies denote – represent a balanced, physiological 'happy-medium'; and thus level of recognition and approval in contemporary culture that is specific to them. This enhances the semiotic, commoditised function of the Drifters' bodies further.



I now consider how the Changers' bodies function in their lives semiotically.

We have seen that the Changers' collectively aim to be embourgeoised, yuppie men. The discrepancy between who and what the Changers' are and who and what the Changers' want to be forms the basis of their anomie. The Changers' attempt to bridge this discrepancy by 'buying' themselves middleclass identity vicariously, through the ownership and consumption of middleclass commodities, and by working in 'office jobs'. Both of which bolster the Changers' middleclass, Yuppie pretences (in spite of the alienation their labour lives and consumption patterns prompt). We have also seen that the Changers' have 'built' middleclass physiques in Gym D, by modifying their bodies to be slim, toned and defined. They have done so by lifting light(er) weights for more reps than their Traditionalist and Drifter counterparts. The Changers' also incorporate a high amount of CV in their gym lives, which they combine with 'toning' exercises (like '21s' bicep curls) and regular low-carb, low fat, high protein dieting, so as 'to be athletic looking', in congruence with the mass media's 'hegemonic aesthetic'. Significantly, the Changers' do not desire physiological mass, and do not use steroids or perform 'building exercises', as their fellow Gym D users typically do.

In the same way that the Changers' buy middleclass commodities, socialise in middleclass leisure spaces and work in middleclass jobs so as to align themselves with a level of 'Yuppie' identity in their existences, the Changers' also substantiate their identities as middleclass, post-industrial citizens through their semiotic bodies. In essence, the Changers' use their bodies to prove to other (typically middleclass) citizens - in their offices, places of leisure etc – that 'we', are also, 'like you': we also have 'office jobs', 'middleclass clothes', accents, education and, further, middleclass bodies: despite 'our roots', we have assimilated into a middleclass lifestyle; and our bodies are further, aesthetic testimony to this. In this way, the Changers' bodies bolster their claims to be like the 'corporate', global men that are glamorised in the mass media, whom they want to emulate. Their middleclass bodies are as



integral to their middleclass identities and claims as any other commodities in and facets of their existences are; as shown below:

I ask: ‘you say you want to be a corporate man, but who is that? What is a corporate man?’

Changer: ‘The corporate man is like an office worker who wears cool clothes, has a fast car and a good haircut and who is ripped in his physique, like someone who knows about the world ... he is not a steroid person with a shitty job ... this sounds proper arrogant but I’ll tell you it for your work ... the other night I was speaking to this girl, and she was fit as fuck (sexy) and I wanted to impress her and so I told her where I work, and that I am a graduate and I showed her my car and I knew she was thinking, wow, this guy is the real deal ... I told her about how I want a wife and to get on the property ladder and to be as good as I can be ... then I took my jacket off and she saw my arms, and I had just pumped them up before I met her (in Gym D) and my veins were really visible, and then I knew she thought, his body is perfect also, he ticks all the boxes ... she knew that I was also a corporate man. But if my body had been shit, then I would have lacked something, like a key physical part of who I want to be, like who I have become.’

The Changers’ toned, slim bodies differentiate them from their working class counterparts, in Gym D and society at large; and go some way in bridging the hiatus between the Changers’ actual and desired realities and identities. The Changers’ bodies are a fundamental part of their ‘cultural clothing’, and affirm their status as ‘modern’, ‘Yuppie’ men, particularly in the ‘global’, ‘fantasy’ spaces they frequent in their leisure lives.

Comparatively, while the Traditionalists’ modify their bodies in an attempt to ‘hold on’ to the industrial, ‘mining habitus’ that ‘made’ them and ‘their’ Town, the Changers’ modify



their bodies so as to denote their trust in and assimilation into a habitus and culture of post-industrialism, social mobility and ‘global’ masculinity. Rather than being a form of social subversion or compensation and atonement – as the Traditionalists’ and Drifters’ bodies and body-modification has been shown to be - the Changers’ bodies are a further form of conformity and uniformity in their live; and an extension of their regulation and adherence to the hegemonic masculinity promoted through society’s mass-media.

I now summarise chapter eleven.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown that my participants’ gym lives are defined by an implicit anomie, which stems from the fact that ‘the human design’ prevents my participants’ from physically ‘looking’ and anatomically ‘lifting’ in the way they would like. Accordingly, the pursuit of the ‘perfect body’ has been shown to be a biological and cultural contradiction; which is necessarily ‘strainful’. There is a direct disjunction between society’s bodily ideals, and the ability of society’s members’ to embody such mediated ideals upon their own bodies.

However, this chapter has argued that body-modification is not *interpreted* as being an anomic phenomenon per se by my participants’ phenomenologically, in spite of the implicit anomie discussed above. This is due to the use of anabolic steroids and/or gym supplements among my sample, which go some way in compensating for their genetic, physiological limitations; and, the ways that my participants’ believe that their body-modification is, comparatively, considerably ‘less anomic’ than other components of their existence, and other leisure pursuits they have found themselves involved in (e.g. golfing). Hence, reflexively and ‘ethno-pharmacologically’, my participants’ have relativised and alleviated the psycho-social anomie and melancholy that their gym lives could potentially represent; and thus interpret their body-modification as being the one part of their lives that is ‘fair’,



meritocratic, and non-exploitative; in a society that is otherwise fundamentally anomic and allegedly ‘bias’ against white, working class males. This chapter, through its analysis of ‘gym anomie’, has therefore affirmed the assertion that:

‘physiological Calvinism is the philosophical tenant of bodybuilding: that is, success as a bodybuilder is partially predetermined through genetics, but good protein, complex carbohydrates, training, can help one realise his or her predetermined potential’ (Klein, 1993: 146).

While working class existence is typically defined by social disjunctions, unfairness, cultural paradoxes and a sense of resignation – largely due to the limited opportunities working class males’ are given, and the way in which contemporary society apparently treats white working class males’ as ‘second class citizens’ – those who use Gym D have found a pursuit that is free from the disjunction they ordinarily endure. Thus, body-modification represents a – perhaps *the* only - cultural act and pursuit that working class males’ are truly in charge and ‘in control’ of. While working class males’ are not in charge of their societal destinies, and their ‘success’ outside of the gym, they are in charge of their physical destinies, and ‘success’ inside the gym.

As well as exploring the notion of anomie in relation to my participants’ body modification, this chapter has also substantiated and explored:

- the direct relationships that exists between gym labour, capitalist labour and Marx’s theory of alienation through labour, and
- The direct relationship that exists between my participants’ ‘commoditised bodies’ and the theory of commodity fetishism.



This chapter has reasoned that the above, direct relationships mean that my participants' body-modification should, 'in theory', be a further source of alienation, fetishism and depression in their lives.

While it has been shown that the 'things' which my participants' buy and own can cause profound commodity fetishisms in their lives (especially for the Changer, the Wannabe, and, inversely the Drifter typologies of life identified in this work), we have seen that the 'commodity bodies' that my participants' inhabit do not cause my participants' fetishisms. Rather, their bodies are essentially 'immune' from fetish. All three of the participant groups' researched here, regardless of the 'sorts' of bodies they inhabit, reflexively view and use their bodies as 'true commodities'; i.e. commodities that enhance and serve, rather than debilitate and subserviate my participants' lives and identities. Simultaneously, while labour - especially post-industrial labour - has been shown to be a highly alienating part of life for many men in my sample, gym labour has been shown to be free from alienation, in spite of gym labour's inherently capitalist nature.

Accordingly, my participants' gym lives are immune from the principles of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. Through body-modification, my participants have found a pursuit that is non-anomic, void of alienation and able to function as a source of 'self confirming essence' in their lives. In turn, by definition of their gym lives, my participants' are able to construct and enjoy genuine (physiological) 'commodities' that do not cause them fetishism, but rather function to inherently improve my participants' existences, and communicate information about my participants' semiotically; as this chapter's summary considers further later. Little wonder then that my participants' are committed to body-modification and revelling in Gym D's culture in the polemically 'excessive' way they are. For Gym D, and the behaviours it facilitates, provides my participants' with a somewhat cathartic experience and pursuit that, unlike any other facet of their lives, is able to redress,



escape and even atone for the anomie, alienation and fetishisms they normally endure. Gym D, as a space, micro-society and activity, therefore allows my participants' to 'act' and 'feel' as they want, and in a way they can't ordinarily in a capitalist society that is intrinsically melancholic. We will return to this notion in this work's conclusion. For now, it is enough to make clear that while the appeal, importance and significance of body-modification has been recognised by others scholars – many of whom have either empathises the culturally induced 'need' and desire to be in shape (Leit et al, 2001), the biological addictions that define body-modification (Shusterman, 1997) or the ability to address ones' psychosocial demons (Klein, 1993) as being the primary reason and motivation for people's gym lives - this work is the first to propose that it is body-modifications' ability to fundamentally refute capitalist culture's intrinsic anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism in the live and minds of its practitioners, and essentially 'sooth' the depression that capitalism creates, that makes the pursuit so popular, especially among working class males' in post-industrial Northumberland, whose chances of psychosocial 'escapism' from their low serotonin lives is normally limited to ritual drunkenness. Gym D, from this perspective, is a somewhat utopian institution. It functions as a refuge and 'haven' where working class lads can 'escape' from the outside world and partake in 'therapeutic' practices that emancipate and shield one from the psychosocial sadness of contemporary existence.

This chapter has also considered how my participants' bodies act as semiotic and metaphoric objects in their existences. We have seen that the aesthetics of the Drifters' bodies both challenge the 'lazy', 'inferior' tags that they, as a typology of life, are branded with, and also affirm and enhance the Drifters' 'Chav', 'hard' masculine identities. Comparatively, the Changers' 'slim', 'cut' and 'toned' bodies bolster their 'Yuppie', embourgeoised identities and pretences. By inhabiting middleclass bodies, as well as jobs, social lives and spending patterns, the Changers' visually affirm themselves as an intermediary working



class/middleclass form of Town A life. Simultaneously, the Traditionalists' bodies act as a form of subversion and resistance in their lives. The Traditionalists' essentially 'hold on' to the mining past and habitus that 'made' them through their body-modification, by aligning their own physiques and aesthetics with those their mining forefathers exhibited. Masculinity, identity and culture have thus been shown to be 'inscribed', relatively, upon and through the Changers', Drifters' and Traditionalists' bodies. My participants' bodies thus signify much about my participants' ideals, identities, senses of 'self' (Giddens, 1991: 54) and social struggles.

While other works 'on' the body have emphasised the importance of 'reading' the modified male body as a cultural metaphor in the general sense – e.g. as a metaphor of social regulation (Foucault, 1975; Turner, 1996), as a metaphor for contemporary culture's male vanity (Bordo, 1999), and as a metaphor for contemporary man's low self esteem and need for attention and recognition (Klein, 1993) - this work has tried to develop and substantiate how my participants' bodies are social metaphors. It has done this by analysing my participants' bodies 'semiotically' and hermeneutically; by which I mean through a micro analysis of my participants' bodies that located and correlated the visuals of my participants' bodies, and the 'metaphoric' values their bodies represent, in relation to my participants' wider social existences, 'cultural conditioning', and reflexive views. By considering my participants' bodies semiotically and cross-comparatively, I believe that I have illustrated the 'deeper *aesthetic* sociological meaning and significance of my participants' bodies and body-modification (as well as the *psychosocial* meaning of my participants' body-modification, in mind of body modification's ability to refute cultural anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism in its participants' lives). I have highlighted that Gym D does not merely house a group of males who attend the gym in a perfunctory, routine way; so as to modify their bodies in line with society's bodily ideals. Rather, I have implied that Gym D's



users are consciously involved in somewhat sacrificial but calculated behaviours and processes that will, over a long period of time, both change the aesthetics of their bodies, and ensure their bodies communicate information to others, and affirm their places and identities in contemporary society. My participants' bodies are seminal to their presentations of the self (Goffman, 1959), and *politics of selfhood in global capitalism* (Harvey-Brown, 2003). Thus, the modified male body should be seen as the quintessential commoditised and communicative vehicle, through which contemporary males' communicate their masculine identities; in a culture and epoch when masculine identity is confused, in flux, in competition and apparently 'in crisis' (Clare, 2001; McDowell, 2003). Particularly in post-industrial localities where the white working class male is, reflexively, no longer dominant, due to the emergence of 'mouthy, stuck up women who don't know their place' and 'immigrants who think they're better than us' challenging their positions.

Chapter eleven acts as this thesis' final Findings and Analysis chapter. Structurally and epistemologically, I am now in a position to conclude this work.



**Section Four:**  
**Conclusions**



## **Chapter 12:**

### **Conclusion**

#### Chapter Overview

Chapter 12 aims to reiterate and thematise the central discussions and findings that have been presented in this work. Chapter 12 considers how this study may be developed in the future; and analyses what this thesis has contributed to the fields of sociology that it is related to. Chapter 12 also predicts what will happen to both the urban and cultural constitution of Town A in and over the next twenty years. I hope my predictions regarding Town A's future will be of particular use to any policy makers reading this thesis – i.e. those with a chance to shape Town A's future directly, through their decisions and distribution of wealth - as well as the social theorists that the rest of this thesis has been written for. I begin chapter 12 with a recapitulation of this thesis' central discussions.

#### A recapitulation of this thesis' central discussions

This thesis has considered the extent to which Marx's theories of alienation and commodity fetishism, and the notion of anomie explains, contextualises and accounts for the culturally induced melancholy that a sample of 42 men who live in or near Town A, and who 'workout' in Gym D phenomenologically experience in and as part of their 'low serotonin' existences (James, 1997). This thesis has also considered the relationship between the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism and my participants' 'gym lives'. This work has considered whether my participants' body-modification extends or alleviates their cultural melancholy, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishisms; and has investigated how my participants' modified bodies relate to their identities and cultural positions semiotically and metaphorically. Ultimately, this work has illustrated how anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism manifest themselves subjectively yet inevitably in the 'lived experiences' (Charlesworth, 2000) of working class males living in post-industrial Northumberland today, irrespective of the 'type' of working class lived experience those males can be stratified into. This work has also drawn attention to the seminal way that the male body, Gym D as an



institution and the sport of body-modification functions in the lives and minds of men living in Town A at the time of writing. By so doing, it has filled epistemological voids in the paradigms of the sociology of the body, the sociology of de-industrialisation, the sociology of Marxism and masculine studies; by giving empirically and phenomenologically rooted accounts of a somewhat forgotten populace and place, and a 'closed' world and community within that.

This thesis' exploration has been framed around Town A's sociological 'evolution', which has seen the Town somewhat reluctantly develop from being a quintessentially industrial empirical context, into being a post-industrial, 'glocal' empirical context. Town A, as chapter one of this work highlights, was once a rigid, homogenous society that was founded, physically, economically and culturally, upon its coalmining industry. Thus, Town A, its social habitus and the 'lived experience' it facilitated its proletarian community closely resembled those which guided life in 'Ashton', as explored by Dennis et al (1956). However, the loss of coalmining in Town A meant that the Town became 'de-industrialised'. Town A and its populace thereby embarked upon the socio-economic processes and changes that were seen and endured in countless other localities and communities globally as macro society became de-industrialised (Martin and Rawthorn, 1986); which is a process that American scholars have succeeded in recognising and accounting for (Linkon and Russo, 2002); even if their English counterparts have not, as acknowledged by Roberts (2007).

This work has suggested that Town A's ongoing evolution into a post-industrial society has coincided, and is anthropologically inherently linked with:

- 1) a didactic, 'global' mass-media system entering Town A and changing the way people in Town A live, think and expect as a result of the mass-media ideologically manipulating and



changing Town A's residents' cultural ideologies'; in line with Gerbner et al's (1986) cultivation theory.

2) The onset of immigration, and the 'rise' of the Town A women; meaning that the once 'other' in Town A – i.e. 'women and foreigners who don't know their places and are above their stations' - have come to challenge the overwhelmingly white, patriarchal, misogynistic and xenophobic cultural constitution that once existed as Town A's 'dominant' culture (and is still preserved in Gym D today).

3) The fact that many residents in Town A have decided or managed to live 'dole dependent' lives, by adjusting their limited aspirations and identities to accommodate a life of relative poverty and income support dependency. Meaning that working class life has become a work-shy, state dependent existence for many in Town A and similar localities today.

I have thereby illustrated how life in Town A is undergoing continual flux and change at the time of writing, due to the 'macro' sociological themes identified above diversifying life, ideology and power in the micro of Town A. In essence, this thesis has considered how different typologies of men in Town A have responded and are responding to changes in 'their' Town; and its habitus'. I have shown how the narrative of 'de-industrialisation' relates to working class life and masculinity in Town A as a specific locus. Russo and Linko (2005:17) are right to assert that: 'working class life and experience is shaped by the complex interactions among class, race, gender, place and other categories'. Here, I've located these complex interactions in detail, with reference to Town A and its bodybuilding community.

This thesis' insights were founded upon and substantiated by the 'data' that I elicited from a sample of 42 body-modifying men who live in or near Town A and who ritually train in Gym D. I researched my sample through a combination of 'flexible but controlled' qualitative interviews, and classic ethnographic research; which took place in Gym D and the other



social spaces that my participants' frequent during their leisure time. Thus, my fieldwork, the qualitative 'grounded' data that it elicited, and the reflexive voices presented in this thesis are products of the phenomenological tradition; by which I mean products of my belief that in order to 'understand' and write about Town A, Gym D and the sociological phenomena investigated here, I had to see those places and phenomena from the perspective of those who are actively involved in and with them daily (my participants). This thesis is a derivative and example of the notion of *verstehende* therefore: my methodological and epistemological onus was always upon understanding how my subjects' view their realities, not upon how I understand their realities as a 'privileged' observer.

Accordingly, a natural fit between sociological theory and sociological method has been displayed in this work. Any methodological approach other than the conversational, phenomenologically-based one taken here - given the complexity and relativity of a person's 'depression', body-modification, labour life, consumption life, sense of social strain and self-interpretation thereof - would simply have lacked the insight and value-free openness that is needed to understand how actors in Town A subjectively understand their social world, and their places in it psycho-socially. For lived experience, social 'action' and the society it takes place within is too complex and relative to reduce and simplify through and to the analogy of numbers (as can be done in the 'natural sciences', due to them being governed by nomothetic, absolute rules that don't exist in 'the social'); as demonstrated in the following Weberian assertion (Weber, 1922: 7):

*(Sociology is) ... the science whose object is to interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which the action proceeds and the effects which it produces. By 'action' in this definition is meant the human behaviour when and to the extent that the agent or agents see it as subjectively meaningful ... the meaning to which we refer may be either (a) the meaning actually intended either by an*



individual agent on a particular historical occasion or by a number of agents on an approximate average in a given set of cases, or (b) the meaning attributed to the agent or agents, as types, in a pure type constructed in the abstract. In neither case is the 'meaning' to be thought of as somehow objectively 'correct' or 'true' by some metaphysical criterion.

Thus, this work has not just adhered to and advocated the promotion of 'the ethnographic case-study method in the hope of helping to fill a void in sports sociology and sports anthropology' (Klein, 1993:7), in mind of the void that body-modification represents in sports anthropology; but also, concurrently, promotes the ethnographic case-study method to fill the void that the notion of the males' 'working class lived experience' and his 'depression' represents to sociologists of masculinity and de-industrialisation.

This work is anti-positivistic in its approach to theory and method; despite 'depression' being in the realm of the 'clinical sciences'. For I believe that 'social facts' – like depression, anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism - are subjective and have to be read and elicited within the qualitative context of a particular group, in a micro, empirical situation; and in mind of the founding thoughts purveyed by Durkheim, Dilthey (who distinguished between the natural, positivistic sciences and the human 'sciences'), and Blumer's symbolic interactionism (1969).

With the above recapitulation and thematisation of this thesis' central discussions in mind, this chapter now reiterates what my research has found out.

#### A reiteration of this work's main findings

This work has found that existence and masculinity in contemporary Town A is variegated and diverse. Simply, there is no such thing as a 'normal' or 'typical' male populace, or lived



experience in contemporary Town A. Equally, there is no such thing as ‘hegemonic masculinity’, or a dominant mode of masculinity in Town A at the time of writing. Instead, it has been found that three contrasting typologies of working class life have co-evolved and now co-exist in Town A and Gym D; all of whom live very different *modes* or *forms* of working class life; as exemplified in the typologies’ different labour lives, consumption patterns, subjective cultural aims and body-modifying objectives and practices. In essence, these three modes of working class life are ‘competing’ to become Town A’s dominant male culture. This competition has been shown to take place upon and through the males’ semiotic physical bodies, as this conclusion considers further.

This work’s findings relating to the tripartite nature of masculinity in Town A is both counterintuitive and affirming: it challenges the common assumption that working class culture is undifferentiated and singular; which is an assumption that is implicit in recent work (Charlesworth, 2000) on working class life; but affirms the notion, which is increasingly implicit in masculine studies, that ‘multiple masculinities’ (Pascoe, 2003) exist in societies. In expansion, this thesis has developed the idea that a society’s multifarious collection of males are, consciously or unconsciously, always involved in a struggle to become ‘hegemonically masculine’ (Connell, 1995), dominant and thus culturally normative and ‘right’ in their locality. This work has drawn attention to the ways that the differing groups’ of males analysed in this work use their bodies not just to denote their identities, but to suggest what sort of masculinity is ‘right’ and ‘proper’.

This work has demonstrated the importance of seeing and analysing the three types of working class males identified in this work as being ‘cultural products’ or exigencies of Town A’s cultural habitus’. We have seen that cultural habitus is defined as the:



‘system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures ... which generate and organize practices and representations’ (for those in society) ‘that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor’.

(Bourdieu, 1977: 72).

Thus, the different ‘deeply internalised master dispositions that generate action’ (Swartz: 101) and collective thought have been transmitted to my participant groups by the culture(s) they exist within, and have become products of. In essence, the three types of working class males’ analysed in this work have been created, ‘made’ and are ‘orchestrated’ by three different sorts of cultural habitus that currently operate and give life in Town A. This finding has wider implications for the notion of habitus, as I now consider.

We know that Town A’s cultural habitus was once homogenous and singular. Accordingly, men in Town A – as products of their Town’s habitus – were homogenous and singular in their ‘regular’ actions, lives, appearances and thoughts to the point of stereotype. However, Town A does not have a singular or even dominant cultural habitus today. There is not one singular form of ‘cultural conditioning’, or ‘system of durable, transposable dispositions’ that men in Town A ‘learn from’ and emulate at the time of writing, as there was in the Town’s mining epoch. Instead, there are at least three types of habitus, which will ‘condition’ men in the locality of Town A today subjectively according to this research; as these men themselves come to ‘reproduce’ and transpose their social conditioning to other men in Town A, in a ‘practical’ and ‘pre-reflexive’ way (Swartz, 1997: 101). This shows two things of importance. Firstly, it shows that a micro culture’s habitus is not static or singular. Rather, it is in



constant flux, and able to exist in multiple forms. Hence, while the Changes', Drifters' and Traditionalist' are all products of *a* habitus in Town A, they are, more accurately, products of one of three different forms of habitus in Town A, which exists alongside other modes of itself in the locality. Secondly, it demonstrates that a micro culture's habitus changes *in response* to society's macro habitus. Thus, it is changes in 'global society's' social order and habitus (Robertson, 1992) – i.e. changes to the way that the mass media 'cultivates' the minds and lives of those in society today at a macro level; changes in the way adverts have influenced consumption and spending patterns globally; changes in the way society's proletariat class must labour today, as a result of the emergence of a macro post-industrial economy – that come to define and govern changes in a micro society's habitus. How men in a micro culture like Town A 'feel', 'learn' and present themselves psychosocially within their lived experiences has less to do with their localities 'unique' cultural conditioning per se (as it did in industrial society), and more to do with how the cultural conditioning of the 'global' filters into their local in the era of 'global', postmodernity. Thus micro life and habitus' – in Town A and elsewhere - rotates around and mirrors the habitus of the macro.

It is accepted that 'globalization is the axial theme of contemporary times' (Giulianotti and Robertson: 108). In expansion, I'm suggesting that globalization is also the axial theme in determining a micro culture's social habitus. As society becomes more transnational, networked and thus governed by a macro culture, society's micro cultures (and the cultural conditioning in such areas) becomes more adherent, sensitive, 'lost' to and replaced by the culture of the macro (Robertson and Scholte, 2007); for there is an increasingly significant interrelation between the global and the local. Accordingly, it is inevitable that Town A and its habitus will, in time, exemplify and extend the culture and cultural habitus of the macro, as clarified through Hannerz's notion of the global ecumene (1992). In turn, masculinity in Town A will be constructed by a macro notion of manliness, rather than a localise one.



Indeed, this has already happened with reference to the Changers'; irrespective of the conscious or unconscious attempts to resist macro culture entering Town A by the Traditionalists' and the Drifters'. The way that changes to society's macro habitus relate to and causes changes in the micro of Town A has thereby been elucidated in this work. By my studying a sample of 42 men who routinely use Gym D, I have been able to show Town A's changing habitus 'in practice'; and highlight how contingent the local habitus of Town A is upon that of macro, global society.

I believe that working class culture and masculinity in contemporary Town A, as it has been presented and understood in this thesis, is best conceptualised as being a sociological spectrum. The Changers' exist at one end of this cultural spectrum; as social constructs of both a post-industrial habitus (as their educational and professional experiences testify), and a media purveyed, didactic 'global' ideology that functions to seduce contemporary working class citizens to accept embourgeoised ideals, and aspire to live 'Yuppie' middleclass lives at the expense of them living 'traditional' working class lives. The Changers', consequently, exist as an intermediary working class/middleclass taxonomy of Town A and Gym D life.

Simultaneously, at the other end of this cultural spectrum are the Drifters'; who are cultural exigencies of both the ease at which working class lads can 'drift' through their lives today while being funded by the state, and a 'Chav' notion of life and masculinity, that has entered the semi-rural of Town A from 'the urban'. The Drifters' represent Town A's 'ghetto poor'; and are treated as a stigmatised, excluded 'other'. They are society's 'true aliens': void of the desire to culturally interpolate; and stuck in deviant amplification spirals.

In the middle of Town A's analogous social spectrum are the Traditionalists'. The Traditionalists are social constructs of Town A's increasingly obsolete 'industrial', 'mining' cultural habitus; which the Traditionalists' uphold and preserve, as best as they can, in Town

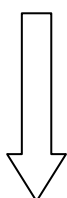


A's current epoch of 'globalisation', de-industrialisation and hence flux. This conclusion will advance to propose that the Traditionalists' will face an Anthropological 'death' in and over the next twenty years, as their cultural 'crisis' intensifies; thereby allowing one of the other typologies of life identified in this work to become Town A's 'dominant' mode of life and masculinity.

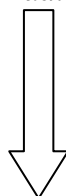
The sociological spectrum discussed above is visualised in the following diagram.

### Contemporary Town A culture as a Sociological Spectrum

*The Drifters'*



*The Traditionalists'*



*The Changers'*



<u>Cultural Features</u>	<u>Cultural Features</u>	<u>Cultural Features</u>
Products of Welfare state/ 'Chav' Masculinity and habitus. Stigmatised and ostracised in Town A; seen and treated as Town A's 'ghetto poor'.	Constructs of Town A's past, now obsolete industrial habitus. Stereotypically 'traditional' in their lifestyles and beliefs. Facing cultural obsolescence.	Embourgeoisied; socially aspiring; 'Yuppie'; middleclass/working class intermediaries. Constructs of a media-purveyed, 'global' habitus.
<u>Labour lives, leisure lives and consumption patterns</u>	<u>Labour lives, leisure lives and consumption patterns</u>	<u>Labour lives, leisure lives and consumption patterns</u>
Anti-work ethics mean their labour lives and consumption lives are limited, and a	Remain committed to performing 'proper graft' (blue collar work); and	Post-industrial 'careers'; typically university educated; socialise in 'fantasy spaces';



further source of their exclusion.	socialising ‘with the lads’. They exercise ‘prudent’ consumption patterns.	aspire to relocate to Jesmond. They attempt to ‘buy’ middleclass’ identity through their commerce.
<u>Body-modification</u> Have modified their bodies to be ‘big’ and ‘strong’. Their bodies are the one source of capital they have in their lives. The Drifters’ bodies go some way in legitimising them and atoning for their lack of interpellation.	<u>Body-modification</u> Use bodies to resist changes to the social order, which renders them obsolete. Their bodies ‘preserve’ their identities as the ‘last of the miners’, by aligning their visual identities with those of their forefathers’.	<u>Body-modification</u> Have modified their bodies to be ‘slim’, and toned; as part of their middleclass appearances and ‘presentations of the self’. The mass media has defined the Changers’ ‘hegemonic aesthetic’.

Whether the tripartite model of working class life, or the typologies of working class life found and described in this thesis are consistent and applicable in other working class milieus, both in the UK and other countries, remains to be seen. Further, whether the ‘types’ of social habitus that operate in contemporary Town A also operate and govern life and masculinity in other micro localities is unclear. I would like to clarify these propositions in the future through further, post-doctoral research into de-industrialised working class life and culture. As stated, I had planned to compare life and masculinity in Town A with life and masculinity in Southern California before writing this thesis. However, the amount of data that I elicited meant making such a comparison in this thesis would have been impossible,



given the word limit imposed upon it. Nonetheless, I may conduct cross-comparative research in the future on these issues, given the (funded) opportunity.

In the same way that there is no such thing as a typical ‘working class lived experience’ in Town A today (for there are at least three forms of working class experience in Town A among a sample of Gym D’s users alone) it has been shown that there is also, logically, no such thing as the ‘typical’ sociological construction of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism in the lives and minds of men existing in Town A today. The diverse nature of the participant group’s labour lives, consumption lives and cultural aims makes it so. Therefore, any discussions relating to how the theories of anomie, alienation, and commodity fetishism manifest themselves in the lives of men in contemporary Town A (with the effect of depressing those men) are only sociologically valid when they are made in specific relation to a *particular form* of Town A/Gym D working class life.

We have seen that the Drifters’ anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism is symbiotic, overlapping; and a derivative of the anti-work ethics that define the Drifters’ lives. The Drifters’ choice to reject work and subsequently ‘live on the state’ means that they are jobless and essentially commodity-less in a society that reveres the consumption of ‘things’, judges individuals on the possessions they own and accepts people upon their capacity and ability to partake in labour. By being jobless and commodity-less in contemporary capitalist culture, the Drifters’ have failed to conform to and interpolate with society’s consumption and labour based ‘reigning goals and standards’ (Merton, 1968: 209). Accordingly, the Drifters’ are ostracised from society on account of their lack of work and consumption lives. This has created an anomie in the Drifters’ lives which stems from the discrepancy between how the Drifters’ are *actually* seen, treated and interpreted by ‘civil’, employed society (who typically see and treat the Drifters’ as culture’s deviant, alien ‘other’) in comparison with how the Drifters’ want to be seen and treated (the Drifters’ want to be treated as ‘legitimate’ citizens,



in spite of their lack of labour and consumption). This also means that the Drifters' suffer from the theories of alienation and commodity fetishism inversely in their existences: ironically, it is not the Drifters' jobs and spending which depresses them - as the theories, themselves written in an industrial society foretold – but precisely the Drifters' lack of jobs and spending that ensures anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism is constructed in their lives. Undoubtedly, the Drifters' 'ghettoisation', which sees them and others of their ilk live their stigmatised lives while residing in spatial areas that are also stigmatised - adds to the Drifters' sense of 'otherness', and bolsters their cycles of deprivation, deviance and exclusion. The Drifters' have chosen their lifestyles and positions in society. The Drifters' consider a life of 'drifting on the state' as being 'a better option' than a 'normal life' of 'working a shite job all week just to get pissed-up at the weekend'.

As part of this conclusion it is worth noting that there are two alternative interpretations of the Drifters' cultural situation to the one presented in this work. Firstly, the Drifters may be *refracting* Town A's cultural evolution. Thus, while Town A evolves to be a 'global' culture, that mirrors and emulates the macro nature, habitus and developments of the wider, 'liquid' (Bauman, 2006) world it is part of, the Drifters – in contrast to the Changers' – deflect the habitus of the 'global' entering the local of Town A. The Drifters, and people 'like them' in working class localities nationally and globally, essentially disrupt the spread of the 'global ecumene' (Hannerz, 1992) into spaces and cultures like Town A. They, therefore, represent a true form of cultural resistance to global capitalism. In their laziness, they will not comply or conform. Hence, they disrupt the ideology of a 'McWorld' (Ritzer, 2000) spreading into the semi-urban, in the seemingly unchallenged, 'consensual' (Burawoy, 1979) way it has in certain urban contexts. Little wonder then, that the Drifters' and people of their ilk are represented and amplified as the 'deviant other' in contemporary society's mass-media; for they represent not just a 'panic' but a massive inconvenience to the social order of global



capitalism. Secondly, it is worth noting that the Drifters' perhaps represent the wisest and in a way the most privileged typology of Gym D life. The Drifters' don't work, but crucially they don't have to. Although the Drifters' are not rich, their positions in society are somewhat bourgeoisie, in that it is 'the workers' who fund the Drifters' (through their taxes), while the Drifters' live (albeit stigmatised and relatively poor) lives of leisure, that are orientated around 'training and chilling'. With these alternative readings of the Drifters' in mind, I now summarise what this thesis has discovered about the Changers' anomie, alienation and commodity fetishisms.

The Changers' collectively desire to be embourgeoised 'Yuppie' beings, who live 'fashionable', media-prescribed lives in one of the urban epicentres of globalisation and fashion, i.e. a 'big city ... like New York or London'. It has been shown that the Changers' sense of anomie is based on the hiatus between who and where the Changers are (the Changers' are merely pseudo-middleclass beings in Town A with mundane, low-paying jobs) and who and where the Changers' want to be. There is an irrevocable hiatus between the Changers' actual realities and desired realities. In contrast to the Drifters' who are forced to practice 'basic' spending patterns, the Changers' practice somewhat lavish spending habits, and display unusual spending philosophies. The Changers' routinely purchase 'middleclass' things and experiences in the belief that doing so will buy them a level of middleclass identity in a sign economy, in which ones' worth and identity can be asserted through the things one owns and where one is seen. The Changers' also ritually consume in the belief that 'spending' will buy them a level of conscious happiness, in their otherwise alienated and anomic existences. However, the Changers' rapacious commodity lives are underpinned by phenomenological unhappiness, and distinctively 'post-modern' commodity fetishisms, which are characterised by addictive-like tendencies, debt and consumption related anxieties. The Changers' work in 'knowledge-based', office jobs. They do so in the belief that their



white-collar 'careers' bolster their middleclass pretences and Yuppie identities, in a way that working in 'manual' jobs would not. The Changers' white collar labour was found to be entirely alienating in the Marxian sense. The Changers' have been shown to be alienated in all of the four ways that Marx's theory specifies the worker will be. Despite the unhappiness that the Changers' jobs bring about, the Changers' will remain in their post-industrial working environments, as their identities as embourgeoised beings are contingent upon them doing so. The depressing consumption patterns that the Changers' display are paradoxically yet inherently linked with their alienating labour: the Changers' 'work to consume', and consume 'to get over' their 'soul destroying' labour experiences. In this way, their lives constitute a cycle of labour-based and consumption-based melancholy.

It is interesting to note that while Drifters' suffer from anomie, alienation and commodity fetishisms inversely in their existences - because they have *not* conformed to society's consumption, labour and socially-mobile based 'reigning goals and standards' (Adaption IV) or ideals - the Changers' anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism is a product of their *conformity* to society's ideals (Adaptation I). The Drifters' are society's 'aliens', and are depressed accordingly. Yet the Changers' are far from society's aliens; rather they are exactly what society has specified they should be. They are exigencies of what happens to working class lads who 'follow the path' that our post-industrial, media-led society promotes. The Changers' work in office jobs, having 'excelled' at school and attended university; yet their jobs are a source of alienation in their lives. They exist as greedy consumers, having been 'made' into consumers by the mass-media that bombards and seduces their minds daily; however, their consumption is a source of depression and anxiety in their lives. Further, the Changers' aspire to be middleclass, in the belief that social mobility is 'right'; and indicative of success and happiness. Yet their attempts to be middleclass cause them a profound anomie; for the Changers' will never be who they currently want to be. In this sense, it seems



that both Adaption (as the case is for the Changers') and maladaptation (as the case is for the Drifters') to society's goals and standards will cause anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism for men in Town A today. Seemingly, working class men are 'depressed if they do' conform and comply with their society's ideals (the Changers'), and 'depressed' – albeit on account of their deviancy rather than conformity – 'if they do not' (the Drifters'). In this way, the deterministic view of cultural depression expounded by the Frankfurt School of sociological thought appears to be as empirically apt in the current age, as it was in its time of formulation.

However, this research's findings relating to the Traditionalists' appear to challenge this rule. The Traditionalists' 'practical' spending patterns – which sees the Traditionalist buy expensive but 'prudent' commodities which financially 'hold their worth' (such as houses and cars) - means that the Traditionalist avoids the direct and inverse commodity fetishism that the Changers' and the Drifters' endure respectively (although the existence of the Wannabe Traditionalists complicates this finding). Simultaneously, a Traditionalists' 'hands on' labour means that he enjoys the *processes* of his work, as well as the actual, tangible, often altruistic *product or service* that his labour amounts to. Traditional, 'proper' labour has also been shown to create solidarity, rather than estrangement, *between* close-knit traditional workers. Traditional labour is thereby conducive to its practitioners' remaining united with their *species being*, in a way post-industrial labour is not. Thus, as a rule, Marx's theories of alienation and commodity fetishism do not apply to the Traditionalists' experiences of labour and consumption. Further, the Traditionalists' are generally content with Town A' as a social structure and their position in it: Town A, as a cultural ecology, is able to satisfy the Traditionalists by fulfilling their 'basic', stereotypically artisan existential aims. The Traditionalists' do not resent Town A, or their 'roles' in it. Rather they are, metaphorically, 'fish in water' in the locality, as they exist, ideologically, as the 'last of the coalminers' in



Town A, albeit in an era when they and Town A's mining habitus is becoming anachronistic. Therefore, the Traditionalists' escape the anomie, or strain that their Gym D counterparts endure. In this way, 'Traditional working' class life has been shown to be less depressing – i.e. less anomic, alienating and prone to commodity fetishism – than the other forms of working class life that this research has identified. The Traditionalists' avoid the alienation that post-industrial, technological work necessarily creates (Blauner, 1964; Chonoy, 1955). They also avoid the commodity fetishisms and sense of social strain that younger cohorts in Gym D endure.

Nonetheless, the variables of immigration, an increasing shortage of suitable 'proper graft' (manual work), the rise of the 'new' Town A woman, and the lack of a political party that is 'willing to stand-up' for 'people like' the Traditionalists have begun to frustrate many of the Traditionalists, and others of their 'old fashioned' ilk. As Town A develops to be an increasingly 'global' (as opposed to 'glocal'), post-industrial (as opposed to industrial) locality, these variables are bound to intensify. For the supposed 'evils' of macro, global capitalism come to govern life in the micro locality of Town A. Therefore, the Traditionalists' will find themselves an increasingly depressed and obsolete form of Town A life in the future, before they experience a sad, inevitable sociological demise, as this chapter goes on to consider.

Although the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism were written in and about a form of capitalism which was considerably less 'advanced' than the form of capitalism investigated here, the theories have proven to be theoretically and empirically relevant in this work. Indeed, the fact that only two existential variables other than those contained in the theories<sup>118</sup> were identified by my participants' when they openly discussed the reflexive causes of their sadness illustrates the extent to which the theories are

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<sup>118</sup> These two variables are Town A's mothers and Grandmothers, and Town A's weather.



‘applicable’ to contemporary Town A life from the phenomenological perspectives of those ‘in’ it. This affirms the relevance of Marxist thought to contemporary sociology. It also illustrates the need for contemporary phenomenological researchers to methodologically ‘probe’ how the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism are experienced and created in the lives of society’s members today, given the subjective ways that the theories apply to people’s existences psychosocially. This work has not just ‘revisited’ (Shoham, 1982) but modernised the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism, and re-emphasised their empirical applicability to post-industrial society. It has suggested that anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism are overlapping phenomena that contribute to and explain society’s low serotonin convolutedly, rather than in isolation of each other.

The problem of depression has been shown in this work here to be a cultural phenomenon that derives from peoples’ everyday experiences in a capitalist society; rather than a ‘problem’ that derives from a mass, neurological imbalance in society. It is our culture’s ‘nurture’, rather than our human nature, which has been used to account for our low serotonin existences here. As a matter of counterpoint, perhaps those who offer solutions to society’s endemic depression – especially those who prescribe medicine to the ‘weeping well’, despite them not knowing the long-term effects of the ‘medicalization of society’ (Conrad, 2007) - would do well to examine and suggest changes in the labour patterns, consumption patterns and cultural aims of their ‘patients’?

In line with its second epistemological aim, this thesis has considered the relationship between my participants’ depression and their body-modification; and has explored whether my participants’ involvement with Gym D extends or alleviates their experiences of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism. In relation to this, it has been argued that my participants’ body-modification refutes and is immune to the anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism that my participants’ ordinarily endure in their lives. Rather than being



an extension of their melancholy, my participants' involvement with Gym D functions to alleviate their conscious misery. Despite the direct relationship that exists *theoretically* between my participants' gym lives and the theories of anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism, *reflexively*, we have seen that my participants' gym labour represents a form of 'self-confirming essence' in their existences; and corresponds to the idealised view of work propagated by Marx. Simultaneously, the muscular 'commodity' bodies that my participants have produced in Gym D through their gym labour have been shown to function as 'true' commodities in my participants' existences: i.e. as existentially advantageous, non-alienable commodities that 'serve' and 'work for' my participants both semiotically (in relation to my participants' subjective 'self presentations') and existentially (by increasing their confidence, helping them to get jobs, respect etc) in a way that commodities rarely do otherwise in a capitalist culture. Further, in spite of the implicit anomie that body-modification withholds, my participants' have found ways to practically overcome their gym strain (through steroid and supplement use), and consciously relativise the amount of anomie their gym lives induce (i.e. by comparing their gym anomie with other, more anomic components of their existences).

While this work has argued that body-modification ameliorates contemporary existence's inherent anomie, alienation and commodity fetishism, Gym D as a space, subcultural diorama (Klein, 1993) and institution has been presented in this work as being a cathartic experience. Gym D, I believe, should be read as a somewhat glorified social club, that preserves masculine solidarity, behaviours and joy for its users in an increasingly emasculated, effeminate, regulated and depressing world. For all three strata of males that use Gym D, the gym offers a unique, therapeutic, 'real' cultural experience that contrasts with the volatile, ever-changing 'outside world', with its rules and falseness. We swagger in the gym, while working on our commodity bodies, safe in the knowledge that the gym allows us to escape



from our daily pressures and stresses. We can rely on other users of the Gym to 'perk us up', with their self-deprecating humour and clever observations of 'the' (macro) 'world out there', while we parade in our (micro) world 'in here'. We exist as a close-knit community, and indulge in 'our' sport; while listening to conversations and indulging in behaviours that are not tolerated outside of Gym D and the few other bastions of manhood that remain 'in this' sedated 'day and age'. By definition of Gym D, we remain men, and preserve our manliness in a private space, among somewhat exclusive peers.

Thus, Gym D - for all of its users - truly is 'a haven in a heartless world'. Gym D's users' are united by the spirit and act of body-modification. They will continue to shout, laugh, inform and gossip, while they stack-up bars, drink protein shakes and do their best to entertain and impress each other, at the expense of those not like us. 'We' are purposefully jocular, immature and machismo in this arena. But below that, there is a love and respect among 'us' users, which plays a fundamental part in our lives, moods and identities psychologically. Gym D is not 'just a gym'; like the sport it contains, it is a sub-cultural, even subversive way of life. I don't believe that enough work produced 'on' bodybuilding has explored and made clear the profound attachment that a gym's users may feel for their sport, gym and gym's community. I hope to have gone somewhat in exploring this relationship here.

Klein (1993: 14-15) points out that:

'in 1979 there was precious little interest in either the study of bodybuilding ... or men. The early 1990s, by contrast ... have made men's studies a fast growing field. This new interest ranges from views of men as warriors without weapons, men without jobs, men in search of missing fathers and in flight from overbearing mothers, to men grappling with issues of sensitivity and manliness ... what all these new views of men have in



common is ‘dissatisfaction’ with the status, and at times, the idea of ‘being a man’ in contemporary society’.

However one wants to see and understand the depression, ‘dissatisfaction’ and confusion that men globally encounter today, apparently by virtue of them being ‘men’, I’m suggesting here that the act of body-modification and the institution of Gym D plays a seminal part for men in the locality of Town A to ‘cope’ with their sadness and ambivalences. While my participants’ may be men ‘without weapons, jobs, fathers etc’, through the refuge of Gym D, my participants’ figure out ‘what manliness’ is today; among a collection of other men who share similar questions, fears and confusions in a post-industrial society in transition. While my participants’ are, in essence, men ‘without’, they are also men ‘with’ weights and ‘gym mates’. Hence, my participants’ both ‘work out’ their daily pressures on and through weightlifting; and find solidarity and direction within the gym’s community. They also construct ‘visual’ masculinities on and through their bodies: those physiological tools that play a much more significant part in their wider lives and identities than other sociological works ‘on’ the body and masculinity have acknowledged and realised.

For, in line with this thesis’ third epistemological aim, this thesis has suggested that the three typologies of working class life identified in this research all use their bodies as distinctive semiotic devices in their existences, and in ways that averts their relative depressions and crises. The Drifters’ allow their bodies to function as commodities in their (otherwise commodity-less) existences. The Drifters’ also use their bodies to challenge, even atone for the ‘lazy-tag’ which debilitates their lives, and affirm their ‘Chav’ identities. The Changers’ inhabit middleclass bodies, that are visually in congruence with the bodily ideals that are defined and purveyed by a ‘global’, media-based hegemonic aesthetic, rather than a localised, artisan one. By the Changers’ ‘owning’ middleclass bodies - as well as middleclass clothes, haircuts, leisure lives, jobs, educations and, increasingly, accents – the Changers’ substantiate



their journeys and identities as embourgeoised, socially mobile, ‘global’ individuals.

Simultaneously, the Traditionalists’ ‘industrial’ bodies denote their loyalty and affiliation to Town A’s mining past, and also function as a form of ‘resistance’ against Town A’s post-industrialism and ‘glocalisation’; which render the Traditionalists’, as a typology of life, obsolete. Hence, the Traditionalists’ bodies help them to negotiate the ‘crisis’ that they face as anachronistic men. Their artisan working class bodies metaphor their artisan ideologies and ideals.

This means that all three of the participant groups identified in this research use their bodies as the ‘bearers of symbolic value’ (Shilling, 1993: 128) in their existences. The typologies’ bodies function as distinctive ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton, 1995) in their lives, semiotically and metaphorically.

‘Social scientists interested in men’s studies have been working and meeting increasingly since the mid-1970s, in an attempt to document the vicissitudes of masculinity. Although the early research tended to assume a single male identity in a heterogenous society such as ours there is no single masculinity, no one view of what a man is ... one way to frame masculinity is to see it as a set of ideas, attitudes and behaviours that may be at odds with each other ... these cultural norms regarding gender are differentially shared by groups ... in society ... Connell terms a society’s dominant notion of manhood as “hegemonic masculinity”, a sense of masculinity that exists alongside others, but because of its “official” position enjoys a greater status’ (Klein, 1993: 16).

As well as showing the vicissitude of masculinity in Town A and Gym D today, at a time when Town A’s hegemonic masculinity is in flux and transition owing to the narratives of de-industrialisation and globalisation changing men, this work has drawn attention to the



different ‘ideas, attitudes and behaviours’ that define and divide the Changer, Traditionalist and Changer taxonomies of life. This thesis has also shown how the modified bodies of the groups play a seminal part in the group’s collective views of themselves; and how the groups’ communicate their identities ‘as men’ to other today. I believe that this work is the first to emphasise how ‘masculinity’ is signified through the body to the extent it has.

It is said that (Klein, 1993:133):

‘bodybuilding often is a site for working out problems cause by ... psychosocial development. “Protest masculinity” (hypermasculine styles, behaviours etc) is the shorthand for addressing many of these issues. Massive physiques talk for you. They broadcast invulnerability and confidence so you don’t have to’

I believe that this is the case for many body-modifiers’. Yet, I also believe – in expansion of this mode of thought – that body-modifiers’ do not simply lift weights to ‘broadcast’ an aura of power; but to also broadcast more subtle signs about themselves and their positions in society. Whether other groups of males’ in localities other than Town A modify and use their bodies in similar ways to those documented here is not clear at the time of writing, but something I’d like to explore ethnographically in the future.

Chapter 12 has now summarised and thematised the central discussions and findings presented in this thesis. This chapter now considers how this research could be ‘developed’ intellectually in the future, and advances to predict what will happen to Town A, culturally and physically, in and over the next twenty years.

### The Development of this study

The process of ‘Expanding the Ethnographic case study’ ... ‘in order to achieve a link between context-specific data and meso- or macro-level generalisations’ (O’Rian, 2007: 613)



is proving to be a popular phenomenon among contemporary sociologists. In line with this trend, I believe that this ethnography would benefit from such expansion and replication, across multiple scales and sites (Burrawoy et al, 2000; Marcus, 1998). This expansion would allow us to consider the extent to which the findings proposed in this thesis are specific to men living in Town A and using Gym D. I would like to compare and contrast if the findings presented in this research are applicable to men existing, consuming, working and modifying their bodies in other localities; i.e. localities that offer very different ‘lived experiences’, ethno-histories and notions of masculinity to Town A. Practically, it would be easy to expand this research within different cultural contexts by asking users of other gyms the same questions that I asked my participants, and by observing users of other gyms in the way that I observed my participants here ‘in the field’. It may also be that I expand this thesis in a more longitudinal way by returning to Town A in the future, so as to repeat this research in light of Town A’s and Gym D’s socio-economic evolution.

I observed a further anthropological phenomenon ‘in the field’ while writing and researching this thesis that I would have liked to explore in this work in more detail, had time and words permitted me to do so. This phenomenon relates to the changing ways that the Changers’ and the Traditionalists’ began to present themselves while training in Gym D, between the time period of the summer of 2009, and January 2010.

It became noticeable that all of the Changers’ began to wear rugby shirts, shorts, socks and tracksuits to train in. They did this despite having no genuine interest in or experience of playing rugby. Their choice to wear rugby attire was, thus, ‘purely an image thing’:

‘Football is a Chavs game. People that play football are chavs, people that watch football are chavs – like drunken louts, and people that wear football shirts, well say no more really ... the worst is on holiday, when they’re there drinking beer and eating fried



breakfasts in football shirts, total fucking scum ... But rugby, well that is a gentleman's game ... at uni (the university of Northumbria) all the lads that played rugby were proper nice guys, from good backgrounds ... people that go to boarding schools are rugby players ... and wear *Canterbury* clothes (an expensive brand of rugby clothing) and stuff ... that is why I reckon we all train and wear rugby stuff now, cause it's an image thing ... I even wear rugby shirts when I'm out in Jesmond on a Saturday night, for that reason'.

During the same time period, many of the Traditionalists' began to either wear mass produced T-shirts and vests that are made by gym clothing specialists (such as *Pit-bull Gym Wear*) and/or gym clothing that is produced by gym supplement companies (such as *Maxi-muscle*). These items typically carry bold, training related statements on them such as 'I may be old, but I'm stronger than you', 'the gym is my playground', 'Big Mo fo', 'supersized' and 'life's too short to be weak'. Ethnographically, it became clear that the Traditionalists' had become increasingly interested in the strongmen competitions that became televised and popularised in mainstream culture during the course of this research. In the same way that the Changers' aligned their 'gym presentations' with the 'middleclass' game of rugby (and thereby allowed the macro connotation of the game and image of rugby to 'speak for them' and their identities in the micro of Gym D), the Traditionalists' wanted to emulate their new found 'strong men' heroes, and align themselves with the identities of strongmen (all of whom wear and are sponsored by the sorts of gym clothing the Traditionalists' are now dawning). Therefore, the Traditionalists' would travel to a specific shop in Newcastle city to purchase these items, so as to look and dress like TV's 'proper strong bastards' who 'can pull aeroplanes and trucks and stuff'.

The above examples emphasise how images and fashions from the 'macro', televised world 'out there' are replicated and emulated by men in the micro of Gym D and Town A. It may be



that I develop this analysis, of the aesthetics of my participants' in Gym D and their relationship to the outer world, through further research.

Now that this conclusion has said something about the possibilities of expanding and replicating this research in the future, I consider what I believe will happen to Town A, culturally and physically, over the next decade.

### The future of Town A?

In 1988, Dennison and Edwards' (:113) predicted that two contrasting scenarios would occur in Tyneside and its neighbouring Towns as a consequence of its de-industrialisation:

'In the first, Tyneside manages to establish a technologically based economy ... in the second, the economy stagnates through failure to adapt to changing circumstances ... unemployment continues to grow, particularly among the unskilled and under-qualified; those with marketable skills migrate; and reliance on welfare becomes a predominant mode of existence'.

Both of Dennison and Edwards' forecasts have come to fruition. Tyneside has established a post-industrial economy, as the 'careers' of the Changers testify to. Undoubtedly, the reputation and function of post 1992 Universities in the region have contributed to this, by serving to train residents to become able to partake in the region's growing number of IT and service based jobs. Simultaneously, unemployment continues to define segments of the North East as a region, as the lives of the Drifters', and countless other 'Chav' existences 'up here' illustrate. Yet, this is not the whole story: further to these two situations simultaneously being realised, Tyneside as a region and Town A as a locality has also seen its 'traditional' culture experience a 'crisis'. Hence, the 'traditional' working class man in the North-East of England finds himself existing as an anachronism today in a de-industrialised, mutli-cultural,



politically correct world, in which the industry and industrial habitus that 'made' him has disappeared (or is at best maligned and rendered obsolete).

Gorz was wrong to say 'farewell' to what has been referred to in this work as 'traditional' working class culture in his 1982 publication. For working class culture survived long after Gorz's publication rendered it extinct. This is especially true of masculine working class life in the North-East of England, where the 'Geordie plater' (and miner, shipbuilder etc) 'being the epitome of the class to which Gorz is bidding an explicit farewell and an implicit 'good riddance' (Byrne, 1985: 75) in his work existed, both ideologically and professionally (even if he did not flourish) long after the loss of 'his' industry. However, we are now at a time when we are saying a goodbye to working class culture: Gorz's farewell was premature, but ultimately right.

The loss of Town A's 'traditional' working class culture means that a new, 'dominant' culture *must* come to fruition in Town A; and become Town A's 'normalised', or 'real' (Dudley, 1994) culture. This is a fact of sociological evolution. Culture is not static; it is organic and always evolving. In the same way that a post-industrial economy has come to replace the industrial economy that once existed in Town A, a new form of (not necessarily masculine) culture must also replace the 'traditional', industrial masculine culture that was once dominant in Town A, but is now sociologically obsolete. For as both the human and zoological sciences have shown us consistently, an ecology can only have one dominant 'species' or culture at the top of its hierarchy, regardless of how many different species or cultures that hierarchy may consist of.

Hence, while the loss of Town A's industry - coupled with the onset of the ideology of globalisation entering the North East region - represents not just a 'crisis' (Clare, 2001; McDowell, 2003) to but the demise of 'traditional' working class life in Town A at the time



of writing, it offers an opportunity for either unemployed or pseudo-middleclass men in Town A to impose their ideals upon Town A; and essentially 'make' Town A theirs, both culturally and physically as I'll come to. The emergence of a new dominant, or hegemonic form of masculinity in Town A and comparable areas is thus imminent, and currently in negotiation. As we've seen, the bodies of men in Town A will act as semiotic tools in this battle: men will demonstrate their ideologies and identities within this cultural 'battle' upon and through their bodies.

In this sense, Town A's 'Chav' and 'socially mobile' residents are currently - consciously or unconsciously - involved in what Dudley (1994: 316) refers to as a 'cultural struggle for the real'; i.e. a struggle which sees two very different masculine cultures in the same Town try and impose 'a particular conception of how things are and how men are therefore obliged to act' (Dudley, 1994: 316) upon and in Town A's collective culture. The future of Town A is contingent upon who 'wins' this cultural struggle.

Inevitably, there will be some 'proper', 'hands on', 'traditional' jobs for males to perform (such as plumbing, building etc) in Town A in the future, in spite of Town A's continued transition into a post-industrial locality. Yet these jobs, while necessary, are and will become increasingly unfashionable and sparse; especially now that 'others' (i.e. 'foreigners' or 'immigrants') are willing and able to perform such labour, for less rewards. Thus, the amount of 'proper' work in the region will not be able to sustain 'traditional' working class culture and masculinity; as the region's heavy industry once did. Accordingly, most of the 'new generation' of men in Town A will, in and over the next twenty years, find themselves either:

A) aspiring to work in 'office jobs', having attended local, post 1992 universities; and thereby integrate into the region's burgeoning knowledge economy, or,



B) living a life that is defined by apathy and laziness, which is ‘funded by the state’; and constitutive of a deviant, ‘Chav’ lifestyle and model of masculinity.

For these are the two options that Town A’s men are and will essentially be faced with, assuming they do not ‘make it’ in sport, win the lottery, or find another, unconventional path away from Town A and the lived experiences it offers. Significantly, Town A’s men will generally not want to ‘piss about’ trying to get ‘manual jobs’, which are both hard to acquire and unfashionable in contemporary Town A. Let us now take this sentiment further, and consider how Town A’s cultural future and ‘struggle for the real’ will reflect and determine its physical, urban future.

Chapter 4 made clear that a direct relationship exists between the separate *spaces* or neighbourhoods of Town A, and the contrasting *cultures* of Town A. Different working class societies, or modes of working class life, exist in the different enclaves and spatial segregations that constitute Town A as a physical entity. Town A’s spatial divides enables the ‘Changers’, ‘Drifters’ and ‘Traditionalists’, and the forms of culture they are products and representative of, to exist and evolve. This relationship is exemplified most strikingly by area 4 of Town A (being Town A’s ghetto) in light of the vilified, deviant, ‘excluded’ form of working class life that exists in it; and by the ‘posh’, ‘new’, somewhat ‘suburban’ houses of area eight. Which have come to house an army of ‘respectable’ members of Town A; many of whom commute from the area daily so as to partake in ‘knowledge’ jobs in nearby areas. Hence, this thesis agrees with the comments of Marcuse (1993: 361), who proposes that:

‘neighbourhood has become more than a source of security, the base of a supportive network, as it has long been; it has become a source of identity, a definition of who a person is and where he or she belongs in society’.



The relationship between neighbourhood, culture and personhood will continue to develop in Town A over the next twenty years. Accordingly, in the future, Town A will physically evolve to reflect, 'suit' and enable its dominant culture. Hence, Town A will, over the next twenty years, physically evolve to be either:

1) a 'slum' that houses a mass, unemployed 'ghetto poor' which will resemble, in all but the race of those who live in it, the 'projects' that have been constructed in the USA (assuming that people of the Drifters' ilk win Town A's cultural struggle for the real); or

2) a commuter town, where – if the Changers and people of their habitus come to win Town A's struggle - post-industrial workers will reside in modern, gentrified housing. I now discuss the implications of these two scenarios occurring; and also hope to make clear how a ghetto and a series of privately owned houses will not be able to live 'side by side'.

#### Town A as a ghetto?

If new generations of Town A residents *consensually decide* to 'drift' through their lives as the Drifters do now, or when residents in Town A are *forced* to drift, or survive on benefits, due to a lack of labour for them to partake in, then Town A will inevitably develop into a large-scale ghetto, that houses a mass unemployed demographic who have failed to assimilate into a post-industrial economy; and who rely on state-benefit to finance their marginalised lives. In such a scenario, Town A's ghetto life and community will not be spatially limited to area four, as it is now. Instead, most areas of the town will become an extension of area four. The working class slums of the future will not house 'a sort of industrial reserve army which is particularly suited to the needs of a post-Fordist system of production' (Byrne, 1995: 95), as they did during the post war period. Rather, they will house a 'truly disadvantaged' (Wilson, 1987), truly excluded 'Chav' mass; who will, as a result of their lack of education and lack of cultural capital, be unable to partake in post-industrial labour, even if they have



the inclination to do so. Town A's populace will thus come to be rejected, forgotten, stigmatised and hopeless. The delinquency, deviant cycles and ritual apathy that is currently associated with area four will worsen, and spread throughout town A; which will hold a mass, 'very real underclass' (Robinson and Gregson, 1992) that will be culturally and spatially segregated from 'civil society' in their private (residential) and public (leisure-based) spheres of existence. 'Chavness' will come to represent in British working class society what 'blackness' does to America's underclass (Wilson, 1992); and it is from Town A and similar de-industrialised areas that 'Chavness' will be negotiated, experienced and amplified. Town A's 'ghettoisation' will be a synonym for its 'abandonment'. Like other spaces in the North of England, Town A will develop into a stigmatised anachronism; which houses an abandoned, delinquent culture. This process will ensure that the North's towns, as well as cities', die 'a slow death' in a sociological sense:

'Plainly we have something like an urban crisis on our hands ... in the industrial north of England we seem to be experiencing what Power and Mumford have described as *The Slow Death of the Great Cities* (1999) ... Power and Mumford's examination of tendencies in large parts of Newcastle and Manchester ... which make up the 'traditional white working class' of the industrial North of England, demonstrates that if things go on as they are, these areas may be abandoned' (Byrne, 2001: 194).

If Town A does develop into a ghetto, then Town A's hospital will be its sole 'pull factor'; i.e. the only reason or incentive for individuals from outside of the town to visit the space. Inevitably, embourgeoised individuals (e.g. the Changers' and future generations 'like' them) will leave Town A so as to get on with their lives, from more 'pleasant' and less stigmatised areas; where housing and schools are of a better standard. It may also be that the 'problem families' which inhabit other 'problem areas' in the region will be re-located to Town A in the future. In the words of one of my participants when I discussed this idea with him: 'all the



scum will live and rot and pinch together, off each other'; as the region becomes more segregated, both culturally and physically.

### Town A as a commuter Town?

If Town A's 'cultural struggle for the real' ends up being 'won' by the Changers – that is, if being, thinking, working, consuming and 'living' as the Changers' do now (rather than how the Drifters' do) becomes the town's cultural norm - then Town A will come to function as a 'commuter town'. By which I mean that Town A will house an army of post-industrial workers who will most likely commute to Newcastle on a daily basis.

In such a scenario, Town A's physical culture will undergo radical regeneration. The need for respectable, spacious and modern housing that commuters living in Town A will raise means that areas one and two will be 'regenerated' to look and function as area eight does now: new, homogenised detached and semi-detached houses will be constructed. Area four of Town A's will also be regenerated. Meaning that an exodus of Town A's ghettoised, unemployable demographic will occur, as part of an urban and cultural 'gentrification' (Slater, 2009) or upgrading in Town A. Presumably, those who currently occupy Town A's ghetto will be re-housed in a comparable way to how those who were living in the Montrose Garden area of Morpeth – a 'mini ghetto' – were re-housed in 2003, following the policies implemented by Northumberland County Council; and the Aboriginal population were 'moved on' as part of the gentrification of a suburb in Sydney (Shaw, 2007). Town A's commercial centre will also be globalised: 'local' shops will be ousted for national and multi-national chains. Hence, Town A will be a locus that is 'on the up'. It will sell and deliver the dream of post-industrial, McDonaldised 'loft living'; and act as a base for an army of post-industrial workers who will have fully succeeded in swapping the mines, coal and picks that structured Town A in its industrial era for the offices, IT systems and conformity that defines



post-modern labour. This mass postmodern proletariat will be totally alienated through their labour and consumption lives, and at the mercy of the hegemony they are exposed to. They will be a completely controlled and sedated proletarian class: without any wider purpose in their lives, other than conformity, consumption and the eagerness to 'fit in' to a mediated model of 'respectable' life and lifestyle.

One must not underestimate the role that education will play in shaping the future of Town A. In and over the next twenty years, whether new generations of Town A's citizens end up either:

- 1) drifting through their lives while claiming income support (consensually or otherwise),
- 2) surviving by performing the sparse but sought-after manual work that will be available or
- 3) assimilating into the region's emerging knowledge economy, and existing as an embourgeoised working class/middleclass intermediary

depends, largely, on the education they receive. Hence, the physical and cultural evolution of Town A is contingent upon the education levels that residents in the locality will receive, as I now consider.

If a working class male in Town A leaves school at sixteen and completes a course that allows him to be a 'proper tradesman' (i.e. a plumber, tiller, electrician, labourer etc) at a technological college or through a 'practical' apprenticeship that focuses upon teaching job-specific, vocational skills, and if that individual then manages to find 'hands-on' employment within the limited amount of manual work in the area, then that individuals will manage to continue to live a post-modern form of 'Traditional' Town A life discussed in this work: he will be able to culturally and professionally 'find his place' in Town A and similar areas; and perform the 'proper' graft that needs doing. According to this research, this individual will



not be as alienated through his labour as his post-industrial working counterpart; yet, this research implies that such an individual may be perceived of as having a 'lower human worth' than his office-working neighbour; as the case currently is in area seven of Town A, where those who 'work with their hands' are looked down upon by office workers.

If, however, a working class male in Town A leaves school and either fails to learn a trade, or is unable to find steady employment in the trade they have learned, then he/she will almost certainly end up 'drifting', and thereby become unemployable, apathetic, 'ghettoised' and totally reliant upon state-provided benefits for his survival.

Alternatively, if working class males in Town A leave school and go on to attend a local University, and, accordingly, if that individual embarks upon a 'vocational', 'practical' course that teaches IT and business literacy, then that that individual, on the evidence of this thesis, will become 'embourgeoised'; and enter the post-industrial, office based environment. This is for two reasons. Firstly at University, working class lads and lasses are 'trained' to perform and conform in the white collar environment by definition of the skills they are taught. Secondly, in the University environment and the other spaces where student culture manifests itself, the working class student meets 'posh southerners' with BBC accents and tales of gap-years; sees fashions, technologies and stylistic statements that would otherwise be alien to him; and realises that there is a way of life other than that contained in Town A. Working class students therefore 'learn' and are able to be socially mobile in higher education by definition of their social experiences, as much as their educational ones.

*Labour's* well-documented policies to educate 50% of the UK's population to degree standard and encourage more working class people to embark upon degree courses have to be seen from a new perspective in light of this finding. For the policies do not just represent a continuation of the way that education has been used as a means to socially control society's



mass proletariat<sup>119</sup>; it also represents a policy that can, potentially, prevent the ‘ghettoisation’ of Town A, and other de-industrialised Towns in the future. By ‘educating’ working class citizens to be focused upon their careers, consumption patterns, and the emulation of media-produced lives, the policy prevents working class citizens from partaking in a life of ‘drifting’, state-dependency and deviance. In this sense, the emergence of several ‘new’, post 1992 universities, and the growing social pressures and initiatives that encourage working class people to attend universities, can be seen as the latest version of ‘the hidden curriculum’ (Jackson, 1968).

Regardless of how Town A evolves, what is undisputable is that in the future, working class life in Town A will be defined either by *exploitation* (Town A’s residents will be exploited by the post-industrial, often national or multi-national organisations they work for and at the mercy of the trends and conventions of the mass-media they follow) or *exclusion* (if Town A becomes ghettoised, its residents will be excluded from ‘civil society’). Town A’s exploited or excluded residents will exist at the bottom or near the bottom of the increasingly ‘Brazilianized model’ of society (Therborn, 1985) that is emerging in the ‘developed’, global capitalist world; i.e. ‘a social system ... headed by a super, and super exploitative, rich with a ‘squeezed middle’ of relatively but not absolutely secure workers and a large and immiserated poor’ (Byrne, 1995: 64). Hence, while the modes and means of production in a post-industrial working class society differ from those that existed in industrial, working class society, it is significant that the same themes - of exclusion, exploitation and depression – will continue to resonate in the lives and minds of the proletariat, and their phenomenological

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<sup>119</sup> ‘From the mid-nineteenth century onwards the power of the state was used to create the structures which provided the bourgeois definition of education and to discredit and destroy alternatives’ ... education thus functioned as ‘the processes through which the hearts and the minds of the working class were “captured” by bourgeois ideology; through which the class were incorporated’ (Corrigan and Firth: 234). It is being argued here that Universities, both ‘modern’ and ‘redbrick’, function in a similar way today, for proletariat members of a post-industrial society.



working class experiences. At least they have the gym to visit, as a means of psychosocial escapism and catharsis.



## Section Five: Appendix



## Appendix A:

### Qualitative Interview Template

The following is a template of the questions that I asked my participants'. The questions acted as a basis for our interview discourses. They provided a structure that guided our conversations; and made it possible for me to elicit all of the appropriate and valid 'second hand' phenomenological information, or episteme, that I needed to support my thesis:

#### (General questions to elicit the ethno-histories/autobiographies of my participants)

\* Age? \* Family? \* Where do you live? \* Who else lives in your house/with you?  
\* Do you own the house/rent it/a room in it etc? \* Education? \* Job?/What have you done in the past professionally? \* How have you got to this stage in your life; what is your story? \* Future Plans? \* What are your hopes, dreams and aspirations?

#### (Questions on my participants' 'depression')

\* How do you personally define 'depression'? \* What is the difference, if there is a difference, between depression and unhappiness? \* Are you depressed/unhappy? Who is/who else is? Why? \* What makes you feel depressed and unhappy? \* What sources of your existence, or life, has caused you to be depressed/unhappy in the past?

#### (Questions on the relationship between my participants' depression and the four aspects of 'alienation through labour')

\* When you work, what is the 'product' or 'service' that your work produces? (E.g. if you make baths, then the product of your work is the completed bath. If you work in a call-centre, giving people information; then the information you provide is your service). \* Do you personally feel separated from the product or service that your labour makes or delivers when



you have completed making that product, or delivering that service? \* Are you involved in your work; your everyday labour and the acts and processes that your work requires of you? Or are you uninvolved in your working life? \* Do you feel ‘forced’ to work, meaning that your work, instead of being rewarding, is merely a ‘means to satisfy other needs’ and something that would be ‘avoided like the plague’, if it could be? \* Are you alienated, or depressed by, the people you work with? What about other people in your life: do they depress you; and do you feel separated from them, for example, your families, your friends, ‘Joe Public’? \* Do you feel separated from your species being – by which I mean your ‘soul’ - because of your job; i.e. does your work stop you being all you could be within your existence? \* So, how does your work/job relate to your depression in general? Does it make you more depressed, or less depressed/does it make your life/existence more or less depressing? Do you have a spirit or a soul; something inside of you – an ‘essence’? If so, does your work stifle and frustrate it? Does your life stifle it in general? How does your job relate to your identity?

(Questions on the relationship between my participants’ depression and their commodity fetishism)

\* (After explaining the concept of what a commodity is) which items, or ‘things’, are the ‘commodities’ in your life? \* How do commodities relate to your life and your existence: do they improve your life? Or make your life worse? \* What about your acquisition of commodities? What do you have to do to acquire, or get, the commodities you own (i.e. work to buy them)? Is it worth it? Or does this process depress you/make you unhappy? Are you a slave to your commodities? \* What about money? How does the commodity of money relate to your life? \* And your happiness? \* Do you have enough money? Are you a slave to money? Would you like more money? Do you do things in your life to make up for your lack



of money (alluding to a discussion on strain theory and the idea of anomie)? If you won millions on the lottery, how would your life change in terms of what you would buy and how you would live and spend? How does what people buy relate to their identities?

(Questions on the relationship between my participants' anomie and their depression)

\* What are your goals in life? What do you hope to achieve on this earth? Do you feel you can achieve these goals, and fulfil your ambitions? \* Have you achieved any goals in the past? How does it make you feel when you achieve goals? How does it make you feel when you don't? Does it depress you? Do you feel like you have been prepared by your society and its institutions (i.e. by your schooling, by your family members etc) to fulfil your goals? What is the meaning of your life in general? Is it important to have meaning? How does your sense of meaning, or lack of meaning, relate to how you feel in your life?

(General questions on my participants' body-modification and conceptions of masculinity):

\* When did you start training? Why? How often and when do you train now? Why do you train now? Why do you train in Gym D, as opposed to the other gyms in the Town, or in near-by areas? How do you train; what is your gym routine? How do you want your body to look? Why? Has the media shaped your image of 'the perfect body'; or have other influences? What does your body say to others about you and your identity? Do you train so that your body can 'speak' to others for and about you? What is a 'real man'? Are you a 'real man'? How does a real man look? What does a real man do for a living; what does a real man buy?



(Questions on the relationship between my participants' gym use and their depression):

- \* How does your gym use relate to your life? Does it make you, your body and your mind 'better' and happier? Or worse, and more depressed/unhappier than you would be without it?
- \* Are there any aspects of your gym life that make you particularly happy or unhappy? How do you feel about the body you are in? How do you feel about the changes to your body that your training has made? Do you enjoy your body, and the shape of your body?

(Questions on my participants gym use and their anomie):

- \* Does training give you a sense of meaning in your life? How does your training relate to your wider life and plans? Do you have targets and aims that relate specifically to your gym use? What are they? Do you think you are able to reach these goals and targets? If so, why is reaching these targets different to reaching your targets outside of the gym? How do you feel when you reach or fail to reach a gym target?

(Questions on my participants gym use and their commodity lives):

- \* Do you use commodities on your body to enhance it (e.g. steroids, supplements such as protein shakes, L Glutamine, Creatine, ZAMA etc?) How do these supplements make you feel: happier or sadder? Is your body a commodity; are your muscles like having a fast car, or a big house/is your body a status symbol? \* How does your body relate to your life? Does it improve it? \* What about having to train to keep your body or improve it? How does that need to train relate to your life? Do you feel trapped and obliged to train? Why/why not?

(Questions on my participants gym use and their (alienated?) labour):

So, do you feel separated or alienated from your body (the 'product' of training)? Or does your body being like that (i.e. modified) make you feel more involved with and in it than you



would if you didn't train? \* Do you enjoy the process of training/working out: getting a pump, lifting iron etc (your gym labour)? Does it function as a 'self-confirming essence' in your life? Or does it feel forced? If so, why do you continue to do it instead of 'avoiding it like the plague'? How do you feel about the people you train with, and the other people that use the gym? What about people that work out in general? Do you relate to people in the gym in a different way than people outside the gym: are you closer to them? Why?/Why not?



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