

Guilt, Women, and Exercise

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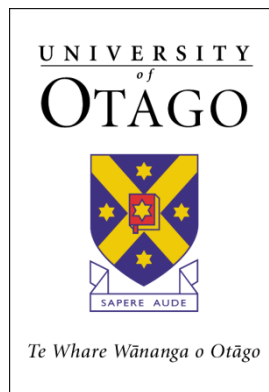
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GUILT, WOMEN, AND EXERCISE

by

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Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Otago, Dunedin

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore exercise-related guilt experienced by mid-age women. While guilt occupies a prominent place in women's narratives about exercise, it has been largely overlooked in sociocultural research on health, fitness, and related discourses. I argue that guilt plays a significant—and often negative—role in women's experiences of exercise (e.g., anticipation, performance, and retrospection), often manifesting in anxiety, internalised self-critical surveillance, and even depression. Mid-age women are targets of gendered societal messages and discourses celebrating and moralising an idealised fit feminine body. I draw on the concept of 'the imperative pathway' to show how discourses around women's exercise, health, and bodies create an impasse that is fraught with guilt feelings: complex social forces impose a nexus of responsibilities that reduce available time and resources, while an aging body imposes physical limitations and changes. As a self-conscious emotion (e.g., not directly observable), guilt is a difficult construct to engage with empirically and ethically. I adopt a heuristic and pragmatic approach reflecting a poststructural ethos that recognizes individuals' fluid subjectivities. Through reflexive online and offline observations, conversations, and interrogations, I interacted with women, listened to their voices, and the voices surrounding them. In my analysis of these voices, I draw on theorists from a range of disciplines, taking inspiration from Marcel Mauss who advocates including bio-psycho-social aspects in human scrutiny. My aim has been the creation of a rich, holistic picture of how guilt (defined by women themselves) interacts with socially constructed notions of exercise, and how it operates within mid-age women's exercise realities. I also provide a space for their voices as they

navigate challenging tensions of responsibility, power, and desire. In pursuit of these aims I ask questions such as: what do women deem to be their sources of exercise-related guilt? How does their guilt manifest? How do they manage it? How does it operate in their lives? I suggest that women's exercise-related guilt is often induced by the well-meaning, blamed on the less culpable, and discomfiting for more than the obviously vulnerable; it inhibits many of the intended positive outcomes of the inducers, and drives a self-perpetuating bio-psycho-social cycle of self-incrimination. I strive to offer women alternative, and more critical, ways of thinking about guilt relative to exercise. I hope to provide women with the opportunity to share similar experiences, and thus help alleviate negative responses to feelings of exercise-related guilt. Finally, I trust my analysis can offer ideas for more holistic, empathetic, and critically informed communication to women that are sensitive to the potentially emotionally damaging effects of perpetuating norms relative to their bodies and social expectations.

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I would dearly love to honour each of my participants, by name, in this public space in recognition of their profound impact on my intellectual journey. Ethical considerations and my own high regard for their privacy prevent this. I do, however, take this opportunity to thank them as a group. They generously shared their insights with me throughout this research, and without them, this thesis would not exist. For each of you, I am deeply grateful.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I explore the concept of guilt relative to exercise as experienced by mid-age women. In particular, I explore their sources of exercise-related guilt, the ways in which their guilt manifests, and the ways in which they manage their guilt. Ultimately, I work toward a rich holistic picture of how exercise-related guilt operates in women's lives, drawing on a multiplicity of women's voices, including my own. As a mid-age¹ woman whose exercise identity has experienced disruptions, I have a keen interest in—and empathy for—the insights of women whose experiences and understandings of exercise have been largely shaped by Western fitness and exercise discourses. My contribution to the body of knowledge lies in suggestions for a more ethical approach to the dissemination of health and fitness information, in my empathetic insights into the psychosocial impact of exercise-related guilt, and in my interpretations of the complex operations of women's exercise-related guilt.

Guilt, women, and exercise

You do not have to look far to find articulations of guilt in daily life. Online and offline, expressions of guilt crop up in myriad contexts and conversations. Confessions and expressions of guilt feelings flow cognate with a vast range of objects, events, people, and other emotions. Publications abound seeking to comfort, commiserate with, and cajole the

¹ My view of assigning a label of 'mid-age' does not ignore the subjective nature of such a concept, but I have focused mainly on women between the ages of 35 and 65.

guilt sufferer: *Escaping Toxic Guilt* (Carrell, 2008), *Goodbye to Guilt* (Jampolsky, 1985), *Graduating from Guilt* (Eckert, 2010), to name only three. Over the past few years, I have recorded quotations gleaned from personal encounters, online discussions, social media discourse, advertising messages, magazine and newspaper articles, and academic literature in which ‘feeling guilty’ is the topic.² The following examples are just a few of the guilt-related discursive events I encountered: people have suffered from ‘alcohol guilt’, ‘food guilt’, and ‘post holiday guilt’; have ‘gone on a guilt trip’, have been ‘guilt tripped’ and ‘put on a guilt trip’; have enjoyed ‘guilt-free me time’, ‘guilt-free eating’, and ‘guilt-free TV-watching’; have purchased ‘guilt flowers’, ‘guilt cake’, and ‘guiltaccinos’³; and have admitted feeling both ‘exercise guilt’ and ‘not-exercising guilt’. These last two, exercise-related, guilt references are at the heart of my research.

When you consider the popular definition of *guilty*—“having committed an offense, crime, violation, or wrong, especially against moral or penal law”⁴—it is difficult to reconcile such an indictment with the ‘misdemeanours’ frequently cited by women when discussing exercise. But the following examples suggest that the seemingly incongruous use of the term guilt is not without meaning: these women posted on Twitter: “Trying not to feel guilt for ditching the fam and taking 30 min exercise mom timeout”; “Having blissful morning & avoiding non-exercise guilt”; and, “But that’s the whole point of exercise!! So you can eat cake without the guilt!”

² All quotations are from publicly available (i.e., published) sources, such as twitter.com, facebook.com, urbandictionary.com, blogs as noted, and newspapers. Urban Dictionary is a user-generated online dictionary of slang words and phrases, and thus can be considered a dynamic reflection of some aspects of popular culture and subcultures.

³ “Fair trade coffee, ordered either as a result of self-inflicted guilt, or pressure from more socially conscious peers.” (urbandictionary.com)

⁴ Collins English Dictionary, Complete & Unabridged, 10th Ed. (2014)

This woman blogged about her feelings of guilt in anticipation of *hypothetically* exercising:

Am I the only one to suffer from exercise guilt? Now, it's not what you think - that I feel guilty because I haven't been out for a run, or to the gym. That would be too normal! I feel guilty when I am going to do some exercise, especially in the school holidays. It's mum guilt. My kids are teenagers now (so it's ok to leave them while I go to the gym! I'm not that bad a mother!!) - but still there is some part of me that feels like I should be there at home doing things with them...I know, I am an idiot!...I need to let go of the guilt and get my butt to the gym!! (Kimberly)⁵

Another woman shared her feelings of guilt about not exercising, and then the positive emotions following her 'successful', determined efforts to exercise:

I'll probably be a little sore tomorrow from today's overdue workout / walk / exercise, but I welcome that instead of the way my body felt when I did nothing for a week! And that guilt one feels when not doing these things—we're actually our own worst enemies! I finally made myself stop the excuses, wipe off the guilt trip, and walk to the gym—oh how much better I feel! (conniesgirl)⁶

As I read these, and many similar, expressions of guilt, I wonder exactly what sort of 'transgression' these women feel they have committed? In what way could their actions be construed as 'wrong'? Who do they envision is handing out their 'sentence'?

Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky (2007a) connect the somatic (exercise) with the moral (guilt) in this way: "Post-industrial culture focuses on physical culture for leisure and enjoyment, but also for the moral value and personal responsibility of keeping the body young and fit" (p. 6). That is, by fitness having been equated with goodness, and then with the inevitable 'success' that follows, they posit "an imperative pathway" (2007a, p. 6) has been mapped out for women through pervasive and targeted health and fitness messages. Taking *imperative* to mean an unavoidable obligation, I look more closely at

⁵ From the blog, *A Bit of Help with Life* (Willis, 2013)

⁶ From the *About.com: Exercise blog* (Wachner, 2010)

modern Western society and identify specific voices that seem to be preaching this sermon.

Within this society, infused both with a “culture of slimness” (Mansfield, 2011, p. 90), and a “globalized fitness culture” (Markula & Kennedy, 2011, p. 21), I suggest that the imperative pathway imposes and perpetuates social expectations (Smith-DiJulio, Windsor, & Anderson, 2010)—or obligations—on and for women within many or all aspects of their lives (Featherstone, 2010; Spitzack, 1990). For example, their GP prescribes more exercise (Pringle, 2008), health promoters encourage healthier eating habits (Wray, 2007), parenting magazines offer many well-meaning tips for being a better mother (Warner, 2005), media images—regardless of target audience—project the ideal female form (J. Wright, O’Flynn, & Macdonald, 2006), and women’s magazines and self-help books (Duncan, 1994; Markula, 2001), proclaim that all of these goals of perfection are easily reached with simple dedication and prioritization (Smith Maguire, 2008b); it’s a matter of “doing what’s right for you” (McDermott, 2011). And if any one of these imperatives were not enough, there’s academic literature that conjures up the possibility of “aging successfully”⁷ (Hsu, 2011, p. 458). [See also Spoel, Harris, & Henwood (2012) for “positive aging”] Importantly, I argue, the imperatives emerging from these various “socio-cultural sites...intertwine and compete” (Lupton, 1995, p. 5) with one another, creating reciprocally interacting pressures and emotions.

Both proscriptive (don’t/shouldn’t) and prescriptive (do/should) messages embedded in these discourses have the potential to create a sense of obligation, and thus feelings of guilt if unmet. It is primarily those feelings associated with ‘falling short’—particularly

⁷ “...successful aging indicates low risk of disease, high psychological and physical function, and engagement with life simultaneously” (Hsu, 2011, p. 458)

with respect to exercise—that I explore within this thesis, but also women’s feelings about, and responses to, their *sense* of obligation.

Conceptual overview

In this thesis I explore the concept of guilt experienced with regard to exercise, by mid-age women. Underpinning my understanding of ‘experience’ is the premise that nothing conceived of as a human ‘experience’ occurs without the presence of emotions (Blauvelt, 2007; Terada, 2003); furthermore, all experience is embodied (Crossley, 2006; Damasio, 2010; E. Thompson, 2007). Invoking Merleau-Ponty, Alexandra Howson (2005) argues that an adequate understanding of experience “includes not only thought and reflection based on observation but also *feeling*” (p. 146, emphasis in original). It is not that guilt has been excluded from sociological studies of exercise/fitness, and health. Rather, it has merely been lurking inside these general areas of concern and hasn’t been purposefully isolated to be investigated on its own merit.

Additionally, I look at how guilt relative to exercise is discursively re/presented by various societal voices, one of which is that of women themselves. I critically combine and/or juxtapose the vantage points enjoyed by sociocultural, physiological, psychological, and philosophical disciplines as a means of creating a more nuanced picture of guilt for women in modern society. My provision for polysemies has been inspired in large part by theorists who privilege a multidimensional perspective (e.g., Grossberg, 2010; Ingham, 1997; Maguire, 2011; Thorpe, 2012). ‘Multi’, for me, includes materiality, critical pragmatism, feminism, and sympathy for constructionism. Following Nickolas Rose (2013), I espouse the biological/material from within a context that is largely sociocultural

in orientation (but hesitate calling constructivism “passé” (p. 4), and the linguistic turn dead-ended, given history’s reputation for irregular trajectories and its penchant for repetition).

Both theoretically and methodologically, I embrace principles that encourage heuristic adoption and adaptation (Wolcott, 2002). Thus, I have adopted and adapted theoretical concepts to the initial and emerging issues, and have chosen and executed research methods in a way that responds to localized exigencies. I have also tried to remain sensitive to the physicality of my participants, acknowledging the “meaning potential” (Evans, Davies, & Rich, 2009, p. 392) generated by their bodily presence. When I refer to ‘women’, therefore, I am conscious of their socially and culturally constructed identities, as well as their biological entities, constituted as “flesh and blood, thinking, feeling, sentient, species being, a ‘body *with* organs” (2009, p. 392, emphasis in original) - an aspect of humanness I think is especially relevant in discussions about exercise (moving) and emotions (feeling/being).

I situate my investigation of the subjective experiences of particular women within a broader exploration of exercise, emotions, and guilt as a specific emotion. In creating this contextualized space, I listen to voices both online and offline (e.g., social media, women’s blogs, fitness/health websites, women’s lifestyle magazines, health promotion material, newspapers, self-help books), guided by tenets of discourse and visual analysis (Harper, 1998; Hook & Glaveanu, 2013) and drawing on the strength of various social theorists’ conceptual tools (e.g., Michel Foucault, Elizabeth Grosz, Sandra Bartky, Elspeth Probyn, Jennifer Hargreaves & Patricia Vertinsky, Arlie Hochschild, Nick Crossley, and Bryan S. Turner).

For example, I draw on Sandra Bartky’s (1990) theorizing of the “internalization of

intimations of inferiority” that results from oppression, or “a harsh dominion exercised over your self-esteem” (p. 22). She suggests that “the psychologically oppressed become their own oppressors; they come to exercise harsh dominion over their own self-esteem” (p. 22). Bartky’s internal view provides a vantage point from within the “panopticon”, Michel Foucault’s (1979) application of Jeremy Bentham’s prison metaphor epitomizing a scheme that is intended to “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (p. 201). A poignant example of this panoptic power can be sensed in the following blog post, which adds a disembodied *voice* to the panoptic *gaze*: “Guilt is the ever-present companion of the modern parent, a nagging voice so familiar that most of us simply think it’s our own, constantly detailing our failures” (Antonia, 2011).⁸ I also use the notion of the “confessing body” (Grosz, 1995) to evoke the moral, the somatic, and the emotional aspects of women’s experiences of ‘transgression’ against their internal and external ‘oppressors’. In common parlance, as well as in religious and legal contexts, ‘confession’ is considered the mechanism by which guilt is palliated, if not expunged. We think of it primarily as a spoken phenomenon. How, then, does a *body* confess? Elizabeth Grosz (1994, p. 35) explains: “Bodies speak, without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes” through practices such as dieting and exercising. By paying attention to speaking bodies and conversing with them through narrators’ scripts (e.g., interviews, online discourse), I have sought—and continue to seek—to shed more light on the mechanisms at work and their embodied effects. Throughout, I engage these less cheerful perspectives of oppressive influences dialectically with the possibilities and opportunities that women may find for

⁸ From the Slate.com blog, *XX Factor: What Women Really Think*

‘resistance’⁹ (Bartky, 2002b; Foucault, 1978; Shaw, 2001) within the relationships of power, described by Foucault (1979) as operating “at the level of individuals, bodies, gestures and behaviour” (p. 27).

Guilt is described in psychology literature as a self-conscious emotion that is produced when an individual perceives themselves to have provoked “a negative outcome by acts of commission or omission” (Fontaine, 2009, p. 199). That is, by doing the ‘wrong’ thing, or by failing to do the ‘right’ thing. Beyond this basic characterisation there seems to be little consensus on a succinct definition of guilt due to the many and conflicting ways in which the term is used and conceptualised across disciplines (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994, p. 243; Elison, 2005; Lazarus, 1991). However, my poststructural inquiry does not concern itself with the disciplinary significance of the *term*, but rather with the meanings ascribed to the *concept* by the individual and with the effects of that meaning within the individual’s lived experience (Howson, 2005). My own conception of *guilt* in this study is that of a complex bio-psycho-social blend of emotion, cognition, and sentience (Damasio, 2000b; Probyn, 2005). But most importantly, I view individual experiences of it as subjective constructions that are—following the sentiments of W.I. Thomas—“real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572) for that individual.

I use the term *cogmotion* to capture this complexity. I coined the term *cogmotion* based on my reading of various neuroscientists (Damasio, 2010; Nicolelis, 2011; Pessoa, 2013; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991), psychologists (Ekkekakis & Petruzzello, 2001;

⁹ I will discuss the concept of resistance in more detail later, but here I want to simply introduce the basic idea, based on the laws of physics, that *resistance* acts against the direction of motion. Picturing a prevailing discourse (Foucault, 1972) or a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1979) as the ‘motion’ against which people are resisting, you can see that resistance doesn’t necessarily require overt action on the part of the person around whom the motion is flowing. Rather, sometimes just standing still can signal a form of resistance.

Elison, 2005; Keltner & Buswell, 1996) and social theorists (Guattari, 1995, 2009; Hochschild, 1990; Thrift, 2008; Tomkins, 1963). *Cogmotion* conveys the multifaceted nature of embodied emotions (including the concept of guilt) by embracing the elements of ‘emotion’, ‘motion’, and ‘cognition’. My first twinge of inspiration came from Jeff Elison’s (2005) argument for viewing guilt as a non-emotion (Ortony, 1987); he suggests that “feelings of guilt represent multiple affective-cognitive hybrids” (p. 5). While I found his explanation useful (but don’t reject the element of emotion in guilt feelings), I appreciated it more in combination with Nigel Thrift’s (2008, p. 187) perspective, which adds a dimension that accounts for the moving body: “we can now understand emotions as a kind of corporeal thinking” (He draws on LeDoux (1996) and Damasio (2000a, 2003), both of whom were immensely helpful).

As I explained, with respect to my broader philosophical view of this phenomenon, the psychological, social, and bio/physiological are always all in play. *Cogmotion* provides a succinct semantic reminder of this layered complexity, and avoids forced linguistic separation that perpetuates mind/body dualisms. Donald Nathanson (1992) gives another view of these interwoven distinctions, which I have found helpful: *emotions* are rooted in our biography (i.e., sociocultural), *feelings* are rooted in our psychology, and *affect* is rooted in our biology.

Main questions

As both a moral (Berntson & Cacioppo, 2009) and a social emotion (Baumeister et al., 1994), guilt—that is, the experience of feeling guilty—arguably plays an important role in shaping people’s identities, relationships, actions, and experiences. Guilt carries its ‘moral’

label because it involves the judgment of others or one's self, and its 'social' tag because it occurs in an interpersonal context (Panayiotou, 2006; E. R. Smith & Mackie, 2008).

However, little is known about how it actually operates within women's lives, how it manifests, and how they manage it, including with regard to exercise. Therefore, one of my aims for this research echoes the concerns of the feminist Kerry McGannon and her colleagues, who ask, "how can we further deconstruct and understand fitness and morality narratives surrounding women's bodies..." (McGannon, Johnson, & Spence, 2010, p. 101), and in so doing become more sensitive to the potentially emotionally damaging effects of those narratives that impose unrealistic and negative views and implicit expectations on the female self?

Do women who incorporate exercise into their daily lives feel guilty about those periods of physical activity? Reciprocally, do women who intend to exercise but 'fail' to do so experience guilt about those periods of 'failure'? Having identified these scenarios in both sociological and psychological literature, as well as in pedestrian conversation, I then spoke with women themselves and listened to their narratives, their stories, to see whether and how they align with academic reports (e.g., Bulley, Donaghy, Payne, & Mutrie, 2009; S. Drew & Paradice, 1996; Eyler & Vest, 2008; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004).

I have sought to gain insights into whether and *how* guilt manifests, aside from the term itself used in conversation. That is, are there other linguistic signals that expose more dimensions of guilt? And do these manifestations indicate, or illuminate, the existence of different types of guilt (i.e., that would change or extend our current definition of guilt as 'a moral transgression')?

Furthermore, I interrogated these narratives as a way to explore how women make

sense of their experiences of guilt: do/can women articulate what they deem to be the source(s) of their feelings of guilt about exercise? (e.g., do they feel a panoptic gaze?) How do they assign meaning to feelings of guilt? What, if any, are the forms of resistance they use toward those feelings? What other elements of their lives (e.g., the body itself, children, work) do they connect with feeling guilty about exercising or not exercising; and what are the “affective investments”¹⁰ (Fullagar, 2009, p. 392) associated with this connection? To address these queries, I arrived at four main research questions that guided me throughout my project:

1) What are the sources of women’s exercise-related guilt? (and how do they articulate those sources?) In other words, what do women say are the sources of their guilt? Can they unpack/critique that general feeling of obligation or expectation; and if so, how?

2) How does exercise-related guilt manifest in women’s lives? That is, aside from the term ‘guilty’ that shows up in conversation, what does this guilt look like? Are there identifiable clues or indicators of it?

3) How do women manage their exercise-related guilt? This question seeks insights into the meanings women assign to exercise-related guilt (if any), and also sheds light on any forms of resistance they might use, and on the affective/emotional toll of exercise-related guilt.

4) How does exercise-related guilt operate within women’s lives? This question reflects the impact they feel it has on their relationships, behaviour, and health. Thus

¹⁰ This phrase might suggest a temporal disjuncture: investing is something that is typically done ahead of time; affect is instantaneous and unpredictable. However, you can sense ahead of time that something will be emotionally demanding, and you do it anyway because you want/enjoy the returns on that investment.

highlighting the close connection between emotional and physical well-being (e.g., the psychopharmacology literature refers to guilt as a form of ‘introspective hostility’).

To summarise, I have tried to acknowledge the complexity of guilt in forming my questions, and “in addition to asking what it is that individuals actually experience when they feel” guilty (or not), I also look for insights “about the social nature, origins, and consequences of emotions” (Kusenbach & Loseke, 2013, p. 35).

Being researched, being the researcher

Given the interconnected nature of our multiple lives (e.g., we do not stop thinking or feeling something just because we physically leave a place or person), it seems plausible to think of exercise in any given woman’s life as part of a complex whole. And therefore as I consider the place and role of one emotion within this constellation I am sceptical that it could—or should—ever be isolated or ‘controlled’ as a known variable, or to be ‘measured’ in the true sense of the word. My constructionist view of reality (Burr, 1998; Crotty, 2003), then, lets me suspend judgment about whether an individual’s conception of guilt matches the socially accepted linguistically based definition of guilt, and therefore about whether the individual has ‘understood’ what guilt ‘is’. Their perception is their reality; their felt, lived, and remembered experiences are shaped and constructed by many complex interacting elements and Others (Bower & Forgas, 2001). The research process in which they play a part is just another form of social interaction and meaning-making event (Averill, 2012; Burr, 2003; Jost & Kruglanski, 2002).

This constructionist vantage point thus facilitates a view from which I see all the actors—researcher and researched (animate and inanimate)—in the research process as

active/influential participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). While I (the researcher) have, as the prime research instrument, held a position of relative power in the research process (Oakley, 1993)—particularly in interpretation and reporting—there is a sense in which my ‘participants’ and I have together constructed ‘truth’ through our interactions and relationships (Richardson, 1990). Michael Crotty (2003) argues that one’s cultural context predates any construction of those truths, and thus emphasises the need for sensitivity to individual social histories:

while humans may be described, in constructionist spirit, as engaging with their world and making sense of it, such a description is misleading if it is not set in a genuinely historical and social perspective. It is clearly not the case that individuals encounter phenomena in the world and make sense of them one by one. Instead, we are all born into a world of meaning. (p. 54)

Crotty’s ‘all’, moreover, is a reminder that “no researcher can separate herself from personhood” (Stanley & Wise, 1979, p. 361). That is, I am this researcher-person in some form or other in any of the methodological personae I appropriate: online observer, data analyst, interviewer, or accidental eavesdropper. But in the intimate encounter that characterises the interviewing process, the import of who/what/how I am rises ineluctably to the fore of the research consciousness. As I acknowledge my position(s) as a white, mid-age, married-without-children, dual Canadian-American woman who has historically enjoyed sport and exercise, I am aware that each of these elements of ‘personhood’ have impacted the inflection of my ‘voice’, whether I make them explicit or not (S. Day, 2012; Gilgun, 2010). Significantly, my more recent experience of a fading exercise identity and physicality coincided with the beginning of this thesis, and I feel it has injected a new (for me), and poignant empathy into my reflections.

“A qualitative researcher is understood as an observer in the world, but always as a

‘situated’ observer” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 4). My accounts of others’ accounts, and my accounts of their actions, therefore, do not represent an ‘objective’ reality. That is, they don’t simply mirror ‘what is there’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 64):

When we describe something, we are, in the normal course of events, reporting how something is seen and reacted to, and thereby meaningfully constructed, within a given community or set of communities. When we narrate something, even in telling our very own story, it is (again in the normal course of events) the voice of our culture—its many voices, in fact—that is heard in what we say.

So, like any discursive interaction, the interviews and conversations carried out during my research can be defined as mutually constructed by me and my participants (Potter, 1998). And just as significantly, each person’s culture and community infuse each interaction comprising our co-constructed narrative.

Importantly, to extend ethical care to my participants in a way that aligns with my beliefs about both co-construction and academic reporting, I use language throughout this thesis that may not always adhere to a traditional definition of ‘scholarly’ writing or ‘academic-speak’. The debates around this issue have not been resolved, and are, in my view, an irresolvable conflation of epistemology and taste. In Pierre Bourdieu’s (2005) words: “many judgments of taste are situated somewhere between the adjective and the exclamation” (p. 36). In order to reach women, and in order to honour my commitment to my participants of writing on their behalf, I write to an audience for whom exercise-related guilt is a material reality. My ethical responsibility to my audience-participants demands clarity over cogency, empathy over erudition, should I have to choose between them.

Methodology

In a description of their attitude toward inquiry, data, and reporting, which formed the basis for their book *The Lonely Crowd* (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney, 1950, 2001), David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney recall that the book was “based on our experiences of living in America—the people we have met, the jobs we have held, the books we have read, the movies we have seen, and the landscape” (p. lxxi). They conducted interviews with a variety of people (e.g., different ages, sexes, social classes), including friends and “collaborators in other parts of the country”. They didn’t claim representativeness of the country’s diversity, but emphasised instead the illustrative nature of their data from which they created their descriptions and interpretations. Their ethos and approach resonates with me, as does C. Wright Mills’ (1959) description of sociological inquiry as an exercise that integrates with everyday life (p. 211): “You do not really have to *study* a topic you are working on...once you are into it, it is everywhere. You are sensible to its themes; you see and hear them everywhere in your experience...”

So, as I’ve watched and listened to women, both in person and online, synchronously and asynchronously over the course of this research, I’ve realized my sensitivity to the themes of women’s exercise has been evolving for many years. Beginning with my first enthusiastic jogs as a 16-year-old ‘runner’ (and associated discovery of *Runner’s World* magazine), through years of various ‘experiments’ involving weights and (my) muscles, to my obsessive adherence to road cycling, my own exercise experiences have informed my views of other women’s exercise practices, performances, and opinions.

Against this backdrop of diffused social inquiry, I approached my data in a manner

best described as ‘discursive reconnoitring’. That is, I have drawn on a mix of concepts and theories across a range of disciplines, and in the process have hopefully attained a more “fluid theoretical vocabulary” (D. L. Andrews, 2008, p. 56). My aim has been a continual, reflexive “synthesis of empirical, theoretical and methodological influences...drawn from, among other sources, the sociology and history of sport and physical activity, the sociology of the body, and cultural studies” (D. L. Andrews, 2008, p. 46), exercise psychology, and critical psychology. In order to gain understanding of the complexities surrounding women’s emotional experiences of exercise, I used multiple data-generation modes, a type of methodology advocated by Pierre Bourdieu—he calls it a “discursive montage” of “all sources” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 66).¹¹ Lawrence Grossberg (quoted in conversation with H. K. Wright, 2001), too, encourages the use of “any and every kind of empirical method, whatever seems useful to the particular project” (p. 145); that is, anything that enhances the generation of “more and better information, descriptions, resources, and interpretations” (p. 145). To that end, in listening for women’s voices and for voices talking about women, I have been attentive to the evidence-potential of—and have assembled evidence from—a wide range of sources, including television, social media, blogs, websites, newspapers, magazines, popular literature, outdoor advertising, interpersonal and overheard conversations, and interviews.

Grossberg (2001) goes on to encourage rigour and suspicion in the use of these methodological tools, emphasising their “discursive constructions that themselves produce discursive constructions” (p. 145) and reminding us of the unavoidable presence of theoretical assumptions inherent in methodological choices. So while my sources have

¹¹ I thank Holly Thorpe (2007) for raising my awareness of this approach, and for inspiring my adoption of it.

helped me see and understand exercise-related guilt in new ways, I have been sensitive to the implications of my re-constructions and to the ways in which I have put theory to work (Wolcott, 2002).

I also invoke the concept of *Flux*, which has infused my approach to inquiry. Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze (1995, 2009, p. 73) explain their term flux—which they hope can “remain ordinary and undefined”—as a *process* of inquiry that “goes beyond all dualities”; it does not impose an identity tag on any of the voices involved, researcher(s) included. The emphasis is on disrupting what we think we know—“and there is no reason to know”: “this could be a flux of words, shit, money, it could be a financial mechanism or a schizophrenic machine” (p. 73). As I have wrestled with the propositions embedded in various methods, each claiming some valid union of theoretical and empirical, I have grown increasingly empathetic with the views of François Châtelet: “One has to admit that methodology is becoming a pain in the ass. With the imperialism of methodology, any research work or deepening of a subject is ruined” (quoted in Guattari, 1995, 2009, p. 75).

In view of sidestepping this problematic imperialism, my lack of “methodolatry” (Rorty, 1999, p. xxi) has allowed me to venture into many different approaches to inquiry, each of which gives rise to different ways of seeing. In aggregate, moreover, these ways of seeing can work together (via analysis and synthesis) in dealing with guilt’s disciplinary promiscuity; a feature, I argue, that demands a wide net in order to catch the variety of people and situations in which guilt operates. My expectation for this approach is that it has produced a richness of detail (and potentially, insights) that adds more nuances to our current understanding of the nature and operations of guilt, particularly with respect to women’s experiences and emotions surrounding exercise. In the next chapter I provide

some of the ‘ways of seeing’ guilt that can be found in various literatures. My intent in laying this groundwork is to highlight the complexity and messiness of emotions generally, and guilt specifically.

Embodied emotions: physiological feelings

Consistent with my social constructionist sympathies, I see embodiment as multidimensional and also as a process. Looking through a sociological lens, Bryan Turner (2008) describes three aspects of embodiment: having a body, being a body, and doing a body. These aspects cover our physical characteristics (body as a thing), our subjective ‘working’ on our body (body as a project), and our ongoing changing identities (body through time), respectively. This multifaceted view leaves room for and respects “the lived experience of the sensual or subjective body” and recognises that “practice involves the sensual, live body and its effects on social relations” (Turner, 2008, p. 245).

What interests me particularly in his conceptualisation is the omnipresence of emotions, which he doesn’t address specifically. But having, being, and doing a body are emotional realities; we react emotionally to our own physical characteristics (and in fact our emotions help shape those characteristics), we engage emotionally—not as robotic pragmatists—with our bodies (e.g., we don’t like some feature so work to change it), and we respond emotionally to every twinge and shift as our bodies are produced through time. For my purposes, even within a brief, discursive study, relatively devoid of physical presences (i.e., the majority of contact was auditory only or online), I have tried to remain mindful of the very physical realities of my participants and the worlds they inhabit. The reminders often arose through my own body (e.g., pain, fatigue) and its influence on my

ability to observe and on my enjoyment of being and observing. But my participants, too, have added their own reminders, with and without prompting. One participant, for example, was diagnosed with breast cancer part way through this study, another with diabetes; as they share their experiences with me, I cannot claim to hear or understand them without acknowledging—and respecting—their cogmotional pain. Even without such medically extreme impositions in one’s life, however, biology and physiology are never out of the picture. For example, this is one of my participants, injecting pathos into a soliloquy about exercise in a way that leaves no doubt as to her somatic realities:

I reflect on my disintegrating body. I note my decreasing muscle tone, the onset of gout, muscles that cramp easily, multiple signs of poor circulation. And I still feel like I could exercise any time I wanted to and it would be okay. But that confidence is decreasing. I now am starting to feel as though even if I exercise I can’t change any of the things that are happening to my body. The onset of menopause seems to have brought with it a great weakening of my mind and body.

Edging toward a psychosocial view, we “tell more than we can know” (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) and can “know more than we can tell” (Gigerenzer, 2007, p. 16; Polanyi, 1966, 2009, p. 4); we have a “mindful body” (Probyn, 2005, p. 56; Rothfield, 1990, p. 139), and an “embodied mind” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Varela et al., 1991). But what do all these disciplinary apothegms help us understand about guilt, and emotions generally? In support of the assertion that “both a mindful body and an embodied mind are needed to tap into somatic and emotive sources of knowing” (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996, p. 8), I suggest they serve to highlight the connectedness and inseparable nature of our cognitions, emotions, and corporeality (a phenomenon encapsulated in my term *cogmotion*, as mentioned). Cogmotion, moreover, is informed by and performed in social contexts. The body, Elspeth Probyn reminds us “is a repository for the social and cultural rules that,

consciously or not, we take on” (2005, p. xvi). So, “how can we listen and speak shame” or guilt? (Probyn, 2005, p. 72) As I’m finding out, this is not simply a matter of ‘finding the right words’; there are psychological, social, and emotional consequences to bringing the hidden into the open, even if voluntarily.

Why should this research care about neuroscience?

Although neuroscientific research cannot directly answer theoretical questions (Satel & Lilienfeld, 2013) about guilt and shame, perhaps it can go some way toward providing pertinent physiological information regarding the embodied nature of emotions (e.g., relationships between language, action, and perception). However, disciplinary distinctions may not be the most fruitful way to view or think about the various levels of analysis; paradigmatic considerations come into play, as do theoretical incompatibilities. Tom Billington (2012, p. 174) points out that “almost paradoxically, narratives from neuroscientific research are utilized as a means of reinvigorating resistance to reductionist accounts.” Also speaking contrary to paradigmatic instincts, he says,

Although susceptible to essentialist positions in relation to knowledge and power, it is argued that some forms of neuroscientific research are challenging long-held epistemological assumptions circulated within psychology and are opening up possibilities for critical approaches. (p. 174)

I believe it’s important to include a neuroscientific view as a reminder that our feelings and thoughts, while embedded in particular sociocultural influences, literally emerge from electrical and chemical signals passing within and between neurons. Some researchers extend the neuronal credit further; for example, the definitive neuroscience text, *Principals of Neural Science*, “affirms that all behavior is an expression of neural activity” (Kandel, Schwartz, Jessell, Siegelbaum, & Hudspeth, 2013). There is ample evidence that these

signals *represent* the functioning of our minds, yet we understand very little of this functioning, and certainly cannot at this point directly ‘translate’ neuronal output into socially or personally meaningful communication (Nicoletis, 2011).

But the important part of this nod to neurology, for me, is the reminder that the sociocultural, the physiological, and the psychological are *always* interacting *reciprocally* to produce cognitions and emotions (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2013; Kövecses, 2003). At no point during cognitive-emotional activity (i.e., daily life) does that activity become *just* a social act, or *just* a cultural reaction, or *just* a physiological event, or *just* a psychic response (even pre-conscious emotions were ‘trained’ in a particular social setting). So why should we recognize and remember these interacting features? It renders analysis much more difficult after all; but I think acknowledging the *dynamic* complexity might help avoid epistemological arrogance, and possibly forestall disciplinary sanctimony. And individually, it can engender respect for one another (and others’ disciplinary knowledge) as we recognize the physiological equivalence that connects us as humans, even while admiring the massive variability of environmental and cultural influences that make us who we are.

Contributions

First, guilt has rarely been studied—especially qualitatively—in relation to women and exercise. Second, due to the nexus of responsibilities that women in mid-life typically bear (Spitzack, 1990), and the stresses and life-changes to which they have historically been subject (S. M. Thompson, Grant, & Dharmalingam, 2002), I view this group as particularly important (sometimes referred to as the ‘sandwich generation’ (depressiontoolkit.org,

n.d.)). Third, bringing together multiple disciplines (Klein, 2008) in one study about women's exercise-related guilt is also new, and has the potential to enhance the current understanding of the construct of guilt, which is currently quite psychologically skewed. Specifically, I interrogate the aggregated merits of sociocultural, psychological, and neurological knowledge relative to embodied emotions (and guilt particularly), viewpoints that have not previously been combined in a single study about women's exercise. I hasten to add, these 'viewpoints' do not each constitute a full-fledged study in their own right. That is, my psychological and neurological perspectives rely on a review of relevant literature, while most of my principles of data generation derive from sociocultural fields (e.g., Bartky, 2002a; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Grosz, 1994; Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2007b; Hochschild, 1983, 2003; Kennedy & Markula, 2011; Lupton, 1995; McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Probyn, 2005; Smith Maguire, 2008a; Turner, 2008; Young, 2005) which reflect the epistemological leanings typically found there.

This research has both applied and theoretical importance. Empirically speaking, it has the potential to provide women with alternative, and more critical, ways of thinking about guilt, especially with regard to exercise—their response to feelings of guilt, their use of it, their reading/interpretation of it in different contexts as a taken-for-granted notion (Oliver & Lalik, 2004). It can provide women with the opportunity to share similar experiences within an empathetic community (or at least make them aware such a community exists), and thus possibly go some way toward alleviating negative responses to feelings of guilt. Romi Lassally (2009) expresses this very sentiment in her book *True Mom Confessions*: “Our shared secrets and support of each other opened the floodgates and we sat there baring our conflicted, guilt-ridden and shame-filled souls” (p. 2). Based on this encounter with a

friend, she created the TrueMomConfessions.com website as an outlet for women to anonymously share their ‘guilty secrets’ in a sympathetic environment. It has been a “rousing success”.

Additionally, this research may offer the various components of the health and media ecosystem (e.g., government, fitness industry, GPs) with beneficial feedback; for example, by way of more holistic, empathetic, and critically informed dissemination of information that is sensitive to the potentially emotionally damaging effects of perpetuating norms relative to women’s bodies and social expectations. I have sought to bolster all of these potentialities by a critical interrogation of the socially constructed notion of guilt, which at the very least introduces possibilities for discussion about its unproblematised nature in exercise contexts.

Poststructuralists tend to “theorise emotion as social, relational, and embodied rather than as an individual sensation that is an aspect of the psychological interiority” (Fullagar, 2008, p. 37). Notwithstanding my strong poststructural leanings, I don’t believe the psychological interiority can be dismissed completely. More specifically, the “individual sensation[s]” connected with this perspective. But at the same time, I have avoided reducing emotions to “a psychic, individualized interiority” (Norman, Rail, & Jette, 2014, p. 27), and the historically compatible view that suggests how we feel arises from an isolated, internal “I”. If cognition and emotion are intertwined continuously, and the whole event is embodied, there is no need to make this an either-or choice: emotions have all these aspects—sociocultural, relational, embodied, and psychological. [For an instructive poststructural viewpoint see J. L. Seeley (2014).]

Studying women’s experiences of exercise makes sense as a way of understanding

emotions (especially guilt) because exercise (especially for women) forces many other emotionally charged topics to the surface: bodies, appearance, clothes, time (management), money, responsibility (children), food, strength/skill, health, energy, and moral ‘success’, to name the main ones. My argument is that guilt plays a large role in the perspectives, management, organisation, experience, and memories of exercise for many women; and by paying attention to its manifestation and operation within their lives when exercise is in the picture, and to how they articulate and manage that guilt, we can gain valuable insights into—and a more nuanced picture of—the phenomenon of exercise in women’s lives, and into its psychophysiological impact. Armed with this additional knowledge, perhaps we can rethink and revamp those aspects of current approaches to health and fitness promotion (including the way in which such information is conveyed, both collectively and between individuals) that are emotionally damaging and psychologically insensitive. Furthermore, I hope that the emotions and experiences shared by the women in this study will be of use and encouragement to both them and their audiences.

Thesis outline

In the next chapter (p. 26) I provide some groundwork for guilt, as defined and described in a variety of literatures. In Chapter 3 (p. 39) I expand on the concept of the imperative pathway, and the guilt potential of interacting expectations embedded in socially constructed aspects of fitness, health, and femininity. This background creates a social context in which my participants exist and, importantly, experience exercise. I position the phenomenon of exercise as just one of several life domains women navigate in Western societies. In Chapter 4 (p. 65) I introduce my participants and the collaborative process

through which I engaged with them. I also describe the theoretical lens I've 'peered' through in my interaction with mediated and unmediated voices, allowing my own voice to saunter periodically into the conversation. In Chapters 5 (p. 104), 6 (p.144), 7 (p.177), and 8 (p. 219) I describe my analysis and synthesis in the process of discussing the particular embodied experiences of exercise-related guilt lived by women in this study, and those I've analysed in print and online media. In Chapters 5 and 6 I address my research question about the *sources* of exercise-related guilt; in Chapters 7 and 8 I address my research question regarding the *management* of exercise-related guilt; I briefly discuss the *operations* of exercise-related guilt at the end of Chapter 8 (p. 254). In the final chapter (p. 258), I review this work and its main contributions, concluding with thoughts regarding related future research opportunities.

2 ALL ABOUT GUILT

In this chapter I introduce guilt from a synthesised vantage point that embraces its complexity. By creating a landscape of guilt, shaped by and viewed from multiple disciplinary perspectives, I am able to situate exercise-related guilt in a more nuanced light.

Chapter contents

- Defining guilt
- Friends of guilt
- Facets of guilt
- Effects of guilt: social, psychological, physiological
- It's personal

Defining guilt

Emotions are a universal phenomenon (Nussbaum, 2001). They are “a powerful force in the structure and change of societies” (Scheff, 2000, p. 84). They are integral to human existence and in fact are essential in the definition of being human (Damasio, 2010). As just one complex piece of this ubiquitous presence, guilt is neither amenable to direct observation, nor is it necessarily a clear concept even to the individual who is experiencing it (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt is considered a self-conscious emotion that is produced when an individual perceives themselves to have provoked “a negative outcome by acts of commission or omission” (Fontaine, 2009, p. 199). Beyond this basic characterisation there seems to be little consensus on a succinct definition of guilt due to

the many and conflicting ways in which the term is used (Baumeister et al., 1994, p. 243; Lazarus, 1991). Guilt carries its ‘moral’ label because it involves the judgment of others or one’s self, and its ‘social’ tag because it occurs in an interpersonal context (Panayiotou, 2006).

Friends of guilt

Proponents of keeping affect separate from emotion semantically and conceptually seek to emphasise the pre-conscious, non-cognitive nature of affect compared with the conscious and cognitive character of emotion. They also point to the purely physical sensations that constitute affect (which are only, but not always, just a part of emotion). Brian Massumi (1987), for example, argues that affect does not denote “a personal feeling” (p. xvi) (which he terms *sentiment* in Deleuze and Guatarri’s *A Thousand Plateaus*), but is rather “a prepersonal intensity” (p. xvi). Thus, “without affect feelings do not “feel” because they have no intensity” (Shouse, 2005, para. 7).

Donald Nathanson (1992), a clinical psychiatrist who built on Silvan Tomkin’s work,¹² summarizes these three elements another way, assigning feelings to psychology, emotions to biography, and affects to biology. He explains that *affect* is “the strictly biological portion of emotion” (p. 49), which signals immediately his belief in the integrated nature of these phenomena. Shifting from affect to *feeling*, he says, “involves a leap from biology to psychology” (p. 50) and points out the additional complexity in the concept of *emotion*.

¹² Nathanson (1992) refers to Tomkins as “the psychologist most responsible for the revolution in our understanding of emotion” (p. 49). Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963) produced much of the groundwork for what is now called Affect Theory, in his two volumes of *Affect/Imagery/Consciousness*. Donald Nathanson, MD, trained as an endocrinologist, and then as a psychiatrist; he worked closely with Tomkins who was keen to test possible applications of his theories in a clinical setting.

Emotion, as an accumulation of affect-laced memories and the affects triggered by each re-memory, emerges moment by moment out of our social and biological histories.

The actual difference between these events, in temporal terms, is miniscule—measured in hundredths of a second—and is often not distinguishable by the person experiencing the affect or emotion. In fact, the confluence of elements at work in affective or emotional experiences is so quick, with many factors happening simultaneously, and without any definable edges to any one ‘piece’, that they might be more accurately described as “assemblages” of emotion” (Wetherell, 2012, p. 15) or an “affective episode” (p. 85).

In terms of experience, it does not seem very useful to know about these categorical distinctions; knowledge or awareness of them doesn’t materially change how I *experience* affect or an emotion. The utility of semantic and conceptual categories, then, seems to manifest in efforts to create shared meaning, in both research and everyday contexts. In other words, when I try to explain to someone else ‘what I felt’ or ‘how I feel’, I rely on labels and terms to get my meaning across (along with facial and gestural expressions). Of course, attempts to dissect social phenomena into increasingly finer slices (i.e., units of analysis) for the purpose of measuring and defining may also promote separating and labelling. And in some ways, guilt has almost taken on a life of its own as a phenomenon that is more than just an emotion or a feeling or an affective episode. I believe this extra dimension may be attributable to the moral element present when guilt is named; and questions of morality hinge on value judgments, which often arise in social situations.

Taking the Tomkins-Nathanson view again, when someone says they ‘feel guilty’, psychological (feel) and biographical (guilty) aspects of the person’s response to the situation have been introduced, both aspects of which are infused with biology. When you

think about this in relation to guilt about exercise, the significance of retaining all aspects in the mix of particular analytic endeavours becomes clear: there is a personalised understanding (feeling) that is brought to bear on the decision of whether to exercise; there are recalled experiences (emotion) of failure and/or success that join forces with the immediate physical sensations (affect) of fatigue (for example) in a reciprocally influential burst of experience. So while the *term* guilt retains a fairly simplifiable linguistic definition, its live conceptualisation becomes polysemous when viewed from an individual's bio-psycho-social perspective.

I find Arlie Hochschild's (1983, 2003) point about why emotion shouldn't be subsumed under affect a useful caveat. She is concerned with preserving the context in which an emotion emerges and thinks that when emotions are conceptually reduced to a positive or negative affect they can only offer answers about 'how much': "What precisely there is "a lot" of or "a little" of is unclear" (p. 202). She makes her reader think about the "distinction between a fearful dislike...and an angry dislike", and suggests that when such distinctions are conveyed as merely 'negative affect', "we lose the idea that emotions reflect the individual's sense of the self-relevance of a perceived situation. We lose an appreciation of what the language¹³ of emotion can tell us" (p. 202).

Since my interest is in people's own perceptions of their emotions-feelings (and guilt in particular), I think paying attention to the social roots of emotion events is essential. After listening to women's descriptions of their guilt-related events, I also think of those 'social roots' as comprising more than just the immediate situation; guilt can be dragged

¹³ She compares emotion to language: "just as modern linguists now examine language as it is used in social context, so emotion, another sort of language, is best understood in relation to its social context" (p. 202).

along through many situations for years, and while temporally a guilt event is unique, it can carry the DNA of guilt past. Affect is an aspect of many (all?) emotion events, as per Tomkins-Nathanson, but doesn't paint enough of the picture on its own if subjective experience and embodied meanings are the goals.

As I said previously, I am not so concerned with the disciplinary significance of *terms*, as I am with the meanings ascribed to the *concept* and to the *experience* of guilt by the individual, and with the lived effects of those meanings for that individual.¹⁴ Given my own conception of *guilt* as a complex bio-psycho-social blend of emotion, cognition, and sentience (Damasio, 2000b; Kövecses, 2003; Probyn, 2005), my emphasis is on the *blend*, and less on the individual ingredients that constitute that blend. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this thesis, I refer to affect and emotion as distinct phenomena if necessary for clarity.

Facets of guilt

Depending on the discipline in question, scholars characterize guilt variously, reflecting the aspects that are of particular interest to them. Common psychosocial labels characterizing guilt refer to it as an emotion that is: *social* (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007; Thamm, 2007), *self-conscious* (Beer, 2007; Keltner & Beer, 2005, p. 200; Lewis, 2008), *moral* (Bassett, Bassett, Lloyd, & Johnson, 2006; Brinkmann, 2010), *negative* (Izard, 2009; Ury, 1998), *secondary* (Ackerman, 2004; Gigerenzer, 2007), or—uniquely—*an affective-cognitive hybrid* (i.e., not an emotion) (Elison, 2005; Ortony, 1987). Neurophysiology has

¹⁴ The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1933/1967, p. 176), disrupting the notion of “mere knowledge” based on subject-object relationships, contends that “the basis of experience is emotional.”

joined the conversation (Basile et al., 2011, p. 229) in recent decades, adding corporeal elements to our understanding of guilt.

There is still something missing from this admittedly complex picture. What does guilt feel like? If an emotion is part physical sensation and conscious thought, what are those sensations and how conscious does that thought need to be before it is recognisably ‘guilt’? Lisa, one of my participants, struggled to decipher the multifaceted sensations she experiences relative to exercising: “I actually don’t know what that feeling of guilt was, and how do I disconnect that from those physiological, itchy feelings in my legs.”

Barbara Keys (2013) refers to the “profoundly intertwined” nature of senses and emotions, suggesting simply that “we feel emotions.” I concur with this and with the philosophers she invokes who propose that “emotions are a form of perception” (p. 32). Jesse Prinz’s (2004) book *Gut Reactions* is one interdisciplinary attempt to lay out a convincing argument in support of this claim. One hurdle that quickly arises in any attempts to find out what those feelings feel like for the individual who is feeling them is the hurdle of communication: translating intangible sensations into linguistically descriptive equivalents.

It is not insignificant that all of the people I spoke with over the course of my project, including my collaborators, when prompted to describe more fully their feelings of guilt—or feeling ‘badly’—struggled to find words that could match or satisfy what they claimed to be feeling. Significantly, no one voluntarily included much description of somatic sensations, despite what we know about the body’s experience of emotions. Prolonged mental effort did not seem to produce more or better linguistic results. In many cases, cognitive fatigue quickly set in along with frustration at the inability to give vocal

expression to their 'inside emotions'. Barbara Keys (2013) thinks that it "could prove especially powerful" to "integrate attention to both [senses and emotions], and to their interactions" (p. 32). I have attempted to do that to some extent in this project, and trust that my interpretations have honoured my participants' (Riessman, 2002) feelings and emotions, however indefinable and ineffable they are. With respect to guilt, however, I have come to realise that it presents an additional challenge to the translation work: the women I interacted with at least, could scarcely describe how a physical motion feels, let alone an ephemeral notion that they are usually trying to avoid. In the following quote a woman describes her guilt feelings arising from a chronic social situation, and notably invokes a tangible and perambulatory metaphor to convey the intangible phenomenon:

My year has been more structured...But I've still been stressed...and sometimes a bit lost. Why? I've only just recognised it, this small, sharp-toothed monster that's been dragging along at the bottom of my jeans. I've been feeling guilty...I feel inferior to friends who work in the office from 9-5. This is my own doing, none of them have ever made me feel bad about it. (Spaeth, 2012)

Drawing on Elspeth Probyn's ideas about guilt, shame, and pride, Robyn Longhurst and colleagues (2012) characterise the guilt felt by their participant mothers as "visceral". That is, their guilt was "felt in and lived through [their] bodies on a daily basis" (Longhurst, Hodgetts, & Stolte, 2012, p. 295). Finally, adding to this 'felt' aspect of guilt the concept of "noetic feelings", or "epistemic feelings" (Arango-Muñoz, 2013, p. 193) expands the scope of guilt to include "a puzzling" phenomenal aspect of the mind, such as "the feeling of knowing...uncertainty...and the tip-of-the-tongue" experience. I suggest that a person's guilt feelings might overlap with such epistemic feelings, especially in moments (like many participants shared) when their guilt is a mere glimmer or when their corporeal bandwidth has to accommodate many simultaneous cogmotions.

I have no issue with characterisations of guilt that limit their focus based on disciplinary preferences; however, given my interest in subjectivities of participants, and in privileging their perspectives, I have kept a multifocal view throughout. Thus, in my critical approach to thinking about guilt, and analyzing the guilt feelings of others, I don't exclude any of the facets of guilt described in the literature—social, self-conscious, moral, negative, secondary, affective-cognitive, noetic—but rather distend the theoretical possibilities for understanding guilt relating to exercise.

Functions of guilt

Darwin's taxonomy of emotion and affect was based on observation, and thus the lists that have descended from that source “do not reckon with more complex affective states such as envy, guilt, jealousy, and love” (Brennan, 2004, p. 5). That is, facial expressions alone do not adequately capture or convey these “cognitive affects”, which in some taxonomies “are termed desires”. Sticking with Darwin's legacy, evolutionary biology has come to see guilt as an active participant in “reciprocal altruism” (Shapiro & Stewart, 2011, p. 64). Viewed through this lens, “guilt is advantageous as it regulates opportunistic behaviors such as those that maintain social relationships.” Furthermore, says the evolutionary biologist, “guilt is adaptive and protects humans from one another” (p. 64). So guilt starts to look bit two-faced (or multi-sphered?): on one hand offering interpersonal protection, on the other (and possibly because of) inducing self-punishment.

Rebecca Schaumberg (2012) talks about guilt as a “really uncomfortable” emotion that is “something that we tend to want to get rid of but the drive to reduce our feelings of guilt

can actually propel us to act in really positive ways.”¹⁵ My contention with this argument, however, is: not only does doubt remain around the issue of what ‘positive ways’ might look like, and who gets to define that, but there is also lack of feedback about what the secondary and tertiary effects of that guilt might be. This is the paradox that health promoters face (whether they realise it or not), which essentially comes down to an ethical question of ‘means to an end’. That is, if guilt does induce uncomfortable feelings, is it ethically okay to purposefully use guilt to motivate people? Schaumberg says probably not, and suggests (in her interview) “rather to teach them that guilt is an ‘all right’ emotion, as opposed to saying it’s bad to experience negative emotions.” Alternatively, there could be an attempt made to reduce the need for guilt in the first place, in the case of exercise and fitness promotion, more specifically.

Effects of guilt: social, psychological, physiological

Both shame and guilt “involve affective reactions to evaluations by other people and...standards” (both internal and external), and thus “both imply some form of social sensitivity” (Leith & Baumeister, 1998, p. 2). But unlike shame, guilt enjoys the reputation (in psychology particularly) of encouraging prosocial effects. That is, it appears to benefit relationships in various ways, one of which is “it motivates people to admit responsibility for their wrong actions, to make amends and repair damaged relationships” (Katchadourian, 2010, p. 75). “On balance”, June Tangney (2001) argues, “guilt appears to be the more adaptive emotion” (p. 13803). Even non-psychologists show more lenience toward guilt than toward shame; Elspeth Probyn suggests it’s “overrated”, and “is, of course, more

¹⁵ Quotes are all taken from the Schaumberg (2012) interview on BBC World Service.

publicly acceptable than shame” (Probyn, 2005, p. 45). But despite this upbeat utility, Herant Katchadourian (2010, p. 75) cautions, “guilt still carries a serious pathological potential.” While my interest isn’t in the extreme reaches of pathology, I am nevertheless struck by the associations made with guilt within studies of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and major depressive disorder (MDD): in some subtypes of OCD,¹⁶ for example, guilt is referred to as “a sense of inflated responsibility” (Shapiro & Stewart, 2011, p. 64) with respect to the moral aspects of obsession. ‘Responsibility’ is a concept that arose often in my conversations with women during this research, particularly in connection with temporal conflicts between obligations to children or work, and self. I suggest, based on my observations, that it is the ‘sense’ as much as any actual ‘inflation’ that matters to the person who is feeling guilty (i.e., responsible). Feelings, after all, argue Craig Smith and Richard Lazarus (1992), are apparently of sufficient strength in an individual’s mind to cause self-blame (e.g., for having been irresponsible) and emotional distress in some measure. And given that “guilt upholds feeling rules from the inside” (Hochschild, 1983, 2003, p. 82), an overt externally imposed social rule isn’t always necessary for the production of momentary (or chronic) guilt sensations.

Research on human cooperation, which “interweaves neurobiology with social science”, and links guilt feelings with distinct brain activities, suggests that “anticipation of the feeling of guilt can motivate us to behave unselfishly” (Nauert, 2011). But what happens after that ‘unselfish’ act? Are there lasting effects for the co-operator from these guilt-induced, socially acceptable actions? Between the initial awareness of being faced

¹⁶ OCD-related scrupulosity is “obsessions that involve religious and/or moral content” (Shapiro & Stewart, 2011, p. 64); guilt is typically put to work in these cases.

with a choice and the anticipated guilt, is there is a sense of being coerced (e.g., by a certain person, by society, or by the universe)? Is it possible that so-called unselfish behaviour may have entailed substantial “emotion work” (and sometimes “emotional labor”) (Hochschild, 1983, 2003).¹⁷ In which case, the chain of emotional consequences has not ended. Val Pappé (1996) hints at this in a health context, which I think is also relevant for exercise-focused discourses:

Look at the popular language of health “Take charge of your body,” is the message. “Be responsible for your health.” “Fight disease.” When we are well, these statements sound fine. But what are the implications for those of us who are not? That we are irresponsible and undisciplined? Despite all of my efforts to heal, the lack of change in my condition engendered guilt.

In my opinion, Herant Katchadourian (2010) presents the most well-balanced view of both guilt and shame when he says:

There is no warrant for calling shame an “ugly feeling” any more than there is for considering guilt in its pure form an unalloyed blessing. It would make better sense to view guilt and shame as we do other emotions such as fear and anger. They are neither good nor bad in themselves, but just part of our nature. They become a blessing or a curse depending on how they are used. In light of this, the new perspective on shame and guilt does well by pointing to the beneficial effects of guilt, but errs in downplaying its potential for damage; conversely, it does well by pointing to the damage that shame does, but errs by downplaying its beneficial uses. (p. 137)

Such a flexible conceptualisation seems to accommodate—and reflect—the fluctuating, transitory nature of feelings and emotions (and affects) generally, and makes room for cultural and social influences, while avoiding ideological dualisms.

¹⁷ To clarify Hochschild’s (1983, 2003) lexicon: “I use the term *emotional labor* to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*. I use the synonymous terms *emotion work* or *emotion management* to refer to these same acts done in a private context where they have *use value*” (p. 7).

It's personal

Richard Lazarus (1991) states that no two people will see or hear exactly the same thing even when experiencing the same environment at the same time, “because personal agendas shape what is relevant for that person to attend to and how events should be perceived and appraised by that person” (p. 393). Furthermore, personal agendas and perceptions are rooted in cultural symbols and meaning systems which affect the significance inferred from a given object or event (Kövecses, 2003). Therefore, these emotional stimuli are not truly the same for each person.

Another related complicating factor is that something like guilt may not always *mean* the same thing to the same person, even in seemingly identical situations (Riessman, 2002). A person may use the word guilt to describe what they're feeling, but give them a few minutes to contemplate and they may change their first description or add more descriptors. And in another situation (different day, place, companions, etc.) they may use guilt in a completely different way semantically. All of these variations and variegations are credible for that person. Having said that, I believe that my inspection of an aggregation of unique experiences reveals evidence of shared or similarly attributed meanings across an assortment of people.

Meaning-making is universal (Sundararajan, 2012). As Dewey (1929, p. 411) suggests, “poetic meanings, moral meanings, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meanings, rather than of truth.” So, while I believe that the experience and expression of emotions generally carry the DNA of the performer's culture (e.g., Panayiotou, 2006, pp. 183-184), I also think there is room for an individual to create idiosyncratic meanings. Therefore, eliciting participants' understandings of guilt is

particularly important.

To more fully appreciate and account for guilt's complexity, whether collectively or individually applicable, Katchadourian (2010) insists, requires more than just one perspective. While his polychromic lenses were more *disciplinary* in nature, I apply the principle methodologically and critically in pursuit of conceptual richness. In discussing guilt in relation to a variety of life domains and social settings, then, I am better able to situate exercise-related guilt and its operations within "the social milieu" (Wesely, 2001, p. 176) in which women's subjectivities are produced (Nogueira, 2014). Ultimately, as Sara Ahmed (2004) says, "emotions *do things*" (p. 119; italics in original), and therefore, rather than simply viewing emotions as psychological inclinations, "we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective" (2004, p. 119). In the next chapter I set about to consider guilt in this way.

3 GUILT AND THE IMPERATIVE PATHWAY

In this chapter I illustrate a formula for guilt that is present within various life domains for women; how it animates gendered discourses within society, and is embedded in the imperative pathway. In doing so, I suggest a psychosomatic cost of guilt, and thus the relevance of taking exercise-related guilt seriously. I acknowledge the complex—and interacting—constellation of forces at work inside and outside women’s bodies in the creation of guilt feelings, and argue for a holistic approach to understanding exercise (health, fitness) as just one of many moral imperatives.

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Good advice

Advice-soaked discourses promising greater health and wellbeing are firmly rooted in Western societies. Even if women-specific health messages were eliminated, there are plenty of other voices along the imperative pathway that could take up the slack. For

example, the following governmental guidelines for achieving good health are rife with shoulds, the healthy backbone of these and many other models of moral citizenry. These directives are unequivocal and unapologetic in their specificity and confidence.

New Zealand adults “should...put together at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most if not all days of the week”, and “if possible, add some vigorous exercise for extra health benefit and fitness” (health.govt.nz). Australian adults, “irrespective of cultural background, gender, or ability”, are urged to “accumulate 150 to 300 minutes (2 ½ to 5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity or 75 to 150 minutes (1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours) of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities, each week” (health.gov.au). Canadian adults should “be active at least **2.5 hours a week** to achieve health benefits; focus on **moderate to vigorous aerobic activity** throughout each week, broken into sessions of 10 minutes or more”, and add “activities **that target your muscles and bones** at least two days per week” (publichealth.gc.ca, their emphases). “The possibilities are endless” for American adults, who “should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.” For even more health benefits, they “should also do muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week” (health.gov). The step to achieving a firm end through these means appears to be a simple matter of ‘putting together time’, ‘accumulating activity’, and ‘increasing frequency, duration, and intensity’. I suggest that guilt emerges and is strengthened when these imperatives come up against one or more of the many other

imperatives, as I discuss in this chapter. I see these conflicts as ethical dilemmas, as they frequently offer a choice between multiple undesirable alternatives.

For your own good

People in Western societies seem overwhelmingly receptive to the idea that exercise is always good for them (and often, more is probably better than less). Physiologically and psychologically, the evidence in support of health benefits of physical exercise appears irrefutable (Leon, 2012; P. J. Smith, Potter, McLaren, & Blumenthal, 2013; Soares & de Sousa, 2013). Socially, the doing of it provokes approval; not doing it invites reproach. But I argue that *exercise* does not just consist of physical motion. Exercise comprises many elements: the anticipation of it, the planning, the social setting/actors in/with which the exercise happens, the artefacts involved (e.g., clothes, equipment), the time required, the experience of it, the sensations, the bodily reminders (e.g., injuries, soreness), the cool down (including retracing all the above steps), and the (emotional) memory attached to each step. Memories accumulate; and when one or more or all of the steps outlined are infused with negative emotions, what effect does that have on any other steps, and on subsequent activities throughout the day? And, from a longer-term perspective, what effect do repeated negative experiences (Yamaguchi, 2011) and rehearsed memories (Sternberg, 2001) have on the individual's overall relationship with exercise?

Ethical dilemmas

I can see both benefit and detriment in what is known as *exercise* today (explicated by feminist scholars, e.g., McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Wray, 2007). There can be

emancipatory effects, as corroborated by many women (McDermott, 2004); empowering aspects related to the elements of joy and physical exuberance recounted in many women's experiences of exercise (Partington, Partington, Fishwick, & Allin, 2005); and there are longer-term mental and physical health benefits (Donaghy, 2007), factors consistently documented both medically and anecdotally (Hug, Hartig, Hansmann, Seeland, & Hornung, 2009; Little, 2002). But there is a less cheerful side to exercise as it is typically conceptualised in Western societies. In the process of promoting health and fitness, the various voices responsible for conveying those messages take on a prescriptive character (Petersen & Lupton, 1996), imposing a sense of obligation on the audience. This sense of obligation, while it may sometimes and in some ways act to motivate people to exercise, can also induce negative emotions (including guilt) and overwhelming feelings of unobtainable expectations. Critiquing the marks of "developed societies", Félix Guattari argues that "most of their power depends upon systems of guilt and internalizations of norms" (Guattari, 1995, 2009, p. 198). He refers to the resulting individualised guilt as a sort of "social terror" (1995, 2009). Health and fitness norms, I suggest, are implicated in this social terror. Incidentally, by implicating the social (norms) within the life of the individual (guilt), I don't mean to imply that the capitalist state is the only influence over our concepts of health and fitness. My characterisation of exercise clearly shows the complexity inherent in the concept. Western capitalism is, however, an unavoidable reality for me and my participants; it is the cultural backdrop for my participants' understandings of exercise, and for my interpretations of their narratives.

As part of this social terror, then, many societal voices that perpetuate discourses of fitness and health do not always evidence ethical sensitivity toward their audiences

(Lupton, 2014). Ulrich Beck (1992) describes some of this insensitivity, when he argues that “all...the...experts dump their contradictions and conflicts at the feet of the individual and leave him or her with the well intentioned invitation to judge all of this critically on the basis of his or her own notions” (p. 137). So, along with their imposition of moral imperatives, discourses of fitness and health add to the conflicting and competing demands that create crises of time, energy, financial resources, and emotion. As one of my participants explains, exercise is just part of the web of responsibilities she faces daily; but what

has always disrupted my exercise is guilt induced by [my husband] either wanting to exercise with me or wanting me to take care of something instead of exercising ...I have always been made to feel guilty if I didn't fit my exercise into a convenient timeslot for everyone else. So part of the liberation process to exercise freedom is gaining that space in general - for *everything*, not just exercise. (Shyla)

She is left to sort out the dissonances amongst the swirling mass of directives, and like many mid-age women, “she sees to it that everyone is properly served at the tea party of life” (Bartky, 2002a, p. 244) before—if ever—pre/serving herself.

The imperative pathway expanded

Building on the imperative pathway as outlined by Hargreaves and Vertinsky (2007a), I argue that the ‘fitness/beauty = goodness = success’ trajectory can be usefully expanded to include even more aspects of female existence in Western societies. Mid-age women, who are my focus for this thesis, face particular social, psychological, and physiological challenges (as well as economic and political) in the form of social roles and responsibilities, social expectations, gendered discourses, shifting identities, and effects of aging. My aim is to show the intertwined and conflicted nature of some of the many

expectations that litter the imperative pathway. And more specifically, to show that exercise and exercise-related guilt are best understood as part of a social ecosystem, and not as isolated phenomena within individual, disconnected lives.

My chief interest with the particular age range on which I've focused is its alignment with a time of life that for most women typically involves filling multiple social roles—their children may still need care and supervision, while at the same time their parents may begin to need assistance. Linda McDowell (2013) speaks about her aging mother's loss of independence, and how “the burdens of care are unevenly distributed as I find myself again managing questions about love and guilt” (p. 168). The time constraints, the unique physical and mental demands, and the sense of responsibility that marks the middle years of many women's lives (Perrig-Chiello, Hutchison, & Hoepflinger, 2008) seems to me the ingredients for a ‘perfect storm’ of emotions. Mid-age women directly influence the well-being of both the elderly and the young for whom they are frequently the primary caregivers and/or care managers. Natasha Brown and colleagues (2012, p. 246) state that “in most households, women maintain their traditional role of being the individual who is primarily responsible for” the household's shopping and cooking, “which often intertwines with their roles and responsibilities associated with motherhood”. In many cases, too, women play a critical role in shaping the exercise- and body-related attitudes and practices of their children and grandchildren (Obel, Bruce, & Thompson, 2008).

Given that exercise is just one part of the constellation of demands comprising a person's day/life, it is unlikely that any associated guilt will exist in isolation. Guilt experiences consist of interacting sociocultural, psychological, and physiological elements, and affect people in many areas of their lives. And as the vast list of self-help and psycho-

hopeful books, resulting from Google and Amazon searches on *guilt* might suggest, guilt exists in traces to truckloads within virtually every domain of social life. But how is it conveyed? What constitutes a discursive guilt formula? How do societal discourses and messages articulate and imply guilt? What do signs of guilt look like?

Following are some of the many expectations scattered along the imperative pathway. I delineate them here to emphasise the complexity of competing demands, and thus the conditions of possibility for guilt. In particular, I foreground the role of exercise within each aspect, which, of course invokes the topic of bodies. Drawing on Deborah Lupton (1995) in *The Imperative of Health*, “I favour a dialectical approach to body, which recognizes the location of bodies in nature, but also the ways in which discourses act to shape bodies, and experiences of bodies, in certain ways over which individuals have only a degree of control” (p. 5). The imperative pathway, then, is travelled by people who are not having, being, or doing bodies (see discussion on p. 18) “in circumstances of their own choosing” (Shilling, 1991, p. 665). I discuss each of these imperatives in more detail later on in this chapter:

Good life - A work-life balance (Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield, & Sharpe, 2011): the expectation that, as a female, you will provide for your family, physically and emotionally (Lois, 2010); will show an ethic of care; be a good parent; an organised, creative homemaker; and be a conscientious and productive employee/worker. Exercise can help make you a fun, fit, energetic, dependable, and productive caregiver and employee.

Good health - Healthy: the expectation that you will be a healthy citizen, taking responsibility for your own health (R. Crawford, 1980; J. Wright et al., 2006) - eat properly, sleep enough, eliminate stress (and ensure your offspring do the same), and of

course, exercise. Exercise is a given, and plays a leading role in achieving success in cardiovascular fitness and related health aims.

Look good - Feminine: the expectation that, as a female, you will display a certain level of feminine aesthetic, i.e., pretty, soft, and if muscular, then at least adorned with feminine markers (Vertinsky, 1990). Exercise can make and keep you slim and sexy, and also allow you to dress appropriately and attractively.

Be good - Congenial: the expectation that, as a female, you will convey emotions that match your femininity, i.e., quiet, smiling, agreeable (Bartky, 2002a). Exercise decreases depression, and can make you happier, and more socially upbeat. Notably, being ‘good’ is a premise underlying all of the other expectations, in that meeting them means you have done the ‘right’ thing and are thus a ‘good’ person/parent/citizen. Being female, however, adds a unique dimension to ‘goodness’ that typically emerges in discussions of gender roles or an ethic of care.

Age well - Youthful: expectations of youthfulness emerge within discourses of health, of fitness, and of femininity, rendering age another form of potential failure and guilt (Spoel et al., 2012). Exercise can stave off aging, improve cognitive function, guard against bone loss and joint degeneration, and make you look younger than you are (a moving target).

When I try to separate these expectations and related moral imperatives into categories, or into discrete sections for discussion, I find there are no hard lines of distinction. That is, the expectations of a good parent are inextricably linked to the expectations of a healthy citizen. The expectations attached to being that good and disciplined citizen are overlaid with expectations of a fit person; exercise is implicated in

the achievement of both identities. For females, being a fit person also carries the less visible expectations of femininity; muscles and endurance are expected, but so, too, is a feminine comportment and non-aggressive demeanour. Feminine ideals, in turn, are generally expected in performances of motherhood and womanhood, along with an ethic of care that attends not only to the object of immediate attention but is also indefinitely 'on call'. In her study of women's experiences with anti-depressant use, Simone Fullagar (2009) concluded that her participants commonly drew upon the

psy-discourses prevalent in so many life domains, [and] judged themselves as not 'good enough' in relation to expectations that they and others could perform consistently, effortlessly and tirelessly as superwomen—working, shopping, caring, cooking and being attractive selves. They implied that normalized femininity was premised upon unlimited embodied resources whereby women always had emotional and physical energy available for themselves and others. (p. 397)

Exercise is the means by which women can, theoretically, meet the moral imperatives and expectations embedded in all life domains. It promises to render them good, disciplined, fit, healthy, worthy, and age-resistant, and it can be practiced with appropriate femininity. However, exercise messages also tend to either explicitly or implicitly lay out discursive boundaries of appropriately *feminine* behaviour and appearance (Markula, 2003). For example, models used in ads are more likely to be thin, young, and aesthetically appealing by most social standards (Young, 2005). Ironically, even the unfaltering, effortless smiles worn by those (or any) models can imply a standard of positivity and cheerfulness that is out of reach for many women as they try to get through a hectic day. As Andrea, one of my participants said, "the idea of smiling while exercising is crazy to me...I don't feel happy I feel tired." This paragon of womanhood becomes the benchmark, the minimum requirement of 'success'. The process of achieving it (or not) is often marked by

repeated failure, with many women reporting their exercise experiences in terms of weight lost or gained, miles covered or unaccomplished, body parts sculpted or wobbling, and other measurable improvements to their appearance (Spitzack, 1990).

Hence, the body choices mid-age active female agents make are never “separate from the social milieu in which these choices occur” (Wesely, 2001, p. 176). So before ‘speaking’ with my participants (see Chapter 4) about exercise, I introduce some of the complexity of their social milieu as embodied in the guilt ethos of the imperative pathway. Importantly, visual rhetoric constituting so many societal discourses (Becker, 2007a; Handa, 2004; G. Rose, 2011) re-presents formulas for exercise-related guilt in a mutually reinforcing dynamic (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006). For example, parenting discourses highlight fit, ‘fun’ parents; health discourses use slim, smiling citizens; occupational discourses show fit, energetic, productive employees; lifestyle discourses incorporate active, happy, trim people; fitness and physical activity discourses in turn point to each of these visible enthymemes as good reason to exercise, thereby adding legitimacy to their own claims and expectations. “Images invite comparisons: they are constant reminders of what we are and might with effort yet become” (Featherstone, 1991, p. 178). Significantly, whether it is represented visually or textually, I argue, *exercise* is an active presence in the messages in which it appears. That is as a socially constructed verb, *exercise* is an automatic call-to-action; a choice is implicitly thrust on the viewer/reader: ‘just do it’ (good/right) or just don’t (bad/wrong). In the following sections I illustrate the interwoven nature of discourses that invoke exercise, and thereby perpetuate exercise-related guilt along the imperative pathway.

‘Ought implies can’

Throughout this research, I have been (and am) particularly interested in the slippery distinctions and effects of ‘could’ versus ‘should’. For insights I refer to the maxim in ethics, “ought implies can”, which means that “a person ought to perform a certain action only if he [sic] can do so” (Yaffe, 2005). In other words, no one is morally obligated to do what is impossible. However, the way in which societal voices use the terms ‘ought’ and ‘should’ does not seem to acknowledge the other part of this ethical issue: people *do* feel obligated to do the impossible, especially those things that have been normalised. Thus, it is possible that when someone realizes they ‘can’t’, while still sensing the obligation of ‘should’, they feel a dissonance they characterise as ‘guilt’ or ‘feeling guilty’. I think of this phenomenon as an immutable insult - an implicit standard that cannot be met, but which nonetheless continues to mock every failed attempt to comply. This, I believe, contributes substantially to the negative essence of guilt feelings. Immutable insults lurk within many societal messages, typically couched in a prescriptive ‘should’ or ‘can’, and in a proscriptive ‘shouldn’t’ or ‘can’t’. In my discussion of an expanded imperative pathway, I call out a variety of messages exemplifying this language, and highlight the guilt formula within them.

Formulas for guilt

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, guilt is characterised most simply as a response to not doing the right thing or to doing the wrong thing. Both scenarios infuse daily life, exemplified in moralised obligations and expectations (e.g., ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘need to’) embedded in gender roles, gendered discourses, and societal messages. There are

many ways to fall short or ‘do the wrong thing’; there are ample opportunities to blame oneself for failing to meet expectations. To add emphasis to this argument, I offer an admission by one of the most visibly ‘successful’ women of her generation in Western culture; as the COO of Facebook, 44 year old Sheryl Sandberg¹⁸ epitomises achievement:

Every woman I know feels guilty about the choices they are making, including myself. In fact I feel so guilty I wrote a whole book about it. (CBS 60 Minutes, March 11, 2013).

What makes obligations and expectations a question of morality is their link to what’s ‘good’. The ‘success’ that signals a final step along the imperative pathway, then, is dependent upon one’s ‘goodness’ leading to that step, no matter how stellar your achievements. Significantly, an imperative *is* one irrespective of audience (if any) or situation. Whether an audience receives an imperative as such and acts on it doesn’t change its nature: a command, an unavoidable obligation. I argue that even women who have no intention of exercising are nonetheless aware of health and fitness rhetoric and of societal expectations, which position exercise as a normal and basic (possibly essential) component of good health, and especially as a way to reduce weight/size. The choice of whether and how to do the ‘right’ thing is extant and omnipresent. Moreover, “in a health-valuing culture, people come to define themselves in part by how well they succeed or fail in adopting healthy practices” (R. Crawford, 2006, p. 402). Thus, as Hargreaves and Vertinsky (2007a) and others (e.g., E. Rich & Evans, 2005) have noted, a concept such as fitness isn’t just about a lack of illness or of meeting a set of prescribed physiological measurements (e.g., blood pressure); it’s also about being perceived as a *good* person,

¹⁸ She is ranked on *Fortune*’s list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business; she is one of *Time*’s 100 Most Influential People in the World. Her ‘book’ is *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013); in it she encourages women to “sit at the table,” seek challenges, take risks, and pursue their goals with gusto.”

signified as a *worthy* person (Tinning, 2014), and admired as a *responsible* citizen with “moral value” (Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2007a, p. 6). *Exercise*, then, as sacrosanct within ideologies (and practices) of health, enjoys reflected glory when “*health* is conceived as the condition of possibility for the *good* life or even the *good life* itself” (R. Crawford, 2006, p. 404; my emphases).

Moral imperatives can be found within other discourses, too: for example, it’s not enough to know about parenting, there is an expectation of ‘good parenting’ (Seagram & Daniluk, 2002). Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (2005) cite an excerpt by Adrienne Rich, written in the 1970s, poignantly describing “the invisible violence of the institution of motherhood”: “the guilt, the powerless responsibility for human lives, the judgments and condemnations, the fear of her own power, the guilt, the guilt, the guilt” (1976, in Ehrenrich & English, 2005, p. 251). The subsequent decades filling the period between Adrienne the poet and Sheryl the executive, don’t appear to have offered much relief, as Judith Warner (2005), the author of *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, writes:

Suddenly, as the 1980s turned into the 1990s, the word “guilt” was everywhere in the magazine stories on motherhood, and it wasn’t guilt about “not feeling guilt” anymore. It was guilt about working, guilt about *not being there* enough for the children. Working mothers were no longer heroines, symbols of the new and healthy freedoms won by Mothers’ Lib. They were villains, selfish and “unnatural”. (p. 91)

Importantly for a “maternal guilt” (Rotkirch & Janhunnen, 2010) formula, a good mother (Miller & Brown, 2005) also stays fit (Dixon, 2009) to enable her to be a better caregiver (S. Drew & Paradise, 1996; Wattis & James, 2013). In an article titled *A fit mom*

is the best mom, Lisa Druxman, founder of Fit4Mom (see Figure 3.3, p. 53)¹⁹ in the USA, explains that it's important for mothers to stay active "because it all starts with mom....their family needs them to be healthy and happy. We believe that moms need to take care of themselves first and foremost so that they can take care of everyone else" (Garin, 2013). Figure 3.1 (p. 52) from the website of *The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity*, foregrounds the message that doing one's laundry might be an 'excuse' for avoiding exercise. Applying a guilt formula, then, being a 'bad' housekeeper allows you to be a 'good' mother. The image in Figure 3.2 (p. 53), taken

Figure 3.1: Excusing yourself - *Mothers in Motion*

from the Facebook page of a fitness club in New Zealand,²⁰ illustrates just one of many

¹⁹ On their website, fit4mom.com/about: "We will inspire moms to reach optimal health and well being. We will inspire children to emulate their moms and make fitness a part of their lives." (Fit4Mom®)

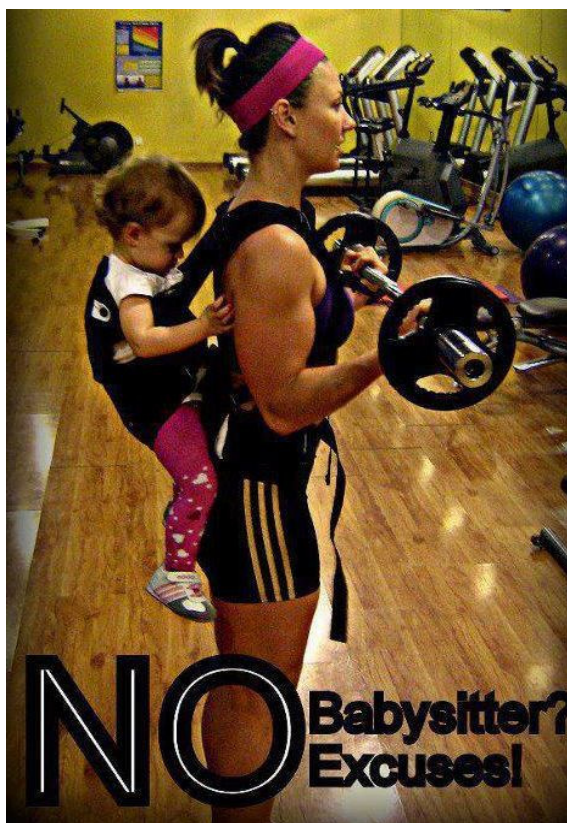
²⁰ www.facebook.com/HealthAndSportsFitnessClub (healthandsports.co.nz)

variations of the fit-for-caring ethos (which is essentially being fit-for-*others*) promulgated in exercise rhetoric today. The image suggests that failure is impossible, given this dual solution. The choices—and the consequences—are the caregiver’s.

Similarly, the image in Figure 3.4 (p. 54) from an article in the *New Zealand Herald* about helping “older mums return to work fighting fit”, suggests mothers-to-be can begin ‘taking care of themselves’ (and thus the almost-born) during pregnancy. Something, the article claims, that is “likely to lead to a more positive outlook and attitude which is good for everyone, employers included” (Christian, 2014).

Figure 3.2: Raising the bar - ‘No excuses!’

Figure 3.3: Fit for everything - *Fit4Mom.com*



I contend that this fit-for-caring syllogism extends to non-mothers (e.g., caring for elderly relatives), and to ‘productive workers’ generally (e.g., keeping fit helps you avoid the post-lunch energy slump). The Mayo Clinic, for example, promotes exercise as a fit-for-

everything solution, outlining “7 benefits of regular physical activity”, that can “improve your life” in ways that range “from boosting your mood to improving your sex life” (mayoclinic.org). Something characterised as a *benefit*, of course, implies it’s good for you. The guilt potential is set: you can do the ‘good-right’ thing and enjoy any number of benefits, or choose a ‘bad-wrong’ thing and the associated inadequacies of an unimproved life.

Figure 3.4: No pause for pregnancy



Further, health and fitness isn’t just about lack of disease or strength of limbs (Metzl & Kirkland, 2010). Both *health* and *fitness* also carry an obligation of not being fat, and more specifically, of ‘looking good’ (e.g., Figure 3.6, p. 56). Looking good—“the body beautiful”—in turn, “comes to be taken as a sign of prudence and prescience in health matters” (Featherstone, 1991, p. 184). This isn’t a new concept, of course, as evidenced by names such as *The Women’s League of Health and Beauty*, founded in London in 1930 by Mary Bagot Stack (see Figure 3.5., p. 56). More recently, Sharlene Hesse-Biber (1997, p. 10; 2007) has written about “the Cult of Thinness”, arguing that “being female is the

primary criterion for membership”, “the object of worship is the “perfect” body”, and exercising is one of the “the primary rituals” for achieving that body. Notwithstanding cultural and societal differences and disruptions between 1920s Britain, 1990s America, and now, the relative emphasis on *health* versus *beauty* has fluctuated over time without a clear winner (see Figure 3.6, p. 56, in which ‘looking good’/beauty precedes ‘feeling great’/health). As Samantha Murray (2010) argues, “it is increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to separate medical constructions of the ‘healthy’ female body from the cultural standards of the attractive one” (p. 1). So, while some posit that “in contemporary society the cult of the body represents an increased emphasis on physical appearance” (Tinning, 2014, p. 36), I suggest notions of wellness, health, and fitness have become *conflated* with those of beauty, thinness, and appearance generally. These “unrealistic standards of beauty” (Atalay & Gençöz, 2008, p. 178), represented by an idealized female body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), are created and perpetuated through ubiquitous messaging that targets women in every life domain, and thus in each of their lived identities (Markula & Kennedy, 2011).

I argue that a guilt formula lurks within this “phoney moral universe” (Gard, 2009, p. 42). Or in Susan Bordo’s (1993, 2003) words, there are “psychic anxieties and moral valuations contained within” “the contemporary slenderness ideal” (p. 187). That is, one can succeed at doing the ‘right’ thing by ‘feeling good’ (e.g., exercising), while failing to do the ‘right’ thing by not ‘looking good’ (e.g., not thin enough). Conversely, one can be ‘good’ and gain “social value” (J. Wright et al., 2006, p. 708) by maintaining an appropriately slim body, even while suffering ill health (i.e., not taking care of yourself responsibly = guilt; and consequently failing in other domains), thus being ‘bad’.

Figure 3.5: Ladies who lunge - *The Women's League of Health and Beauty*, 1939, London²¹



Prunella Stack leading fellow members of the Women's League of Health and Beauty during a rehearsal at Wembley Stadium in May 1939. Photograph: Fred Morley/Getty Images

Figure 3.6: 'Women looking good, Feeling great' at *Configure Express* gym, Auckland



**Women looking good,
Feeling great**

²¹ I do not intend to diminish the generous efforts of this group or its founder's, whose vision, according to the *Fitness League* website, "was of a league of women who will renew their energy in themselves and for themselves day by day. She believed completely in the power of women to make the world a better place to live in" (thefitnessleague.com). My point is to illustrate the perpetuation of the language in discourses around women's health, exercise, and bodies.

Being female, moreover, adds aesthetic and emotional imperatives to the mix: ‘looking good’ is more than being fit, slim, and beautiful; it requires a certain feminine demeanour (Wolf, 2002) and *feminine* attractiveness. Implicit in these norms is the association of feminized, beautified health with “worthiness as a person” (Featherstone, 1991, p. 184), in addition to the ‘goodness’ I already mentioned. Thus, another moral facet has been added to the already unachievable physical standards. Sandra Bartky (2002a, p. 242) defines femininity as “a set of qualities of character and behavioral dispositions as well as a compelling aesthetic of embodiment”, adding, “the two cannot be entirely disentangled.” A ‘good’ feminine disposition requires nurturing/caring ability (Wearing, 1990), agreeableness, deference, and smiling (Hochschild, 1983, 2003). “The “truly” feminine woman”, Bartky (2002a) suggests, “is warm, nurturing, expressive, unaggressive, gentle” (p. 242). A ‘good’ feminine aesthetic makes use of artefacts such as “jewellery, cosmetics, and fashions with features such as lace and flowers” (Davis, 1997, p. 27), and feminine beauty practices (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012) such as those promoted by Caci, one of “New Zealand’s trusted skin treatment and appearance enhancement professionals”:

for centuries [women] have plucked, waxed, bleached and more recently we have shaved. Undoubtedly these removal methods help us reach our ultimate goal: smooth, hair free, feminine skin. It’s what society expects of us women.
(Caci.co.nz)

As with the foregoing imperatives, the expectation of femininity raises the spectre of guilt in the failure to properly meet any of multiple parameters, through either omission or commission.

But in an interesting twist, meeting the demands of exercise can sometimes be the reason for failing to meet the standards of femininity: sweating, for example, doesn’t play nicely with styled hair or certain cosmetics; huffing and puffing puts an added strain on

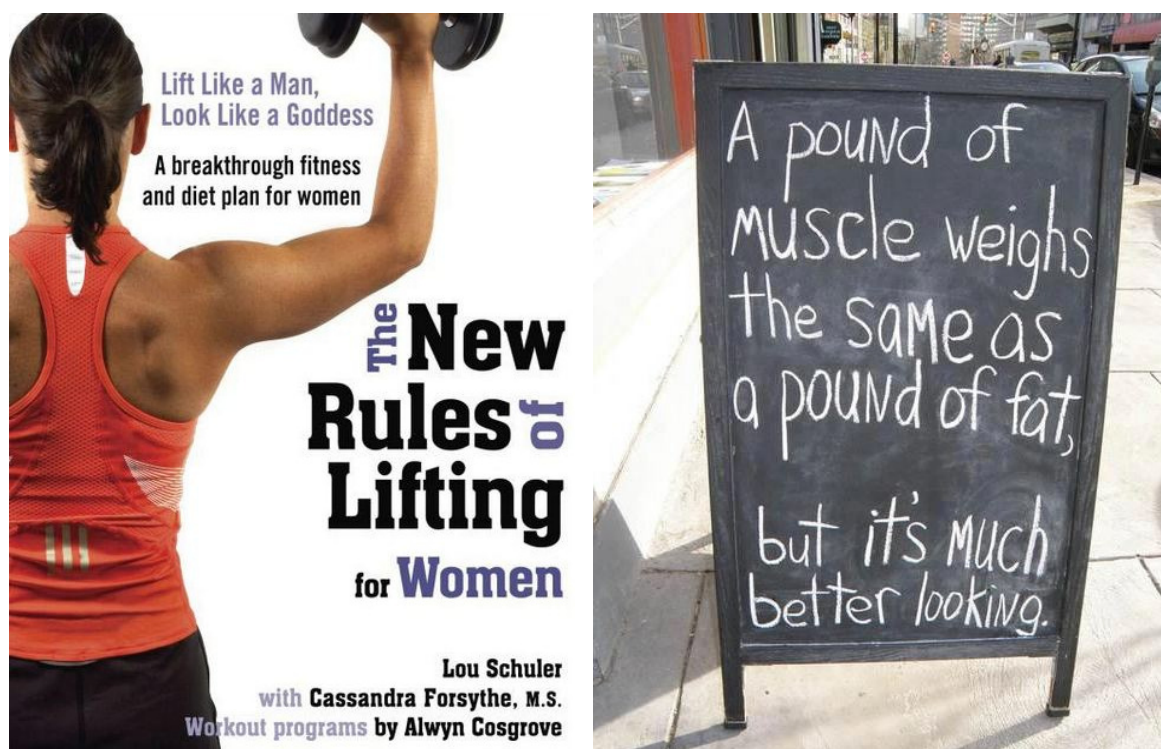
composure. I suggest a related site of potential dissonance between fitness and femininity discourses, exemplified in what Bartky (2002a, p. 244) calls “the three imperatives of women’s movement: discreet body display, restricted spatiality, and grace”. Or, in proscriptive language: don’t stand out, spread out, or spaz out. [See also Iris Young’s (1980) discussion of “feminine body comportment, motility, and spatiality.”] And yet women do. It’s difficult to imagine any mid-age woman entering a gym for the first time, for example (not to mention other experiences such as shopping with children or enduring a mammogram), and not feeling as if they had fallen short of at least one of these proscriptions.

Furthermore, and paradoxically, says Pirkko Markula (1998), “the characteristics of healthful beauty have been expanded to include a psychological dimension: the attractive female body has come to signify a controlled mind and healthy self-confidence” (p. 10). While ‘controlled’ and ‘confident’ are not features historically foregrounded in descriptions of “docile body” (Duncan & Klos, 2014) versions of a feminine ideal, the imperative pathway generously evolves to accommodate shifting societal standards and choices (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). To illustrate an enduring aspect of discourses surrounding women’s bodies, I note a cartoon (see Appendix B) in London’s *Daily Mirror* newspaper from 1927, captioned “Changing ideals in feminine beauty”; scribbled in the bottom margin is the query: “changing ideals, the cult of emaciation - where will it end?” According to Sharlene Hesse-Biber (1997), it hasn’t yet ended. The “Cult of Thinness” still looms large today, with thinness holding a privileged position within the “cult of the body” (Tinning, 2014), despite an added emphasis on firmness and muscularity.

Patricia Vertinsky (2010, p. 347) describes “the evanescent glow of health and firm

muscularity that was suddenly and inextricably linked to beauty” (e.g., Figure 3.7, p. 59, left) beginning in the early 1980s in North America; “within the...wider “exercise-body beautiful complex”” (p. 126), according to Joseph Maguire and Louise Mansfield (1998) “slim, toned bodies are ‘established bodies”” (p. 122), revered bodies. As evidence of this firmly established discourse, I present the sidewalk sign in Figure 3.7 (p.59, right), which I photographed in Auckland. Unavoidably, then, “attaining a slim, toned, and cellulite-free form” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009), is an essential aspect of acceptable modern Western femininity. And exercise, as the answer to these interwoven imperatives, is itself an expected practice embedded with rules and expectations, which can be broken and unmet.

Figure 3.7: Shaping discourses - weight and see



Only the good dye young

The final imperative I highlight on this expanding pathway adds a unique layer of ‘shoulds’ to the foregoing mass of guilt-edged obligations. There are two aspects of this imperative I want to highlight: one is the idea that all of the expectations I’ve discussed so far exist in perpetuity; age does not lessen their impact. Two is the notion of ‘successful aging’, which by definition evokes possible ‘failing’ and thus guilt.

For women, the moral imperatives of being a good person, a good parent, a healthy person, a fit person, a slim person, a good looking person, a feminine person, a disciplined person, and an energetic, toned person carry forward through mid-age and beyond. The specific targets and standards may shift, but the essence of the expectations and related moral value remain. To these requirements for worthiness I add a final impossibility: youthfulness. Even if someone meets the preceding demands to a guilt-free extent, their otherwise ideal body must also remain wrinkle-free in order to achieve ‘success’ along the imperative pathway. Unlike all the other imperatives, such as the much-maligned adipose tissue, age is non-negotiable; time will prevail. If perpetual *youth* is literally impossible, *youthfulness* is at least a pursuable goal (Brooks, 2010). ‘Can’, in this case, implies ‘ought’. The formula for guilt is alive and well in discourses of ‘aging successfully’ (Chodzko-Zajko, 2000; Dogra & Stathokostas, 2012), which draw on both health discourses (Greenhalgh & Wessely, 2004) and ‘eternal youth’ discourses (Skrabaneck, 1994).²² Both ideologies encourage thinking about the future. I suggest that guilt arises in the form of

²² Petr Skrabaneck (1994) refers to healthism as “the ideology of the ‘health of the nation’” (p. 11), and connects it to “the narcissistic cult of youth, health and beauty, preached by health promotionists”, which he argues “increases the feeling of guilt and anxiety in an ageing population who would give anything for a magic mirror which would tell them that they are beautiful and needed” (p. 40).

doubt and extrapolation as people make choices (i.e., do the right or wrong thing) now that will affect their (successful or failed) older selves. Consider the counsel given to her readers by popular health guru, Dr. Libby Weaver (2012), author of the book *Rushing Woman's Syndrome*:

The way we treat our body today not only determines how we feel and function today but it will affect how we feel and function tomorrow, in five years time, in 20 years time...Wouldn't it be wonderful to be active and flexible in body and mind at 80, rather than stiff and utterly exhausted? The power to be that, the power to change, is in your hands and in your hands only...this is not the dress rehearsal. (drlibby.com)²³

I am once again stuck by the complexity of overlapping and interweaving imperatives, which compete for time, energy, and resources, and thus I do not wish to minimise the realities of a biological body. However, I notice the parallel tracks of knowledge acquisition and self-reliance that feed into a guilt formula in which a person can feel guilty now *and* later about the same ('wrong') decisions. And what about someone who is only half way to 80 and is already 'stiff and utterly exhausted'? As the sole executor of their 'state', their moral failure appears to have grave implications. According to healthism discourses (Barsky, 1988), "individuals are expected to acquire medical knowledge" (R. Crawford, 2006, p. 402), to facilitate self-directed disease-prevention and healing. This epitomises the responsible citizen (R. Crawford, 1980); being irresponsible, then, is to 'fail' to educate and subjugate oneself enough or properly. Furthermore, the "feminine 'healthy' citizen",

it is suggested, should seek both soundness of body and physical allure through self-care techniques proffered by the new public health. In these discourses there

²³ This quotation is from her website. While roaming the New Books section in the library one day, her book, *Rushing Woman's Syndrome*, caught my eye as potentially relevant for exercise-related guilt. I put it on hold, and was intrigued to see that I was on a waiting list of over 400 people. Apparently, a chord is being struck.

is an elision between the ideals of commodity culture and public health, for both promote the slim, attractive, healthy, physically fit, youthful body as that which women should seek to attain. (Petersen & Lupton, 1996, p. 80)

Appearing unfeminine and/or unhealthy is, plausibly, to ‘fail’ to vitalize and glamorize oneself; it could also imply the person has failed to even seek these goals, another opportunity for guilt. Exercise plays a leading role in these discourses, and is therefore inhered in ‘the way we treat our body’, and in the ‘medical knowledge’ and ‘self-care techniques’ that women are expected to acquire. Exercise is touted as preventative, preservative, and protective, all of which make exercising a *pro-actively* good/right choice.

More-ality

Ironically, it seems, leisure/exercise as a former ‘site of resistance’ (Shaw, 1985) to gendered norms and associated pressures has morphed into an “exercise-body beautiful complex” (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998, p. 109), which “reinforces established standards of femininity” (p. 109). The added emphasis on *firm*, while remaining thin/feminine/attractive, and of course healthy, I suggest works to erode the concept of leisure as a site of resistance (Henderson & Gibson, 2013; Shaw, 2001), empowerment (Brace-Govan, 2002), and/or pleasure for women (Little, 2002; Smith Maguire, 2008b). That is, exercise-as-leisure has become a *prescribed* element of a ‘healthy lifestyle’ (e.g., Kennedy & Markula (2011); also see my ‘good mother’ discussion, p. 53); and the prescription inheres in *all* the expectations of the imperative pathway. The accumulating weight of obligations turns leisure into work (Rojek, 2010; Smith Maguire, 2008a); women respond to this imposition with, among other things, resistance (Henderson & Hickerson, 2007). ‘Leisure’ may be found in exercise, but exercise is not leisurely. My research explores the idea that ‘exercise’ is not an inert or

innocent notion (or practice), but is rather infused with guilt (and shame) due to its associated relentless standards of (feminized) body shaping, health-knowledge acquisition (Currie & Wiesenberg, 2003), and moral responsibility (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009).

Expectations (however implicit) embedded in the range of ‘good’ standards I’ve discussed in this chapter provide myriad ways to misstep, to get it wrong, to fall short, and thus to experience “the disagreeable feeling that we call guilt” (Posner, 1999). For one thing, each requirement arguably competes with the others for time (Blair-Loy, 2003; S. Drew & Paradice, 1996), energy, and emotional resources (Lois, 2010). Hence the guilt potential in concessions and tradeoffs, which by definition hint at less-than-ideal choices and outcomes. Despite this disagreeableness, “guilt is frequently viewed as a virtue, as a high sense of responsibility and morality” (Purcell, 2012). This is a misleading characterisation, argues Maud Purcell (2012), who suggests that guilt is a “destroyer of emotional energy”, which “leaves you feeling immobilized in the present by something that has already occurred.” Adding up recurring feelings of guilt earned via many ‘already’s’, and by the perception of constantly falling short, a person arrives at a significant accumulation of spent emotional energy—“an undramatic, undramatized suffering” (A. C. Rich, 1976, in Ehrenrich & English, 2005, p. 251) —and associated potentialities. So, “when is guilt unhealthy?” Nel Noddings (2002) answers her own question: “guilt is unhealthy when it persists without justification, when we blame ourselves even though disinterested observers would find us innocent” (p. 217).

Jennifer Smith-Maguire (2008a) concludes her book *Fit for Consumption* with a cogent summary of the fitness field, which has resonated with me as I’ve looked more closely at what she calls “intended and unintended consequences”:

What makes us fit is not necessarily what makes us healthy or happy...the fitness field illustrates the intended and unintended consequences of the body's place as a status object in contemporary consumer culture, in which occupation is privileged over recreation, form over function, and control over enjoyment...for bodies that are fit for consumption, leisure is work, health is appearance, and pleasure lies in discipline (p. 208)

To clarify my own understanding, I replace “for bodies that are fit for consumption” with ‘for females to be deemed socially valuable and morally worthy’. Arguably, social value and moral worth are the conceptual premises on which norms and expectations are based, and on which many health and fitness discourses rely for convictive and motivational strength. Thus they inform women’s judgments of their own feelings and actions about their health, bodies, and appearance: ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘good’, or ‘bad’. I hope that the preceding chapter has rendered a little more visible “the role of discourse[s] in constituting subjects” (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012, p. 119) who are traversing the imperative pathway. I have also highlighted the guilt formula as a ubiquitous and active component within those health and fitness discourses. In the next chapter, I introduce women’s voices—those ‘subjects’ making judgments about themselves. Needless to say, I am well aware that women cannot position themselves “outside of” those discourses (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012, p. 119).

4 HEARING VOICES

In this chapter I expand on my approach to ‘data’, and describe the people who helped me create it; I describe the process of creating the data; and the resources upon which I drew in the data-generation process.

Chapter contents

- Introducing voices
- Discursive reconnoitring
- Mediated voices
 - Mediated voices in particular
- Unmediated voices
 - Social media; interpersonal communication
- Collaborating
 - Contacting
 - Creating
 - Confiding
 - Miscellaneous musings
 - Skipping class

Introducing voices

“The way that research is presented is itself a narrative, a form of methodology, and discussing methodology is itself a form of narrative construction” (Greenway, 2008, p. 324). So I begin my narrative by introducing the voices that speak throughout: some I’ve characterized as mediated, others as unmediated. Some voices have emerged from sources,

such as mass media and the built environment, while others come directly from women themselves via interpersonal contact or unsolicited content such as blogs. Some voices (e.g., fitness industry) speak via many different channels (e.g., newspapers, magazines, built environment, advertisements), and one channel may contain multiple voices (e.g., online news article followed by readers' comments).

To clarify, mediated voices are those voices who speak about, and most importantly, *on behalf of, women*. By contrast, unmediated voices are those of women, speaking *on their own behalf*. The mediated voices I listened to and analysed exist within several societal domains: government/public sector, third sector, business/private sector (e.g., the fitness industry), and the media (e.g., television, newspapers, magazines). These voices filter into women's lives through many channels. The four general channels of data generation of which I took note were: social media, interpersonal interaction, mass media (print, offline, online)²⁴, and the built environment. Examples of each include:

- 1) Social media - Facebook, Twitter, blogs
- 2) Interpersonal communication - written and spoken conversations with me
- 3) Mass media - radio, television, newspapers, books, websites, magazines
- 4) Built environment - outdoor advertising, shop fronts

It is important to emphasise that 'unmediated' describes an aspect of the relationship between my participants and their stories: they speak for themselves; no one speaks *for* them in the instances I've chosen to report. It does not refer to the mode of conveyance (e.g., email, blog), or the degree to which a particular story has been edited in the mind of

²⁴ Technically, both social media and outdoor advertising are subsumed under mass media, but I make these distinctions based on my perception of their emotive, social, and physical properties.

the speaker (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002), or to the idea that the stories people tell have been shaped by societal discourses (Foucault, 1980; Polkinghorne, 2007).

As I listened, I interrogated them, analysed them, and wrote about them, with my research questions acting as guides. My analysis took the form of both—and sometimes simultaneous—bottom-up and top-down approaches. Privileging women’s voices, I gave them space to explain themselves, and engaged with data from those sources in an inductive manner, looking for any patterns, repetitive ideas, and accumulating themes (Potter, 2012; Riessman, 2002). Or as John Law (2004) describes, “trying to open space for the indefinite” (p. 6). Further, “rather than searching for only coherent lines of argument, I allowed the multiple voices of any one participant to argue amongst themselves” (Spowart, 2010, p. 99). Years’ worth of conversations, including those that occurred during this study, have provided ample evidence of these arguing voices. Rather than contradictions, however, I prefer to consider ‘arguments’ as women making meaning of and within fluid identities and bio-psycho-social entities (Evans et al., 2009).

Both categories of data—from mediated and unmediated voices—and my associated analyses, informed one another continuously throughout the project, beginning with the first glimmers of interest that spurred the development of my research questions. But the primary focus of my analysis and synthesis has been that of unmediated voices, in order to gain their perspectives and expressed meanings associated with exercise-related guilt. Having reached satisfactory theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2012) with my analysis of women’s voice, I approached the mediated voices one last time, peering through a lens created by my interpretations of unmediated voices. Within the scope and time of this PhD I could only really discuss ‘snapshots’ (see Chapter 3) of various mediated voices. I include

mediated voices because I see them as contributing to the source of women's guilt, directly and indirectly via mechanisms of power and discourse/knowledge. So they are interesting in this research for their exemplifying role, to highlight and support my analysis and the themes I've claimed to have generated from the unmediated voices, and to contextualise women's lived experiences.

Discursive reconnoitring

I have found a sharp contrast between the lack of discussion around exercise guilt in academic literature and the proliferation of online and offline discussions of it. Scholarly output tends to cluster within psychology—specifically exercise psychology (e.g., Sabiston et al., 2010)—but does not go beyond a cursory mention or occasional participant quotation. Psychology research on guilt generally does not touch on exercise-related topics or concepts. In fact, June Tangney, one of the most prominent guilt researchers today, deliberately culled references to the body or dieting in her survey instruments, as she realised her measures were “less apt to capture intense but more circumscribed shame and guilt experiences focused in a specific domain” such as “failures at dieting” (Tangney, Youman, & Stuewig, 2009, p. 197). The latter, on the other hand, can be found in a steady stream from myriad sources, including personal blogs, social media sites, and interpersonal conversations. I therefore investigated online and offline sources for women's rich, varied, and personal accounts of guilt relative to exercise, and examined their voices to understand how they talk about it. I also listened empathetically to what they said and didn't say about guilt relative to exercise.

I have also been interested in apprehending what discourses they seem to draw on to

define their relationships with health, exercise and their bodies (J. Wright et al., 2006). Following Foucault's concept of 'discourse' as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49), this particular question attempts to illuminate some of the social practices and knowledge traditions that help shape women's perceptions of reality (e.g., what is a 'fit' body? Why do I exercise? Is sport 'proper' for someone my age?). Women's realities, of course, are situated and contingent (M. Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008), but nonetheless rooted in a social world. We are surrounded by digital and print media, other people, physical advertising (e.g., billboards), and visual stimuli (e.g., store front merchandising). Norman Denzin (2007) argues further that "culture and the emotional selves we experience on a daily basis are constituted and embodied by the mass media" (p. viii). There is constant interplay between 'offline' and 'online' worlds in daily life, with few barriers between digital and print. We are immersed in a digital world, but also live in a tangible world; we are part of a physical/material world, but unavoidably affected by digital realities. Through my discursive reconnoitring, then, I have endeavoured to add more detail to the holistic picture in which exercise-related guilt may be situated in women's daily lives.

Mediated voices

Below is a sketch of mediated voices (Figure 4.1, p. 70) with which I interacted throughout the period of my research. It isn't a comprehensive list of individual sites and platforms, but rather an outline of categories with examples to more easily gain a sense of the scope of my reconnoitring. I invested more time in some than I did in others, as my analysis developed and my conceptualisations became more focused. I gained insights about the nature of

potential guilt discourses from my first encounters with these voices, and through the “art of controlled speculation” (Thrift, 2008, p. 255) brought my insights along to my first interactions with participants. My participants, in turn, helped me refine my ideas about

Figure 4.1: A sketch of mediated voices

Mass media	Private sector	Public sector	Third sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UK news outlets (e.g., BBC, The Daily Mail, Guardian.co.uk) ▪ New Zealand news outlets (e.g., NZ Herald, Stuff.co.nz) ▪ US news outlets (e.g., The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, forbeswoman.com) ▪ <i>Next</i> Magazine: a NZ-based print magazine targeting women 35-55 yrs ▪ Variety of women’s lifestyle magazines (online and print) ▪ Other internet sources: Yahoo, Google, YouTube, Urban Dictionary, wefeelfine.org ▪ Variety of radio and television sources (e.g., BBC, TVNZ) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NZ gyms (e.g., City Fitness, Body Tech, Configure Express, Club Physical) - websites of all, physical locations of some ▪ Gyms with transnational reach (e.g., Les Mills, Curves) - websites of each ▪ Store fronts, signage, billboards in Auckland, NZ city centre (also in several Asian, European, and American cities) ▪ Fitness and sports websites and print material (e.g., Nike, Avanti) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UK Department for Culture Media & Sport (DCMS) ▪ Sport New Zealand (formerly SPARC) ▪ Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) ▪ Womenshealth.gov - a project of the US Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health ▪ Better Health Channel (BHC) - funded by the State Government of Victoria, AU ▪ World Health Organization (WHO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UK Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) ▪ The New Zealand Institute of Health and Fitness (NZIHF) ▪ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) ▪ The Cooper Institute: a US-based ‘research and education organization dedicated globally to preventive medicine’ ▪ Exercise is Medicine®: a multi-organizational initiative of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)

exercise-related guilt, and to think about the guilt-edged imperative pathway in (hopefully) deeper and more ethically sensitive ways as I listened again to the mediated voices that

contribute to health and fitness discourses.

Reading messages through the eyes of my participants isn't something I can truly claim to have done, but allowing my distilled interpretations of their ideas, opinions, and perceptions to lead the way, I briefly re-engaged with the mediated voices listed here. My objective has not been a media/communications analysis, or an in-depth semiotic analysis of these entities, but rather to cut a broad multimodal swathe through these online presentations with my participant-lens intact. I highlighted some exemplars from that analysis in Chapter three. In the next section I flesh out methodological details about mediated voices which I found particularly fruitful.

Mediated voices in particular

As the face of the fitness industry and often the 'expert' voice in women's lives, gyms and gym personnel were a great source of information throughout this research. I contacted 50 gyms in the greater Auckland area between November 2012 and March 2013, and exchanged emails with seven different staff members (male and female) from six different urban gyms. My intent was to simply stimulate responses to the following questions, and then follow up with more questions if my contact was willing to continue the conversation:

- 1) What are some of the emotions that you most frequently hear or see women expressing about exercise? (can be before, during, or after exercising)
- 2) In your experience, how common is it for women to say they 'feel guilty' for not exercising or for missing a workout?
- 3) Conversely, how common is it, in your experience, for women to say they 'feel guilty' for taking the time to exercise?

Several correspondents generously shared additional insights and opinions in follow-up emails. While these fitness professionals are individuals (and thus might be unmediated

voices at some level), I count them as part of my mediated voices by dint of their position of authority within broader discourses of health and fitness.

Newspapers, websites, radio, television, and self-help books (health, exercise, or lifestyle-focused) formed a large section of the chorus of mediated voices I analysed. Knowing that these channels of information operate within women's lives provided me with enough reason to cast a critical eye and lend a critical ear to their presentations and pontifications. My discursive reconnoitering has been a deliberate meander; in addition to serendipitous encounters, I set up email alerts for the search terms: 1) 'exercise guilt', 2) 'feeling guilty about exercising', and 3) 'feeling guilty about not exercising'. The alert system regulated and automated my scanning of the horizon and beating of the bushes, and gave me a sense of where I might find guilt 'hotspots'. I captured every piece of exercise-related guilt data—and other guilt-related data—I found relevant, storing them digitally in multiple secure locations. This way I was able to return to any page, article, photo, etc., as many times as I wished throughout my analysis.

In my sketch of mediated voices (Figure 4.1, p. 70) I included various public spaces under the category Private sector, based on the overt commercial activities of shops, and those implied in advertising signage. My analysis of these voices involved observation—and documentation (photos)—of images and text throughout downtown Auckland to assess the presence of a wider 'guilt discourse' (Lefebvre, 1996). My documentation became increasingly theoretically specific as I tuned into exercise-related voices. The photo in Figure 4.2 (p. 73) is an example of an advertisement, found in the window of a building along a main thoroughfare, which uses a generic mix of prescription and proscription. This type of messaging—and its conspicuous location—I suggest, may play a role in the creation

and perpetuation of the discourses that invoke ‘imperative pathways’ and evoke a panoptic gaze.

The final particular mediated voice I want to call attention to is women’s lifestyle magazines. As part of my discursive montage of multiple data sources, they played a larger

Figure 4.2: Public displays of disaffection



role in my research with respect to my participants, due to my belief in their emotive strength in conveying messages about women’s bodies. Of course, not all women read these magazines; some of my participants ignored or avoided them. And for those who do, a typical magazine-skimming experience doesn’t necessarily mimic the experience of seeing the same images in the course of an interview. But in general, I argue, these types of

magazines reflect wider discourses about women and gendered norms. They target women, and contain images of women that can be considered exemplars of discourse found in other magazines and other advertising sources.

In their analysis of women's magazines, which focused on discourses of depression, Suzy Gattuso, Simone Fullagar, and Ilena Young (2005) refer to the work of Joke Hermes (1995) when they suggest that "women's magazines create a particular cultural space through which understanding and managing human emotions are negotiated" (p. 1642). Hermes elaborates: "Different forms of insecurity are voiced through reading and thinking about feature stories and problem pages in the magazines" (Hermes, 1995, p. 41). She points out that people use/read magazines to (primarily) "learn about other people's emotions and problems", but often also learn "about their own feelings, anxieties and wishes" (a goal I consider key for in this research). Jennifer Nelson (2012) sums up the conflicted stimulus of these popular publications in the title of her book, which includes the phrase, "the lure and loathing of women's magazines."

Drawing on Margaret Carlisle Duncan's (1994) analysis of *Shape* magazine, I cast a critical lens over multiple women's lifestyle magazines. I looked for the rhetorical use of 'emotion mechanisms', or textual and image devices, that worked to evoke emotional responses—in particular, guilt—in relation to "fitness and morality narratives surrounding women's bodies" (McGannon et al., 2010, p. 101). I chose for particular analysis one of the top selling New Zealand monthly women's magazines, *Next* (Figure 4.3, p. 76), which its publisher claims is "the most modern and empowering magazine for women in New Zealand." A lifestyle magazine comprising information about beauty, fashion, health, relationships, travel, and food, *Next's* "tradition of celebrating real New Zealand role

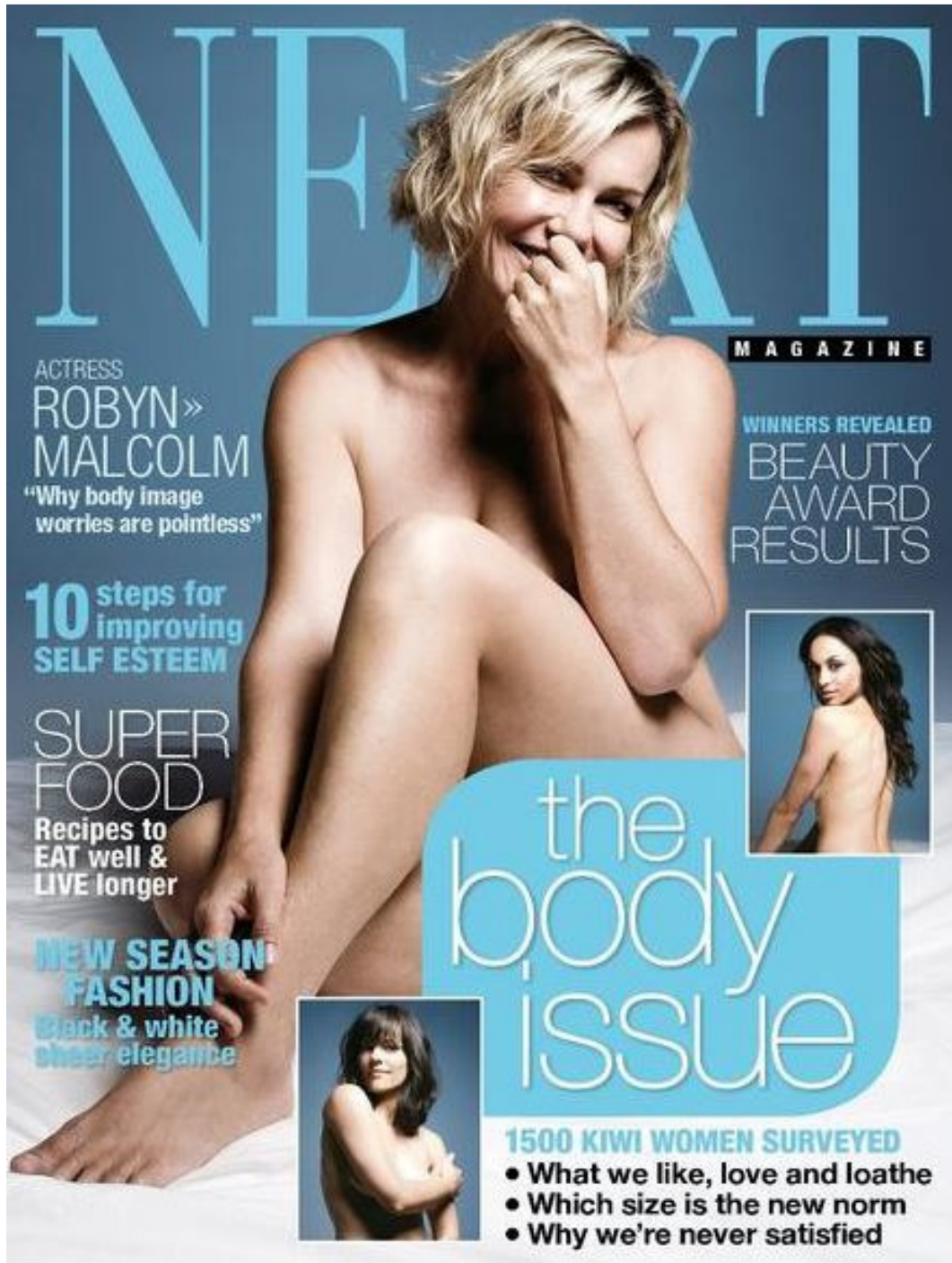
models resonates with smart women” (acpmedia.co.nz).²⁵ I deliberately avoided a health-and-fitness-focused publication, because I believe messages embedded in ‘unsuspected’ contexts may symbolise more poignantly the “panoptic gaze” (Duncan, 1994, p. 52) directed at women’s bodies.

Initially, I conducted a close reading (e.g., Markula, 2001) of several *Next* magazines to get a general impression of the potential for exercise-related guilt-inducement in the overall presentation, as well as in particular ads, articles, and other graphical elements. I identified several exemplars from the magazines of ads, articles, and other multimodal features, which represented (to me) aspects of women’s lives that are subjected to implicit societal imperatives relating to exercise: slim bodies, fit bodies, food, health messages, clothing, and exercising. I included these examples in my online interview, specifically asking for my collaborators’ emotional reactions to them. Once I had received all the responses, I read through the magazine again to compare my original thinking about the guilt potential with my collaborators’ answers; my new reading of the magazine reflected the ways in which my collaborators had influenced my understanding of the embedded discourses and implicit imperatives in this media voice, relative to the sources, management, and operations of exercise-related guilt.

Asking what women think about media images of other women might cause the reader to think this is another instance of replicating “semi-causal equations of media influence”, and as such it might “pay scant attention to the intricacies of subjectivity” (Probyn, 2011, p. 681). This is not what I was trying to do or imply. While I do believe that media is

²⁵ The target audience of *Next* magazine is 30-59 year-old women; it has a circulation rate of over 44,000 and an estimated readership of 349,000 - NZ Audit Bureau of Circulation, Avg. Net Circulation (Jan-Dec 2011); Nielsen CMI (Oct 2010-Dec 2011).

Figure 4.3: *Next* Magazine cover



influential in some ways and to some degree with respect to how we see ourselves and what we aspire to, I am not suggesting these relationships are simple, consistent, or completely knowable. Even within the confines of this study, I could see the multiplicity of selves in

play, and the conflicted ways in which women responded to images, texts, and ideas. In the remainder of this chapter, I describe my approach to interacting with women and listening to their voices.

Unmediated voices

Working from the ‘theory’ that frequency suggests prevalence and thus a degree of normalcy within a wide spectrum of internet-using society, I began trolling social media sites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) and a variety of websites early on in an effort to gain a sense both of the ubiquity and the nature of guilt feelings generally. Lelia Green (2010) emphasises the prominent and essential role the internet plays in today’s modern society, characterising it as “pervasive” (p. 2). It is intrinsic to media and communications, entertainment, politics, business, and education, as well as to social interaction, and thus as an indicator of popular sentiment and common opinions it can be fruitful (Markham & Baym, 2009). I also took note of exercise-related discourse, particularly the way in which emotion words are employed (Edwards, 1999). In this quest for the prevalence of reported guilt feelings in relation to exercise, I opted for aggregators of information—websites that are designed to bring customized information to users, rather than users having to manually search the web for relevant information (a time-consuming prospect). One particularly useful site was Addictomatic (addictomatic.com), which “searches the best live sites on the web for the latest news, blog posts, videos and images. It's the perfect tool to keep up with...what's now or what other people are feeding on.” This site includes Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and Google search (among others) in its sources, thus covering some of the most popular social media sites available today.

The unmediated voices within my ‘discursive montage’ to whom I gave analytical preference were women’s voices—some of whom I know (e.g., interviews) and many of whom I do not (e.g., online observations). I would like to re-emphasise that ‘unmediated’ refers to the voices who spoke to me on their own behalf. I have sought to provide a space for their vocalisations, some of which were raised through ‘official’ and unofficial conversations. To this end, I invited several women to collaborate with me in the research (some volunteered without invitation) by sharing their views in an online interview I designed (see Appendix A); some of these women also spoke with me and/or communicated by email in multiple follow-up conversations. I use the word *participants* as an umbrella category for all the women I’ve seen and heard through my life, and significantly, those I’ve encountered throughout the course of this thesis (including my collaborators). They are participating in the sense that their influence on me is embedded in how I think and feel and write about guilt and exercise. The women I refer to as *collaborators*, however, are those with whom I have actively engaged throughout this research. They have been the recipients of my persistent questions, rambling emails, and requests for chats. And they have consistently helped me clarify concepts, disrupt my assumptions, invoke reflexivity, and inspire new directions; all while generously sharing very personal elements of their lives and selves.

Taking a page from Brita Ytre-Arne’s inquiry (2011) into the phenomenon of women’s magazine reading, I felt that in order to better understand women’s emotional reactions to magazine images and messages, it would be “necessary to analyse how real magazine readers experience them” (p. 214). In concurrence with Ytre-Arne and others (e.g., Hermes (1995)), it seemed that the uni-directional perspective produced by content analysis would

be insufficient for my purposes. Furthermore, I wanted to use my participants' accounts as a guide for my reading of mediated sources to better understand how their perceptions corresponded to my own interpretations of features I highlighted as theoretically significant. In order to create the qualitative interview, I had to make some theoretically informed choices (which photos to include, for example); however, my analysis of participants' provocative responses subsequently helped form (and inform) the basis for my reading of the magazines. And in a reflexive loop, my close reading of the magazines—and other mediated voices—helped me make interpretative conclusions about the meanings my participants may have been conveying in their descriptions.

Social media

There are literally thousands of blogs²⁶ with potentially rich, 'good data'; so my first concern was to decide on what to base my choices. The blogs are meant to be women's individual voices: one woman's voice expressing that woman's opinions/feelings. That eliminated blogs written on behalf of some cause, or in view of a specific product, or the like. But it still left thousands of individual women's blogs; so I needed another filter. Given my interest in mid-age women, I checked the 'About me' sections for any age information, and eliminated any that with certainty did not fit my criterion. This still didn't eliminate enough to make the next decisions easy. I needed another filter; I could say that it should be exercise-centred, but in fact I am just as interested in exercise-related guilt that emerges ad hoc from talk in daily life as I am about a preset exercise blog where you know

²⁶ Whether blogs are part of social media or a distinct category is contested; however, I've opted to include them based on the dialogic element of the blogs I read: allowing readers to comment on each blog post essentially creates a conversation with the author (i.e., social). I include readers' voices in my analysis as well.

what you're in for. I opted for a mix, focusing on people's personal communication—their stories, anecdotes, words of woe, amusing accounts, and events of note—and any unsolicited expressions I felt were relevant to my research questions. Being constantly aware of my own perspectives and particular interpretations of what they were saying made me keenly sensitive to their use of language. For example, if they didn't use the word *guilt* but were talking about something in a way that sounded like feelings or admissions of guilt, I had to make that leap somehow for my reader. If they spoke about 'managing emotions' without using those words, I had to make sure that is what I (thought I) saw in their narrative. And as for the question of whether they are able to articulate guilt feelings (i.e., one of my research questions), I felt that just because I didn't *see* articulations in their monologues didn't mean they *couldn't* articulate their emotions if asked or pressed. This is perhaps an issue better addressed in face to face interaction and direct communication.

Choosing blogs to analyse began with a Google search for the phrases 'guilt', 'guilt AND exercise', and 'exercise guilt'. Within the hundreds of thousands of hits, I found personal blogs, specialty sites, and commercial sites in which the topic of exercise and/or guilt was being discussed. Filtering through these links, I focused on several factors: were the comments made by women? Could I determine an approximate age range of the person speaking? If the guilt topic under discussion wasn't directly about exercise or exercise-related issues, was there reason to believe it might be relevant to exercise for women in my population of interest?

I tended to restrict the filtering process to the first 100 results, due to both time and relevance (this did require trusting Google's algorithms for assessing relevance, but given the overwhelming volumes of data available, some automated reduction mechanisms are

almost certainly needed for maintaining sanity and deadlines). I aimed for a mix of types and geographic locations in view of the claim of the ubiquity of guilt; this also reflected my eclectic group of collaborators.

Many blogs have what is called a ‘Blog roll’, which is a list of links to blogs of friends, or blogs that are of interest to them, and which they claim to read. In essence, following this hyperlinked trail is a modified form of snowball sampling. That is, instead of flesh-and-blood women recruiting friends, and friends of friends, to be my interview participants, I used blogs (and implicitly bloggers) to ‘recruit’ more blogs.

I monitored a variety of blogs over the course of about 10 months (some for longer than others), capturing relevant excerpts and images from them. In the ongoing distillation of this and other data from unmediated voices, I have viewed blogs as a form of self-expression, cultural artefacts, reflections of popular culture, psychic moments, examples of impression management—all of which you might also get from people who are physically present, minus the visual and paralinguistic aspects (although even some of those can be conveyed via digital symbols). While I am also interested in the emotional implications of gesture, facial expression, etc., I obtained those details from conversations with the ‘live’ people to whom I spoke. In many ways, nevertheless, online discourse might be considered more spontaneous and undisturbed than many face-to-face conversations. Underlying these issues, of course, is an unspoken premise of validity (Mishler, 1990), which haunts face-to-face interaction as well: ‘am I seeing the “real” person?’ Or another common anxiety, ‘how do you know they’re telling you the truth?’ Aside from the point that my analysis began even in the decision to look at a website or blog (and thus has passed through critical filters already), it seems this sense that someone can be fully ‘verified’ in all aspects is more a

strengthening illusion than a concrete reality. It speaks to the researcher's epistemic stance, which in my case embraces all idiosyncrasies, disjuncture, and inexplicability as useful and meaningful parts of someone's whole. And given that "no emotional experience is ever experienced exactly the same way a second time" (Denzin, 2007, p. 5), the notion of stability and consistency embedded in the concept of verifiable 'is-ness' quickly loses traction in questions of affects, feelings, and emotions. [For a reflexive discussion on the limitations of online data, see James & Busher (2009)]

Another social media channel in which I heard unmediated voices is Facebook. I found it a rich and productive source of women's opinions, feelings, and expressions (often accompanied with photos). Clearly, there are women who don't use the site nor have access to it, and many who have access but don't post comments. My interest, however, isn't in a census of Facebook users, and I am satisfied that the voices I did hear talking about guilt and exercise are relevant to my analysis. As with all other elements of my discursive montage, I captured comments and photos as I encountered them, and stored them digitally where I could access them at any time during my ongoing analysis.

Interpersonal communication

Aside from personal emails and phone calls, one of the means by which I solicited women's reactions and responses to mediated voices and societal messages, as I've mentioned, was to design an online version of a face-to-face interview. I gave my participants a choice of speaking face-to-face, speaking via Skype video or chat, or working through the online interview questions. Most chose to do the online interview first and then asked for a follow-up Skype or email conversation. I sent each person an information sheet

and consent form electronically, along with a link to the interview; I also included a statement of consent on page one of the online interview, which my participants ‘signed’ by dint of proceeding with the first question. They could begin—and pause—the interview at their own convenience.

A significant benefit of the online version (see Appendix A) was it afforded a platform for photos. The photos were all taken by me: some were of a display of magazine covers in a centrally located shop; others were of various content pages of *Next* magazine; still others were taken during my peripatetic observations of downtown Auckland. The women who chose to answer the online questions were able to view the images in private, take time to consider their own reactions to them, and think about what they wanted to share with me. In person, as I saw during my initial face-to-face interviews, reactions may tend to be more immediate and spontaneous, but, based on the theory of ‘thinking fast and slow’ (Kahneman, 2011), in combination with my constructionist view of interaction, both of these contexts provided opportunity for individuals to express meaningful feelings, emotions, and thoughts. As one of my collaborators said, “even when we think we are as cool as a cucumber about the body ideal (like I think I am) we are still bottling it when confronted with pictures, etc.” (Andrea)

In early analysis of the aggregating unmediated voices (which included my collaborators), I loosely followed a constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1999), reflexively working toward a distillation of data until I had reached adequate theoretical saturation. As I focused more intensively on my collaborators’ narratives, I gave allegiance to a thematic approach based on broad principles of discourse analysis (Gee,

1999; Wetherell, 2003) with a generous side of *Flux* (Guattari, 1995, 2009).²⁷

On a final, and ethical, note: I have sought to avoid for my participants what Ann Oakley (1984) describes as the “soul-destroying tyranny of being told the meaning of their lives by others in terms which are not theirs” (p. 196).

Talking about guilt and exercise

I expand on my approach to analysis and synthesis in Chapter 6, but provide an introduction here along with my methods, which I consider analytically infused (Wolcott, 2002) in any event. Analysing interviews, social media, blogs, and other online voices was an iterative process of critically reading (transcripts, comments, etc.)—being aware of alternate interpretations, fluid meanings, etc.—while thinking about my research questions and about theoretically relevant concepts (e.g., confessing body, imperative pathway). Each time I read through the responses, I would note what I perceived as contradictory statements, gaps in storylines, recurring themes, surprising silences, conceptually relevant phrasing, wording, or ideas (Riessman, 2002); I was also alert to expressions of emotion and any related somatic descriptions, especially if the participant connected those descriptions with ‘feeling guilty’ or similar expressions.

As discussed, I viewed my participants’ voices as unmediated (although not with the implication that any essential ‘truth’ was being articulated or uncovered). Thus, I allowed the voices themselves, speaking on their own behalf, to dictate/lead in my inductive handling of their recorded interactions with me, both in the online (asynchronous) interview, and in live conversation. This approach clearly relies on my own analytic

²⁷ See page 17 in the Methodology section of the Introduction for an expanded discussion on *Flux*.

abilities, critical thinking, and understanding of the theoretical concepts in play, and less on any inherent strength of a known method.

Drawing on Arja Laitinen (1987, described in Kosonen, 2005) I think of each person as a composition of (their life history) “biological and psychological lives” that are shaped within a social life (and also help shape that social life) and so have tried to keep the biological being in the picture at all times. Laitinen also emphasises the influence of time in the shaping of an individual's perception of their life experiences, and thus the importance of assessing how “different forms of social time, working time, family time, and sporting [in this research, exercise] time intertwined in women's life courses” (Kosonen, 2005, p. 36). I trust I have honoured my participants’ preferred meanings and self-presentations, and done so with ethical sensitivity (Giardina & Newman, 2011).²⁸

Collaborating

My recruiting began with women aged²⁹ 35 to 65, who were citizens of New Zealand, as that’s where I was living at the time. While I have no illusion of ‘representativeness’ in the traditional sense of generalisability, my intention was to find a mix of mothers and non-mothers, with a range of occupations; aside from those generic specifications, I didn’t impose demographic or psychographic boundaries. Without further restrictions, I felt I would theoretically improve the possibility of exposure to more nuances or aspects of guilt,

²⁸ The self-disclosures of Giardina and Newman resonated: “We...struggle to create rich, vivid texts that morally, ethically, and faithfully interpret the complexities and pluralities we have encountered” (p. 523).

²⁹ Although I refer to participants throughout this thesis as ‘mid-age’ women, I am aware of the possible incongruence of an imposed definition of ‘mid-age’ in a study that has constructionist sympathies. As Sharon Wray (2007) explains, chronology and significance of age are “often contextually situated” (p. 133). Therefore, by suggesting an age range of approximately 35 to 65 years, I am signalling some general boundaries that exclude, for example, teenagers and senior citizens, while leaving chronological margins that allow for adequate variations in people’s self-perceived age.

and to women who do not typically experience guilt relative to exercise. Thus, I would also increase the potential for garnering richer detail from more ‘sides’ of this complex issue.

The women’s voices infused throughout this thesis began speaking many years ago. They echo the voices of my grandmothers and their sisters, my mother, my aunts, their friends, my cousins, my friends, my co-workers, colleagues, and acquaintances. Add in the voices that I hear every day through social media, the internet, and mass media, and the choir has overflowed the dais; the chorus has grown to thunderous levels. The voices—more precisely, what they said—became data as I interacted with them; it was (and still is) a process of co-creation that happened at my behest, was interpreted through my eyes, and is articulated in my words.

During the few years of my official study, I didn’t speak directly to most of these women. Some of them had passed away, some of them have been out of my life for years, and most of them I have never met. But the echoes have continued, even as new voices have joined in. The women who agreed to share details of their lives with me may be soloists for the sake of this analogy, but they are part of the choir. Their differences and similarities have provided elegant complexity to my picture of exercise-related guilt. In aggregate, my collaborators and other unmediated voices I listened to before and during the study, have helped me create a more nuanced understanding of how guilt relative to exercise may operate within women’s lives.

As a group, my 14 collaborators tick multiple demographic boxes: they range in age from 27 to 54, come from different (six) countries and sub/cultures, and fill a variety of occupational roles. From working class to upper-middle class, they represent a variegated crowd. Some are married with children, some are married without children, some are

single, some are partnered without children, and some are single with children.

To honour my ethical responsibility to each of them, I have been sensitive to the implications of revealing too many of their personally identifiable details. For example, matching a particular quote to a particular collaborator, however anonymised or pseudo-named, runs the risk of tracing anything from speech patterns to location details back to the person in question. Whenever I was in doubt about which details might cause someone anxiety I asked the person directly, telling them what I had in mind to mention. In some cases I was given the all-clear, in others a cautious refusal.

Contacting

In line with my constructionist perception of ‘active participants’, I consider the whole interview process an ‘active’ phenomenon. That is, the “sampling for an active interview is an ongoing process; designating a group of respondents is tentative, provisional, and sometimes even spontaneous” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 74). My ‘sampling’ process included all of these attributes. I began with a tentative reconnaissance of a downtown Auckland women’s only gym³⁰; conducted a provisional pilot interview with a friend; and eventually carried out my recruiting process in a rather spontaneous manner, with the occasional assistance of a few of my collaborators.

One of my initial recruiting ideas was to contact women-only gyms in the Auckland CBD and work with gatekeepers to make further contact with some of their members. I would ask permission either to post an invitation on their public notice board in the gym, or

³⁰ Configure Express, a country wide franchise which “was established to encourage New Zealand women to go to the gym. Women who are busy with work, with their families, with relationships, friends, and daily routines.” (www.configureexpress.co.nz)

to broadcast an email invitation to their member list. However, in my first attempts, I realized this approach was not as straightforward as it seemed, and I experienced some of the “delays and obstructions” (Becker, 2007b) common to sociological fieldwork. I subsequently used those initial reactions to inform my next approach, taking further cues from Howard Becker (2007b) who says of researchers: “the difficulties provide valuable clues to the social organization they want to understand. How people respond to a stranger who wants to study them tells something about how they live and are organized” (p. 64). Gym managers quickly lose interest in proposals that don’t involve an increase in membership tallies.

For my pilot interview, I invited a friend—someone who I knew well enough that the initial barriers to comfortable communication were already overcome. Given my burgeoning realisation that guilt (and exercise, in some cases) is a difficult subject to breach, I felt that this comfort level was important, if not essential. In the pilot interview I employed a (loosely) semi-structured approach involving visual methods (Azzarito & Kirk, 2013; Banks, 2001). Specifically, I brought along a women’s lifestyle magazine, which my participant-collaborator and I skimmed through together as I interrupted with questions about her impressions and reactions to particular images or messages. Photo-elicitation is a tool, a visual narrative method (Becker, 2007a; Harper, 2005; G. Rose, 2011) that is well-known—but under-used—in the social sciences. Jonathan Lachal and colleagues (2012) employed visual narrative methods in view of “the difficulty experienced by obese adolescents encountered in [their] clinical practice in putting issues of food and family relationships into words.” Their intention was to “facilitate verbalization” (p. 1100).

In their study of young women athletes, Hurworth, Clark, Martin, and Thomsen (2005,

p. 60) found that using photo interviews—permitting a combination of “visual and verbal language”—helped the researchers bridge “psychological and physical realities.” I adopted a similar view, and concur with their claim that “imagery dredges the consciousness and subconsciousness of the informant” (p. 60), thus tapping emotional states which are otherwise not observable, nor can the informant easily articulate them. Melanie Green (2005) also suggests that “visual images may be especially powerful ways of thinking about the self because they tend to be relatively impervious to change via arguments or other forms of persuasion” (p. 60).

As I gathered my whats, whys, wherefores, and wits together following my pilot interview, I remained convinced of the usefulness of images for interviewing, but less confident about the need (and efficiency, given time constraints) for visages. Talking about guilt and other emotions isn’t something that just anyone feels comfortable doing, especially not in one conversation with a relative stranger. I conducted one more face-to-face interview with a friend, to expand my questions and test additional theoretical waters. Then I focused on an approach that afforded a broader reach, more privacy for participants, greater potential for multiple conversations, and of course, a platform for photos.

I believe that having multiple in-depth conversations (Fielding, 2003) with people increases the likelihood of eliciting more detail. Incidentally, whether the additional detail also becomes ‘richer’ is a difficult assessment for a constructionist to make on behalf of others. As James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium point out (1995, p. 74), “respondents are capable of articulating accounts, descriptions, and evaluations in many ways, from more than a single position or perspective, responding in more than one voice.” However, as I do not see an interview process as a search for ‘the truth’ of someone’s ‘real life’, my

influence is rather part of a ‘performance’, a notion that Alan Latham (2003) suggests “helps us to avoid thinking of the self as fundamentally an issue of depth” (p. 2007). In addition to affording a holistic, multifaceted picture, multiple discussions allowed the women, as full collaborators in the research process, to “make sense to themselves” of how they “understand and make meaning of their experiences” (Seidman, 2006, p. 24). By conducting the follow-up conversations via instant messaging (e.g., Skype, Google), phone, or email, I provided the women with an alternative communication format for expressing their thoughts and feelings (Illingworth, 2006). These extended discussions also allowed for ongoing and new recollections, which facilitated my ability to “thicken the descriptions” (Ryle, 1968) of their lived experiences (not to be confused with the illusion of capturing ‘what’s really there’). Several women expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to think (and write) about guilt and related topics (e.g., Emma: “the writing has sorted out my view on it”).

I digitally recorded (audio) my face-to-face and Skype interviews—upon gaining permission from the individuals in question—and provided the necessary ethical assurances regarding privacy, anonymity, data protection, and the voluntary nature of the process (i.e., they could terminate the interview and/or participation in the research at any time). I provided each person who participated in the online interview with a consent form and information sheet prior to starting the interview. Their answers were captured digitally on the web server, and I transferred the data to a secure personal folder.

My transcription process for the face-to-face interviews, as part of my analysis, was characterised by reflexive ‘listening’ in which I sought to capture complexity (e.g., including inflections, pauses, etc.) and ambiguities (e.g., seeming contradictions) in the

women's articulations of their lived experiences. I read over their comments repeatedly, looking for indications of guilt, other emotions, and exercise-related events. My interest was as much in possible themes within each narrative as across their narratives (along with all other participants).

Over a few months, I invited various women to participate in the next phase of my inquiry—an online interview (which I describe in the following section). Again, I relied on friends and acquaintances, for the same reasons outlined for my pilot interviews. A few of them, in turn, invited friends, passed along the link to the interview, and put me in contact with them so I could send them my consent form and information sheet.

In speaking with people who I singled out (having 'volunteered' does not eliminate the fact that the research opportunity has been imposed on their unsuspecting psyches) to play the role of a research participant-collaborator, I was cognizant of the influence that even my virtual presence may have on their interview experience. However, my view of this experience as a data-creating process (St. Pierre, 2013) embraces the overt presence of the researcher, and as I developed my questions and visual stimuli I deliberately invoked myself for my collaborators (i.e., used my name, and first-person tense).

Creating

The online platform I used to create my online interview was SurveyGizmo³¹. A user-friendly, research-savvy, methodological tool, it proved intuitive and more than flexible enough to support my heuristic design process and question evolution. A few of my collaborators tested my initial version, helping me with question wording, conceptual

³¹ www.surveygizmo.com

hurdles, and other potentially misleading glitches. I tweaked and refined the first version, before inviting more women to participate. The full, final version is in Appendix A (p. 301).

More typically, photo-elicitation (Marisol, 2004; Radley & Taylor, 2003) assumes the use of photographs taken by the participant as the basis of the interview. However, drawing on the underlying *principle* of the evocative nature of images (Azzarito & Kirk, 2013; Harper, 2002), I used photographs taken by me of both live and ‘printed’ people and cultural artefacts (e.g., urban environment, signage) to facilitate verbalisation. The photos I took of the contents of four different *Next* magazines also served as a sort of ‘feedback loop’, thus adding an “audience reception” (Duncan, 1994, p. 52) dimension to my online interview. That is, my participants, as readers of women’s magazines, gave their reactions to the multimodal material, which I contrasted with my own evaluation of the same material. In a sense, you could characterize this as Women’s voices assessing the (mediated) voices talking ‘behind their backs’. The questions I was able to ask using photos of outdoor advertising and the like also helped temper and test my ongoing interpretations and impressions about guilt and exercise-related guilt that I had formed during my online (and photo-shooting) rambles. In the course of the interview, I asked both direct and indirect questions relating to guilt about exercise in the context of other aspects of their lives.

While I constructed questions in particular ways with an aim to elicit particular types of answers, I’m not suggesting that (my) questions have inherent power to persuade. I do believe in the power of language (P. Drew, 1998), but am not implying that a particular word will produce—and certainly not always produce—a particular response. My intent

was to make the online interview as close to a face-to-face interview as possible: purposely foregrounding my presence; purposely asking contrasting questions; purposely keeping the language relaxed. I am under no illusions that the answers I received are *the* answers, or any form of ‘right’ answer; had I asked the same questions a month, week, or even day later, I would likely have received different answers. In fact some of my participants said as much, almost by way of an apology. I assured them there were no ‘wrong’ answers (Riessman, 2002), and encouraged them to just say whatever came to mind in that moment.

Furthermore, I am aware of the likely presence of the popularly termed concept, ‘social desirability’ (Conroy, Motl, & Hall, 2000). One of my participants wrote to me later, ‘confessing’ that this type of self-presentational management “kinda applies to me doing your [online interview]”. In other words, she was aware even while typing her answers, that she was carefully choosing words and descriptions of herself that would present a picture of a good, healthy, well-adjusted adult (mother, in her case). I wasn’t surprised by this admission, given the open-endedness of the questions, and also given the distinct moral tone (i.e., guilt) of the topic - personal exercise habits and emotions connected to them. However, my interest is in what my participants are willing to tell me about certain topics, choreographed or not; I am not in search of any discoverable nature or essence in their behaviour (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012) that I expect will uncover the mysteries of exercise-related guilt at all, or once and for all. Rather, from their narratives and comments I have attempted to glean insights into the phenomenon I’m calling exercise-related guilt, both by scrutinizing the individual and by scanning an aggregation of individuals talking about guilt and exercise. As Paul Drew (1998) argues, whenever we use “practices of reporting, describing, and reasoning” to present ourselves,

our behaviours, or that of others', our language reflects our perception of our (or their)

(im)propriety, (in)correctness, (un)suitability, (in)appropriateness, (in)justice, (dis)honesty, and so forth. Insofar as descriptions are unavoidably incomplete and selective, they are designed for specific and local interactional purposes. Hence they may, always and irretrievably, be understood as doing moral work—as providing a basis for evaluating the “rightness” or “wrongness” of whatever is being reported. (1998: 295).

Having said that, I did consider carefully which questions to include and how to phrase them, as time and energy (of the participants) dictate some cut-off point for such decisions.

For example, in one question I asked: *“Please tell me a little about your background. Anything you feel like sharing about your family and early experiences will be helpful. Examples of topics you could include: a. environment in which you grew up (e.g., rural, urban, etc.), b. number/gender of siblings; relationship with them, c. parents' attitudes toward physical activity, d. first 'sports' memory”*. This was a wide open question - the same type of question with which I began my face-to-face interviews. My main aim was to provide a warm-up for thinking about exercise as something that had a beginning in their lives; as something that—like most aspects of life—is rooted in their early years. The openness was meant to facilitate participant-chosen focus, and the suggested topics reflect my interest in the psychosocial ‘history of the present’ (Foucault, 1979) for each unmediated voice I had listened to. Prompting thoughts about family and siblings could elicit comments about rivalries or special bonds; prompting thoughts about the home environment could elicit comments about the formation of early habits; prompting thoughts about parents’ attitudes about physical activity could elicit comments about early value systems and support networks; prompting thoughts about sports memories could elicit comments about how positive or negative early emotional experiences with physical motion were. In aggregate, the answers to these prompts have the potential to provide a lot

of context for the individual in question, and thus to offer some links to their holistic past on which I could draw for my analysis and eventual conclusions (Geertz, 1994; Riessman, 2002).

In a subsequent question, I built on the developing narratives, focusing more on specific memories of exercise: “*When (if ever) did you first become aware of ‘exercise’ as something distinct from ‘just playing’? Try to describe any impressions you recall having formed of exercise at that time.*” My thought behind this question was to stimulate thinking about their own ideas regarding exercise, particularly in contrast to other types of activities. Trying to remember one’s childhood impressions typically stirs up emotionally charged events and might be seen as ‘highlights’ from the past. Although I may not be able to make a direct link between then and now, I believe that our past does establish bases for our present perceptions and beliefs about exercise (Bourdieu, 1978), and produces our (physical) *habitus* (Mauss, 1973). So when my collaborators encountered questions about the present, they had already been thinking about a time when they (typically) had enjoyed being active.

A final example from my online interview is a vignette that I created, based on typical exercise-related experiences and daily scenarios I had heard and read women talking about. My premise was that what people choose to talk about and how they talk about it are some indications of their own thinking processes and priorities (P. Drew, 1998; Gilbert, 2002). Hence, this question assumes that a person’s answer will reflect ‘what they would do’ (but without asking them directly), and thus how they might reach their decisions if they were faced with the situation presented in the vignette: their value judgments = what they value; their suggestions = what they would tell themselves; what they focus on in the story =

what's important in their own lives.

Clearly, this text-based method places quite different demands on participants than does a spoken format, and writing is more difficult for some than for others. Ultimately, however, I felt my concern for creating a “welcoming space” (Richardson, 2002, p. 417) for collaborators was met best by the privacy and contemplation afforded by this asynchronous approach (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Critiquing

To deal with my concerns about the link between my analytic conclusion and the ‘way the question was asked’, I checked with some of my interviewees multiple times about ‘what they meant’, and how they interpreted the questions. This was a great analytic help, albeit a reminder that “conversations between people is invariably a process of ongoing negotiation or meaning” (M. Andrews et al., 2008, p. 14). Here I offer an example of the critical heuristic nature of my interview design, and implementation: In a follow-up discussion with one of my collaborators about a week after she had completed the online interview, I solicited her opinion about the experience. Recognizing her own familiarity with research, I asked her to comment on the substance of the questions particularly. With respect to one question, she said: “I felt there was an over-emphasis on negative perceptions...to the extent that it felt slightly imbalanced.” And, referring to a vignette question, she shared: “...it is quite long though and makes you think a lot...” My response to her opinions reveals some of my ongoing reflexivity in developing the online questionnaire, particularly in view of my inquiry paradigm:

Will have another think about the ‘negativity’ aspect. I’m finding it’s actually quite tricky to make these question decisions when you don’t adhere to the belief

that it matters (for one's research questions) whether you ask a 'leading' question or how strategic you get with question order. Not that I don't give it any thought, but with this particular tool, my main objective was to make it as similar as possible in character to a f2f interview with me (obviously I could have made videos of me asking the questions, but I thought that might cause technological problems for some people). My f2f interviews haven't been nearly as structured as this - but writing out the questions kinda forces a sense of purposeful structure into the proceedings.

My questions typically focused on how they *felt* about various images or concepts, but interestingly, they often responded to the request for 'how they felt' with an additional 'rant' (Riessman, 2002) about their interpretation of what the message or advertisement (for example) was trying to say to women in general. In my view, this is one way in which online conversations bear a resemblance to live conversations.

Confiding

If "participants come to trust in the sincerity and the motivation of the interviewer, they may be prepared to share in-depth insights into their private and social worlds" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 251). The subject matter in question did present challenges in terms of people's sensitivity to privacy. That is, feeling guilty about something is inherently a personal issue and a person may be unable to share either the feeling or the cause of it. Given that I haven't attempted to get at any essential 'truth' about my participants, my efforts to 'dig deeper', to probe and prompt, should be seen as a way of helping my participants feel comfortable in expressing thoughts that they may not typically share.

In view of the foundational tenet of the ethics of research—do no harm—I have wondered about the impact of helping people develop alternate ways of looking and thinking. What happens next? Is it ethical to, essentially, disrupt someone's point of view if they are comfortable with it and in shifting it they become dissatisfied and unhappy?

Kimberly Oliver and Rosary Lalik (2004) expressed similar unease following their interactions with young girls involved in a school ‘beauty walk’:

We believe that girls need to have opportunities to develop alternative discourses about taken-for-granted practices that form the hidden (as well as the official) curriculum. Nevertheless, we wonder if it is helpful for them to develop these discourses without concomitantly developing strategies for political action and structural transformation (Luke 1992). We wonder whether learning critique alone might not leave adolescents with feelings of frustration and helplessness. Luke explained that the language of critique might be politically counter-productive for adolescent girls and others who must live in a school and society dominated by androcentric power structures. (p. 127)

They add that their conclusions in this regard remained elusive, and thus they could not suggest a way to apply their ‘classroom critique’ meaningfully (i.e., action, transformation) in a political or social context. I am aware of the potential for this type of effect, especially given my overt interest in emotional responses.

The “everything is dangerous” (Foucault, 1983; Toll & Crumpler, 2004) idea occurs to me relative to me purposely inciting people’s emotions; and the fact that no matter how I try to frame it, an interview is an odd, contrived performance. My worry has been that, having prodded people to think deeply and talk about events/things/feelings that may be shameful or embarrassing, I trot off with my data and leave them to deal with their fresh mental trauma without having provided any associated de-briefing, resources, or strategies. Therefore, I have endeavoured, whenever possible, to follow up with my collaborators and attend to any ethical concerns.

There was also the issue of ‘voice’ (Gilgun, 2005), or ‘unmediated voices’, as I’ve characterized women speaking on their own behalf via individual narratives and comments. This paradox is not a new one in human research: how can I talk about ‘voice’ when I am ethically responsible for protecting the identities of those voices (Gilbert, 2002), and thus

engaged in carefully eliding details and pumping up opacity? But at the same time, how can I avoid ironing out so much texture that an individual's position is decontextualised? Context is important, undoubtedly; however, as I've mentioned, my choices have ultimately been guided by the care and protection of others involved in this research. Whenever I faced a decision about particular details, I contacted the collaborator in question and sought permission to include the identifying characteristics; in some cases, the answer was *yes*, in others it was *no*.

Miscellaneous musings on studying people

My research questions will never truly be 'answered'. There will be answers posed, but they should not be viewed as complete or final. For one thing, people's lives do not stop when they agree to join a study. They will feel some things the day I ask them a question, and feel other things the next day (as a few of my participants have corroborated). The answer they give me today could be very different from the answer they give me to the same question a year from now, or five years from now. So, whatever I learn about them is merely a passing glimpse into a chronology of events (and in this case, also emotions), a temporal thread plucked off the coat of (their) life. And therefore whatever claims I make about the data must be stated with appropriate disclaimers in full view. One claim I do want to be able to make is to have reached a point of theoretical saturation, and to have reached a depth of analytical insight at which I find convincing footing.

Research inquiries are embedded in philosophies of reality. Generalization—typically rooted in positivistic ideology—is a common objective of research, and is pursued with the assumption that having discovered Some Thing about a small group of people, it will be

even better—if not necessary—to find that same Some Thing in a larger group of people. This enthymeme has the hidden premise that one person’s life cannot teach us as much as hundreds of people’s lives can. However, not every research question is looking for Some Thing, and thus finding it in hundreds of people is neither important nor meaningful (for that investigation).

The concept of generalisation ranges along a continuum from strictly statistical calculations to more ‘naturalistic generalisation’ (Stake, 1995). My view for this investigation is aligned with the latter rather than with the former. Naturalistic generalisation is really the reader’s point of view, in that whatever they see in the research findings that resonates with them and/or their situation, they ‘adopt’ and use however they wish. It is not a matter of the researcher dictating to the reader what must be extrapolated. I see my collaborators as fellow travellers with me in a quest for understanding. They enjoy benefits of deeper understanding even while they are searching for different ways to say things, or for alternative ways of explaining something to me. They assure me they’ve ‘never thought about this before’, and are looking forward to finding out how my other participants felt. This is a form of generalisation (if one must use that word); this is research in action—and activating—already accomplishing tasks of informing, moving, disrupting, and sympathising. Collaborators—who are also my reading audience—have ‘used’ my research even before it’s completed.

The question may be asked, ‘how many participants did you have?’ The hidden premise here is that more is somehow an improvement over fewer. But I see no automatic value in simply piling up participants. For one thing, they are not identical units; that is, some provide more extensive insights, some are more reflexive, and some are more self-

aware, all of which impacts their wordiness, willingness, and theoretical worth of their responses. Choosing women who were able to articulate their feelings, who were willing to share their ‘weaknesses’, and to engage in introspection, was a continuous process of reflexivity (for me) and sensitivity (toward others).

Given my focus on an intangible phenomenon—paradoxically, on its manifestation, its operation, its articulation—and the ways in which women manage this unseen force, I needed time to make my collaborators feel comfortable, to allow them to express emotions and feelings that don’t necessarily reside at the surface of consciousness. My job as the researcher is to pay attention to the accumulating data and its theoretical significance, to analyse it in an iterative manner, and to think critically about both my position and attitude, and the participants’ subjectivities as they presented them to me.

As I began conversing with women about their perceptions and experiences of exercise, it became increasingly apparent that guilt is a difficult subject to interrogate. For the women who collaborated with me—whether writing or speaking—once we got past the word itself, there was much hesitation, stammering, and expressions of frustration at their inability to articulate what they were feeling. Simply declaring that they ‘felt guilty’ about something, did not automatically catalyse an expansive soliloquy by them on those feelings.

Unlike some emotions, which are produced with very little, if any, conscious evaluation, guilt doesn’t become recognizably guilt until the person has assessed their physical and moral sensations and reactions to a particular situation, and formed at least a rudimentary judgment about both of those things. But the constant fluctuation in judgment, psychology, and sentience makes it difficult to arrive at something that is definable and reduced enough to allow satisfactory articulation. So I “reveal and revel in complexity”

(Wolcott, 2002, p. 96), but at the same time “strive to make things appropriately complex without rendering them more opaque” (p. 96).

Skipping class

A ‘representative sample’ was never my aim in this study. However, it did come to my notice early on that there may be a silence within my unmediated voices that can be accounted for by socioeconomic status. This suspicion was supported by literature around exercise relative to class (e.g., Marxist feminism, sport and mainstream sociology, exercise psychology), but was strengthened further after a conversation with a friend (who was also one of my collaborators). She works with single mothers in a housing project in a large Canadian city. Her observations align with those of Suzanne Laberge and David Sankoff (1988) [see also Dumas, Laberge, & Straka (2005)] who observed:

The relative absence of participation in physical activities by working-class women, as defined by the norms, may be due to the fact that they see no advantage in it. In view of their specific position in social space (determined by sex and class), the contribution that participation in physical activities could make to changing the conditions of their lives is probably quite small. (p. 285)

According to my friend, exercise in particular (as opposed to other body work like nails and hair) just isn’t part of these mothers’ lives. They walk to the grocery store because they can’t afford a car, not because they’re trying to get their 10,000 steps in for the day. They receive nutrition information as a basic survival tool in their grocery store negotiations with expensive healthy food, not as a means to keeping their schoolgirl figures. The stress of making a living and raising a child with scant social or emotional support shapes their existence; there is little time, energy, or money available to spend on flattening their abs (especially not at a gym) and expanding their biceps.

But, while I wouldn't presume to ever fully understand their lived experiences, I would argue that they're not blind. Watching movies and reading magazines in a Western country today is not the purview of the upper classes. As I said previously, exercise-related guilt isn't only experienced by people who are already trying to fit exercise into their life; where there is knowledge (about health, fitness, exercise, etc.) there can be guilt, as the imperative pathway suggests. There may not be any immediate likelihood of participating in exercise, and all the external forces may be firmly in place, but what if in the very acts of resistance, rejection, realisation of the unattainable ideals, and other defences, there is an accumulating emotional impact?

In the next four chapters, I give voice to the women who spoke with and to me—both participants and collaborators. My analytical musings on their exercise-related “emotion work” (Hochschild, 1983, 2003) relies on metaphors and analogies to capture the cogmotional (cognitive-emotional-physical) and social elements of women's exercise-related guilt: more specifically, I find a judiciary analogy useful for illustrating the social, and that of a flame for elucidating the cogmotional.

5 SOURCES OF EXERCISE-RELATED GUILT: SPARKS

This is the first of four chapters in which I describe my analysis and synthesis of unmediated voices, and the conclusions I have drawn from that process. More specifically, I focus on exercise-related guilt at an individual level, but not on particular individual women. That is I look at women's exercise-related guilt from the perspective of the aggregated individual. Beginning in this chapter, I discuss what I've interpreted as *sources* of that guilt; I divide sources conceptually into sparks (this chapter) and fuel (next chapter), and describe the theoretical framework I've developed based on those interpretations.

Chapter contents

- Introduction to analysis
- Overview of Sources of exercise-related guilt
- Triggers (sparks)
 - People/bodies
 - Opportunities
 - Messages
 - Cogmotion
 - Time
 - Conflicts/choices
 - Actions

Introduction to analysis

My focus while reading unmediated voices (including collaborators) was to pay attention to as *much* as possible, while attending “very closely to the way people speak about themselves” (Denison & Winslade, 2006, p. 102). This analytical attitude could be described as an empathetic ear, as I listened for emotion references—guilt in particular—and noted my participants’ narrative reconstructions of them. I wanted to avoid forcing their words into pre-packaged concepts or categories, and rather attempt to think “with a different linguistic frame” (p. 102). Recognizing that one’s thoughts are never theory-free (St. Pierre, 2013), I nonetheless strove to let my participants’ voices take the lead.

The distinction between participants and collaborators is worth reiterating here. Importantly, the women who were just participants were not aware of my research activities, and as such I could say they were ‘unprompted’ by me. They included bloggers, women who commented on other blogs, women who commented following a news article, women who posted on Facebook, Twitter, and on discussion boards, and women I saw or overheard on the street. My collaborators, on the other hand, were contacted by me (or by another collaborator) and made aware of my research before engaging with my online interview. I should note again that most of my collaborators are personal friends, and therefore in many cases gave me permission to draw on our numerous previous conversations in addition to their specific interview answers and the conversations we had after they had completed it. One significant aspect of this distinction is the relative potential for ethical harm by me. Given my collaborators’ heightened awareness of the topic of exercise and its associated emphasis on bodies and emotions, I was conscious of the possible effects this imposed task/topic might have on them (J. Wright & Macdonald,

2010). In fact, I made the decision to exclude particular acquaintances from my study, despite my belief that they would have provided valuable insights, because I could not foresee an ethically sensitive way to approach them, based on my knowledge of their sometimes unhappy history with sport and/or exercise.

My approach to soliciting and interpreting collaborators' narratives began, like Arlie Hochschild's (1983) foray into her questionnaire data at the beginning of her exploration of emotion work, as a fishing expedition. That is, I "cast out these requests to see what I would find, but I had an eye out for a certain kind of catch" (p. 13); in my case, indications of sources of guilt (and emotion in general) in how people communicated about exercise. More specifically, I paid attention to expressed *feelings* about exercise and about the place exercise seemed to have in women's lives. I noticed the silences in their narratives—those instances in which they evidenced surprising (to me) calm when they had previously expressed outrage about the same issue. I noted historical gaps—time spaces I recalled as containing significant events, but which the collaborator chose not to share just then (obviously applies just to the women I know personally). Language suggesting affective, embodied, material, or social significance caught my psycho-critical eye, as I endeavoured to appreciate the multiple "planes of experience" (McGrath, Reavey, & Brown, 2008, p. 57) manifesting in expressions and inflections. Given the challenges associated with transcribing embodied emotions and sensations, I recognize there are levels of (bodily) knowing within each individual that I, as Other, won't have access to, including during this study (Papoulias & Callard, 2010).

My interview questions emphasized my collaborators' *feelings and emotions* about many exercise-related concepts and artefacts and incorporated some visual examples:

health and fitness messages, advertisements, other people's comments about exercise, photos of people exercising, personal memories of exercise, and present feelings about their own bodies. From their responses to these questions, and in our subsequent conversations, I began to piece together a picture of how exercise-related guilt operates in their lives.

As I said previously, guilt is a common refrain in narratives of fitness, health, and exercise. But guilt relative to exercise has rarely (if ever) been the focus of research attention. So the presence of guilt isn't news; rather, I am interested in the nature and the effects of guilt.

I have relied heavily on my collaborators' expressions, memories, eloquence, energy, and most importantly on their willingness to share their thoughts and opinions with me. As the prime research instrument, interpreter, and reporter I hold the balance of power in this joint enterprise. However, recognizing "the ambiguities, fluidity of meaning and undecidabilities of the text" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 140) that have become my data, and of my interpretations of that data, I encourage "a shift of emphasis to the reader and her creativity" (p. 140). In other words, I offer the same suggestion here as I did to a question posed by a rather captious academic early on in this project ('what am I supposed to do with your data?'): you may do whatever you want with my data. Ideally, it will meet the ethical needs (Coveney, 1998) of the reader as they negotiate the many and contradictory discourses around the (un)moving body. Hopefully, it will help you as it continues to help me, to disrupt my embedded assumptions and become more attuned to the ethics of interaction at both individual and societal levels.

Overview of sources of exercise-related guilt

Even with the best laid plans, some days I just don't get my workout in. Or I eat ice cream instead of dinner...It isn't that I don't want to lose weight — I do. It isn't even that I am not willing to do the work — I am. What it really comes down to for me is guilt. (Jamie, blogger³²)

My observations and emerging analysis up to the point at which I began communicating purposively with my collaborators indicated that guilt was indeed everywhere. Guilt about exercise also appeared regularly in conversations about food, bodies, family, and other social phenomena; however, while *seemingly* an uncomplicated connecting of dots, exercise-related guilt quickly proved tricky to trace. I was thus often unsure whether what I was seeing was actually guilt and also was primarily about exercise³³.

What I initially thought of as sources began to look more complex as I listened to and read more women's accounts of exercise-related guilt events. In line with most guilt research and with the definitions of guilt, women reported feeling guilty either about having exercised or about not having exercised (both of which can be construed as either 'not doing the right thing', or 'doing the wrong thing'). But upon closer inspection, and with further interrogation of some specific instances, it appeared that the guilty feelings had a sort of precursor that was included in the story but wasn't directly implicated by the guilty party. For example, this response by a woman to my request for her thoughts as she imagined getting dressed in the morning, and catching sight of herself in the mirror:

I really need to do some toning ...Sometimes there's feelings of frustration and guilt, knowing that I could make the time and have the means to work on toning my body. Other times, I'm content knowing that I'm not where I used to be in

³² From the blog, *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl)

³³ Whatever I do count as 'evidence' is, of course, viewed and assessed through the immediate filter of my own epistemology (I'm not going to find 'the truth' no matter how long I look), experience, and culture (Crotty, 2003).

terms of size and weight, simply from eating more whole foods, rather than processed. (Michelle³⁴, married with three small children)

She attaches guilt first, and directly, to her ‘knowing’, a connection that was repeatedly referenced by many participants (more on that later). Next is an explanation of what it is she ‘knows’ that has caused the frustration and guilt: her failure to ‘make the time’ and to use ‘the means’ she already has for working on her body. But the guilt was *triggered* by ‘seeing’ herself in the mirror: that visual reminder of her failure to be a good, responsible person (and thus mother). A good, responsible person doesn’t let time get away from them, doesn’t waste their good health or their good intentions, and puts the knowledge they have into action. The spotlight here is trained on guilt’s active ingredient role in this dynamic relationship between her (imagined) literal outer reflection and her intangible inner reflections.

I thought of these precursors conceptually as *triggers* that set off a chain of emotions and events leading to the actual conviction/confession of guilt about exercising or not exercising. Building on Silvan Tomkins, Daniel Nathanson (1992) describes how the affect *interest* “may be triggered by a slight increase in hunger, by an image remembered, or by other internal sources of stimulation we may never discern” (p. 73). Thus, I acknowledge in my notion of guilt triggers somatic and psychic elements, as well as the inevitably undetectable—and unconveyable—intangibles that are part of all personal experience.

What also became apparent to my interpretive eye were the actions of some *presence* that ebbed and flowed, affecting what seemed like the intensity of the guilt (notwithstanding the limitations of textual and verbal communication to convey embodied

³⁴ All collaborator’s names are pseudonyms.

feelings/sensations). Over time I decided that the *presence* was a combination of a person's:

- 1) level/extent of *knowledge* about health/exercise/fitness
- 2) sense of their *ability* to actually meet the immediate expectation (wherewithal, including emotional, physical, temporal, financial), and
- 3) *perspective* of exercise at that moment (how they *framed* it, which is not always the same each time).

When my collaborators speak of 'feeling guilty', my analytic assessment is that these three ingredients combine to act in concert with a given trigger, producing varying intensities of guilt feelings relative to the immediate instance. A useful analogy for me has been to think of guilt as a flame, which can be triggered by *sparks*, thereby igniting the *fuel* of 'bad' behaviour to which the guilt feelings relate; the tripartite presence, acting like a guilt regulator, I conceptualise as *accelerants*. So while there is a hint of chronological sequence in this language, I don't wish to suggest the presence of temporal rules. When I discuss how women seem to manage their exercise-related guilt, it should also become clearer what the fire retardants and extinguishers might be in this analogy (i.e., managing mechanisms).

Triggers (sparks)

In this section I describe the things women identified as triggers for their exercise-related guilt. I have organised my interpretation of these guilt sparks into a loose conceptual arrangement of: People/bodies, Opportunities, Messages, Cogmotion, Time, Conflicts/choices, and Actions. Each category subsumes several aspects or subthemes that I discuss using examples from participants' narratives. There are nuances within and between

many of the types and subtypes that often get lost in abstraction and reduction in sociological and psychological studies about the challenges associated with individual exercise. I have attempted to draw some of these subtle differences to the surface.

Importantly, I find many triggers can be two-faced forces (i.e., disloyal, not dichotomous). For example, they can act to both motivate and demoralise, encourage and discourage, inspire and infuriate. This is not to say they are necessarily dualistic. Rather these notions “reject a binary logic (either/or, this *or* that) in favor of a logic of connection, a logic of the *and* (this *and* this *and* this *and* ...)” (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 4). One of the most pronounced examples of this spark characteristic amongst my collaborators was the presence of other people. More precisely, an interaction with another woman who represented to my collaborator someone who ‘had it all together’, and was thus outwardly a ‘successful exerciser’. This person could act as a trigger for guilt even as she inspired the onlooker:

If others around me seem to be able to fit exercise into their schedule quite easily, then those feelings of guilt surface again and again if I'm struggling with fitting it into my schedule. (Michelle)

I wouldn't say I feel raging shame/guilt but if a muscly chick ran past me, my reaction would depend on if I felt frumpy that day or if I was satisfied with my level of effort at that moment. (Janet, single, no children)

People/bodies

This theme refers to the many ways in which the actual or envisioned presence of physical bodies—one's self and/or others—can spark guilt about (not) exercising. The guilt triggers I perceived relating to this theme were: seeing someone else exercising, hearing that someone else had exercised (when the listener hadn't), seeing images of fit(ter) people

(could even be a store mannequin), catching sight of themselves in the mirror, sensing a ‘smug attitude of other exercisers’, or just suddenly realising that ‘They’ were making her feel guilty. Strangers, peers, family, friends, co-workers, and self all contributed to this guilt trigger. As Amina Doherty (2013), a Nigerian feminist activist contends, even more potent than the influences of media messaging is the pressure and criticism that comes from within “our own homes, amongst our families and in our communities.” Perhaps sensing this impending judgement helps explain why “almost 2/3 of women choose to exercise in a location where they’re unlikely to bump into anyone they know” (MacMichael, 2012), as one UK-based study reports.

Paula, one of my collaborators, assures me she reacts emotionally quite differently to images and ads in magazines and newspapers than she does to someone in person (and thus would be more likely to listen to advice from the latter). Her argument is that she can assess a live body, ask them questions, and ‘know’ whether they have genuinely achieved what they say they have (e.g., weight loss, fitness level). She feels the decisions she makes about exercise are better served by a living example with whom she has personally interacted, than by a glossy page produced via dubious motives.

My collaborators’ feelings and reactions toward other bodies and toward their own body induce self-criticism about how they themselves look. That criticism seems to trigger talk and emotions about the need to exercise and eat differently to ‘fix’ their bodies, especially the “problem areas”. Within this theme, I want to draw attention to the implicit element of social comparison in each of these people/bodies guilt triggers; for example this blog reader:

I have found there is a dark side to being immersed in the world of Healthy living blogs. You can compare yourself to the extreme and end up ignoring your bodies natural capabilities/needs because “she can do it”. (Erica)³⁵

Social comparison of bodies and physical abilities isn’t restricted to those who are feeling inadequate in that comparison. Lisa, one of my more physically active collaborators, describes her yoga ‘class status’ (implication intended):

In yoga class...I like being [long pause] better than the majority of people in the class, like I kind of get a sense of enjoyment from that, although I try to not think about that...

And my collaborator, Donna—married with three pre-teen children—links her emotional security to a ‘successful’ comparison between her body size and those of her friends (incidentally, she also expressed vehement resentment about other people telling her what her body should look like):

The women with whom I like to regularly interact are all a bit larger than I am in size. That makes me feel better and more secure.

Taking the implied opposite of this comment, I suggest that if her friends were smaller in size than she is, she would *not* feel better—perhaps worse—and she would feel *less* secure. I think these examples echo the relationships of power at the individual level that are well-entrenched within many of these exercise-related guilt triggers.

I am interested to see that this body comparison does not necessarily transfer to a comparison of active bodies. Seeing someone else exercising may have a powerful, cogmotional impact on the viewer, which can be positive and/or negative (and every combination between extremes), but it doesn’t necessarily translate into a desire to mimic the motion in question, or to acquire a similar exercising identity. As my collaborator,

³⁵ She commented following a post on the blog, *Healthy Diva Life* (Gagliano)

Sarah (single, no children), said in response to the photo (Figure 5.1, below):

No, I wouldn't be inspired to join them...I might feel guilty sitting at my desk, yes. So the fact they are active would motivate me to be active but not to join them. :-)

Importantly, even a positive reaction can bear the marks of guilt, as this woman's disclaimer suggests:

I often exercise while watching tennis matches--less guilt than sitting & watching other people work out--& burns calories! :) (ValerieDavid, Twitter)

Health advocates and exercise enthusiasts would applaud this sort of 'just doing it' attitude, but probably fail to notice—or at least care—that the guilt isn't eliminated, it's simply tamped down for the duration of the tennis match. The *anticipated* guilt about “sitting” is triggered by the idea of watching someone else exercising—and burning

Figure 5.1: Bodies at work



calories—while they themselves are not. In the course of my interviews I showed the photo

in Figure 5.1 (p. 114) and built a ‘story’ around it, painting these women as my collaborators’ co-workers out for a run on their lunch break. Asking directly whether my collaborators would feel guilty not joining these co-workers stirred a range of responses, which tapped into the location of the photo, the apparel, the activity, the timing (short lunch break), the work responsibilities, and the weather, again showing the complexity of a seemingly straightforward situation.

No, I wouldn't feel guilty. I don't like to run. Have never built up the endurance. Tell myself it is not good on the knees. If I exercised of any sort at lunch, I might sweat a bit, then I'd have to take a shower and start all over again. (Donna)

I would love to join them for a run and would feel inspired but I would also think about how much work I had to do and why I didn't have time to go for a run. Yup I would/do feel guilty when they are out running. (Gina, married with two young children)

Shyla (married with two teenagers), underlines the strength of internalised discourses as she willingly accepts the idea that guilt could be a force for good in her life. The catch is her own inability to ‘guilt’³⁶ herself effectively, which she takes tentative steps toward in identifying the parameters of her willingness to “actually do something about it”:

I might feel a little guilty. It would be nice if I felt guilty enough to actually do something about it. If I knew them, and I was assured that they would slow down for me, then I might join them.

As I discuss in the next chapter regarding the management of exercise-related guilt, there are many factors at play in what is often framed as inspirational motivation to exercise (e.g., role models) (Cotter, 2012).

A person’s reaction to social stimuli, as I’ve tried to emphasise throughout this thesis,

³⁶ While grammatically incorrect, this colloquial use of the term guilt as a verb was common across all my data sources. I am interested in how people understand guilt, and have therefore tried to reflect their use of the term itself when possible.

is a complex phenomenon: the thoughts, emotions, feelings, and affects stirred in the moment may or may not linger long enough to produce linguistic expression of them, and irrespective of the eventual articulation, the cogmation that is shared with others will not necessarily remain consistent across time or situations.

Hearing that someone else had exercised:

People in the office talking about exercise waaahhh #guilt#fatpotato. (Katieb, Twitter)

Would I feel guilty? I guess when I hear that other people have been out exercising and I haven't that day I get a pang of something, I am not sure if it is guilt, I don't feel I have done something wrong, but there is an admission that I should be doing exercise like so and so. (Andrea, married with two small children; my emphasis)

Seeing images of fit(ter) people, or a store mannequin:

Magazines, and to a lesser extent, TV and other media, leave me feeling depressed. It's astonishing how much more upbeat and happy I feel when I don't look at these false images. There's an immediate effect - within half an hour of reading/browsing/looking I feel down...Media has a very strong pull, especially glossy images. (Bambis, news reader)³⁷

Catching sight of one's own reflection in the mirror:

At one point in my interviews, I asked my collaborators to respond to an imagined scenario in which they were getting dressed in the morning and caught sight of themselves in the mirror. The responses show how the initial spark of discontent/criticism set off by their reflection quickly flares into an assessment of their physical—and associated moral—failings:

I REALLY need to get in shape and lose some weight!!! I tend to feel like a failure when I see that I need to get in shape/lose weight. I am not crazy about looking in the mirror. (Susan, single, no children)

³⁷ She commented after the *Guardian* article, 'Uncomfortable in our skin: the body-image report', by Eva Wiseman (2012).

Yuck Anger? that my body has changed so much but more so that I did not continue at the gym. Annoyed with myself for not having self-control when it comes to eating. (Deb, married, no children)

I have put on too much weight and need to exercise, nothing fits me properly anymore. (Gina)

My thighs are so fat. My ass is so big and droopy I feel a little depressed when I look at myself in the mirror...once I am dressed I feel helpless. I have done all I can and it is still not good enough. I don't need to be young or look young. But this flabby spreading out feels so undisciplined and uncontrolled. So sloppy. (Shyla)

The attitude of other exercisers:

I can become competitive. It kind of depends on their attitude too. If they don't notice that they're more fit, it doesn't bother me as much; whereas if they are smug about it, I get defensive and may feel inadequate. (Janet)

'They make me feel guilty':

I don't feel anything...other than simple recognition of oh yes there it is again the body beautiful, the curvy, slender white but tanned woman in a bikini, there she is again. Perhaps in my sub-consciousness I register her, feel something because don't get me wrong it is not as if I am not drawn into wanting to be like this women, a desire to look like that... (Andrea)

I call attention especially to the mysterious 'they' in women's lives as a potent guilt trigger. My reading of women's narratives and of my collaborator's interviews highlighted the ubiquitous, but seemingly indefinable, *presence* that is often accused of imposing expectations which lead to feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Thomsson, 1999). For example, in their interviews with mothers, Susan Drew and Ruth Paradice (1996) found that guilt was induced by a perception of irresponsibility (spending time on 'non-productive' things like exercise) and impending blame from 'they' (family?). The various 'disruptive influences' that people point to as reasons for stopping exercise or for 'skipping a workout' often involve other people, even when they don't explicitly mention the presence of others (e.g., moving house, working late). All these interacting relationships

constitute a large part of the ‘complexity’ of including exercise in a daily schedule, I think (not a new thought, but bear with me). But this self-other complexity is difficult for people to explain, and is possibly so subtle it’s not necessarily explain-able; lots of stuff hitting the interpersonal fan, which they are not comfortable revealing or expounding on in an interview because it may reflect badly on them or on someone they care about.

My final thought for this theme, which incidentally applies to all the other themes as well, is the fluidity of guilt triggers. That is, awareness of bodies/people flickers in and out of our visual field and consciousness, stirring up momentary reactions. We are not either influenced by others or not influenced by others; we are not either impervious to certain people, or not impervious; and we are not either made to feel guilty or not made to feel guilty by this or that person. Many situational factors come into play in any given moment. Guilt may flare with body related struggles (e.g., esteem, identity) in those moments, and just as quickly subside. But, I argue, this ‘unsteadiness’ doesn’t reduce the emotional (or physical) significance of the trigger, in that moment or over time as the flickers of ‘evidence’ pile up. Despite self-compassionate efforts and reassurances in private, seeing other bodies on the street or in the shop can bring the inadequacies, carefully reframed in private, rushing to the surface.

Opportunities

This theme is about the (ironic) ways in which something seemingly innocuous, such as for example nice weather, can act as a trigger for exercise-related guilt: it not only removes the ‘excuse’ of bad weather, but it can also be a reminder of how many days (weeks, months,

years) have gone by without having exercised. It is this awareness, then, of ‘lost’ opportunities to which participants tended to explicitly attach their guilt:

If it was a really nice day, I might wish I could be out doing something that I enjoy, instead of sitting inside wasting a perfectly good, beautiful day. (Janet)

Other types of opportunity triggers can be created by the conceptual or physical removal of barriers such as financial commitments (e.g., ‘free offers’), time pressures (e.g., 24-hour gym), and physical difficulty (e.g., promises such as, ‘it’s very easy’).

Figure 5.2: ‘Complimentary yoga’ - stretched for time



In my interviews, for example, I showed the photo in Figure 5.2 (above), which I took in Auckland, and solicited my collaborators’ reactions. Anna (married with two teenagers) managed to squeeze a world of complexity into her brief answer, highlighting the multifaceted nature of what could appear to be a simple act of agency in a beneficent

situation:

I will surely feel guilty if I have to turn down this free offer because it crashes with my other duties such as cooking dinner for my family and help the kids with their home work. You can say that setting priority should have made me feel good but it does not. It just makes me feel like I am failing to balance my time.

I encountered many examples, in both online and offline conversations and observations, of the opportunity trigger created by the promise of minimal difficulty, or simplicity. These sorts of promises are typically embedded in exercise scheduling schemes, or food/fitness programs, or parenting ideas aimed at making exercise a priority. This example from an article called ‘Stop the Exercise Guilt and Start Moving’, on the U.S.-based website healthywomen.org shows how even seemingly empathetic voices often subtly project the idea that we *do* have opportunities but are simply not taking advantage of them:

When you hear advice to exercise for 30 to 45 minutes or more, nearly every day, you may think, "In whose life? Get real." Many women feel the same way. We're too busy and too tired—from job, family, home and other demands—to squeeze exercise into our overcrowded days. Those time blocks seem like impossible hurdles to get over. Even if we try, it's difficult to stay on track for long. Now, instead of feeling guilty about what you can't do, you can start feeling good about what's possible for you. Research shows that even short bursts of physical activity improve your health, especially if you spend your day sitting. Adding a little activity helps lower your cholesterol, blood pressure and weight, cuts your risk of heart attack and diabetes, and improves how you feel emotionally. (My emphases)³⁸

They, like many similar voices, put the onus on the (non)exerciser to act on this helpful knowledge that “even short bursts” are better than doing nothing. And in this instance, they simplistically offer exercising as the antidote to feeling guilty about not

³⁸ “Healthy Women (HW) is the nation’s leading independent health information source for women. Our core mission is to educate, inform and empower women to make smart health choices for themselves and their families” (healthywomen.org).

exercising, tacking on their own guilt-inducing rehearsal of health risks associated with failing to do “what’s possible for you” (i.e., an opportunity). As Shyla said with some frustration, “they try to tell you...take the stairs when you can, for e.g....but that ‘when you can’ thing - it never comes.” The sense, moreover, that others are able to do what she is not, adds to her frustration, guilt, and shame.

This trigger theme also relates to the managing mechanism of ‘impediments’ (see p. 240); it represents a *lack* of an external force, or what many literatures call ‘barriers’ to physical activity. I frame it as an unavoidable obstacle outside a person’s control. That is, as exercise psychologists and other professionals imply by ‘eliminating barriers’ (Reichert, Barros, Domingues, & Hallal, 2007; Seefeldt, Malina, & Clark, 2002), there is nothing standing in the way of exercise, and therefore when you choose not to exercise, you have only yourself to blame. As Paula (widowed, with one teenager) explains, when she chooses not to exercise, there is no guilt

if something came up and I couldn't get there, but would if I just didn't feel like going...that's just laziness, apathy. It's my problem, there's no one else to blame. I had to make the decision - I chose, and can't point the finger at anyone else.

Her choice, therefore, comes at a psychological cost: she had the power/agency to decide not to exercise, but having made the (‘wrong’) choice, she has labelled herself as ‘lazy’ and ‘apathetic’. Her (much lauded in some circles) sense of personal responsibility has tapped into the self-flagellation inherent in health imperatives generally, in an effort to motivate herself to make a better choice next time. She adds this instance to previous instances of laziness and apathy, thus reinforcing negative affect connected with exercise-related decisions.

Messages

The ubiquity of messaging in Western societies (Eskes, Duncan, & Miller, 1998) may make this particular trigger seem almost too ordinary to mention. But it was apparent in my interactions with my collaborators, that even while they rejected or claimed not to notice particular messages, their emotions were engaged and demanded their attention.

Incidentally, while images are often part of messages (e.g., the portrayal of the fit body in many advertisements), this theme focuses on the overall connoted and denoted meanings in public communications. Both exercise- and non-exercise-related messaging can act to spark guilt about not exercising. The media, the fitness industry, health promoters, and the self-help industry are all complicit in this trigger. Even the word *exercise* in everyday conversation can trigger negative emotions and guilt about exercise, starting a firestorm of anxiety and feelings of inadequacy that wind their way into the rest of that woman's day.

If I'm slacking off with the exercising... my initial reaction to the topic being mentioned often involves a twinge of guilt for not keeping up with something that's good for me. (Michelle)

I think I hate the word exercise...People always bring exercise up in conversations, how they haven't done any and they should have, how they have and they feel great etc. I find it so tedious and yet I am totally drawn into the whole idea that we need to do this thing called exercise. (Andrea)

These quotations provide good examples of how various themes intertwine: this woman's feelings about exercise are provoked by hearing the word *exercise*; messaging and her emotions about exercise are both reinforced and reignited in private conversations (*people* theme), and at the same time, her narrative clearly reflects the conflicted cogmation (*cogmation* theme and *conflict* theme) she experiences when *exercise* reaches her consciousness.

Fitness gyms stand out in this particular service to humanity. The righteous rhetoric

seeking to encourage women to move more is pervasive, both within their public messaging and in interactions between gym personnel and their clientele (which also calls up the people/bodies theme). In addition to mainstream media advertising, internet presences, and messaging plastered on places of business, messages are also transmitted and perpetuated via fitness ‘experts’ employed in gyms around the world. Motivational dicta such as “Change your body, change your life” (clubphysical.co.nz), or “There is always a way to achieve any outcome you desire, if you're committed!” (jenkinsgym.co.nz). These gyms pave the way for guilt for those who do not perceive themselves to have changed or achieved, who don’t desire ‘outcomes’, and who aren’t adequately committed (these perceptions can crop up for anyone, however usually ‘dedicated’, and are not either/or in character); after all, who else is to blame when they fail to find ‘a way’ and thereby signal their regrettable lack of commitment?

Even if every sermon resulted in a convert, the *process* of being made to feel guilty has accumulating emotional consequences. Every gym staff member who responded to my questions assured me that it was “very common” for women—“the majority”, in fact—to experience/express feeling guilty about missing a workout. More importantly, those feelings “can become all consuming for some women”, many of whom never “comfortably, mentally move forward” but are “too ashamed to even show up for further workouts” (Steve, personal trainer and group fitness instructor). And yet the idea that guilt is normal (if not necessary), and therefore innocuous, persists in both the messaging and the mentoring employed in the fitness industry.

Another example of a message-trigger for exercise-related guilt that I heard from my collaborators was ‘success stories’ about health/exercise/dieting. Explaining that she is

aware of the proliferating incantations of ‘easy’ fitness solutions, Shyla said:

....we tend to tune them out. and the problem is that they often feature people who have already been successful in getting an exercise program going.

Her implication is that while she can convince herself that she isn’t a legitimate target of these messages, the reminder of her failures is nonetheless present. Guilt is now free to enter. Notice, too, the interwoven presence of implicit triggers in Shyla’s comment: there is the trigger of *people* (i.e., who have succeeded where she has failed), *time* (i.e., that she doesn’t have for exercise), and *conflicts* (i.e., choices she’s made in which exercise was

Figure 5.3: Presumed innocent - 'Keep up the good work', Subway ad



ruled out), all rolled up into the overt message trigger to which she is responding in the moment. This hints at the Operations of exercise-related guilt, which I discuss in more depth in Chapter 8 (p. 254). For now, the preview of the reciprocal nature of guilt triggers

can serve to underscore the fuzzy edges between triggers of guilt, and thus avoid thinking of them as mutually exclusive.

Relatedly, message triggers can also appear in the guise of unwarranted praise, which in a way generously marks the reader herself as a ‘success story’. As some women indicated about the message ‘keep up the good work’ in the photo above (Figure 5.3, p. 124), it made them feel guilty as it reminded them they weren’t doing any ‘good work’ at the moment (or lately):

The slogan “Keep Up The Good Work” would most likely cause me to feel guilty, since there's not necessarily any “good work” (exercise) for me to “keep up”.
(Michelle)

The “keep up the good work” might cause guilt because I'm not always consistent with my exercise. (Janet)

Being exhorted to keep up the work good reminds me that I am not doing any.
(Shyla)

In my interviews I showed my collaborators the cover images of eight books, which I chose from among the 50 most popular in Amazon's 'Exercise & Fitness' category. Interestingly, the broader category of ‘Health, Fitness, and Dieting’ subsumes this self-help section, giving some support to the idea of this normalized discursive trinity I talk about in the next chapter. Following are a few of the emotions and feelings my collaborators shared in response to the following cover images (Figures 5.4 - 5.6):

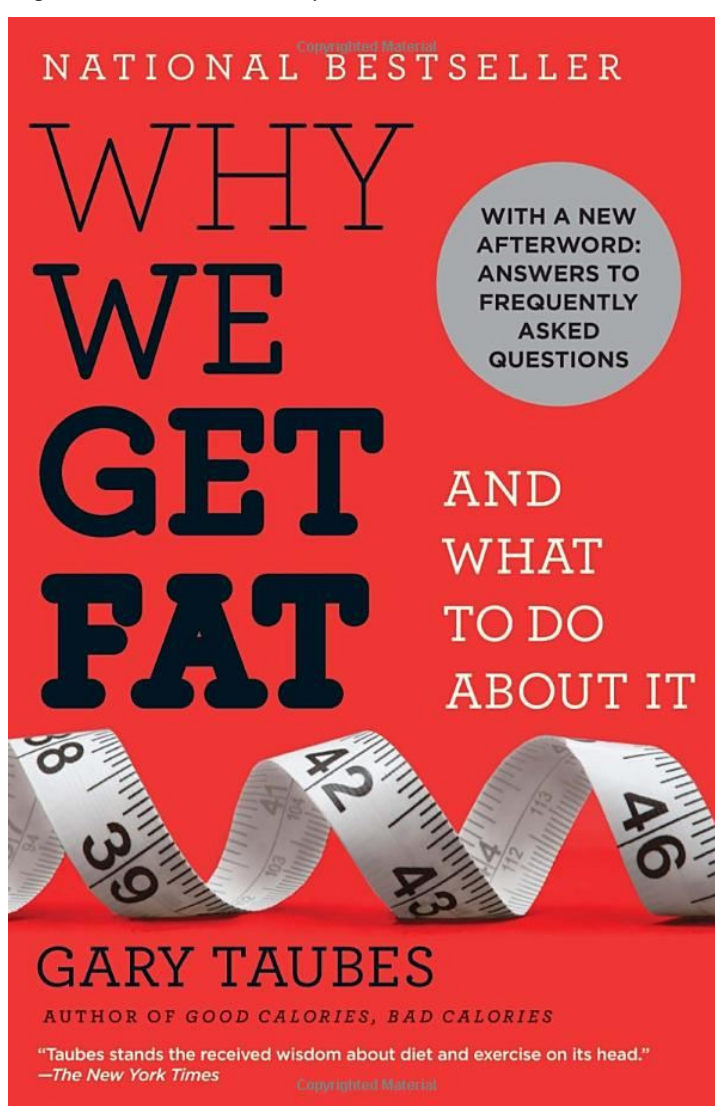
[the book] *Why We Get Fat and What to Do about It* -- It makes me feel guilty because it implies that there is a definite reason as to why I am fat and there must be something I can do about it that I am not doing. (Paula)

Paula says the book (Figure 5.4, p. 126) *makes her feel* guilty, and I argue the book is therefore a visual spark for the guilt that follows: the wrongdoing in question, the action about which she feels guilty, is her fatness. And true to a guilt response, she expresses an

urge for reparation (i.e., “there must be something that I can do”). Susan equates her guilty feelings with feeling ‘badly’—a common synonym used by participants—in response to the image in Figure 5.5 (p. 127):

I feel badly about the 21 days to total body transformation because I know I won't follow that diet and who knows, it could be a really good thing for me. I would like to read it, because I wonder how difficult it would be to do it, and wonder if I could be successful at a diet like this.

Figure 5.4: Book cover - *Why We Get Fat and What to do about it*



In her case, the book sparks guilt by reminding her of past dieting failures. The wrongdoing about which she feels guilty is her failure to do something that “could be a

really good thing” for her health. Referring to the cover image in Figure 5.6 (p. 128), Shyla commented:

Everyday Paleo - makes me feel guilty because I always have this nagging feeling that I've set a bad health example for my kids.

Figure 5.5: Book cover - *21-day Total Body Transformation*

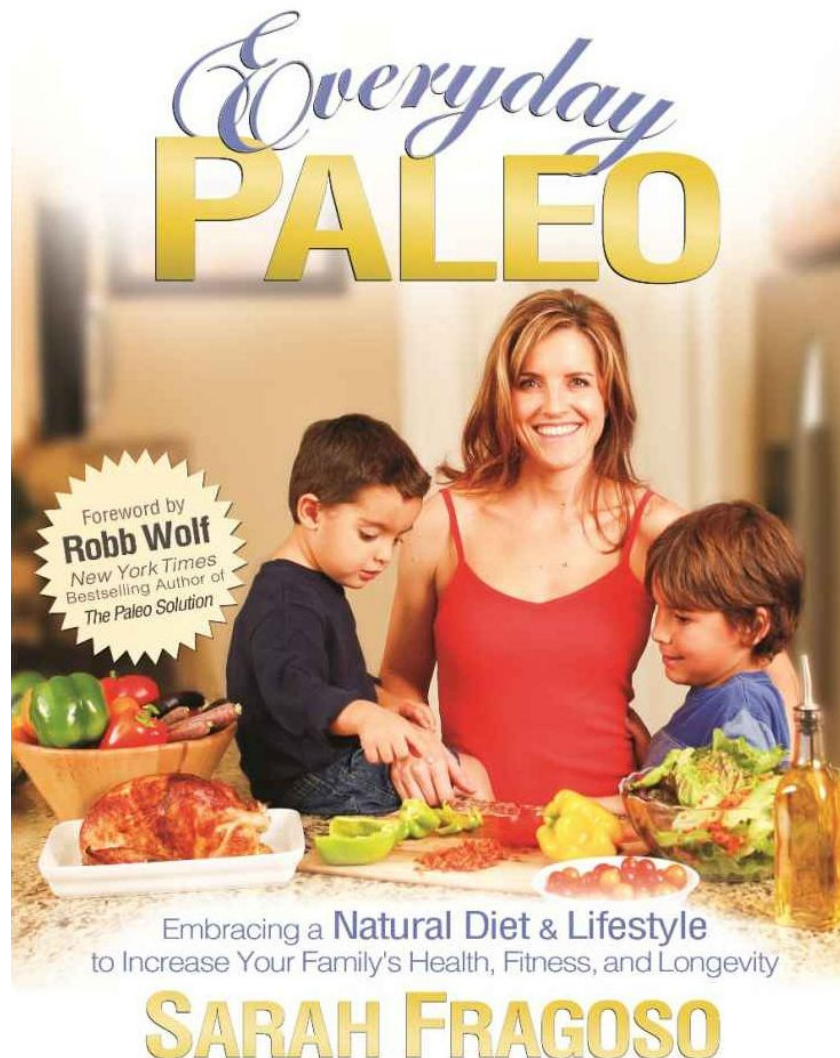


Shyla also uses the phrase *makes me feel* in her accusation of the book’s (Figure 5.6, p. 128) guilt-inducing characteristic; but the flame of guilt burns in response to an awareness that she may potentially be a flawed parent. The nagging feeling is arguably guilt in another guise—that flickering cogmotion that eases in and out of our consciousness, flaring up in

moments like this in which something acts as a potent spark we can't ignore.

Again, I note the multifaceted nature of these guilt triggers: the acceptance of both the indictment and the sentence: 'I am fat/unsuccessful, I am therefore guilty, I must pay for this transgression by doing something to remedy it.' Or, as Shyla pointed out subsequently regarding a TV program about healthy eating and carbohydrate addiction, "the 'treatment' depended on my first believing that I was an 'addict'."

Figure 5.6: Book cover - *Everyday Paleo*



Cogmotion

The name of this theme, as I explained earlier, is my attempt at capturing the complexity of a person, specifically, the idea that cognition, emotion, and motion (the living, moving body) are never separate, and occur interdependently (thinking/feeling/moving). This discussion includes a range of guilt triggers, including: feeling tired (fatigue), feeling fat (or unhealthy), and feeling judged (or overtly criticized) about one's body. It also includes memories of 'failed' attempts at exercising (feeling inadequate, incompetent, etc.), or 'failures' in the form of too much exercise—both of which may be the cause of present injury or bodily damage:

I don't mean that I don't exercise at all. When I do, it feels great. I do aerobics or yoga at home, or I walk outside, or I swim. But I can't keep it up very long, and it seems very easy to just stop. I think this history has a cumulative effect and exacerbates the feeling of guilt when I hear about exercise. (Shyla)

It is difficult—and perhaps not necessary—to tease out whether the injury/damage triggers guilt about past in/action, or whether the memory of past in/action is itself a trigger for feeling guilty about the present injury/damage. It's quite possible they exist in a free-trade situation. The key here is that *physical* bodies participate in the guilt cycle, and their biological presence plays a role in the social and psychological creation of, and reaction to, exercise-related guilt.

The diversity of expressions points to the ambiguity of meanings associated with guilt. Not all the women in my study were able to articulate what guilt feels like for them. Some were insistent that it “doesn't have a physical feeling”, although it could “make you feel shame”. Others were somewhat confused by my question (about what guilt feels like for them) and referred to guilt as a “self-explanatory” thing/idea. Some collaborators and participants who did take a stab at translating sensations into sentences said:

My god - how can anyone say that the mind and body are completely separate? When I am sad, everything hurts more and when I am happy, I feel like my muscles are so strong I could gather them up and fly...even if we DO want to separate them, it can only be in terms of intersecting continua, not mutually exclusive categories... Well you know, I have done SO much introspection over the last years and I wonder sometimes if that has added to the exhaustion. (Shyla)

Guilt is a funny thing...It comes in all shapes and sizes and it can strike anyone - men and women, exercisers and non-exercisers or athletes and couch potatoes. Whatever form this guilt takes, it reminds me of the grapevine growing in our backyard. It grows fast and silent, creeping along and slowly strangling every plant in its path. Guilt has the same effect, draining us of precious energy we could be using for more productive things. (Paige, blogger)³⁹

I actually don't know what that feeling of guilt was, and how do I disconnect that from those physiological, itchy feelings in my legs...my head wouldn't be as clear...or I'd itch for it...my body wouldn't feel right... (Lisa)

If only it could be as simple as "guilt feels like a tummy ache"... (Shyla)

Feeling tired

I push what I need to do for ME to the end, and then I am too tired to do it...so I don't do it. [Anita: 'and feel guilty?'] "yeah. but I would feel guiltier if I exercised and didn't do the others [i.e., putting others first]. I am just one more item on my to do list, and lowest priority. (Shyla; my emphasis)

The genesis of Shyla's guilt here could be interpreted to be fatigue, which she describes as her reason for not exercising ("so I don't do it"). But again, she ascribes her guilt to her failure to actually 'do it'. It is interesting to see the imbrications of different guilts in this narrative: guilt about not exercising, while felt and acknowledged, is quickly outmuscled by the *imagined* guilt of having exercised instead of having helped others. So my participants are faced with competing responsibilities. Exercise is what responsible, morally superior citizens do; helping others and executing one's work obligations signals the same virtues. Thus, the impossibility of doing it all, and doing it well, is starkly

³⁹ From the *About.com: Exercise Blog* (Waehner, 2010)

obvious. Guilt (and shame) is, I argue, frequently an aspect of the fallout from this emotional eddy.

Incidentally, this comment of Shyla's is a good example of how the guilt triggers I've identified tend to intertwine, making it difficult to dissect 'barriers' and 'levers' to exercise (in a way that would produce a sense of 'knowing' amongst physical activity promoters), and to ascertain for one's self *why* I didn't exercise.

Feeling fat or unhealthy

Didn't run for 2 days in a row, no exercise yesterday. I feel like complete crap. Guilty for taking just one day off. -_- (Twitter, Ariel@FatsNotCute)

This person equates *guilt* with feeling "like complete crap", but the guilt is associated with "taking just one day off", or in other words, failing to exercise when she 'should' have. I argue that it was her *feeling*—*cogmotion*, more precisely—that triggered her guilt-edged awareness about not having exercised. Thus her own body acts to stimulate negative emotions about what she/her body isn't doing.

Many of the comments I solicited about looking in the mirror could also fit within this trigger theme - the visual trigger was barely, if at all, separate from the cogmotion that accompanied that sudden awareness of 'needing' to lose weight, and thus exercise. Their initial comments such as "Ew!" and "Yuck!" give the impression of an almost visceral reaction happening in tandem with their articulation.

Feeling judged

Feeling judged, whether it's a sense based on your own inferences and intangibles gleaned from others' behaviours, or whether you received personal criticism, the *feeling* (and affect) is crucial in this cogmotion trigger. A sensation such as, "I feel like some moms judge me

for wanting the time to work out” (Jamie, blogger)⁴⁰ suggests this woman feels guilty about working out, but attributes the source of that guilt to “some moms” who are judging the way she uses her time. The following blog writer does not specify where her guilt comes from, but describes it as something that crests after she feels (i.e., guilt triggered) she doesn’t deserve a treat because of her transgressions (e.g., being overweight, not exercising):

There’s also the guilt that comes with feeling judged. You know when you’ve gained weight and feel you should be exercising, but you’re sick, tired or just need a break? Or you find yourself indulging in a piece of cake or in a beautiful blouse. Maybe you truly deserve these things, but you spend all your joy feeling guilty. Not only are you unable to eat your cake, but you’re unable to enjoy it too. (Brandi-Ann, blogger; my emphases)⁴¹

One gym employee whose opinions I solicited about the potentially damaging effects of feeling guilty about exercise offered this insight:

I think that it can have a huge negative impact particularly on a women’s self-esteem. I think the guilt factor is definitely amplified when slacking from exercise results in weight gain. It tends to be the pattern at this time of year - when the sun’s out and many people are on holiday or socialising more (therefore eating and drinking more) so tend to put on weight having missed many of their gym sessions (and not taken up other forms of exercise). They get the guilt to try and come back in, and if they aren’t motivated/reassured initially they then take an even longer break almost feeling defeated for the time being. I think that how they feel at this point (disappointed, ashamed, disgusted, heavy, huge, annoyed, fearful, etc) just adds to the guilt for missing even more gym time and by the time they do get back into it (even if slow and steady) there is a big emotional boulder coming with them and this can really affect the enjoyment that is meant to come with exercise. (Amy, personal correspondence; my emphases)

Clearly she was struck—as was I—by the complex tapestry created by the twisting social, cogmotional, and somatic threads.

At this point, it is worthwhile highlighting the word *slacking* (from exercise) in the

⁴⁰ From the blog, *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl, 2013)

⁴¹ From the blog, *The Inspiring Bee* (Uyemura, 2013)

preceding quote, as an example of the subtle ways in which discourses are perpetuated and imposed, even in the most sympathetic monologues. The word is loaded with negative attribution, of both the character and the actions of the slacker. The normative assumption is that exercise will consist of a chronologically consistent regime, and any deviation indicates a personal flaw of some kind. Guilt is therefore, according to this logic, a friend of fitness routines because it induces people to do what's best for them. But even amidst Amy the gym employee's detailed description of the negative cognitions she witnesses, she intimates that the solution to this "emotional boulder" they are carrying lies within the person themselves: "when slacking from exercise", "tend to put on weight", "having missed many of their gym sessions", "they then take an even longer break", are all transgressions against the predetermined norm we call exercise. The established rules of conduct within the church of fitness condemn by their very existence. There is no escape from the spectre of regularity—often conflated with 'disciplined'—embedded in modern notions of exercise. And thus, guilt is just a flicker away from igniting into flames, demanding confession and repentance from each, regardless of the extent or excellence of one's obedience.

Time

Time has been well-noted as a factor in women's exercise experiences—in the barriers and challenges associated with being able to do it regularly (S. Drew & Paradise, 1996). Much effort and propaganda goes into suggesting how women can perfect their 'time-management skills' in view of fitting exercise into their schedules. And it is a factor that received a lot of airtime in my participants' narratives. This blog reader's dilemma exemplifies a common refrain:

I have tried for months to carve out time to exercise and guilt sabotages it. Both my kids still wake at least once or twice at night so early mornings are really hard for me. I work full time out of the house so evenings I too feel guilty spending time exercising when I should be spending time with my kids. (Megan, blog reader)⁴²

Her sense of not having sufficient time triggers her guilt-saboteur. Her guilty feelings, then, attach (i.e., are *about*) alternately to *not exercising* and *exercising*. Exercising, moreover, competes with her self-imposed imperative: “when I should be spending time with my kids.” She feels compelled to try to carve (i.e., an effortful, emotion-laced endeavour) a chunk of time out of the immutable block of 24 hours that constitutes all our lives; and it is that *awareness*—of having to once again negotiate ineluctable guilt—that I argue sparks her guilt feelings into a flame.

There are some more subtle aspects to time that seem to act as triggers for exercise-related guilt. The *end of a day*, for example, signals that time has run out and whatever exercise hasn’t happened will likely have to wait until at least the next morning. As I experience myself quite often, this realisation can cause a surge of guilt, regret, and frustration. And while these emotions may in some cases eventually lead to ‘intentions’ and ‘prioritising’ the emotional cost and emotional labour have already happened - there are already consequences.

Picking up the rest of Amy’s (gym employee) narrative I shared in the previous section, you can see that she hints at these consequences when she adds (my emphases):

If their self-esteem is suffering rather severely you can just see that exercise and getting to the gym almost becomes a stress in itself- not to mention for a lot of NZ woman at the moment who are balancing their job, balancing family time and running a household- just another thing to add to their load. Stress is inevitable along with all the other things with it (damaging to all aspects of health!).

⁴² From the blog *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl, 2013)

These sentiments were corroborated many times throughout my study. The photo in Figure 5.7 (below) I took of a bus-stop advert, for example (sticking with the gym for a bit longer), elicited responses indicating both *cognition* and *time* factors:

Figure 5.7: 'Burnt out? You need us', *City Fitness* ad



For me the idea of city fitness being able to solve feeling burnt out for me it just silly. Squeezing in exercise is not going to fix burnt out it is going to add to it,

just another thing you feel you are pressured to fit into your already bursting day.
I don't need that. (Andrea)

A *milestone*, such as a birthday, is another manifestation of time as a trigger. As an acquaintance explained, her 40th birthday signalled to her that her body wasn't "where she wanted it to be" by that point in her life. So in addition to acting as one more reminder that she is aging, her big day also triggered guilt about the exercise she had failed to do leading up to this auspicious moment. Whatever resolutions or promises she may have made about getting in shape by a certain date (time), or for an occasion (another trigger), are forced up against the calendar on the wall and brought to account. One of her instinctive reactions, she reported, was to avoid having her photo taken - that would just produce commemorative artefacts of her failure. She would then re-suffer every time she caught sight of the photos, a guilt-edged re-enactment she didn't care to abet. As I'll discuss later on, these 'managing' mechanisms all take their physical and emotional toll.

Finally, in this comment by Shyla, which I have already cited in the section on cogmotion as a trigger (and thus confirming the interweaving nature of the triggers), I focus on time—specifically, its omnipresent imposition—as a guilt trigger:

I push what I need to do for ME to the end, and then I am too tired to do it...so I don't do it. [Q: and feel guilty?] yeah. but I would feel guiltier if I exercised and didn't do the others. I am just one more item on my to do list, and lowest priority.

Referring again to the imbrications of different guilts in this narrative, I also identify "the end" of the day as sparking guilt in Shyla. The realisation that there is very little time left exacerbates her fatigue and plays a leading role in her decision to not exercise that day. Her "to do list" suggests another time element, in that items on lists are typically accomplished in sequence - when time runs out, items remain on the list, arguably triggering guilt about what wasn't finished (e.g., exercise). This seemingly innocuous

process is rife with emotional significance, as Jen (blogger) describes when she attempts to make a list of everything she is behind on: “The amount of emotional energy this steals from me is almost unbearable.”⁴³ Incidentally, Jen’s blog is a good example of a non-exercise-focused source of women’s voices (as I discussed in Chapter 4, p. 75) contributing to my insights about exercise. Exercise is just one component of the daily firestorm of ‘to dos’. Non-exercise obligations also steal emotional energy—the act of feeling that you *must* but *can’t* do them—which, I argue, impacts a person’s overall sense of ability to exercise. I discuss ‘To Do Lists’ in the next section, emphasising the inherent conflicts embedded in them, of which time is often implicated.

Conflicts/choices

This trigger is a significant theme in my analysis: it’s about the many mini-conflicts that arise throughout any given day. I highlight the tradeoffs and choices women face, which may not seem related to exercise, but in fact directly and indirectly affect their choices about it (e.g., whether to exercise). Nel Noddings (2003) observes that “conflict arises when our engrossment is divided, and several cared-fors demand incompatible decisions from us” (p. 18). I suggest that one of our ‘cared-fors’ is ourselves, and is therefore an ever-present part of the negotiations. Importantly, *negotiation* is not always an interpersonal event; it can be an intrapersonal event, and as such it can be a bargaining between an individual and their responsibilities, obligations, or their own physical limitations. There are many types of conflicts, which I am loathe to assign labels to as it artificially reduces

⁴³ From the blog, *Jen Hatmaker* (Hatmaker, 2013)

the complexity and variety of situations. But financial, time, task, and energy conflicts are certainly examples which demand emotion work.

Economic tradeoffs may be easiest to visualise: the purchase of one thing automatically eliminates alternative purchases, or at least reduces the likelihood of purchasing more. For example, money that was tagged for a gym membership may have to be handed over for car repairs. As one of my collaborators related to me, her sporadically used *Curves* membership made her feel guilty, not because of the missed exercise but because as a responsible parent she couldn't justify the financial sacrifice that could be better used for her child. This constitutes *exercise-related* guilt.

The 'To Do List' represents conflict: it is a visual reminder of the many and constant tasks and responsibilities falling on a person's shoulders. It may seem like this trigger could be a Time theme, as I discussed above, but time in this context is more about its fungibility and finiteness relative to responsibilities. That is, the time designated for sleeping is drawn from (or "carved out" of, as per the blogger Jamie, above) the same time bank as that used for eating, working, and exercising. If you run out of time, you have to trade one thing for another, and when the thing that gets dropped is exercise, there is an opportunity for guilt feelings. A To Do List exacerbates the potential for guilt because it reminds me of how many things are competing for my waking hours and my finite energy.

Exposure to, or an awareness of, health/fitness discourses creates 'mini conflicts' throughout the day. Consider, for example, Gina who told me, "I try to take the stairs at work whenever possible." Picture this decision-making process happening multiple times each work day: she needs to go up or down a floor or floors; this creates a choice that is saturated with implications for her self-perception, both for her responsible working self

and her responsible healthy self; if she chooses the stairs, she is ‘stealing’ time from her employer, if she chooses the elevator she is missing an opportunity for one of those “small increases” that health promoters get excited about - but either choice potentially leaves some form and degree of guilt (Noddings, 2003). Significantly, as I discuss in Chapter 3, the parameters of this negotiation with herself have arguably been shaped by normative societal discourses, such as those promoted by the Ministry of Health in this collaborator’s country. For example, their website lays out the reassuring imperative: “physical activity should be a normal part of your day, and not a chore” (health.govt.nz). They remind the reader that “even small increases in physical activity can produce measurable health benefits”, and provide helpful “Tips for getting active”, one of which is “use the stairs instead of the lift” (health.govt.nz).

In addition to the decisions that these conflicts present, there are often comparative images in the mix, which creates tension between what a person wants (but sees as shallow/conformist), what they think is reasonable (given their age/duties), and the imposed reality of even having to fight this fight. Jamie the blogger’s (Weitl, 2013) conundrum is a poignant example of this tension:

There are so many other items that seem like they should be higher priorities — my kids, my husband, my work — that taking the time to carve out the chunks of time needed not only to exercise but also to meal plan and prepare healthy foods — quickly becomes overwhelming.

Her guilt feelings are not isolated, neutral events that she, the guilty, just needs to get over, but are “real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928)—can become “overwhelming”—and as such are of ethical concern in any transference of information, including exercise enlightenment.

Actions

I based this theme on my observation that some exercise-related guilt seemed to be triggered by particular, and often deliberate, actions that derailed exercise plans. More specifically, actions that participants did to/for themselves. While I can think of many actions that conceivably fit into this theme based on my own experiences and those of acquaintances in the past (e.g., shopping, movie-going), in this study eating was the ‘act’ that regularly appeared in my data. Exercise is virtually inseparable from thoughts of food for many (most?) people, as these Twitter proclamations (two of many examples I culled) insinuate:

Best thing about exercise is being able to eat rubbish guilt free afterwards.
[accompanying photo of cream and jello] (Claire Roche, Twitter)

@emma457 don't forget what is good about doing exercise though. Guilt free eating of pies/cakes/crisps after. (stevesage, Twitter)

Notice Claire's use of *being able to* eat guilt-free, as if the ingester's access to their rubbish was blocked by some external force, which only exercise could remove. Guilt, moreover, would be inevitable without the foregoing exercise. Incidentally, when I searched for exercise-related emotions on Twitter I didn't use *food* in any of my search terms. Guilt can be triggered by the *act of eating*: “I ate a Chinese [takeout] then got on exercise bike for ages, the guilt”; by thoughts of *anticipated eating*: “Exercise hurts now but makes you feel good later. Cake feels good now but makes you feel bad later (guilt, heart failure...) ;-);”, “Ditched my office chair for an exercise ball so now I don't feel as guilty eating this cupcake for 2nd breakfast. (Big Jenn@big_jenn_c, Twitter)”; and by *thoughts of having eaten* (usually recently, usually ‘bad’ food): “Absentmindedly ate a whole bag of allsorts. If someone could do my guilt & exercise for me that would be great.

(ellie@LooksLikeEllie, Twitter)”

In the mind of the guilty, each of these food events is an ‘action’ or transgression that invokes exercise (e.g., ‘I should exercise’, ‘I should have exercised’). Exercise has become a sort of ‘morning-after pill’ for illicit or ill-conceived calorie consumption; or if eating is in the future, exercise can be used for ‘protection’ against unwanted calorie accumulation or birthing of fat. The angst produced by tensions between food (i.e., pleasure) and exercise (i.e., pain) was readily apparent in both my collaborators’ and participants’ narratives.

Discourses around fitness and exercise include efforts to persuade the populace that exercise *is* pleasurable⁴⁴ (although this is often framed as ‘push through the discomfort and you’ll eventually start enjoying it’), but judging by the narratives at my disposal I see an unreservedly positive response to food/eating (e.g., Shyla: “Food porn!”) and by comparison an almost universally negative response—or at least grudging tolerance—to exercise/exercising (e.g., Donna: “No, it is not positive!”). Guilt plays an interesting role within this whirl of affects and emotions: one moment food is the guilt-inducing transgression, the next moment it’s the reward for guilt-driven punishment/exercise. This recursive loop—another preview of the operations of guilt—can play, in varying intervals, continuously for long periods, taking its emotional toll along the way. An example of one of these intervals happened in my interviews when I showed an image of chocolate cake:

Yummy- I have a very sweet tooth so...I would turn the page quickly to avoid thinking about such food. (Megan)

She follows her initial unequivocally appreciative response with an acknowledgement of its power to make her think about such (i.e., sweet/bad) food, which would presumably

⁴⁴ For example, *Configure Express*, a “gym designed for women” promises that they “make it lots of fun” (configureexpress.co.nz).

lead to the even greater crime of actually eating such food, which could cause her to feel, as she said later, “I have ‘cheated’”, a guilt-worthy indictment that must be atoned for with exercise. Brandi-Ann’s Socratic venting on her blog captures the sentiments of my other participants as she wonders ‘aloud’ about her guilt-edged actions and reactions:

Why Do We Suffer From So Much Guilt? What’s wrong with...taking time out to rest and relax? Where did the guilt come from and why do we have so much of it? ...When did enjoying our lives become something we should be ashamed of? ...I’m not sure. To me, it’s often become an automatic response. If I take a break, I’m lazy. If I eat ice-cream, I’m a pig. (Uyemura, 2013)

This food-exercise-guilt triplet isn’t restricted to women who struggle to find time to exercise, but is also apparent in women who exercise to self-reported extremes. Exercising, I argue, does not ‘cure’ guilt about not exercising, as many fitness promoters would have us believe. Rather, the recursive loop I mentioned above evolves to accommodate increases in any one or all of the three components. As Lisa said in a conversation about her food-restricting habits and exercise addiction, “the more you do it the more normalised it becomes and you become further removed from it being not normal.” Inherent in her ‘normalised’ actions is also a habituation of emotions and sensations. So while her narrative didn’t bear overt references to guilt, guilt looms even in the positive affects, feelings, and emotions she describes relative to her physiological excursions:

I get pride...I feel a sense of satisfaction when I can come home after a run or after yoga class and have a smoothie or have lunch.

“*I can* come home...and have a smoothie or have lunch”, suggests she is *allowing* herself to consume energy now that she has expended sufficient stocks. Much like the previous participant’s phrase ‘*being able to eat*’, Lisa hints at her own sense of a formula for food-exercise justice in which the floating guilt meter for eating-exercising is relieved in advance by having exercised appropriately (i.e., enough to cancel the caloric threat).

When you consider all of these comments and feelings in light of the quote, “It’s easier to wake up early and work out than it is to look in the mirror each day and not like what you see”,⁴⁵ which gained popularity across social media sites, it is easy to see the internalisation process at work. In the context of exercise, especially, we see a normalisation of female *athletic* bodies. Annmarie Jutel (2009) says they have “become positioned as the elusive ideal to which other women must aspire, not unlike the list of prescriptions proffered by traditional women’s advice and etiquette books about acceptable feminine presentation and comportment” (p. 1019). Or as Sandra Bartky (1990) expresses it, the “internalization of the intimations of inferiority” (p. 22) - those ingested norms and values that become part of who we are and how we assess ourselves relative to the ideals insinuated by them.

This section has covered the exercise-related guilt triggers of People/bodies, Opportunities, Messages, Cogmotion, Time, Conflicts/choices, and Actions. I have shown how they are geneses of guilt about exercising or not exercising, as opposed to the thing about which a person claims to feel guilty. I have also demonstrated that these triggers are often analytically inseparable, entangled with one another throughout a given person’s daily life. In the next chapter—conceptually a continuation of this one—I shift my focus to the ‘fuel’ that ignites guilt sparks, and fans the ensuing guilt flames.

⁴⁵ The quotation is attributed to Jayne Cox, “otherwise known as the ‘Specialist Women’s Coach’”, who provides “eating disorder therapy and professional coaching to women across the UK and worldwide” (jaynemcox.com). I ran across it here, among other places: <http://www.pinterest.com/susie762/fitness-motivation/>

6 SOURCES OF EXERCISE-RELATED GUILT: FUEL

In this chapter I continue my analysis (and analogy) of sparks/triggers and flames, focusing on the ‘fuel’ that guilt triggers ignite. I re-use some participant quotations I chose for my spark/trigger themes, as they also contain evidence of the guilt-worthy *behaviours* as perceived by the perpetrators.

Chapter contents

- Behaviours (fuel)
 - Exercising - the sins of selfishness
 - Not exercising - the evils of evasion
- Regulators (accelerants)
 - Knowledge - what you know can hurt you
 - Framing - an exercise in perception
 - Ableness - weighing my wherewithal
- Mixed up
 - Not-exercise accelerants
 - Exercising accelerants

Behaviours (fuel)

What I’m calling ‘behaviours’, or ‘fuel’, in this analysis/synthesis form *the other part of sources* of exercise-related guilt. As I mentioned in my Overview (p. 108), a *source* isn’t a singular entity; rather, it comprises both a generative spark and something that that spark could ignite. The (behaviour) themes in this part of the model fall loosely into one of two

categories: exercising, or not exercising. As I explained above, the exercise-related indictment that women bring against themselves is ultimately about one of these two ‘transgressions’, even though there are often many aiding and abetting factors leading up to, surrounding, and following the act or non-act. As Michelle said in response to my question, “What do you picture now when you hear the word ‘exercise’? For example, when the topic comes up in conversation; does your reaction to your idea of exercise tend to be positive?”:

If I’m slacking off with the exercising...my initial reaction to the topic being mentioned often involves a twinge of guilt for not keeping up with something that’s good for me.

In her own assessment, she links a “twinge of guilt” directly with “not keeping up with something that’s good for me”, and implicitly with “slacking off”. But her guilt was triggered by the word *exercise* arising in (hypothetical) conversation. She had been in her not-exercising state for some time before this particular episode of guilt was sparked. At first glance you could say it was the topic of conversation that she felt guilty about (i.e., “my initial reaction”), but rather the topic *made her feel* the guilt that she had already assigned to her ‘slack’ behaviour - both past and present. To flesh out my analogy, the mention of exercise sparks a flame of guilt when it connects with her realisation (fuel) that she was not exercising; the flame of guilt is fanned by accelerants that include her framing of “slacking off” (ability/perspective; undisciplined), “not keeping up” (ability/perspective; weak), and “with something that’s good for me” (knowledge; irresponsible). I discuss accelerants later in this chapter. The two abiding themes of exercise behaviour, then, are the result of sifting through the evidence for more nuances in—and possible distinctions amongst—women’s articulations of guilt about *doing* or *not doing* exercise.

Conceptually, then, the ‘exercising’ behaviours about which women expressed guilt can be lumped under a theme of *selfish*. The ‘not exercising’ behaviours about which women expressed guilt can fit comfortably within a theme of *undisciplined*. In both categories, women point a finger of blame at some perceived weakness or failure in themselves—physical and/or moral. As I mentioned in my discussion of conflict/choices triggers above, women are often torn between two impossible expectations of responsibility: exercising *is* the responsible thing to do—unless it isn’t; taking care of family *is* the responsible thing to do—unless it isn’t enough. An ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982, 1993) clashes with an ethic of self care (Markula, 2003), as “cared-fors” (Noddings, 2003) collide in a flame of guilt.

As I explain in the section on regulators/accelerants (below), the nature of these flames of guilt is influenced by many factors. In this section, however, I want to simply focus on the *fuel* that is not/exercising, and slide in a reminder of its socially constructed genesis. That is, what makes *exercise* (and thus also its absence) flammable, what makes exercise an ‘object’ imbued with credence and value, are the discourses that have formed it (Foucault, 1972; Pronger, 2002). Now that women have internalised exercise as a necessary component of a worthwhile life, they can no longer imagine life without that morally infused obligation. But, importantly, as I discussed in Chapter 3, the moral imperatives embedded in discourses around fitness and exercise compete with other moral imperatives (i.e., social discourses), creating impasses of time, energy, responsibility, and thus emotional consequences (e.g., guilt).

I believe the particular weakness/failure people *choose to focus on* in a given misdeed or missed deed shapes their experience of exercise-related guilt in that instance. This is part

of the accelerant/regulator component, below, but I mention it here to reflect the instantaneous nature of these guilt-episode components. I hasten to add that *choose* in my worldview is not merely a cognitive act but rather comprises all the previously discussed elements of affect, feeling, cogmotion, and their embodied histories.

So, continuing with my question, ‘what are the sources of women’s exercise-related guilt?’ I round out my answers with a characterisation of the fuel that guilt-sparks ignite: the exercising and not-exercising behaviours about which women report feeling guilty. Depending on the nature and amount of fuel in any given situation (and presence of accelerants, as mentioned), the guilt produced can be anything from roaring flames to feeble sputters.

Exercising - the sins of selfishness

The category of guilt-inducing ‘exercising’ behaviours did not appear nearly as often under my scrutiny as did ‘not-exercising’ behaviours. Based on the general idea I’ve used from the beginning that guilt can be about sins of omission and commission, I have suggested that *not exercising* fits the slot in our society of ‘not doing the right thing’ (omission). By default, then, *exercising* can fill the role of ‘doing the wrong thing’ (commission). As you can see, this is not a straightforwardly tidy arrangement: exercising, according to most Western societal norms, *is* considered ‘doing the right thing’ (Lindwall & Martin Ginis, 2006). But, as my subheading implies, exercising for my participants—for these women who talked about their experiences of exercise-related guilt—exists in a complex ecosystem of responsibilities, and therefore does not present a simple or always good/responsible choice. Jamie (blogger) lays out a buffet of options and piles her plate with guilt:

When I choose to workout (or work, or go to the store, go to a meeting at the school, or whatever) in the evening I feel guilty. I feel like I *should* be spending time with my husband. (Weitl, 2013)

In making exercise a ‘doing the wrong thing’ category, then, I have taken into account the ambiguity and complexity that women articulated about their exercising-related guilt. Much of the affects, feelings, and emotions stirred up in this complexity stem from the unavoidable rivalry amongst societal discourses imposing their competing demands: exercising is good, unless it becomes obsessive and takes time away from family or work; but in some cases, when family or work displaces exercise entirely, then that previously noble engagement becomes demonized...until exercise is given its proper place, etc.

Women who suffer from guilt for exercising are not necessarily regular exercisers (by their own definition); there doesn’t seem to be any minimum requirement of frequency in order for this guilt to flare. There are variations on this theme (see: regulators/accelerants, below) that do invoke aspects like frequency, but in my analogy of ‘fuel’, exercising is a pre-existing entity that gains relevance in a situation once ignited by a spark of guilt (see triggers/sparks, above, for the many sources and types). For example, I sense a sudden burst in the flame of guilt women describe when their perceived transgression is exercising instead of doing something they deem (in retrospect or in anticipation) more important; parenting is especially potent in this regard:

Some days I just need to leave the house and know that the [exercise] me time I’m giving myself is much needed. Of course on some days I feel guilty, especially on those busy days when I feel like I haven’t spent much time with my family with work and obligations and the such. (Tracy, blog reader)⁴⁶

⁴⁶ From the blog, *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl, 2013)

I would feel guilty about it [yoga once a week] if I had had a big week and had been working a lot and had been away for work then I would feel that I had to be at home with my husband and kids. (Gina)

The following quote is from a woman who describes how she fits exercise into her busy schedule in a way that could theoretically also diminish her family related guilt; but despite the temporary cognitive enjoyment (i.e., “it felt good”), there is ongoing turmoil that *exercising* has brought to the foreground in her narrative:

I feel guilty too all the time! Yesterday after work, it was run to the food store, pick up stuff at the school, and then since the weather was so nice, do I go for a run (for me) or do I play outside with the kids? I so needed the alone time...so I went for the run (while paying the babysitter) and it felt good. Then it was baths, and bed...no time for the other things I feel guilty about - like not reading to my kids nightly. I am just too spent at the end of the day anymore... and between cleaning and cooking and working... (plus exercise for me) I just don't have the time. I really feel guilty about it! (Forte517, blog reader)⁴⁷

Not exercising - the evils of evasion

This category of ‘not exercising’ behaviour appeared much more often in my viewfinder than exercising-related guilt. ‘Not doing the right thing’ regarding exercise seems to carry a moral horror that is often unmatched by the sin of over-exercising (although possibly not outdone by that of replacing family with exercise). The answer to the question ‘did/do you exercise?’ is a personal one and includes the individual’s embodied perceptions of the amount, the frequency, and the regularity of their exercise (i.e., exercising enough). Furthermore, societal discourses are heavily implicated in our perceptions of what proper exercise—and its associated moral goodness—looks like (Gard, 2011). Not surprisingly, a person’s own situational sense of what’s morally acceptable seems to inhere in questions of

⁴⁷ From *The SparkPeople® Blog* (Meuller, 2009)

exercise behaviours. Behaviours, or *fuel* as I'm calling them in this analogy, of exercising or not exercising are extant but inert; ever-present, they can be ignited at any moment by a guilt trigger, which is fanned (or doused) by the personalised accelerants of the 'guilted'. According to my framework, and drawing on my data from which the analogy springs, when a flame is lit it is extremely difficult—if not impossible—to determine where the fuel stops and the flame starts (and the accelerants are indistinguishable). That is, while the fuel of 'not exercising' remains throughout the ensuing bonfire, the strength of a person's feelings of guilt (i.e., the flame) about not exercising is shaped by the interaction of several things: their health/fitness knowledge, their perceptions of their ability to exercise in that instance, and the way they frame exercise in that particular infraction (as I discuss below, in regulators/accelerants).

I present the following participant quotations as evidence for my analytical conceptualisation of 'not exercising' behaviour/fuel:

I feel guilty about not exercising because I know I could lose more weight and at a faster rate if I did exercise. (Susan)

I sometimes feel guilty about not exercising, especially if I'm starting to feel the effects of it in my body (lack of energy) or in my demeanour (feeling more stressed, having the "blows"). (Michelle)

Sometimes I feel guilty for not exercising, other times I feel I am okay, after all I am not over weight. (Anna)

Didn't run for 2 days in a row, no exercise yesterday. I feel like complete crap. Guilty for taking just one day off. -_- (Twitter, Ariel@FatsNotCute)⁴⁸

These women connect their 'feel guilty' admission to 'not exercising'; that relationship between their guilt and their perception of their transgression seems de facto. But notice the

⁴⁸ This could be an example of how exercising *regularly* produces more guilt when disrupted than does irregular exercise. But it is also possible that 'complete crap' is a physiological reality for her.

‘ifs’, the ‘ands’, the ‘ors’, and the disclaimers (e.g., after all I am not overweight): they are what’s added to the fuel of not exercising (e.g., especially if I’m...). The guilt tied to not exercising still exists when the flame dies down. It is an ‘action potential’ waiting in the wings for a spark to set it alight. Each of these comments is part of a longer quote (which I discuss in its entirety below, under regulators/accelerants). Part of each quotation represents what I see as regulators, or *accelerants*, at work in people’s exercise-related guilt experiences. I discuss my interpretations of this aspect of my framework in the next section, emphasising the close interweaving of fuel, accelerants, and flames.

Regulators (accelerants)⁴⁹

When someone’s guilt trigger is tripped, and they find themselves in the throes of a guilt episode, the feelings of guilt welling up inside them vary from situation to situation (i.e., from day to day, ebbing and flowing throughout different phases of their life), taking on different intensities, meanings, sensations, etc., with each iteration. What influences are at play during these episodes? What makes one flame of guilt higher/hotter than another, or last longer? My interpretation of the many unmediated voices I listened to led me to the significant ingredients of knowledge, framing, and ableness (some literatures might call this self-efficacy, but this isn’t just about the confidence that you *can* physically do a particular thing⁵⁰). That is, the feeling of guilt for any given episode will be shaped by the person’s

⁴⁹ I wanted to find a different word than ‘regulators’ to put some distance between its postpositivistic gene and the concept I’m really trying to convey; however, I haven’t yet succeeded, and am therefore relying on my readers’ trusting indulgence. In my efforts to illustrate my conflagratory framework, of course, I rely on ‘accelerants’ to convey my meaning.

⁵⁰ After studying Self-determination Theory, I came to recognize myself as a ‘black swan’ of that particular model of motivation. No amount of belief in my ability to do this or that activity was enough to motivate me past my shame and guilt for my deficient athletic appearance.

knowledge—type, amount, etc.—about body/health-relevant topics, plus the way they *frame* what exercise means in that moment, plus their own sense of their *ableness*—physically, financially, emotionally, socially—to do the exercise at that time. These are all accelerants in my conflagrative analogy, and each one is always present in some amount, interacting with the others in a sort of system dynamic.

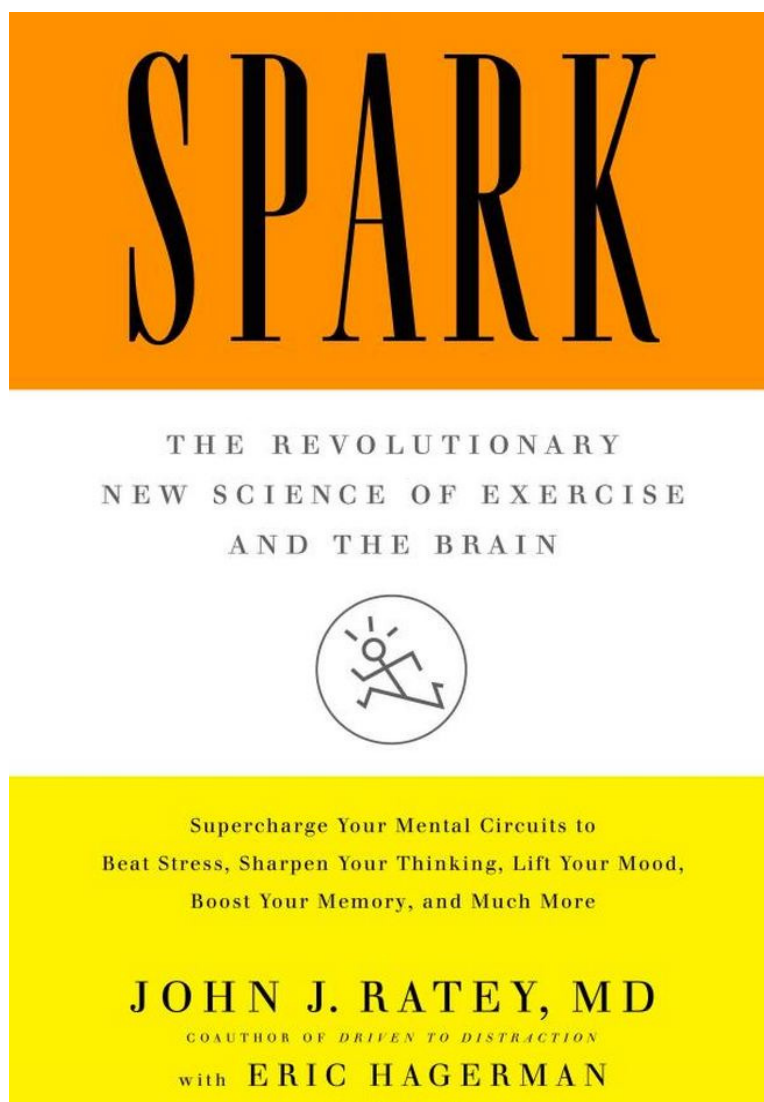
Knowledge - what you know can hurt you

Internalised knowledge can stem from anywhere: early memories of sport or physical activity (or inactivity), health information on the internet, movies, advertisement, friends, among other sources. I suggest that knowledge can add to one's sense of culpability: the more you know, the more you may feel a responsibility to act on what you know. 'What you know' informs and constitutes a large part of your perception of what's right and wrong relative to your exercise behaviours, and in that sense acts to 'regulate' the guilt flame when it is sparked. One example that evidences knowledge helping to douse the flame is in this collaborator's (Megan, a personal trainer) comment: "I hate running and know the injuries it can cause so wouldn't want to join them on a run." She is preserved in that instance from self-criticism of any kind, including guilt, having a decisive knowledge about the activity based on informed personal experience (a type of knowledge). An example, conversely, in which knowledge helps energize the guilt flame is Shyla who responds with "guilt, agreement, and then ultimately helplessness" to her doctor's suggestion that she exercise. She felt guilty, she explained, "because it's not something I don't know...I did know, and yet didn't do it."

It seems, moreover, that the more specific the knowledge, the more specific the guilt

can be. It's not the knowledge you feel guilty about (many women said they were thankful to have the information), but the knowledge adds to your awareness of just how and how much you are misbehaving in a given situation. If you are unaware of the effects of dehydration on your endurance, for example, you will be protected from potential guilt and regret in a way that someone with full knowledge won't be.

Figure 6.1: Book cover - *Spark: The revolutionary new science of exercise and the brain*



Self-help books about exercise, fitness, or health represent an ethical irony about the benefits of information. As an 'expert' voice, they carry authority and authenticity (Jutel,

2009), and thus give additional confidence to the reader/knower. This power relationship was apparent as I showed my collaborators images of various popular exercise-related books. Janet chose *Spark: The revolutionary new science of exercise and the brain* (Ratey, 2010) as the book (Figure 6.1, p. 153) that made her feel guilty, explaining:

If lack of exercise affects my brain, I feel I should be more dedicated to helping keep it healthy. (My emphasis)

She accepts the expert knowledge conveyed by just the cover image⁵¹, and immediately responds to her feelings of guilt, which are fed by this new knowledge and by her framing of exercise as necessary/good (and her lack of dedication as unacceptable), and by her belief that if she *can*, she *ought* (see the regulator/accelerant, Ableness, below) - she has the wherewithal to do it. Now she just *should*.

One woman who stands out for me as an example for the effects of knowledge on guilt is Gina, a collaborator who works in the health industry. Her description of her exercise habits qualifies her for poster child of any conceivable health or fitness campaign. But her angst-ridden report in response to my query about her view of exercise, gives clues about the collateral damage of information:

When I hear the word exercise I always tell myself that I need to do more exercise! This is because I probably don't do enough exercise, and by exercise I don't just mean 30 minutes a day walking, I think of exercise as more intense physical exertion, where you have really worked up a sweat. Then I try and think about how much time I have and when I can 'fit' it in.

Reflecting the discourses of physical activity guidelines from around the world, she gives a detailed description of what exercise must be in order for her to accept it as

⁵¹ Admittedly, it's easy to infer from the cover text that there is plenty to be gained by an energetic sallying forth as soon as possible (after reading the book): "Supercharge your mental circuits to beat stress, sharpen your thinking, lift your mood, boost your memory, and much more." It's hard not to mourn the loss of neurons-that-might-have-been, in addition to synapses that are doubtless in present decay.

legitimate effort. Even if she meets one or more of the ‘requirements’, she still experiences a sense of failure and guilt (‘I always tell myself’).

Framing - an exercise in perception

Exercise is a socially constructed phenomenon in Western societies (Kirk, 2002), but each person has their own version of what it is, and what it means to them. I argue that, not only do they have a unique perspective on exercise, but they also adjust that perspective as situations arise.⁵² In the context of cogmation, the indivisibility of mind/body, this is not simply a thinking procedure in which someone necessarily decides consciously to capitalize on some opportunity to think differently (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). So as I listened to and read seemingly contradictory views articulated by some participants, rather than try to smooth them out and force concurrence, I have left room for multi-part harmonies within and between the voices. For example, Deb who claimed at one point:

I exercise when I choose to exercise so if I took up an offer such as this [yoga once a week], I would feel that someone else is dictating when I exercise. I just wouldn't do it.

Contrast that declaration with an earlier phase of her life in which she used to instruct group exercise at a popular gym: a regimented scheme to which she clearly would have been obligated (dictated to, even). From some angles this could seem contradictory. But as Alan Ingham notes, “contradictions are more than just conflicts of interest” (Ingham, 1997, p. 172); they often “involve historical disproportions between forces and relations of production”. Her *framing* is, I argue, woven with her *knowledge* at the time, as well as her

⁵² How a person frames something in the moment is, I suggest, also rooted in their axiology, from which ‘interests’ arise, and which underpins the mechanisms that women call upon for managing guilt/accusations; I discuss this further in the Overview of Managing (p. 177) in Chapter 7.

sense of *ableness*. That is, her class-instructing phase happened years ago when she was both younger and, in her opinion, fitter. She may have had different financial demands then, more or less free time, a more sanguine outlook, a body she was proud of and less/different knowledge about ways of viewing exercise than she has now. Or the exact opposite of all those conjectures. So Deb frames exercise in different ways at different times - a reflection of the complexity of the decision surrounding exercise for many women.

Individual perspectives can be both fluid and fixed, depending on the relative vantage point from which they're being viewed. Andrea seems to be drawing reflexively on her past, present, and future when she says in response to a photo of a bikini-clad advert model:

I am kind of more accepting now of just being in this skin, fat, flesh and bones and so when I see things like this, I just see them, probably stash them add them to the mountain that already exists inside me somewhere that tells me what a beautiful woman looks like but don't really have any immediate emotional reaction to it. I don't feel guilt, I don't in the moment transpose her body onto mine. If you asked me all this when I was 20 I think it would be completely different.

But just prior to these comments she gave hints about possible counter-narratives regarding the level of attention she 'wasn't' paying, and her faltering "acceptance":

I think that is how I am now with these kinds of images and appeals to the body beautiful, to eating, exercising to achieve this body - I just don't pay attention to them anymore... don't think about other than simple recognition of oh yes there it is again the body beautiful, the curvy, slender white but tanned woman in a bikini, there she is again. Perhaps in my sub-conscious I register her, feel something because don't get me wrong it is not as if I am not drawn into wanting to be like this women, a desire to look like that... (My emphases)

Her framing, then, shifts throughout one conversation as she experiences the flickering affects, feelings, and emotions that have been triggered by an image and accompanying question. Reaching back to her remembered twenty-year-old self helps her situate her present desiring self and keep the flame to a minimum for now.

Ableness - weighing my wherewithal

The third accelerant in the mix is a sense of one's ability to actually do the exercise in the immediate instance. Ability doesn't capture what I mean as well as 'able-ness', so notwithstanding its clumsiness, I have chosen *ableness* for its richer affordances. Feeling able in this model applies to the person's *sense*—in the moment—that they are able: financially (e.g., can I afford this gym membership?), physically (e.g., how tired am I?), emotionally (e.g., feeling anxious about any number of things not necessarily relating to the exercise in question), temporally (i.e., do I have time?), and socially (e.g., do I have the right clothes for the activity, will they like me?). I came to conceptualise this sentient-laden concoction as it emerged across narratives, both individuals' and in aggregate. Not every aspect of this accelerant was necessarily apparent in any one comment or conversation, but with extended, empathetic listening, each of these familiar inflamers made solo or collective appearances.

In much health-focused psychology-based literature, these issues are labelled *barriers* to exercise or to physical activity (e.g., Booth, Bauman, & Owen, 2002; Kowal & Fortier, 2007; Miller, Trost, & Brown, 2002). Typically this type of research begins with the assumption that exercise is beneficial and therefore *ought* to be increased, given the current sadly unhealthy state of the overfed and undermoved populace in question. An obvious step, then, is to eliminate the hindrances that are keeping people from moving. Once removed, so saith the syllogism, people will surely have no more excuses and will 'get active' like we all know they should. Mary Jung and Lawrence Brawley (2011), for example, introduce their topic of "exercise persistence in the face of varying exercise

challenges” by acknowledging that “lack of time is one of the most commonly cited exercise barriers reported” in physical activity research (which my own analysis doesn’t oppose). But they also subtly discredit the reportees by suggesting that perhaps “individuals who claim” such a thing “are ineffective at self-regulating exercise amongst other valued goals during daily life” (p. 728). Having thus hinted at these individuals’ general organisational deficiencies, the authors introduce the concept of self-regulatory efficacy (SRE) - or in other words, my belief in my ability to manage myself and my universe. Quoting Albert Bandura (1989), the originator of self-efficacy theory, they let him explain that,

When faced with difficulties, people who are beset by self-doubts about their capabilities slacken their efforts or abort their attempts prematurely and quickly settle for mediocre solutions, whereas those who have a strong belief in their capabilities exert greater effort to master the challenge. (p. 1176) (My emphasis)⁵³

While this taps into the idea of ableness, it does not embrace the complexity (i.e., capabilities, difficulties) surrounding those self-doubts. ‘People’ do not exist in isolation. Nor do their capabilities—financially, physically, emotionally, socially; they are intertwined with other people and *their* difficulties. We are all time-sharers.

A disturbing downside to focusing narrowly on a few variables is that it can lead to simplistic ideas about how to fix someone’s ‘problem’ of not exercising, which usually involves rehearsing more *shoulds* and *oughts*. The common smorgasbord of solutions for inactivity serves generous helpings of *mea culpa*. Interacting with knowledge and framing, ableness adds to the complex mixture that fuels the spark of guilt, and affects the height and

⁵³ His concept of “the self-efficacy mechanisms in human agency” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122) has been adopted by exercise psychology researchers (e.g., Dziewaltowski, Noble, & Shaw, 1990; Marcus & Owen, 1992; Prochaska & Velicer, 1997).

temperature of the guilt flame.

I've mentioned previously the ethics maxim, *ought* implies *can* (Yaffe, 2005)⁵⁴, suggesting that this idea is embedded in many health and fitness campaigns, and is a guilt-edged assumption: when *can* is not possible, *ought* remains steadfast, pointing its accusing finger. There is no shortage of *oughts* in society and the discourses that shape them (exercise-related voices are particularly generous in this regard). But *can*—which I theorise as *ableness*—is often found wanting. In my ableness theme, additionally, there is the mirrored thought of 'can implies *ought*.' Can is about ableness, *ought* is about framing, both rely on knowledge. You may be able but disinterested, unwilling, or sceptical; but if the imperative of *ought* remains (Rojek, 2010), guilt can flare (i.e., you are not doing the 'right' thing), if only liminal (Sedgwick & Frank, 1995).

Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank (1995), in their *Silvan Tomkins reader*, explain that the total field in which shame is embedded in the central assembly of components of the nervous system at the moment will give quite different flavors to shame depending upon its intensity and upon the objects which appear to activate it and the objects which appear to reduce it. (p. 133-34)

In the next section I give examples of various regulator/accelerants in action. My interpretations of these "objects which appear to activate" and "reduce" guilt are aspects of 'bad' behaviour that women seem to focus on in a given instance of doing wrong or not doing right; and in the process, they activate their fluid reserves of knowledge, perspectives, and sense of ableness regarding exercise.

⁵⁴ In ethics, the maxim "ought implies can" means that one can only be obligated to do that which they can possibly do; one is not ever morally obligated to do what is impossible. But when a fitness or health advocate says I *ought* (or *should* in this era), do I allow myself to consider that it's up to me to decide whether I *can*?

Mixed up

My analysis of the interplay amongst accelerants produced an asymmetry: twice as many about *not* exercising as about exercising. I use a few examples of each category from my interpretations, beginning with *not exercising* and moving on to *exercising*. Broadly speaking, all of the former imply a lack of discipline, while the latter seem to suggest selfishness or irresponsibility. But within both exercising misdeeds and missed deeds (not exercising) the *aspects* that a woman focused on seemed to consist of variations in the mix of accelerant ingredients (knowledge, framing, ableness).

Not-exercising accelerants

The most prominent illustrations for *not-exercising* accelerants involved scenarios in which women focused on: breaking an exercise routine, violating a personal ‘rule’ in the process of not exercising, setting a bad example (usually for their children) by not exercising, failing to organize their time adequately in order to accommodate exercise, not exercising *enough*, and generally weak behaviour relating to not exercising.

Breaking an exercise routine seemed to provoke different guilt (intensity) than simply not having exercised; it also seemed to spur a ready confession. The women who felt some pride of success about exercising on a regular basis were more apparently devastated when they failed to keep going, than someone who had not assigned themselves the label of ‘regular exerciser’ and had not exercised for awhile.

As I described earlier, eating is a regularly necessary disruption, and is therefore at least ‘justifiable’ if kept under control. However, there are other types of voluntary interruptions a woman can inflict on her exercise plans that trigger guilt. There are two

aspects to exercise disruptions that I think are significant accelerants to the flame of guilt. The degree (and possibly type) of guilt women mentioned seemed to be affected by: 1) how specific the exercise plans were, and 2) how other-oriented the disrupting action was. Both of these factors could conceivably germinate in any or all of the accelerants. That is, the specificity of my exercise plans may be based on my ‘knowledge’ that I need a certain minimum amount of aerobic activity per day, which is woven into my perception of exercise as something that I should do regularly, which plays a psychological role in deciding whether I am able to accomplish my exercise today (e.g., if I can fit in 20 minutes but not 30, then I am ‘not able’). My general perception is that the derailing of more specific plans elicits more (specific) guilt, and more altruistic actions causing derailment produce less guilt. Ironically, an ethic of care can induce guilt, thus causing someone to skip their exercise (e.g., to take care of someone else); but that same care-giving act can protect against the exercise-related guilt that normally would be produced by the missed workout.

I observed greater degrees of guilt in my collaborators who identified as regular exercisers or accepted the obligation to exercise, compared with those who rejected exercise outright. The former defined their exercise habits as anything from “extreme” to “haphazard”, and could provide quite a lot of detail about what *exercise* should be, which is perhaps not coincidentally what they expected of themselves. The latter typically evidenced less guilt about not exercising, but easily as much regarding their bodies and appearance (suggesting that exercise was simply not one of their chosen solutions to their

body problems). So if you are of the opinion that guilt is a healthy motivator⁵⁵ for exercise, there is no conflict with these observations—you view guilt feelings as unavoidable in any worthwhile efforts to exercise consistently. But if you do not accept exercise-related guilt—or any emotional labour—as completely innocent or ethically acceptable, then there is more to learn by listening to the guilty’s larger narrative:

...many days I do manage to get up and get my workout in in the wee small hours of the morning — leaving my house around 4:45 to head to the gym or out for a run. But on the days that I don’t, I feel guilty and spend the day beating myself up. Why am I so weak? I should have gotten out of bed. I should have my workout done. Now, when am I going to find the time to work it in? (Jamie, blogger⁵⁶)

Jamie apparently has a regular habit established of rising early to exercise; it fits nicely within the category of ‘lifestyle’ and is arguably something of value to her. I suggest these same factors that have made her ‘successful’ at exercising are what make her more vulnerable to guilt when she ‘fails’, even temporarily. I am reminded of Silvan Tomkins’ (1963) proposition about the link between shame and interest: the more something is of interest (i.e., value) to a person, the more intensely they feel shame when they fail at that thing. Sarah gave me a clue about this when she told me, “I’m not interested enough in yoga to feel guilty about passing it by.” So perhaps the value proposition is of more salience than the specificity of the plans, but in any event, I believe they are connected. As Shyla told me, “the more specific it is, the easier I find it to stick to”, but quickly added the caveat that “the specific things also tend to come with short term goals.” That is, when the ‘thing’ is more specific—including when and how much exercise—she feels better while she’s

⁵⁵ Self-Determination Theory, for example lists guilt as an indicator for good, ‘internalised motivation’, which predicts positive performance outcomes. Internalised—or intrinsic— motivation is also positively correlated in psychological studies with well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

⁵⁶ From the blog, *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl, 2013)

ticking each box; but when the specific thing inevitably gets ditched, she feels more guilt and feels it more intensely than when she simply didn't end up doing something that wasn't really planned anyway (although the lack of plans carries its own type of low-level guilt). The point to remember about a guilt trigger is that it sparks a higher flame (guilt about not exercising); the trigger in this case is whatever task or person or accident, etc., stopped the intention to exercise in its tracks. So my detailing of the specificity of plans that get waylaid is to look behind the scenes for clues about the front-stage emotions.

With respect to the second aspect, how other-oriented the interruption is, women commonly assured me that if the reason for missing their planned exercise (or any exercise) was a 'good' one—for example if it helped someone else—there would be little or no guilt about not exercising (this speaks to managing guilt - more on that later). However, the interruption can induce momentary guilt anyway, creating a new need for guilt management (e.g., emotional labour, cognitive load) that wasn't there earlier.

Furthermore, an accumulation of interruptions, however charitable, can lead to an overall sense of failure that adds to the strength of the guilt spark on each subsequent occasion. As Shyla tells it,

I don't think I have ever been successful with the lifestyle change thing. So in a way, the short term success can actually lead to a longer term sense of shame that the implied goal of all the programs seems to be lifestyle change - 'we've brought you this far, now you know what to do, have a good life'...but each success makes it more confusing - why can't I do the switch over to a new lifestyle if I've followed the program every step of the way? What's wrong with me?

A number of accelerants are clearly at work in her narrative. For example, her "sense of shame" is arguably part of the emotional ableness she is evaluating when picturing herself exercising; she hints at her sense of ableness for any given exercise bout in her general indictment of never having been "successful with the lifestyle change things"; her

paraphrasing of what ‘they’ expect helps frame her perceptions of exercise (i.e., it *should* be a long-term accomplishment); her suggestion that she knows what to do after having “followed the program” taps into her knowledge about exercise/health; and her self-critical conclusion that something must be wrong with her evidences the ethical harm that is done in the name of *motivation* (etc.).

As I said earlier, more knowledge leads to more opportunity for guilt. But here I want to emphasise the cogmotional world into which each guilt spark is born. The quote below is from a fitness expert. Here he describes his gym clientele’s emotional experiences with exercise. He uses the same language as Shyla, and the quote aligns with the sentiments of many other participants. But from my perspective this doesn’t offer much in the way of sympathy or solutions; furthermore, I argue, if there is emotional harm he is aware of but not taking steps to mitigate, he (and his employer) are not engaging ethically with their clients:

The potentially damaging effects of guilt from say for example missing a period of exercise can be great. It can really take a toll on those that are not so happy with their bodies and are trying hard to make a positive change to themselves and their lifestyles. It can commonly result in that person losing motivation all together and being too ashamed to even show up for further workouts. As a fitness facility it's crucial to emphasise that missing a workout is OK and that there aren't going to be any almighty consequences lol. Creating a fun, supportive and disciplined (in a positive and not over the top sense) environment is vital to the success of individuals, especially women, in achieving their desired goals...Guilt can potentially have some damaging effects both short term and long term in alot of cases with women who have quite specific goals. These women are more often than not just your average population not competitive athletes etc and so the effects of guilt can be alot more damaging when experienced in the wrong environment. (Steve, personal trainer and group fitness instructor, personal communication; my emphases)

He is referring, according to my framework, primarily to the downstream effects of some of the guilt triggers I’ve discussed, which is what this section is about. I just want to

raise the idea that “creating a fun, supporting and disciplined environment” may actually contribute to the poignancy of a sense of failure and guilt: one inference is that ‘all these facilitators have been put in place for these women, and yet they *still* can’t keep up the good work!’ There are probably not many women who would disagree with the notion that “missing a workout is OK”, but that one workout exists in a world of many missed workouts and is evaluated (i.e., acts as accelerant) as such by the person making the decision—and determining her sentence—in that instance.

Violating a personal rule is similar to breaking an exercise routine but differs in an important way. It’s an implicit—and importantly, a specific—moral standard self-imposed selectively, and it showed up in reference to food (what kind, how much), health (including exercise, sleep), and appearance. Janet exemplifies this particular focus on ‘bad’ behaviour when she said:

I don’t feel guilty or condemned by someone else...I feel like I’m letting my body down if I’m not doing the best I can.

She takes responsibility for her own body and health, accepting the guilt and condemnation as her own against herself. In another conversation, she became quite indignant about “the media telling us that thin is best”, and extended her outrage to the effects of this tyranny on women’s self-perceptions: “so that’s what we strive for; it sets our standards.” She draws on her knowledge about what she owes her body, and her framing of exercise as necessary, albeit subject to imposed expectations. Her sense of ableness is less overt in this example, as she was speaking in the abstract, not about a specific situation; however, I think she gives a clue about her own assessment of what’s possible in her phrase “doing the best I can.” In other words, when an exercise choice arises, she will evaluate what that ‘best’ is in the moment and any flame of guilt that might result will rely on her

cogmotional conclusions.

It is interesting to note that personal exercise standards are often used to evaluate the behaviour of others (not a new idea, and perhaps embedded in questions of axiology⁵⁷). Janet also described people who don't exercise as "not disciplined"; this moralistic component of her exercise attribution was exposed further when she accused them of "taking the easy way out" and "not being responsible." Media influence notwithstanding, I see much potential for harm in these subtle "intimations of inferiority" (Bartky, 1990, p. 22), which can contribute at the individual level (where lived experience occurs) to their internalisation, and thus to the guilt/shame triggered by people/bodies and unsuccessful comparisons with them.

Setting a bad example for one's children was one of the most morally repugnant events recalled by participants. There are entire blog posts about it; women who were otherwise fairly calm about their exercise transgressions found another guilt gear when it came to their children, particularly the possibility that they were responsible for launching (or having launched) their wards into a life of indolence. But if the guilt flame about not exercising is already burning, this additional accelerant of being a stumbling block to one's children/family adds to the intensity of the flame:

I also feel guilty because I think I am setting a bad example for my children. How can I tell them to exercise regularly if I don't do it myself? (Shyla)

[The book] *Everyday Paleo* makes me feel guilty because I always have this nagging feeling that I've set a bad health example for my kids. (Andrea)⁵⁸

The guilt for potentially setting a bad example by not exercising is implicit in these

⁵⁷ Axiology, briefly, refers to the branch of philosophy dealing with values (Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged, 2014).

⁵⁸ See cover image, Figure 5.6, p. 128

narratives, typically shared by women who were currently exercising. For example, Jaimie gives a positively framed scenario that acts as a buffer for her guilt:

Hearing my kids say, ‘Oh, Mommy, are you going to go run?’ and hoping to inspire them is definite motivation — and not guilt! I need to remember that I am modeling good habits for them.

So in their justifications *for* exercising, women explain it’s for the benefit of the whole family, and being an example is one of those ways it can benefit others. By default, *not* doing this would have negative consequences, including guilt. In this sense *exercising* and *not exercising* are always co-present; there is always the lurking presence of one when talking about (i.e., focusing on) the other. Talking about not exercising is talking about exercising, but as a lack/negative; and talking about exercising introduces the possibility of not exercising as its polar opposite, or as its nemesis. So the accelerants are multifaceted; and the point to emphasise about fuel, too, is its multifaceted nature that retains the presence of both potentialities.

Failing to organize their time to fit exercise seemed to tap into discourses (i.e., knowledge) about prioritising that are commonly found in the fitness and health industry. This relates to both longer term planning such that you are not ‘beach ready’ by summer, and to shorter term (daily) planning such that you ‘didn’t get off the couch’.

I sometimes feel guilty about not exercising, especially if I’m starting to feel the effects of it in my body (lack of energy) or in my demeanour (feeling more stressed, having the "blows").” [accelerants:] “If others around me seem to be able to fit exercise into their schedule quite easily, then those feelings of guilt surface again and again if I’m struggling with fitting it into my schedule. (Michelle)

Her string of ‘ifs’ creates a complex system dynamic of interacting sparks, fuel, flame, and accelerants. I argue elsewhere that Michelle’s guilt here was triggered by “others around me”, but I can see equal possibilities in her psycho-physiological state in these

moments ('lack of energy', 'the blows'). Likewise, her sudden realisation that she's 'struggling with fitting it into my schedule' may have been the initial guilt spark. I see no conflict, then, including as her accelerants, her '*knowledge*' about how organized people live, and about how her body 'should' feel; her flailing sense of *ableness* to actually achieve the exercise she thinks she should, as evidenced in her 'struggling'; and her *framing* of exercise in this instance in terms of others' successes, as something that one 'should' be fitting (easily, no less) into one's daily schedule like good disciplined Others manage to do.

Not exercising enough was a frequent component invoked implicitly and explicitly⁵⁹. These laments could be perceived as backhanded compliments in one sense, but it is nonetheless a criticism of oneself that begs punishment. As Gina exclaimed, "I feel guilty about not exercising almost every day!" Her exercise history and practices as she described them didn't suggest anything remotely resembling lethargy as she implied. Indeed, it didn't seem to matter how much someone exercised, there was always more to be done. My own experience suggests that the personal standard of 'more is better' is an internal voice that requires no additional inspiration to maintain volume or consistency. In fact, the Twitter handle 'FatsNotCute' (below) struck a chord with me, calling to mind the most insistent voice from my past that drove me develop the 'more is better' mindset in the first place. Ariel@FatsNotCute quantified what 'enough' looks like to her when she tweeted:

Didn't run for 2 days in a row, no exercise yesterday. I feel like complete crap.
Guilty for taking just one day off. -_-

The accelerants added to her guilt about not exercising in this example include her

⁵⁹ Incidentally, this particular guilt focus seemed to be triggered by seeing others or images of others who looked fit and/or were exercising.

framing of exercise as something that should be done every day, her implied belief that she was able but did not exercise for some reason (that wasn't relevant enough to mention), and perhaps her embodied knowledge/experience about what feeling like complete crap means physiologically. I found another, even more extreme, example of this guilt focus on the health blog *SparkPeople*®:

I love the workouts I do...and I regularly push myself with heavier weights and higher intensity within the workouts. However, I am nowhere near the level of CrossFit, P90X, Insanity, etc. I have no desire to push my body that hard. I monitor my [heart rate] when I work out, and average well over 65% of my [maximum heart rate] for my age (50). I sometimes feel like a slacker by not pushing myself to the level of HIIT [High-intensity interval training]. I tried P90X and hated it. I work very hard, but still feel guilty as if I'm not really working out if not at that level. (62NVON)

The grip of guilt is clearly not a feature exclusively of those who health promoters and fitness advocates might deem 'slackers.' My interest is in raising awareness of the potential for ethical harm (physical or psychological) in any exercise-related scenario involving guilt. I want to disrupt a settled and simplistic notion of 'guilt is good', and thereby avoid heedless assumptions about its positive motivational force. Psychopharmacology research has linked guilt feelings with depression (Nutt et al., 2007; Torrente, Gelenberg, & Vrana, 2012), and refers to guilt as "introspective hostility" (BAP, 1990, p. 306), thus giving a clue to its potential accumulating influence on person's psychophysiology.

Exhibiting weak behaviour could, at an abstract level, adequately describe and account for most of the guilt feelings about not exercising. For example, confessions such as not continuing at the gym, being 'lazy', or not being 'more dedicated' (e.g., Jamie blog) may be part of each of the other accelerants I have described. However, I think it is important to tease out nuances wherever possible in order to retain the intricacies surrounding women's exercise experiences, and to respect the individualised nature of guilt's effects within this

exercise-related complexity. These slightly different foci of various moments are what help create the complexity faced by researchers and exercise advocates (not to mention women themselves) who attempt to discover patterns of behaviour or predictive indicators. When someone is primarily occupied in the present exercise failure with an overall sense of being a weak person, as opposed to focusing on a momentary failure such as breaking a routine, they could be showing signs of shame—‘I am a bad person’—mixed with the admissions of guilt. Over time, as Shyla and I mentioned, the accumulating failures begin to petrify so that one individual failure is no longer discernible as such; each failure is injected with increasing significance as it comes to represent an insurmountable flaw, a weakness of character. As Brené Brown, one of the foremost present-day researchers on shame, puts it, guilt is “I’m sorry. I made a mistake”, shame is “I’m sorry. I am a mistake” (B. Brown, 2012). So perhaps there is always potential for shame to mix with exercise guilt accelerants. If “a feeling of helplessness and chronic shame” (Nathanson, 1992, p. 423) has come to pervade a woman’s sense of self, any knowledge, perceptions, and sense of ableness she invokes relating to exercise will reflect those affects.

Exercising accelerants

Within the example of transgressive accelerants relating to *exercising*, my participants articulated three general areas of guilty concern: over-exercising, exercising instead of doing something deemed more important, and the sense of selfishness engendered by taking time to exercise (e.g., ‘me-time’). All of these imply some degree of *irresponsible* behaviour, and may appear together, but each focuses on a different aspect of choosing to exercise and actually exercising. Each of these aspects is accused of more than

irresponsibility, however; they smack of self-indulgence, a morally repulsive characteristic in our puritanical Western comprehension of ‘responsible/good’, even when applied to an activity that is, ironically, the epitome of righteousness.

The first concern—*over-exercising*—didn’t appear very often, and was restricted to participants who were actively exercising, or who had exercised a lot in the past. One common thread I saw among them was guilt about how the excessive exercising may have damaged their body in some irreparable way. For example, the possible lasting effects amenorrhea might have had on bone health, and on the ability to get pregnant. Or the disappointing reality of pain and immobility that Deb expressed: “if I had not overdone the running, my knees wouldn’t be shot now.” Other women also registered this same fear about a *lack* of past exercise, which speaks to the flexible nature of exercise-related guilt.

The other two concerns were not restricted to women who were exercising regularly. With respect to the second concern, I glimpsed guilt feelings relating to exercising instead of doing something more important in both self-indictments and in judgments of others. For example, Gina who explained that her typical busy day

...doesn't always leave much time for my exercise, because I can be away from home a bit I feel that when the [children] are awake that I should be spending the time with them and not exercising.

The term *should* is a moral imperative that reveals an internalised line that must not be crossed. A responsible person does what she *should* do, and does not indulge any urge that would take her across that line (i.e., what she *shouldn't* do). Where do we get our *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts* from? I suggest we are born into a world of pre-existing norms and codes, which we internalise in different ways and at different times in our lives. In that sense the accelerant of *knowledge* contains much of those sociocultural ingredients. Our

perspective/framing of exercise, too, is heavily influenced by our socialisation into particular shoulds and shouldn'ts, which includes discourses of 'good parenting'. And our sense of *ableness* in any given instance is rooted in accumulating memories of past coulds and couldn'ts. Integral to each of these, of course, are affects, feelings, and emotions.

As I described in several of the guilt triggers, there can be constant tension between competing guilts that draw from the same reservoir of time, energy, and emotions. *Shoulds* also appear in judgements of others, along with their implied standards embedded in the pronouncement of what was *not* acceptable. For example, to quote Donna again,

I feel they are into themselves. They should go garden or do something active that will help others, rather than just focus themselves.

In her censure she exposes some of the standards that constitute responsible behaviour for her - things, unlike exercise, that indicate a preferred ethic of care. Other parts of her narrative hint at her general view of what constitutes responsible behaviour, for example, "Don't worry about the treadmill; people need you now...you can catch up on your exercise later."

The most-cited guilt-worthy behaviour that appeared was choosing to *exercise instead of spending time with one's children/family*. As Jamie the blogger describes, her offspring-related guilt usually wins out over her work guilt and her not-exercising guilt:

I feel guilty when I try to squeeze a workout in during my work hours — but I feel even more guilty when I try to squeeze in a workout during my parenting hours. I pick the kids up from school at 2:30. Technically, they could play while I run on the treadmill or complete a workout DVD. Or, if I was feeling especially brave, we could all go to the Y and I could put them in the childcare there. Once again, it's guilt that keeps this from happening. I feel like since I just picked them up from school where they spent the last six hours I shouldn't take them to the gym and stick them in the childcare room. I feel like I should be spending time with them – talking to them about their day, readying their backpacks for tomorrow, and starting dinner (of course, made of healthy, whole foods – not PBJ or take-out pizza). Plus, have you ever tried to do an exercise DVD with three preschoolers

who want to help? It's kind of excruciating. Working out with the kiddos underfoot makes me feel guilty — like I'm putting my needs first and not attending to what they need. (Weitl, 2013; my emphasis)

Note that, again, the trigger itself—the conflict aroused by the choice she has to make (i.e., “when I try to”)—wasn't what she calls in question, but rather the eventual behaviour: exercise (i.e., “squeeze in a workout”). The guilt that keeps her from “sticking” her children in childcare while she exercises is anticipated guilt about what a ‘bad’ parent she would be *if* she made that self-centred choice: knowledge and framing. I suggest that if exercise did not represent a selfish behaviour for her, her guilt might be diminished; this may be largely a matter of framing. A fitness mentor would perhaps focus on eliminating the guilt, since that seems to be the overt cause of her distress, and then simplistically condemn the *emotion* as the exercise barrier. Typical advice runs along the lines of ‘when you take care of yourself, you are more able to take care of others’; and several women did share those very sentiments with me:

I am adamant that 45 mins at the gym makes me a better mum and so I just don't feel guilty about making time to do that. (Andrea, who later decried gyms)

‘Being a ‘fit mom’ doesn’t mean I have to be a ‘selfish mom’, is the heading of an online article, accompanied by the photo in Figure 6.2.⁶⁰ I argue that this shows how the discourses linking *selfish* with *exercise*, particularly for mothers, can be perpetuated in both ‘for’ and ‘against’ arguments. They present an unavoidable trigger for exercise-related guilt in the implicit conflict between at least two competing responsibilities (which was apparent in the comments following the article): you are selfish/irresponsible if you exercise; you are irresponsible/selfish if you don't.

⁶⁰ The article is written by “a mother of five young kids” who is “an avid runner” (invoking another guilt trigger for readers in the form of ‘successful’ People/bodies) (A. Brown, 2013).

Figure 6.2: Being a 'fit mom' doesn't mean I have to be a 'selfish mom'



But as I discuss below, this so-called ‘me-time’ can sometimes act as booster fuel to the flame of guilt despite some outwardly positive physical benefits. Consider the added guilt attached to exercising now that other peoples’ wellbeing is dependent upon your self-discipline.

I think it’s also important to remember the possibility of *imposed guilt* in social and interpersonal interactions when someone says they feel guilty about exercising. Shyla hints at guilt introduced by her spouse, guilt perhaps that she would not have generated if making the choice alone:

Even now when the kids are grown up I can't join a group class because they are mostly in the evening and my husband wants me at home. If anything comes up that clashes with the class time I will have to miss the class.

The third example of accelerants at work in an aspect of guilt-inducing exercise that women focused on is best exemplified in the well-known term ‘*me-time*’. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have discussed this phenomenon relative to work, family, and leisure (e.g., Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1996; Spowart, 2010) and all report hearing *guilt* frequently in their participants’ narratives. For example, Jennifer Lois (2010) recalls that,

All of the mothers I spoke to acknowledged the importance of personal time, yet simultaneously most felt guilty and selfish about taking it. Therefore, they framed any pursuit of me-time in selfless terms, saying things like, “If I don’t get myself filled, I can’t give anything back.” (p. 429; my emphases)

In Lois’s study, the ‘personal time’ taken by her homeschooling mothers wasn’t necessarily for exercise (although some of it was), but nonetheless when held in contrast to mothering, both the mother and her imagined jurors deemed her guilt-worthy. The direct connection (i.e., “therefore”) Lois makes between the mothers’ feelings of guilt and selfishness and their re-framing of me-time speaks to the power of those feelings. In other words, they re-frame their activities explicitly to diminish/eliminate/avoid the feelings and emotions triggered by their initial conflict of interest.

Selfishness in this scheme is both an act and a characterisation of an act. When going to the gym (to choose just one exercise example) does not preclude helping others, the label of selfish is harder to pin on the exerciser; but if going to the gym is viewed as choosing self over others, the adulation often turns to reproach. It’s important, however, to avoid adjusting the aperture too finely and thereby creating sharp lines between themes; I don’t want to give the impression that these are known categories or that they exist in isolation from one another. Over-exercising crimes sometimes morph into the next theme if exercising takes the place of spending time with family (for example)—this is both excessive *and* irresponsible—which then morphs into the other theme of self-indulgent: arguably excessive, irresponsible, and selfish.

Viewing a guilt event—for illustrative purposes—conceptually as a sequence, I have discussed the initial sparks/triggers for guilt, influenced by combinations of accelerants, that set alight the fuel of behaviour, creating a flame guilt (of varying intensities and heights). As with literal flames, the instinct is to put them out, or at least reduce and contain

them. My figurative parallel for this response in my hypothetical timeline is Managing. In the next two chapters I focus on the ways in which my participants managed their exercise-related guilt.

7 MANAGING EXERCISE-RELATED GUILT: PART ONE

In this chapter I continue my analysis and synthesis of unmediated voices, and the conclusions I draw from that process. Still working from the perspective of the aggregated individual, I now focus on how women manage their exercise-related guilt, and how it manifests in these negotiations of culpability.

Chapter contents

- Overview of managing exercise-related guilt
 - Introducing the themes
 - Axiology
 - Manifestations of exercise-related guilt
- Confess
- Promise
- Act

Overview of managing exercise-related guilt

You can't separate out these emotions with exercise from the rest of our lives, really...and our life's phases. (Lisa)

If only we could take a pill to kill the guilt. (Kerry, blog reader⁶¹)

My conceptualisation of managing guilt in this conflagrative framework is that of a steady mix of retardants and other techniques for keeping the flame of guilt to a 'manageable' level. Importantly, it co-exists with sparks and accelerants, and is not necessarily about

⁶¹ From the blog, *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl, 2013)

putting the fire out, but rather making the fuel less flammable and/or reducing the height and intensity of the flame. In a judiciary sense, this is analogous to a confession of guilt, followed by the launching of a defence that has as its goal the reduction of a sentence (as opposed to reversing the indictment).

I re-use the following example from chapter four to explain my interpretation of the management of exercise-related guilt in my study. As you might recall, this is a collaborator's (Michelle) response to my request for her thoughts as she imagined getting dressed in the morning and catching sight of herself in the mirror:

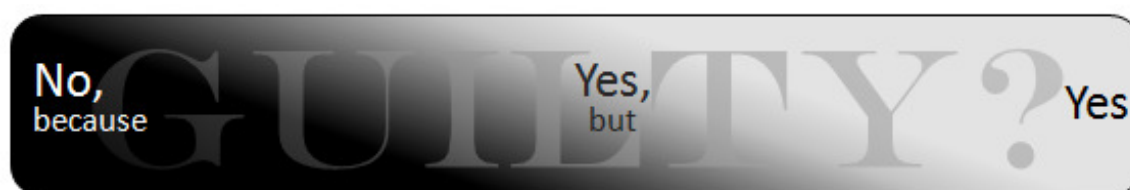
I really need to do some toning ...Sometimes there's feelings of frustration and guilt, knowing that I could make the time and have the means to work on toning my body. Other times, I'm content knowing that I'm not where I used to be in terms of size and weight, simply from eating more whole foods, rather than processed.

As I said previously, she attaches guilt first, and directly, to her “knowing”, which I characterise as an accelerant (knowledge) to the flame of guilt that was sparked by looking in the mirror. Next, she explains what it is she ‘knows’ that has caused the frustration and guilt: her failure to “make the time” and to use “the means” she already has for working on her body. These failures also act as accelerants (ableness), as does her ambivalent framing of exercise as a means to tone and shrink her body. Throughout this scenario, she has been managing the guilt that flickered into consciousness. She was sentenced by the visual reminder of her failure to be a good, responsible citizen (and thus mother): she *is* guilty. Now, standing accused, she negotiates her culpability (i.e., manages her guilt) (Gunnarsson, Hemmingsson, & Hydén, 2013), swinging between acknowledging and ameliorating her sentence: “I really need to...”, “I’m content...”, “I could make the time...”

As I read and re-read women's accounts of their exercise-related guilt, I saw less

indication of categories (e.g., guilty versus not guilty), and more evidence of a continuum. That is, while their responses to their own feelings of being guilty (they had done wrong, or failed to do right) seemed to imply *yes I am guilty* or *no I'm not guilty*, there was significant breadth, variation, and movement within that continuum. Arlie Hochschild (1990) describes women's perpetual emotion-managing negotiations this way: "some feelings we push out. Others we hold in, control, or prevent ourselves from acknowledging or expressing for more than a moment. We manage to feel and we manage to not feel" (p. 120). The following graphic (Figure 7.1) is my attempt at a simplified visual representation of this complex, recursive continuum:

Figure 7.1: Guilt continuum



Taking Michelle's example again, "I really need to do some toning" is an implicit admission of guilt, which places her on the right side of the continuum (using the graphic for these directions). As she explains why she feels this way, adding in disclaimers, alternative explanations, and ending with reasons why she needn't always feel guilty, she is essentially negotiating with herself (and possibly with me as the audience). Furthermore, this negotiation is moving her along the continuum to the left, reducing her sentence, or in other words, the extent of her guilt (in her mind).

In much of my framework, *negotiation* is an intrapersonal event in which there is bargaining between an individual and their own responsibilities, obligations, or their own physical limitations. They are judge, jury, accuser, and defendant all in one. It can be, too,

that negotiating involves direct bargaining with others (e.g., a spouse, over watching the children while she exercises), and this can add to the embodied nature of the stress and to the social consequences of reacting to a guilt trigger, and choosing a course of action. Importantly, all types of negotiating require emotional energy and are thus implicated in overall wellbeing (Widerberg, 2006; Zautra, 2006).

As Nina Gunnarsson (2013) and colleagues concluded in their study of Swedish mothers' healthcare encounters,

The way mothers made moral claims were either by negotiating culpability for their child's condition in their accounts or by appealing quite strongly to an active mother role. Negotiating culpability means the way that mothers, narratively and retrospectively, negotiate responsibility for and potential blameworthiness of their own and the healthcare providers' actions...seemingly a way to restore moral agency in relation to healthcare. (p. 449)

So, in my theorising, a "Yes" or a "Yes, and..." response corresponds to a 'full confession' without negotiation. This is a baring of one's soul without reserve, complying implicitly with whatever the sentence might demand. Moving along the continuum to the left, a "Yes [I am guilty], but..." response is an effort to 'restore moral agency'; it has been taken away by the accusation or indictment (guilty) and needs to be redeemed. The *but* signals the negotiating of the sentence, answering the question, 'how guilty am I?' Conversely, and moving still further to the left on the continuum, a "No [I am not guilty], because..." response is a way of claiming moral agency (not guilty) and providing reasons for why my actions protect me from an accusation of *guilty*. I develop each of these guilt dimensions throughout the chapter.

Finally, I think it's important to disambiguate my conceptualisation of *management* from the common—and similar sounding—concept of *emotion regulation* found in many literatures (e.g., Lane, Wilson, Whyte, & Shave, 2011; Stephan, 2012). I have purposely

stayed away from ‘regulation’ because to me it suggests rules or laws imposed on the unruly or the unlawful; it carries overtones of prescriptiveness. In contrast, ‘managing’ is more of an acknowledgement of an ongoing state of negotiation, and does not necessarily assume a negative entity or force that must be controlled at all costs. In short, regulating is trying to live *without* emotions; managing is trying to live *with* them.

Disambiguation

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) is “broadly defined as the capacity to perceive and regulate emotions in oneself as well as those of others” (Kemp et al., 2005, p. 42). I realise this might sound suspiciously similar to the ‘management’ of emotions, and so I think it’s useful to disclaim my conceptualisation of guilt management in light of the doppelganger definition. In my view, the common definitions of EI continue to separate emotion and cognition, assuming that I can impose thinking on my feelings and emotions and thereby ‘control’ them and subsequent actions. Rather, I believe that emotions are always part of thinking and so they are participating in the process/capacity that is allegedly doing the perceiving and regulating of those same emotions. So to further clarify what *management* means in this thesis, it always assumes cogmotion—it doesn’t separate emotion and cognition and biology. What I’ve been interpreting are participants’ visible and audible (sometimes published, written, or articulated) indications of reactions to their feelings of their own self-described guilt. I can’t say which (or whether a) portion of the reactions are due to emotional intelligence, nor can I say what the ratio of emotion, cognition, and biology is in any given moment during a reaction.

Self-regulating one’s own ability to monitor one’s own feelings, moreover, seems like

circular logic and physiologically impossible. If self-regulating is itself a process of regulating emotions and thoughts, there seems to be the suggestion of an infinite regression. My primary *thought* in guilt management is of effort and energy: those things that women do and say in response to feelings of exercise-related guilt. It is an ongoing process of negotiation with oneself and one's sociocultural environment. And my primary *concern* with management is the cogmotional fall-out.

Introducing the themes

I have scooped up my participants' responses and reactions—managing mechanisms—into loose buckets with permeable sides, and refer to them as Confessing, Promising, Acting, and Defending. The guilt continuum I described above runs through them all, with Confessing generally populating the right-most side (i.e., 'Yes...'), and most of the Defending the left-most. The other two categories typically appear in what I'll call the middle; however, there are no hard edges to these categories as the gradation suggests (Figure 7.1, p. 179) and they should not be thought of as hierarchical, linear, or reified in any way. As I explain below, the spirit of confession inheres in all of the themes, in varying degrees. I emphasise their interwoven and reciprocating natures to avoid implications of mutual exclusivity or binary oppositions.

Axiology

Elsbeth Probyn's (2011) description of anger's effects provides a useful staging for an aspect of guilt that I want to introduce here: the axiology underpinning our affects, feelings, and emotions. She says anger "sets into motion a whirlwind of values, stances, and ideas,

especially as they coalesce in one's self. It shakes up the self at a very fundamental level and lets loose an array of dispositions" (p. 686). To me, this suggests that the values, stances, and ideas pre-exist the whirlwind, although all components are culturally informed and malleable (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, the anger, as Martha Nussbaum (1992) proposes for emotions generally, embodies "some of our most deeply rooted views about what has importance" (p. 42). So too with guilt, I argue, my participants' reactions and responses to it necessarily arise out of their sociocultural beliefs⁶² and values, however quixotic or variable they may have seemed in the moment that I heard/read them. Our beliefs and values constitute our "moral instruction," the foundations of which Jan Wright and Christine Halse (2013) suggest begin formation during early absorption of "the language and practices of families, the messages embedded in children's media and television programmes" (p. 1). As a response to a "moral imperative" (e.g., 'get fit, be healthy'), personal guilt is something that has social and biographical components (Katchadourian, 2010); but at the same time, "in managing feeling, we contribute to the creation of it" (Hochschild 1983, p. 18). In other words, even named emotions are not stored up ahead of time and pulled from the depths; rather, they arise in a situation, and are actively shaped and altered through the process of managing them.

In these examples of my participants' axiological influences on their framing of exercise and their associated decisions, you can see threads of the accelerants I described in the previous chapter: *knowledge*, *framing*, and *ableness* elements that momentarily diminish or increase guilt feelings.

⁶² Note: personal beliefs play a role in everything but aren't really a managing *function*. For example, you can see traces of this in 'substitution', and in many 'defences', as well as in 'external forces' (below).

In this first comment, Susan is responding to questions relating to a vignette I built around a hypothetical ‘Cheryl’, who was facing several conflicting demands, one of which was whether and when to exercise. Susan foregrounds the aspect of *knowledge*—or, ‘what’s important to know’—when she bases her exercise-related decision on “knowing that God would want me to...”:

I would probably pick up the prescription for my mom as that is the more important thing to do in my eyes. I would justify it by knowing that God would want me to take care of my mom, and I can exercise later, even if it is tomorrow.

Her underlying worldview that ties her exercise decisions to the opinions of a higher power is not an insignificant influence in the scenario I presented. Any other types of knowledge about exercise are relegated in preference to her particular ethic of care (i.e., taking care of her mother); the doing of exercise is thus relegated as part of this decision.

In this second comment, I see “what is best for my family and for me” as a reflection of Jamie’s personal belief system that helps her *frame* exercise for her as something that must be done “almost daily...to maintain sanity”:

It’s hard for me to remember sometimes that I need to do what is best for my family and for me that includes almost daily exercise to maintain sanity!⁶³

When she is faced with a decision about whether to exercise, she can draw on her belief that in order to remain sane, and therefore of use to herself and her family, she can justifiably exercise without guilt.

Finally, a sense of *ableness* in the immediate instance is also rooted in one’s personal history of accomplishments and sensibilities. Lisa, for example, recognises that a shift in her values had given her a new perspective on her ability to reduce the amount of exercise

⁶³ From her blog *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl, 2013)

she had historically felt compelled to accomplish:

So I have that sort of a really important value that's inspiring the want to change.
And to get the exercise addiction under control.

In other examples, this shift in values was related to an increase in exercise. For example, Shyla, who decided that her daily walk was no longer about losing weight but rather about feeling relaxed and happy—the new belief/standard caused her to feel able to set out each morning. Or Sarah, whose prioritising of her newly diagnosed health issues seemed to bring her “a lot of joy in terms of relating to exercise” and solidified her preference for “natural exercise”, as opposed to going to a gym.

Manifestations of exercise-related guilt

The management of guilt (and other emotions) may or may not manifest externally. That is, much of the managing that goes on in people's deliberations about exercise happens inside the head; verbal, facial, and gestural articulations communicate the process. But there are also some actions, such as buying exercise equipment, which can overtly signal a person's attempts at managing exercise-related guilt. In short, everything I have identified in this research as *manifestations* of exercise-related guilt will also appear under *managing*; but not all managing themes appear as manifestations because as I said, many are cogmation processes. I highlight manifestations where relevant throughout this chapter.

Confess

Confession dominates the scene of exercise-related guilt. “Processes of sin and redemption” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 13) can also be heard in many of the other themes explicated here. In fact I suggest that each of the other themes—promise, act, defend—is implicitly a

form of confession. This isn't surprising, really, considering that guilt is in itself a sort of confession: I am guilty; I have done wrong/not done right. So as implicit confessions, those noted in the other themes 'go without saying', but are the same as having been said.

What sets confession apart as a separate theme in this section is that it is an expression of guilt but without reparative action (e.g., act theme) or stated intent to 'do penance' (e.g., promise theme). In addition to problematising the 'guilt is good' motif, the aspects of confession that I saw—and interrogate below—are implied imperatives, guilt-assuaging effects, and self-criticism.

Implied imperatives

I understand confessing as expressions of exercise-related guilt, which implicitly acknowledge an *obligation* to exercise. Imperatives such as 'should' and 'need' convey this implication, as in variations of Gina's comment, which I encountered often, "I need to do more exercise":

I would feel guilty/lacking and feel I should "get right on that." (Janet)

I do try to remind myself that I need to be diligent about reducing my weight for health benefits. (Paula)

"I need to" or "I should" echo unspoken imperatives. By comparison, "I have not done X" is a more direct confession/admission without the strings of attached standards, and thus judgment. But saying "I need to" is to show that you are aware (a) of your transgression, and (b) of the "parameters for redemption" (Dworkin 2009, p. 13).

Say, it isn't so

Consciously choosing not to exercise can result in an urge to confess. Once there is a spark, there is an urgency about the negotiations that spring into action, stamping down the ensuing flame of guilt. True to its religious origins, confession is often an end in itself. That is, women can manage (and even reduce) their exercise-related guilt feelings through the very act of articulating their wrong-doing:

Okay okay the guilt is killing me....I skipped the gym today!...Phew...feel better now that I said it out loud. (Twitter)

“Through disclosure”, as Giroux Bordowitz (1994) puts it, we are “asking some higher authority to take the burden away” (in Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 13). Shyla’s comment, “I get a sanctimonious feeling when I talk about doing it” taps into the religious ethos suggested by a higher authority. Although this part of her comment isn’t an explicit confession of doing wrong, she nevertheless experiences a release from guilt (“that I don’t actually do it”) and a surge of positive feeling in the act of sharing an account of her good deed.

Self-criticism

Another aspect of confession that I want to highlight is self-criticism. It is possible to confess without resorting to overt criticism, and indeed most literature on guilt suggests that people’s response to guilt is universally a pragmatic one in which they simply state their offense and get on with fixing what they broke. It’s all quite objective and impersonal. But many of my participants’ confessions were tinged with self-criticism. I thought of those instances as essentially a ‘*yes, and*’ response to the accusation of *guilty*. That is, not only did they admit guilt, but also gave detailed evidence of their guiltiness:

I haven't liked parts of my body for about 25-30 years. (Donna)

For the past 30 years I have always had a membership to a gym, some I am too embarrassed to mention, until the last 5 years! I am 58 years old and in the worst shape I have ever been in...it is so depressing! I am trying to quit smoking and am on ww [Weight Watchers], but I hate my body sooooo much right now I don't know if I should keep trying! (Sharon on Facebook)

So how, you might ask, could such self-flagellation help to manage guilt? Intuitively, we would expect guilt to rise following this extended list of crimes (and perhaps it does in the short-term). One interpretation, drawing on jurisprudence, might be that by baring her soul and thereby offering all the evidence, the confessing party will win a lighter sentence from the judge (which could be her present audience and/or a 'higher authority' and/or herself), which includes temporarily diminished guilt.

I also offer another perspective, based on my framework in which managing corresponds to altering the height and intensity of the guilt flame: airing my faults is like giving a small-but-intense, contained flame (i.e., keeping it 'bottled up') more space relative to available fuel. In other words, I have provided a pressure release for the growing intensity by allowing for more height and space. Participants report feeling better just having had an opportunity to express their exercise- and body-related guilt and shame. I have no doubt the flame will rekindle but I think these brief, intermittent flare-ups might have psychosomatic benefits as well as their more oft-rehearsed downsides (e.g., effects of negative self-talk).

Is confession always good for the soul?

Unlike most research on guilt that highlights its action oriented nature (Tangney & Dearing, 2002), I have found that what women broadly categorise as guilt does not lead inevitably to

amends correlating with a specific behaviour or act. Rather, as Andrea described, she may have a sense of having tripped up, and feel

a pang of something, I am not sure if it is guilt; I don't feel I have done something wrong, but there is an admission that I should be doing exercise like so and so.

Her vague feeling may indeed flicker occasionally into recognizable guilt (as she articulated at other times), but nevertheless there is a familiar guilt-edged *should* lurking around her awareness of exercise that reminds her of her sin of omission.

In the following description, Donald Nathanson (1992, p. 19) explains some of the positive affordances of a “confessional system” for guilt. He emphasises, as others have (Probyn, 2005; Wong & Tsai, 2007), the relative differences between shame and guilt. I am struck by the ways in which the introduction of exercise disrupts some of his observations:

...shame is...a related but quite different discomfort. Whereas shame is about the *quality* of our person or self, guilt is the painful emotion triggered when we become aware that we have acted in a way to bring harm to another person or to violate some important code. Guilt is about *action* and laws. Whenever we feel guilty, we can pay for the damage inflicted. The confessional is a system of release from guilt, for it allows us to do penance for sins we know we have committed--a simple trade of one action for another.

I detect several elements of this analysis that don't fit neatly in exercise contexts: we don't always act in response to guilt; there are no actual juridical laws to guide us; we harm ourselves more than we do others; we violate self-imposed codes (admittedly informed by external influences). Yes, we “can pay”, but in emotional currency that isn't automatically restored to our account. Furthermore, we inflict the “damage” on ourselves. We aren't necessarily released from our immediate (and certainly not our ongoing) guilt, nor are we always fully aware of the exact nature of the crime we've committed. I argue there are no “simple” trades in this complex ecosystem of guilt.

I think it is important in the pursuit of understanding nuance and complexity to avoid

‘choosing sides’ and the urge to have one permanent solution (for everyone or for each person). As I’ve pointed out, confession can produce positive responses and help reduce guilt feelings; it can also stir recollection of personal faults and produce brief, raging flames of guilt. So, in my current analytic view, I find it useful to think of confession as more of a managing technique, than as an ab-solution.

Promise

The theme I’ve categorised as *promise* is characterised by declarations of intended action. A guilty verdict has been accepted, and plans are devised in view of atonement. Like outright confession, the act of promising can be a flame retardant in itself: the first steps have been made toward reparation/action; a vision of what will be has been created. Thus, promises can act to mitigate both present and future guilt. In addition to a straightforward promise, I call out three variations of promising that I detected in my participants’ narratives and discuss them below: conditional promise, hypothetical promise, and scheduling. Finally, I briefly discuss the ethos of ‘trying’, which I argue is inherent in promising; participants avail themselves of this guilt-managing tactic consistently and with no little success.

Promise

The straightforward promising I heard during this research was voluntary. It was most frequently a self-imposed sentence of exercise in response to either the invisible crime of not exercising (or not exercising enough), or the more visible one of eating (too much, or the wrong thing, or both). In this sense, promising is a ‘*Yes* (I am guilty), *but* (I will do

these things) response. Promises employed to manage exercise-related guilt ranged chronologically from immediately following a ‘live’ transgression to hypothetical future what-ifs. This blogger, for example, deploys her assurances of exercise as closely as she can to the end of her week-long crime-spree:

Last week was so unbelievably busy that I didn't get much exercise in and so I promised myself I would go first thing today.⁶⁴

By contrast, a Twitter confessor, posting on a Wednesday, gives herself a few days grace before beginning her sentence; her guilt-management comes with extended credit:

And now...The GUILT. Promise to self: I will exercise/jog and start dieting on Friday. (allyana08)

Janet was less precise in terms of activity and timing, but when confronted with the option of joining other women for a run, gave the impression of being confident in her ability to fulfill her promise to “do something tomorrow” “if I don’t get to it today.”

My collaborators responded to the following photo (Figure 7.2, p. 192) in a variety of ways, some denying any positive emotional reaction, some delightedly devouring the waffle vicariously without guilt, and others like Deb and Paula outlining their plan of negotiation. I show how promising plays a role in their guilt-managing in this scenario. Paula’s promise looks ahead, and creates a direct link between her (potential) sin and subsequent redemption:

I definitely would enjoy a treat but would try to compensate for the extra calories I would be consuming.

Her confession is implicit; she doesn’t apologize for enjoying a treat, but anticipates the required atonement for her indulgence, which must be paid in calories burned. Deb’s

⁶⁴ From the blog, *A Bit of Help with Life* (Willis, 2013)

promise in this example is more oblique, and based on past experiences, but nonetheless is an attempt to manage anticipated guilt in response to a perceived misdemeanour:

Figure 7.2: Waffling on my promise



Sometimes if I over indulge in sweet stuff I jokingly say, “I can always run a bit extra” or “just as well I am going for a run tonight.”

Conditional promise

This variation of promising makes an obligation to exercise conditional; my collaborators typically gave this type of promise in response to a direct question about whether they would exercise in such and such a situation or setting. A conditional promise may put up hurdles, but it nevertheless involves a stated intent to carry out the promise. I saw this management mechanism as an adjustment or rehearsal of the accelerant of *ableness*: ‘I am guilty, and I will atone for my transgressions, but these are some boundary conditions for what I can/will or can’t/won’t do.’ Participants qualified their promises to exercise with phrases such as “*if* they were walking [not running]”, “*when* I felt like it”, “*if* it were a nice day”. This is essentially an elaboration of the ‘*but*’ in ‘*yes, but...*’:

If they were running at a pace where it was possible to chat as well and look about ourselves then I would join them when I could, when I felt like it. If they were all grim determination about how many miles they are doing etc then no that wouldn't appeal. (Andrea)

Andrea implicitly acknowledges her sense of obligation to exercise “when I hear that other people have been out exercising”, but she doesn’t accept their conditions outright. First she imposes restrictions on the pace (i.e., “possible to chat”, etc.), then on the frequency (i.e., “when I could”), and then rehearses her sense of agency (i.e., “when I felt like it”). She also reduces her moral obligation (guilt) by projecting dubious motivations to her would-be running companions (i.e., “all grim determination”). But her promise is intact, and she appears to have every intention of meeting it.

Deb intimates how she would probably manage her guilt about not exercising—at a

particular time and with particular people—and thus gives us a window into her use of promising to negotiate culpability:

I would not feel guilty sitting at my desk because I would know that more than likely I would be running after work.

So we can reverse engineer Deb’s scenario and arrive at the conclusion that if she did feel guilty sitting at her desk, she would manage those feelings by reminding (promising) herself that she will soon be exercising.

Hypothetical promise

The difference between a conditional promise and a hypothetical promise may appear trivial at first glance, but I think it is an important nuance to foreground. When someone thinks about exercise it isn’t always in the immediate sense, and in an exercise-related context; for example, ‘now it’s time to exercise, should I or shouldn’t I?’ or, ‘do you want to exercise right now?’ (see *Conditional promise*, p. 193). Rather, thinking about exercise often occurs unintentionally, and in a non-exercise-related context, such as when reading a magazine, hearing someone talking about it, experiencing a bodily twinge, or simply having a passing wonder about a friend’s health. Incidentally, these are the moments in which (similar to an interview setting) women may feel most inclined⁶⁵ to make promises; or as Shyla offered, “it seems like there’s a motivational surge.” I call these hypothetical promises because, unlike conditional promises that are time- and place-specific, and

⁶⁵ I asked Janet which word would best describe her feelings in this situation: ‘inclined’ or ‘empowered’. She replied: “I would say that some days I would use the word “inclined” and some days I would use the word “empowered”...and that would depend on the mood I was in at the present time or if I felt I had been sitting on my butt too many days in a row...I would be influenced according to how lumpy I was feeling at the moment. Perhaps I am more guilt-susceptible than I realized!”

involve intent, these are not specific ideas about time and circumstances, nor do they come with any intent to actually exercise.

Figure 7.3: Advertising desire



The basic formula is: ‘I *would* exercise if [optional: insert conditions], but I don’t/can’t because of [insert obstacle]. As Susan said:

I don't really exercise. I would love to walk but I am having pain in my foot from an old injury.

Another example is Andrea’s comprehensive description of her cogmotional conundrum:

I have a desire for more control over my time, my days, if I could work like a robot, if I didn’t have emotions, if life didn’t get in the way then yeah maybe I would have a routine where I did the kind of exercise I like everyday - that would be a luxury and a pleasure (it sure as hell wouldn't be running).

These promises can diminish the person’s present guilt flame about exercise by pre-choreographing a future idealized scenario in which they *would* do the ‘right’ thing, but due to unavoidable obstacles in the present, they probably won’t do anything. There is no specific plan for atonement, but the promiser receives salvation anyway in the form of reduced guilt.

The response of several collaborators, “If I lived in that place I’d probably exercise more”, to the photo in Figure 7.3 (p. 195) is a pared down version of a hypothetical promise. They clearly don’t live in that place, and probably won’t in the near future. Their promise is sufficiently indefinite in all aspects, but I suggest this belief in the possible provides temporary emotional benefit, in the form of an attenuated flame of guilt.

Scheduling

Scheduling exercise is a more formalised *promising* technique. By setting aside a particular time (among other details) for exercise, you signal an acknowledgement of your need to exercise (culpability), and also set up the parameters—particularly time—of your responsibility to meet that need. As Michelle explained, “I saw exercise as something I

needed to fit into my schedule, since my job didn't necessarily involve a lot of physical exertion." I include such planning schemes as New Year's Resolutions under *scheduling*—a rather high-profile promising mechanism for managing exercise-related guilt. Shyla's confession is a reminder of its fickle nature: "I ALWAYS feel guilty about not exercising...The guilt comes from a few sources - for one thing I feel bad that I haven't been able to stick to any of my resolutions."

In the short-term, guilt about not exercising can be quelled: it may *feel* as if it's as good as done. Exercise rhetoric would certainly have us believe that setting a plan increases the likelihood of actually exercising (regularly) (T. C. Murray, Rodgers, & Fraser, 2009). But like other managing techniques, scheduling is multifaceted in its effects. After expressing guilt for exercising at home when she "should be spending time with my kids", Megan, a blog reader, shared, "I just joined a gym to go during my lunch at work...I don't know what other time to go...!"⁶⁶ But despite its time-saving efficiency, this guilt-managing move also reminded her of a preceding failure to exercise first thing in the morning or after work: "I have tried for months to carve out time to exercise. And guilt sabotages it." Her awareness then shifts to another life domain in which she has had to face having to "add in the guilt I feel for putting [the kids] into daycare."

Similarly Tracy, another reader on the same blog, finds that "scheduling [exercise] is tough"; she then proceeds to describe how she manages both her guilt about insufficient exercise and her guilt for having faulty organisational skills. I think Lisa's narrative highlights some of the tensions that are generated by promising in the form of scheduling:

⁶⁶ From the blog, *Liberating Working Moms One Voice at a Time* (Weitl, 2013)

I'm still trying to schedule [exercise] into a day's work, and it still feels like a chore that I have to do although I really enjoy it...it's trying to fit it in around everything else, which makes it work, it's the fitting it in to a really busy schedule that makes it feel like it's work. I mean catching up with a friend for coffee feels like work to me because I have to fit it in...

Clearly, exercise isn't the only 'task' that women are scheduling into their day; it isn't the only promise they've made. So while moments of calm and control may follow the setting of a schedule—the guilt flame has been tamed for the time being—the presence of the schedule with its competing promises, can set the scheduler up for subsequent broken promises and the inevitable feelings of guilt and failure that accompany them. [See the *Operations of exercise-related guilt* section on page 254 for an expanded discussion of this topic.]

Try-athlete

Embedded in the notion of a promise is the concept of effort: 'I said I will do this thing, and so I will try to accomplish it'. This formula can range in specificity (e.g., 'I will try to be there at noon and try to run for 30 minutes' versus 'I try to walk as often as I can'), but what remains intact is the sense of obligation. Therein lies the possibility for guilt, and thus the need for vigilant management. Whether they ended up exercising or not, my participants' unease (including guilt feelings) about not exercising nevertheless seems to diminish through their efforts to 'try' to fit exercise into their day. 'Try' may include the rehearsal of those efforts and desires/intentions, and/or the actual planning of exercise. For example, Gina sprinkles an account of her typical day with 'trys':

I try to walk as much as possible during the day for example I always print only one item then go to the photocopier so I have to go multiple times. I try and walk from one end of town to the other if I can and back at the beginning and end of the day...I try at the weekends to play sports with my kids.

Rehearsals of ‘trying’ (like Gina’s) differ from ‘pure’ confessions because they go beyond simply admitting wrong; further, they signal to the confessor (self and/or other) that reparation isn’t just a promised future event, but has already begun. It is a present embodied condition. So managing isn’t exclusively about ‘good outcomes’, but rather entails the whole internal and external, proactive and reactive, process(es) of wrestling with guilt sensations about (not) exercising.

Act

The focus of this theme is the things women overtly do—the actions they take—to manage exercise-related guilt. In my analysis, women reactively and proactively combine psychosocial mechanisms with material solutions in their efforts to diminish or douse the guilt flame. Implicit in these actions is confession, and occasionally hints of promising, but ultimately something is *done*. Thus, many of the managing mechanisms I discuss in this section also qualify as *manifestations* of exercise-related guilt. And with respect to my guilt continuum, this theme begins to shift from the familiar regions of ‘*Yes, but*’ into ‘*No, because*’ territory. ‘*Yes, I am guilty, but I am doing these things*’: I suggest women are actively seeking redemption [or a reduced sentence?] in these types of scenarios. ‘*No, there is no need for me to feel guilty, because of these things I’m doing*’: I interpret this as actively resisting indictment. That is, guilt feelings may lurk around the corner but their managing mechanisms are alert to the danger and so accelerants are diluted, and fires avoided. Six specific categories of action that I’ve identified are: exercise, acquire artefacts, acquire knowledge, avoid, compensate, and substitute.

Exercise

Many confessions begin with a phrase such as “I should really get some exercise”; this suggests that the confessor sees exercise as a direct answer to her question of guilt for not exercising. The idea that exercise can diminish guilty feelings about not exercising (enough or at all) does indeed seem obvious. What better way to show that you don’t deserve a guilty verdict than to perform the very thing for which you were accused of omitting? Here, I re-introduce Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994) concept of “confessing bodies”, another implicit—but public—mode of confession that is particularly salient within the categories of the *act* theme. “Bodies speak without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes” (p. 35) through practices such as dieting and exercising.

A friend on Facebook characterised her workout at Gold’s Gym one morning as “redeeming a slow and groggy start to my day...”, thereby nullifying her moral rap sheet. Simply being at the gym is both a confession and an act/process of reparation for the implicit sin of slothfulness earlier that day. Sarah also relies on structured exercise for its guilt-reducing properties:

I feel guilty about not exercising - usually when work or other life activities get in the way. I feel less guilty when I exercise to a set routine...I do eventually get back to my routines, so I don’t tend to feel guilty for long.

As I discussed in triggers (sources) for guilt, food is one of the most prolific perpetrators. Donna’s and Gina’s responses to my suggestion that they join me in ‘indulging’ in dessert, reflects what Jennifer McMahon (2012, p. 15) describes as “the fundamental tie that remains between exercise (training) and guilt-free eating. Self-monitoring and surveillance operates at a sub-conscious level as the prospect of eating a meal triggers calculations”:

D: Ok, I'll have one too, and walk with you...the long way home.

G: I'm hungry I'll have one and maybe we could both walk home the long way...

And Deb made her 'calculation' process explicit when she said,

I know the consequence of eating too much high calorie food coupled with low activity levels. I take that into consideration when I make the choice to exercise or not to exercise.

Exercise can also be used proactively as a way to bank credits⁶⁷, if you will, against future (usually planned) transgressions, such as eating or relaxing. This way, the anticipated guilt flame can be adjusted in advance, and any guilt embers glowing presently are easily doused by actually exercising:

75min of grueling exercise later...I earned my sweatpants + #TheBachelor tonight! 100 percent guilt free. (J_Knoxy, Twitter)

This woman sets up a (literally) rolling formula for guilt-management, in which any transgressions—omissions or commissions—are automatically atoned for:

Ditched my office chair for an exercise ball so now I don't feel as guilty eating this cupcake for 2nd breakfast. (big_jenn_c, Twitter)

This checks-and-balances phenomenon doesn't seem to end with any known amount of exercise, but rather can increase as one's identity becomes entwined with excessive exercise. My personal experience reminds me 'enough' expands to fit the demands of perception (mine and others'). Similarly, Megan admits to still feeling guilty "if I give myself a 'rest' day from exercise", in spite of a relentless exercise schedule consisting of:

...doing something 7 days a week (2 hour walk on sunday) and intense training the other 6 days - teaching spin class 5 x per week and weight training 5 x per week

⁶⁷ Interestingly, I saw more evidence of this proactive 'banking' system in women who claimed to be regular exercisers, while women who did not claim to be regular exercisers (i.e., most of my collaborators) were more likely to exercise in reaction to having already eaten something they deemed 'bad'.

Another friend on Facebook describes a recent conversation with herself, in which she evidences a splutter of guilt/shame regarding an aspect of her body; her solution for this wayward part of her anatomy is to take it to the gym:

...some days I think to myself, “Do I REALLY want to go work out today?”
.....and then I see a contour that I don’t remember ever seeing before -- or, at least, not for a VERY long time.....and I say, “Saddle up, girl!! We’re hittin’ the gym!!!!” :D

So exercise can work toward redemption for the “confessing body”, both pro- and retroactively, “through continual engagement in the rituals designed to assuage one's constant failure” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 22).

Acquire artefacts

Of course, I’m not saying that we should not make the effort to get enough exercise but this is just one more story designed to make us feel guilty enough to buy more stuff. (Ronnie, blogger⁶⁸)

Another act of guilt-management I detected in participants’ narratives was buying exercise-related artefacts. Shari Dworkin and Faye Wachs (2009) suggest that through the act of purchasing, “individuals confess their gendered failures...to themselves” and implicitly to others “who will gaze at corporeal signifiers of success” (p. 22). These ‘gendered failures’, I argue, are the crimes for which women feel guilty. Acquiring artefacts intended to shape and discipline their confessing bodies, and thus (literally) pay for those crimes, can therefore be interpreted as efforts to manage the guilt flame. The flame retarding may even begin with the intent or a declaration of intent (i.e., promise to buy/exercise), along with strategising talk about ‘overcoming barriers to exercise’ and other

⁶⁸ From the blog *Time goes by: What it's really like to get older* (Bennett, 2013)

self-improvement plans. Even in these early ‘moves’ a person may arguably begin to feel guilt receding in anticipation of doing the right thing, regardless of their current exercising status. Megan describes her guilt-managing sequence leading up to her purchase of home exercise equipment:

I still do feel guilty if I give myself a ‘rest’ day from exercise and it will often prey on my mind well into the evening if I have missed a gym session. As a result I did buy a spin bike for home and then there is very little excuse.

Notice how she subtly berates her future ‘resting’ self, deliberately setting in place a formula for guilt: if she fails to exercise now, having removed this obstruction to justice, “there is very little excuse”, and thus she has only herself to blame. In this sense, her managing takes on a ‘tough love’ ethos, incorporating the guilt-is-good dictum. Thus, she stirs, rather than extinguishes, the guilt embers, and turns what used to “prey on my mind” into a moral triumph.

A few more exercise-related artefacts that appeared in this managing mechanism of *act* were: joining a gym, signing up for an exercise class, and buying books or DVDs about exercise, fitness, or health. These types of purchases are perhaps less visible than exercise equipment, and some of them are ephemeral. Nonetheless, the principle of guilt-management I’m underscoring is the same: an action is taken in view of initiating (or extending) exercise. Implicitly, both confessing and promising are involved throughout the process. As Shyla’s prediction of her purchasing behaviour indicates, however, the initial guilt-quelling can be diluted by subsequent promise-breaking: “I would buy them and then not read them.” Recall the blog reader above who joined a gym she could attend during her lunch hour, and thus minimise the guilt she had previously experienced when exercising instead of spending time with her children. The joining phase, I suggest, was an important

reparative step in her overall guilt-managing experience relating to her time-space tension.

Paula recounts the exercise-related woes of a friend, who “has probably joined [Weight Watchers] and gyms to lose weight 14000 times over her life”, and notes that it was “insecurity about her body”, “pants that don’t fit”, and “the number on the scale” that drove her confessing body to seek redemption in calorie-based penance. Again, as an important stage of that redemptive search, I believe the signing on is key in the management of guilt.

Another example of the role these artefacts can play within the guilt-managing process is described by Donna, as she drags her history of body anxiety forward to the present:

I have been on and off diets since I was in high school, partly because it was the thing to do, and partly because my body isn’t how I would like it to be, as other people see my body...So, exercising to me is trying to make my body look different, which I resent, but want; so the only reason I would do it is to change the outside, not thinking about helping the inside, though I have considered it more recently, now that I’m middle-aged. I actually ordered a DVD from Amazon last week: *Leslie Sansone, Walk Away Your Hips & Thighs*, an exercise DVD I can do privately. (Donna)

As Foucault (1979, p. 42) argues, “guilt did not begin when all the evidence was gathered together; piece by piece, it was constituted by each of the elements that made it possible to recognize a guilty person.” Donna’s accumulating ‘elements’ have each been carrying a conviction of their own (e.g., each diet, each body flaw); but now—at this particular moment—standing in her pile of evidence, she takes action (“actually ordered”) against the guilt.

Interestingly, an artefact can also be imagined as a sort of reified promise, once it becomes part of a person’s daily landscape. That is, a stationary bike may take up a position in the corner of the room as a constant reminder of exercise you declared you would do. Or as Paula said of her husband’s exercise equipment:

He has a Boflex downstairs, and we have an elliptical there as well. WE are supposed to use it. [Note sarcasm]

So these silent accusers, having successfully abetted in the attenuation of a guilt flame, may gradually become a trigger for guilt as they condemn the would-be exerciser who fails to avail herself of the convenient offer of atonement and guilt-avoidance at hand. After all, “one [can] not be the object of suspicion and be completely innocent” (Foucault, 1979, p. 42).

Acquire knowledge

Like other act themes, *acquiring* knowledge is about *doing*. A key focus for this theme is the concept of ‘expert advice’: the confessing learner seeks to familiarise herself with the doctrinal tenets that will help her do the right thing, and do it effectively. Susan enthusiastically declared that she was “always looking for ways to look thinner”, and later mentioned that she was “currently on a diet that Dr. Oz recommended.” Having implicitly admitted her guilt, she is now showing to herself and others that she is on the road of self-improvement. The guilt flame eases during this act of truth-seeking—“when I ask for advice, I tend to react positively and follow it” (Shyla)—but is vulnerable to the many sparks scattered throughout this multimodal information landscape. Paula, for example, was eager to read “good information” in a book⁶⁹ that had triggered her guilt about feeling fat; her willingness to address her own ignorance by reading the book was itself something she could *do* about it, thereby diminishing her feelings of guilt about not doing anything (or at least enough):

⁶⁹ *Why We Get Fat and what to do about it* (Taubes, 2010) (see Figure 5.4, p.126)

It makes me feel guilty because it implies that there is a definite reason as to why I am fat and there must be something I can do about it that I am not doing.

Jennifer Smith Maguire (2008a) highlights the lingering sense of accountability that remains even after someone has solicited an expert's opinion, noting that the individual is still responsible to "use" the expert competently. So the managing of guilt continues "within the framework of the problem of motivation", because any "failure to get fit is not only about a lack of will, knowledge, and dedication; it is also a failure to seek the right help" (p. 126). Thus, the acquisition of knowledge is an ongoing process, a continuous cycle of inadequacy, confession, seeking, knowing, and failing, all of which is intensified, if not driven by, guilt.

The acquisition of knowledge is not a simple sequence of reading facts, acknowledging them as fact, storing this new knowledge, and carrying on with one's day incrementally informed for the better. Whether the topic is exercise in particular or health in general, my collaborators, in the process of acquiring knowledge as a means for managing exercise-related guilt, sought to vet and validate the information they allowed to accuse or excuse them. I discussed the guilt-inducing ability of 'expert' advice under triggers/sparks earlier, and now I emphasise the *guilt-reducing* that same advice can produce. More so than sources such as popular media and magazines, medical authorities (and their views) seem to find a certain glorified position in participants' narratives. Furthermore, many women took pains to present themselves as astute readers, informed citizens, or at least neither cultural dupes (Chen, 2013; Cullen, 2001) nor dopes (Hall, 1981).

Emotionally, I don't take well to others giving me direct advice about activity and fitness. I prefer to tell myself. I don't mind taking advice in health from health professionals - doctor, nurse, dentist - I respect their training and generally take

advice on board but I don't always agree with such advice and may adapt it according to my own perceptions on what's best for me. (Sarah)

I read a lot of scientific stuff...and then general media, internet stuff. Sometimes just come across it...but no, probably seek it out more. Like when on CNN, I'd go look at the Health section. In my humble opinion I think I can filter what's good science and what's not. (Paula)

Confessing bodies, then, having deemed a source 'expert', seem to find particular relief in the knowledge that they are seeking out—and often following—the best course for redemption. “Doctors’ advice is normally medically based. I think I will follow my doctor’s advice if he tells me to exercise.” (Anna)

In contrast to specialist sources, magazines, newspapers, and other popular media are easily accessible, as well as practically omnipresent. All of my collaborators mentioned various combinations of these as sources of their exercise-related information; however, when presented with images of women’s lifestyle magazine display (Figure 7.4, p. 208), their assessments ranged from “a load of rubbish and a waste of money” (Deb) to “I would love to read them all (especially the belly fat one!) ☺” (Susan). Michelle was circumspect in her evaluation, claiming to “read information like this “with a grain of salt”...I don't necessarily trust every tidbit of information that I read.” Clearly, as a way to manage exercise-related guilt, acquiring knowledge is highly individualised and cognitional. Megan draws a more direct line between the gleaning of her information and her confessing body:

I love to get ideas for exercises from the magazine...the female looks very fit and healthy and I'd want to know her secret.

After adamantly rejecting the idea of imposed exercise through most of her narrative, citing both a self-loathing for her body and a defiance of external criticism, Donna reveals that she has begun seeking information about her health. I interpret her search as guilt-

management in response to memories of her late mother's exercise habits:

...there is a youtube clip out that I've seriously considered... Since I'm 47, I am starting to think about exercising more, just to get my circulation better. My mom exercised irregularly, and she didn't always feel the greatest.

Figure 7.4: Visual rhetoric



So, I find significant tension within this particular theme between women's desire for knowing and their interpretation of information when it is presented to them. That is, I see as much resistance to popular forms of knowledge as I do reception; as much dismissal as deference; and as much aversion as adulation. A person can experience the gamut of emotions between these extremes simultaneously in response to the same source, as Andrea summarises: "I am just many insides rolled up into one and I change from minute to minute." However, I detect guilt-management on both ends of the continuum - from

autonomy to ought-onomy.⁷⁰ The latter I interpret, as I have in this section, as someone acting to assuage guilt that has arisen out of a sense of obligation to the rules of others (who are often designated as ‘experts’). In such cases, women seek health and fitness information that they ought to have, in order to do what they ought to do. The former, as the word suggests, I interpret as someone acting out of a sense of their *own* rules, to defend themselves against an accusation (sometimes self-administered) of *guilty*. In these cases, women resist information that implicates them (including material they previously sought), focusing on counter-narratives and self-affirming critiques. I take up this aspect of guilt-management in the following sections and also in the final theme.

Avoid

This theme relies heavily on the concept of autonomy, especially held in contrast to ‘ought-onomy’. I saw many instances in which participants cited their rights and/or ability to make their own choices, whether it was how they responded to societal discourses of health and fitness, how they navigated the daily bombardment of messaging, or whether they exercised in a given situation or at all. These negotiations are rife with the threat of guilt, as I’ve shown, and managing the furtive guilt flame sometimes entails outright rebellion. I interpret the guilt-managing in this theme as an attempt to avoid guilt sparks altogether, or at the very least reduce the likelihood of a raging fire. So guilt itself may not be entirely avoided through these efforts; but it is a person’s proactive response to those things they’ve identified as guilt triggers that matters in this court. This sort of rebellion is typically

⁷⁰ From Greek *autonomos*: having, or living by, its own laws; from *auto-* ‘self’ + *nomos* ‘custom, law’ (Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged, 2014)

characterised by choosing to *not* do something; thus, I characterise it in this framework as doing something (i.e., an act). Importantly, the processes of avoiding sparks and fires, like all managing mechanisms, entail emotion work, and cogmotional consequences. As Paula explains it, while she understands the motivational intent of “rehearsing needs and shoulds” (inherent in avoiding them), the process, however ‘successful’ in terms of actually exercising, nevertheless “hurts you emotionally.”

Overall, women responded positively to images of (or actual) ‘tempting’ food—“when I see pictures of chocolate I feel as though I am eating it” (Shyla)—although food often becomes a trigger for guilt once it’s ingested. However, some women responded immediately to images of food, evidencing guilt-managing strategies as they redressed the near-stumble on the road to fitness: “I would turn the page quickly to avoid thinking about such food” (Megan). Thus, she thwarts future misdeeds (i.e., thinking leads to doing) by responding quickly to the familiar spark of guilt, and using it to guide her through the minefield that is a women’s lifestyle magazine.

Images of—or actual—idealised female bodies are another guilt trigger. Women become attuned to these presences, and can adjust their actions in anticipation of their guilt feelings. So Shyla’s strategy upon encountering a storefront filled with bikini-clad mannequins is to succumb briefly to “a moment of wistfulness” but “then ignore and walk past.” I interpret both the deliberate act of resistance (ignore) and its associated behaviour (walk past) as actions; more specifically, actions taken in an effort to diminish feelings of exercise-related guilt (given the inseparability of exercise and bodies). Andrea’s version of avoidance manifests in claims such as “I just don’t pay attention...anymore”, and “I don’t even notice” “these...images and appeals to the body beautiful, to eating, exercising to

achieve this body”; and it “doesn’t really register with me anymore.” Her observation that “this body is everywhere” implies that the ubiquity of the ideal body has rendered it invisible, and therefore ineffectual. But, nevertheless, by acknowledging that she is “drawn into wanting to be like this woman”, and that she does have “a desire to look like that”, she suggests that avoidance requires an effort, calling for an adjustment of accelerants (e.g., framing) in these guilt-resistant moments.

Another act of avoidance that participants engage in is to dodge mirrors. They have learned heuristically that self-scrutiny often leads to a guilt trap (Carrell, 2008), tinged with self-criticism and despair. The way to manage this inevitable flare-up is to avoid the spark altogether. Susan describes her emotional reaction to ‘self-reflection’ this way:

I tend to feel like a failure when I see that I need to get in shape/lose weight. I am not crazy about looking in the mirror.

Donna’s avoidance techniques are more extreme, but employed with similar benefits in mind. While she never overtly confessed to feeling guilty about not exercising, aside from citing recent fears about her health, her body-related comments reflect signs of shame:

I do not get dressed in front of the mirror. I try only to look into the mirror after my pajamas or clothes are on...I do not get dressed or undressed in front of my husband.

Avoiding specific triggers as a means to manage exercise-related guilt, then, can be thought of as a proactive mechanism. It is an attempt to ward off impending feelings of guilt relating to exercise, or to reduce the likelihood of encountering a known guilt trigger. Incidentally, in this particular technique more than others, I detected traces of other emotions as well, such as embarrassment, envy, and shame. Andrea shares advice with me, at my suggestion that there are some gyms where I feel out of place, assuring me: “with exercise I just don’t go to places where I would feel embarrassed.” In this same vein, Susan

adamantly rejects the probability of ever attending an exercise class: “No. No way...too embarrassing.” Despite confessing her need for and desire to exercise, she has nevertheless flagged certain ‘solutions’ as too emotionally disruptive; they are no-go zones, which she simply avoids. As constantly interacting forces, of course, emotions don’t exist in isolation from one another. Guilt is one part of a dynamic whole, informed by and informing other cogmotional episodes.

Compensate

What I’m calling *compensate* are things women do to their physical appearance in response to guilt about their (non) exercising bodies. While they may say they feel guilty about not exercising, their guilt seems to manifest in ways that are not obviously about exercise (e.g., hair, face). Managing exercise-related guilt isn’t simply an occasional psychological script played out in someone’s head; it’s not just a matter of whether I feel guilty or not (about not/exercising) after having managed my guilt in a particular situation. Rather, managing is an ongoing process without well-defined start and end points to any given flare-up. Furthermore, embodied practices and actions relating to exercise are often interwoven with other body practices and techniques. The three areas I’ve noted are clothing, hair, and the face.

According to various literatures (e.g., exercise psychology, sport sociology, women’s leisure), appearance concerns are commonly cited by research participants as reasons for exercising (Markula & Kennedy, 2011; McGannon & Busanich, 2010; Segar, Eccles, & Richardson, 2008), and are often foregrounded (even in attempts to downplay it) as motivation in both academic and popular texts. However, appearance in these contexts is

typically limited to issues of weight, size, and body shape; I argue this does not adequately capture what appearance means to most women. Appearance-based reasons for exercising also diminish with age, according to exercise psychologists (Amorose & Hollembeak, 2005). Based on my participants' input, however, I am sceptical that the correlation between age and appearance apathy is so simple or clear-cut. While exercise may go by the wayside—in which case age is often used as a defence against guilt—I don't believe that appearance concerns fall into the ditch with it. My collaborators, for example, talk of paying extra attention to their face, hair, and clothing as strategies to overcome their sense of guilt, shame, and inadequacy that arises in response to seeing their own body reflected in the mirror. For instance, Donna describes manipulating her face and hair in an effort to compensate for her misbehaving arms and legs:

My thighs are huge, and now my underarms are wiggling even more...I try only to look into the mirror after my pajamas or clothes are on. Then I try to fix my face and hair to look more attractive, and happy.

For her, 'appearance' is clearly not limited to the body parts that gym workouts or exercise routines typically target. And while exercise could theoretically 'fix' those body parts (something she doesn't deny but also doesn't want to do), she focuses on the things she *can* fix in a compensatory move. I interpret her reactions, and others', as indications that these women do not separate their bodies into two distinct sections, as research reports often insinuate: one above and one below the neck.

ClaireinOz, for another example, commenting after an article in *the Guardian* newspaper about body image, scoops multiple aspects of herself—weight, face, hair, body—into one confessional bucket when she explains:

I'm almost 56 and have hated the way I look all my adult life. My weight has varied a great deal over the years but I've never, ever been satisfied with my face, my hair or my body.⁷¹

Emily, another reader of the same article, describes the way she looks (i.e., appearance) as “plain” and “chubby”, thus conflating her above- and below-neck regions:

I've always hated the way I look. At school I was teased for being plain and became chubby as a teenager. Recently I joined a gym, lost 10 kilos but still feel bad about myself. However thin you are if there's still that dissatisfaction inside, it will never be enough, no matter how much you hear that beauty is skin deep.

Taking her confessing body to the gym, she seeks restitution for physical and emotional damages; 10 kilos seems like a reasonable payment, but in fact she finds the judge (i.e., herself) cannot be satisfied. Feeling plain and chubby is not a measurable offence— whatever transgression the scale reports, exercise can only provide partial compensation. Emily can recruit other types of body work to make up her ‘appearance’ deficit, but as she points out, the emotional debt remains unsettled.

My interpretations are further supported by another of Donna's somatic tales. Her least pleasant memory of participating in an exercise class is “wondering what I looked like”; and to deal with these feelings, she recalls that she “always made sure that I was in sweats, or something that covered my bottom and legs. My hair had to be just right, too.” I find the addition of her hair to her exercise appearance compelling evidence for a compensatory element in exercise-related guilt-management. Interestingly, researchers of social physique anxiety (SPA) (Woodgate, Martin Ginis, & Sinden, 2003) and other self-presentational concerns (Gammage, Martin Ginis, & Hall, 2004) report strong negative correlations between the wearing of baggy exercise clothing and exercise adherence (Brewer, Diehl,

⁷¹ The article was: ‘Uncomfortable in our skin: the body-image report’, by Eva Wiseman (2012).

Cornelius, Joshua, & Raalte, 2004; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998), essentially connecting anxiety about one's size/shape and a desire to hide one's perceived flawed body parts (as per Donna, above, and Shyla, below) with a decreased likelihood of taking up, enjoying, and/or continuing exercise long-term. Although I don't claim to share the same research purpose (i.e., induce people to exercise more), I do see traces of this anxiety in my participants' narratives. However, SPA researchers give scant attention to other appearance modalities and to their related emotional investments, something I believe is necessary for developing a more nuanced understanding of women's (cogmotional) relationship with exercise.

In this final example, Shyla describes a familiar embodied interaction with her mirror. Having previously confessed feelings of guilt about not exercising, she now adds to the emotive mix of accelerants as she struggles to dampen the guilt flame where she can; clothing, posture, and attitude—arguably all dimensions of appearance—are called in as compensation for the damages incurred by her unruly body:

There is a sense of agency as I pick out what to wear, because I specifically choose my clothes to hide my problem areas. But then once I am dressed I feel helpless. I have done all I can and it is still not good enough. I don't need to be young or look young. But this flabby spreading out feels so undisciplined and uncontrolled. So sloppy. Then I take a deep breath and turn away resolutely. Where my figure lets me down my posture and my attitude will pick up the slack.

These compensating acts aren't merely adornment rituals (although they could be that) or feminine ideals in action (although they may also be that); I also see these techniques of the self as responses to exercise-related guilt - attempts to diminish the guilt (and shame) about having failed their moving bodies, by taking control of the parts of themselves that they can.

Substitute

The final ‘action’ within this managing theme is *substitute*. It sits on the graduated border (i.e., Figure 7.1, p. 179) between ‘yes [I am guilty], *but* [here’s how I’m going to fix it]’ and ‘no [I’m not guilty], *because* [I’m doing/have done these things]’, working to diminish the flame of exercise-related guilt through negotiating a substitute for ‘real’ exercise.

Most of my participants have firm ideas about what constitutes ‘exercise’, and invariably they hold it conceptually separate from the rest of life’s motions. Some of their characterisations are: “a specific activity” (Shyla); “more deliberate than just playing” (Paula); it’s about “getting in shape” (Susan); “something boring you do because you feel obliged for your health” (Andrea). Or as Gina describes in rather more detail:

...I probably don’t do enough exercise, and by exercise I don’t just mean 30 minutes a day walking I think of exercise as more intense physical exertion, where you have really worked up a sweat. Then I try and think about how much time I have and when I can ‘fit’ in.

So, someone failing to ‘exercise’, while not fully atoning for the omission, can at least reduce their guilt feelings by displaying good intentions and perhaps performing a ‘community service’ version of their ideal.

I interpreted a holistic range of substituting tactics, loosely differentiated by relative focus; for example, fitness versus wellbeing (this is not a dualism but represents contrasting points). That is, in choosing an exercise replacement, women may focus on other types of bodily movement (e.g., ‘just walking’ instead of running; housework), thus emphasising a physical equivalence to exercise. For example, Tracy (blog reader) explains how she will “play tag in the house” with her young daughter, or “have dance parties” with her to “get my steps in” on days she feels especially guilty about not spending time with her family. Anna counts her housework as “physical training”; Janet thinks exercise is something

“disciplined” people do, but sees her golfing and gardening as valid replacements for “exercise per se”.

Alternatively, women may focus on their non-corporeal dimensions, choosing activities that emphasise intangibles such as spiritual and emotional health (e.g., meditation). Shyla’s body has reached irredeemable status, and so she has shifted her focus:

I have a flabby belly, butt and thighs, but I don’t really feel any amount of exercise that I am able to do can tone them up. So I may as well focus on my internal strength.

Earlier, she highlighted how she appeals to other personal attributes when she is feeling depressed about her undisciplined, “sloppy”, under-exercised body. “Where my figure lets me down, my posture and my attitude will pick up the slack.”

At one point, Andrea refers to exercise as “so tedious”, but confessed:

...and yet I am totally drawn into the whole idea that we need to do this thing called exercise. So yes I joined a gym for a bit, then gave that up. I now do a Bootcamp class...

Nevertheless, as she continues to struggle with socially constructed notions of exercise, she reaches the conclusion that her “health is mostly emotional and spiritual”, and “is what matters to me - not so much my fitness.” She believes in those moments that she is better off resting by the side of the imperative pathway, “content, relaxed, connected”, rather than rushing down it in pursuit of physical fitness.

In each of the above substitution schemes, individuals implicitly (or explicitly) confess a need for exercise whether they did it or not. Notably, despite frequent claims of exercising for health reasons, participants consistently make reference to its effects on their body shape and weight. It is also clear that many have absorbed ‘lifestyle’ discourses (Spoel et al., 2012), which encourage people to incorporate ‘exercise’ into their daily

routines. I see a trace of this doctrine in comments such as Janet's, as she describes what she pictures upon hearing the word *exercise*:

...a gym full of lycra-clad women doing aerobics does come to mind, though I know that that is not the only way of "getting exercise", and that one can benefit from "exercise" in a number of "normal" activities... We should not categorize exercise, but make it a way of life.

So the notion that we can simply slide exercise into our day—taking the stairs here, traversing a parking lot there—has exposed us to countless options for achieving our "10,000 steps a day" (Sarah). But the guilt-inducing expectation remains (perhaps even strengthened): that you *should* (and will) call in a substitute whenever you fall short of the 'real' ideal. I suggest, moreover, that proxy performances are rarely as effective as guilt-managing tactics as authentic acts. Alternative conceptualisations of health, however privileged by and legitimate to, an individual woman, still exist relative to the sanctified doctrine of 'exercise'; they demand justification.

8 MANAGING EXERCISE-RELATED GUILT: PART TWO

In this chapter I continue my analysis and synthesis of unmediated voices, and the conclusions about managing mechanisms of exercise-related guilt I have drawn from that process. Still working from the perspective of the aggregated individual, I now focus on the particular managing mechanism I have defined as *defend*, and introduce my conceptualisation of *resistance*. I also discuss the *operations* of exercise-related guilt as evidenced in the narratives of my participants.

Chapter contents

- Defend: another managing theme of exercise-related guilt
- Strains of resistance
- *Defend* mechanisms:
 - Analysis - I don't need to believe/feel that
 - Agency - I don't need/want to do that to my body
 - Self-differentiation - I don't need to be like them/that
 - Impediments - in-can't-ations
 - Humour - lol-ing about
 - Coping versus managing
- Operations of exercise-related guilt

Defend

This final guilt-management theme is, like all the others, infused with hints of confession.

But unlike the previous themes, *defend* comprises guilt-managing tactics that do not

necessarily accept (implicit or explicit) accusations, and certainly not without a fight. The launching of a defence in jurisprudence is about persuasion, not always about proving literal innocence. The defendant may or may not be or feel guilty, but nonetheless focuses on avoiding public confession that leads to indictment or sentencing (or even to promising and acting). Ideally, the aim of a good defence is to “avoid having to pay, without suffering the pangs of conscience, by denying that morality requires us to act otherwise than as we are acting” (Posner, 1999, p. 41). Failing exoneration, the defendant can negotiate—with ‘the truth’, and with herself and her audience (which are often one and the same)—to arrive at an agreed upon (preferably reduced) punishment. What I take up in this section, then, is the *process* of defending, which, in the first instance, I suggest involves resistance.

Strains of resistance

The concept of resistance in sociocultural disciplines is commonly understood in terms of “powerless agents...resisting the dominant groups” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 91), or “the wrongly oppressed...resisting domination from above” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 536). Additionally, this conceptualisation assumes both a measure of intent (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004) and some expectation or hope for societal change (however slight) as an outcome of resistance (Shaw, 2001). I take a more literal view, drawing on the physical process of resisting: pushing back or against (or holding one’s ground against an external force). I also don’t see resistance as something that must end in overt or outward change in order to be called resistance. In fact, Susan Shaw (2001, p. 186) posits that “while intentionality and outcome are also important aspects of resistance, they should not be seen as defining characteristics. Intentional acts to resist may be more or less successful, and

successful resistance may occur without prior intent.” I suggest, too, that resistance isn’t necessarily visible, nor are its effects for the individual apparent to others. How someone *feels*—regardless of intent or outcome—is my primary concern. For my purposes, resistance is the process of pushing, not the point at which pushing has accomplished its aims. Even in acquiescing—or complying silently, submitting—a person may be resisting emotionally.

The resistance I saw and heard gave the feeling of rebellion or aggrieved disobedience—in keeping with the sense of ‘doing wrong’. I characterise it as less of an activist’s stance (e.g., waving a placard, demanding one’s rights) and more of a response to being accidentally discovered in a compromising position (e.g., hand in the cookie jar, justifying one’s right to its contents). I may or may not *feel* guilty; I may or may not *believe* I am guilty. The fuel of guilt is available, but my main concern is to minimise potential ignitions. In order to accomplish this, as with other guilt-managing techniques, *defending* requires that I adjust the accelerants (knowledge, framing, ableness), and if necessary, keep any fires from expanding. Resistance plays a prominent role in these machinations within this particular theme.

I have distinguished three varieties of resistance within my participants’ narratives, representing differences in intensity and/or direction: deny, deflect, and define. They aren’t isolated from one another, nor do I see them as a strict continuum; rather they tend to share semantic and conceptual space. I will give a brief example of each resistance signature before turning to the tactics and mechanisms of defend:

Deny. By denial, I am referring to *overt* expressions of resistance, which may include both literal and implied denials of exercise-related guilt. For example, when I asked Donna

how she reacts to suggestions and advice about health and fitness, she was defiant in her positioning, refusing to accept any embedded accusations: "...if someone ever again said anything about my health or my weight, I'd tense up, and my guard would go up. Why do THEY want me to change how MY body looks?" In law, denial is a 'refusal to accept the validity of a claim'. So in refusing to accept any embedded (i.e., indirect, implied) accusations (i.e., of being overweight or unhealthy), Donna is refusing to accept the validity of those accusations. In other words, she says 'I am not guilty based on those attempts to make me feel or appear guilty.' Paula's denial is perhaps less adamant, but more explicitly about guilt: "I do not struggle with weight related exercise guilt."

Deflect. By deflect, I am referring to more *passive* forms of resistance. They involve shifting the attack (deflecting) off of oneself, or perhaps ignoring one's accuser; it may even manifest as silence. For example, Andrea discusses how she reacts when in conversation with other women who are talking about 'burning off calories', recounting that she "would just think what a shame", and sometimes doesn't "give any kind of response". She asserts her resistance against the normative messages in play by not responding "in the way you'd want (i.e., by saying what a good girl you are, or by dissuading you...)." Her silence is not assent.

Define. By define, I am referring to resistance directed at a *specific* target; it is definitive. For example, Paula can claim to be guilt-free relative to running: "I would not feel guilty for not running with these women because that is a form of exercise that I cannot participate in due to previous knee injuries." Her lack of guilt, however, does not apply to other forms of exercise, nor does it apply to other, non-injured aspects of her body (as other parts of her narrative indicate).

In the process of explaining why they did not—and should not—feel guilty about not exercising, participants show many subtle negotiations with health and fitness messages and with themselves. Their explanations are responses to explicitly and implicitly prescriptive messaging, and to the opinions and presence of others. As Arlie Hochschild (1990, p. 120) says, “we manage to feel and we manage to not feel”; defence, I argue, is primarily about *not* feeling (guilt). In the following sections, I delineate and provide examples for each of the defence mechanisms I identified in participants’ narratives. They are: analysis, agency, self-differentiation, impediments, and humour.

Analysis - I don’t need to believe/feel that

Through analysis (i.e., breaking apart) of an exercise-related message and/or discourse, participants present evidence for their innocence relative to that message/discourse and its implied accusations. Some of their resistance is often directed at “affective boundaries (i.e., ‘how one should feel here’)” (Beckstead, 2012, p. 716) set up within the message. That is, in addition to ‘here’s what you should do’, some messages also suggest ‘here’s how you should feel doing it’; a double scoop of imperative, with an extra side of guilt. In the process of analysing, participants tap into their doxastic and axiological depths (i.e., beliefs and values), and their resulting defence seems to be an attempt to distance themselves in some way from the message and its suggested guilt-edged motivation.

By adjusting the accelerants of knowledge and framing, they render the flame of guilt temporarily irrelevant. Furthermore, they sideline the third accelerant of ableness, no longer questioning whether they are able to exercise (i.e., accept the implied imperative in the message), but rather questioning the prescription for exercise altogether. The following

subsections highlight various outcomes of analyses, which I distinguished in participants' narratives: poor science, ulterior motives, inferior communication, and unethical care. Each of these outcomes represents a particular type of deficiency in exercise messaging that people called out as justification for their lack of or need for exercise-related guilt in response to that message.

Poor science

Paula, who reads “good research” about health and fitness, takes sides against the illusive disseminators of misinformation:

In my humble opinion I think I can filter what's good science and what's not. I probably react with anger and frustration if people are being sold a bill of goods.

Gina undermines a potential accuser in the form of a book promising a three-week “total body transformation”:

I would not order this book because it's a myth on the front cover; it takes more than 21 days to transform a body, it's a ridiculous claim.

Both of these women foreground their superior knowledge of how the body works, and reject the notion that their information sources might induce exercise-related guilt. Their particularist argument—a sort of definitive resistance—exploits one perceived flaw in the potential guilt trigger, and they are ‘let off’ on a technicality.

Ulterior motives

Whatever spark of guilt might have flickered in a person's consciousness upon first encountering exercise/fitness messaging is quickly doused in the flurry of distrust that follows. Anna and Andrea, for example, both cast aspersions on the financial motives behind an ad showing a group of smiling women participating in an exercise class; beneath are the words “You need us” (see Figure 5.7, p. 135):

...they want your dollars and not necessarily are they concerned about your health.
(Andrea)

I would think that they need these women's money more than the women need them. (Anna)

Paula, too, calls attention to the ulterior interests she sees lurking behind a full-page newspaper advertorial touting a highly recommended health product:

There is always a new fad to try to manipulate women into doing something about their weight.

And Concerned Citizen calls out hidden agendas within health- and fitness-related domains on a societal level. This comment was in response to a *New York Times* article⁷² regarding recent research (i.e., van der Ploeg, Chey, Korda, Banks, & Bauman, 2012) showing the negative health impact of excessive sitting:

The Nagging Industrial Complex survives - and gets paid big bucks - for CONSTANTLY ragging on people and trying to make them feel guilty. Why? guilty, shamed people will buy ANYTHING - standing desks. Treadmills (that end up as expensive coat stands). Diet plans. Diet books. Diet foods.

All of these cynical insights provide ample relief from potential guilt; there is no need to feel guilty about not bowing to the demands of the messages when the purveyors of those messages evidence suspect intentions. *Personae non gratae* dismiss *mea culpa*.

Inferior communication

This particular deficiency provides great scope for critical analyses of societal messaging. Participants found flaws in communication such as insufficient motivational quality of an advertisement, or unconvincing attempts by health/fitness to connect emotionally (e.g., “repetitive and boring”). For example, early on in our conversations, Shyla conceded that “there are people I want to be like. I want to be like the people who are slim and toned and

⁷² From the blog, *Well* (Reynolds, 2012)

healthy”. But when confronted with an advertisement for a gym featuring ‘slim, toned, and healthy’ women, her reflexive analysis in the moment ultimately concludes without an indictment:

I feel like I agree with them. I probably do need something like what they are providing. But the pictures don’t make me feel like joining the class. There’s not enough people shown and the ones there don’t look like they are having much fun.

So participants seem to find health/fitness communication strategies easy targets for analysis, the outcome of which delegitimizes the messages being presented, thus allowing the reader to dispense with acknowledging guilt (or feeling it).

Unethical care

Participants whose analytic musings led to accusations of unethical care spoke on behalf of other women, highlighting the injustices of guilt-inducing messaging. I interpret such a collective stance as one that includes the speaker, and thus one that reflects their own embodied resistance to the message. Andrea’s concern is with ‘women’, and their subjection to constant reminders of the idealised feminine form:

It is a sad state of affairs the way women are bombarded with messages about just their bodies, the need to be a particular size and shape, and all this emphasis on flat bellies.

But as I read her empathetic comment, I am reminded of her response to her own reflection/body in which she assures me that more than merely a glimpse, she would be “doing some kind of full on interrogation of my body/identity via the mirror.” I take these two chronologically separated assertions as parts of a larger narrative, and thus find evidence to suggest she includes herself in her defence of ‘women’ (first quotation).

Paula’s outrage is directed against an un-named ‘they’, and their guilt-edged messages of bodily perfection:

We are told we have to prepare our bodies to present them in public and that there is a certain standard we have to meet in order to be at the beach. (My emphases)

Using the collective ‘we’, she is more overt in her shared opposition, but nonetheless doesn’t bear the entire burden of guilt; rather it is diffused across the group. Similarly, Michelle analyses a women’s magazine feature, which provides suggestions for “figure fixers” (see Figure 8.1, p. 228) in terms of how it affects other women:

Since I believe this is appealing to or even preying on women's insecurities about themselves, there was some frustration and cynicism that was conjured up ... especially when I looked at the prices.

These affective advocates can also be viewed as empathetic, which creates a sort of nested version of an ethic of care: in caring for others’ emotional health, a person takes care of their own, but without overtly (publicly) putting themselves on trial.

Agency - I don’t need/want to do that to my body

I refer to this tactic as maintaining a sense of agency, but in doing so am keenly aware of the risk of over simplifying. I don’t intend to depoliticize it or suggest that there are not always “processes of power [that] appear to set down restrictions upon the variety of ways open to women to construct themselves and their worlds and their options for resistance” (K. Day, Johnson, Milnes, & Rickett, 2010, p. 239). Furthermore, this is not a commentary on whether or how women reproduce gender norms in spite of seeming to resist them. Rather, my focus is on the brief flares of resistance women express in reaction to the idea of corporeal compliance. In this type of defence against guilt, additionally, women seem to evidence a particular ethos of possessiveness about their own bodies: ‘I may not like what I have (and feel guilty about not fixing it), but it is mine, and any changes I allow will not be at the behest of *they*’. As Sarah negotiates with the imperatives embedded in the page of a

Figure 8.1: Covering up the evidence



15 FIGURE FIXERS

Want longer legs? Maybe a leaner midsection? Meet the wardrobe wonders that do the work for you

1. SLIM FULL CALVES with a chunky heel



Darius heel, \$399, Kathryn Wilson.

Many women complain about the size of their calves but few realise you can disguise their fullness and create shape by wearing the right style shoe. Sporting a thicker heel makes calves look less chunky as the leg-to-shoe transition is less obvious than if you're wearing a stiletto. A block heel that tapers at the bottom is the ultimate choice. It's not only comfortable to walk in but the subtle

2. HIDE A BIG TUMMY with a man-style blazer



The number one area that causes women body confidence issues is the tummy. The key to disguising a larger middle is to hide it with tailoring (not swamp it with tent-like clothing). The man-style blazer is a great choice; it's longer with a more structured volume, creating a streamlined look from shoulder to hip. Make sure sleeves are tapered and well-fitting to create balance.

Field blazer, \$437, Salasai.

3. CAMOUFLAGE A CURVACEOUS BACKSIDE with a long, slim top



Length is your friend here. Avoid any top where the hem finishes in the middle of your derriere, as it is the same thing as holding a measuring tape across your butt to show everyone how wide it is. Go for slim

magazine (Figure 8.1, above) guilt is momentarily suspended, and the guilt flame summarily doused as the verdict emerges: ‘No, I don’t feel guilty, *because*

The messages make me angry because they suggest my body is less than adequate. I don't like the language used 'figure fixers' 'big tummy' or 'curvaceous'. They seem very sex oriented to me - make your body beautiful to be attractive to others...Actually, I'm surprised about how emotive I feel - I've never been asked these kinds of questions before so didn't really know what I thought.

In response to the same image, Paula gives a critical sociological assessment (albeit somewhat emotionally arid), which aligns with much of the research findings on gender and media:

My initial reaction is that the physical shape of my body is the most important thing to be successful and I should use my clothes to hide or fix my physical faults (as perceived by the media or fashion experts). It portrays that I need to look like the thin model in the photo.

Paula's answer doesn't tell me whether this is her opinion, or whether she thinks this is the magazine authors' opinion, or whether she is agreeing with them. While she does associate herself (e.g., "I need to...") with the newly enlightened audience, she is less explicit about her feelings on the subject. So I asked her to expand on this in a subsequent conversation, and she explained that when she wrote it she had been "annoyed" with the messaging—frustrated and sceptical—and found herself thinking "how dare they tell me how I should look?" Even as someone whose exercise-related guilt attaches primarily to 'exercising instead of being responsible', Paula adopts strong defensive moves on behalf of her own body. Guilt may be implied by her accuser but she doesn't show any intention of pleading guilty, whatever other emotions may be in evidence.

Defences of agency are not only launched in direct response to messages per se; they can also be invoked in relation to other potential body-related guilt triggers, such as *people* and *opportunities* (to name just two). Andrea, for example, expressed agency in several different instances, refusing to accept membership into any socially prescribed exercise identity or "way of being". She rehearses her individualism (ironically what neoliberal

health/fitness promotion rhetoric (Tischner, 2013) aims for) this way:

I am not going to try to school myself up to behave a particular way in a particular moment. Of course we adapt through seeing what works and what doesn't for ourselves.

Later she adds:

I don't want to use my body to do work - I do enough work to earn money, to care for my family, to run a house - I don't want to work on my body.

Donna is more reactionary than proactive, but is equally emotive in her defence against the idea that she should 'exercise':

If someone ever again said anything about my health or my weight, I'd tense up, and my guard would go up. Why do THEY want me to change how MY body looks.

Judging by another comment she makes, however, she isn't convinced of her own innocence, but focuses rather on negotiating a 'lighter' sentence:

I always think I know what to do to lose weight, but then I just don't do it. I think that if I'd stick to a diet long enough, I could get the results I want. It's just a rollercoaster. Just trying to hang on!

Both Andrea and Donna have, in a sense, mobilised "alternative or counter discourses" (K. Day et al., 2010, p. 238), which act to ensure that sparks do not become flames. Andrea rejects the discourse of normalised discipline (although "seeing what works...for ourselves" suggests she accepts *some* form of recreational exertion), creating a pejorative out of *exercise-as-work*, thus enabling her to hold it contemptuously in contrast with 'real' work. Guilt is no longer relevant. Donna wrestles with the discourse of appearance norms, demonising exercise—and its preachers—as the solution to her saggy sins. But she claims territorial rights to her body, thus keeping the guilt-inducers at bay.

There is another way in which participants seem to express agency, but I interpret this particular defensive move as more of a secondary effect of the next managing tactic—self-

differentiation—rather than a tactic in itself. That is, by establishing how I am not like someone else (and thus do not share their guilt), I may underscore my own sense of agency; however, as I've shown, if a sense of agency is the focus of my defence, I don't automatically differentiate myself, nor is self-differentiation necessarily required. Agency can exist without self-differentiation, but self-differentiation tends to reinforce a sense of agency.

Self-differentiation - I don't need to be like them/that

Women who employ this popular category of defence against exercise-related guilt point to a perceived gap between themselves and an Other: a gap created by differences in anything from age to ideology, from health to history, from weight to worldview and from appearance to axiology. As an expansion on the 'because' in a 'No [I don't need to feel guilty], because' managing tactic, self-differentiation provides myriad options for proving innocence and/or avoiding indictment. Donna gives a fine example of this discriminating sequitur when she declares, "I don't feel guilty...I just know that I don't look like any of those people, and then I put it out of my mind."

Interestingly, the comparison that participants often outlined did not, at first glance, place them in preferred seating or flattering light (although it may). They did not necessarily choose the role amongst the available options that put them in an obviously empowered position within their narratives. Their self-characterisation did not always position them closer to feminine ideals or societal norms in comparison to the Other. But when defending against guilt in a public forum such as an interview, the salient point in exercise-related contexts seems to be both strongly situational and highly relational. That is,

how different from (or similar to) that particular person am I, in that particular scenario or image? In assessing this identity gap, I suggest that if they detect more similarities than differences, guilt is more difficult to dislodge (and comparison may then become more detailed). In the event that someone cited a self-other gap as a source/trigger for their guilt (i.e., ‘*Yes, but...*’), they quickly dispensed with the guilt by first drawing on disparate evidence, which diluted the accusations, thus allowing Self to emerge both innocent and intact.

Generally speaking, I place most of the variations of self-differentiation I interpreted in participants’ narratives under one of two broad umbrellas: *appearance* and *axiology*.

Women seemed to oscillate between framing others as unlike themselves and themselves as unlike others (i.e., contrasting vantage points) in either outward appearance, or (inward) beliefs/values/identity. These are, of course, not the only choices available, nor are they dichotomous. Some elements of comparison draw on both aspects of self and/or the other, as Anna implies in her reaction to a magazine spread featuring typical idealised feminine forms (Figure 8.2., p. 233). Her resistance to the embedded norms of Westernised society results in a clear win for the defence; there is no felt imperative for her to exercise, based on this particular insinuating image:

We cannot be all that beautiful [appearance], yet we are all beautiful in our own ways [axiology]. These kinds of images do not urge me on to do exercises; in fact they put me off.

In the following subsection, I delineate some of the variations I detected within the general categories of appearance and axiology, but without forcing rigid labels on any of them. In fact, I have opted to present all of my examples under one heading—*aesthetic identity* (i.e., loosely mirroring appearance-axiology)—that reflects the interwoven nature

of many participants' exercise-related realities. The defences presented here all work to dissuade the jury (i.e., themselves and others) of the need for indictment or sentencing. The flame of guilt flickers in and out of the picture, but the fuel (guilt) of not exercising is never given the oxygen or accelerants necessary for building an admissible fire.

Figure 8.2: Model citizens



Aesthetic identity

As I've mentioned, appearance-related characteristics are common points of comparison in this guilt-managing defence mechanism of self-differentiation: age, shape, weight, attractiveness, and clothing are some factors commonly called out as reasonable justification for resisting implicit accusations. But none of these concepts is just about physical appearance. I suggest anything relating to appearance is infused with issues of identity (Leeds Craig, 2010; Molnar & Kelly, 2012), which are firmly linked to axiology

(and taste) (Sayer, 2011; Shilling, 2003); all of which are performed across multiple life domains (Young, 2005).

Appearance-based reasons (e.g., weight, shape) for exercising diminish with age, according to exercise psychology literature (Amorose & Hollembeak, 2005); that is, even if exercising practices remain, the reasons for doing it change (e.g., for 'health'). I argued earlier (in *Compensate*, p. 212) that this correlation doesn't imply general apathy toward appearance, and based on my participants' input, women still invoke appearance as part of their age defense against not-exercising guilt. Rehearsing their acceptance of age-related body malfunctions or exercise identity issues is a way of managing guilt about not exercising 'as they should'. Age wasn't necessarily celebrated or even always accepted outright, but invoking it could provide some relief from the discomfort about one's fading looks and sagging body.

Like Donna (above), Andrea focuses on the aesthetic aspect of exercise when responding to a mural showing people engaged in various gym activities (Figure 8.3, p. 235), but also injects an attribution (i.e., "their zest"): "I don't think I share their zest for sculpting the body like this." Anna, by subtle contrast, highlights appearance only: "I do not equate her athletic shape to my round shape." In Shyla's reaction to the same image, she foregrounds the disjuncture between her identity and those of the athletic models, and refers only obliquely to bodies (e.g., "fit"):

I feel a little apologetic that I am not as fit as these people, but not too bad because I see them as completely different from me. These are 'the fit people'. That's who they are. I don't compare myself to them.

Although she claims to not "compare myself to them", she clearly has done exactly

Figure 8.3: Corporeal comparisons



that (at least once) in order to arrive at her conclusions. What I interpret her to be saying, then, is once she has established the complete mismatch based on a comparative analysis (i.e., self-differentiation), she is freed henceforth from the expectation to become one of these ‘fit people’, and thus from any guilt that might flare (e.g., “a little apologetic”) in relation to those expectations.

In response to an image of a store window displaying swim-suited mannequins, Paula calls attention to both age and appearance. She differentiates herself in appearance from those she perceives as the likely bikini-buyers, further qualifying her defence by identifying with a particular social stratum and the attire she deems appropriate for women like her/them:

Most of them [swimwear] are suited to women who I do not look like. There is nothing shown in the window that would be flattering to a “normal” middle aged woman.

Paula successfully dispenses with any implicit suggestion that her body requires work in order to fit into the potentially accusing beachwear. Or as Donna put it, “my bikini days are gone.” By dismissing the “women who I do not look like” as immaterial to her corporeal considerations, and essentially defining ‘normal middle aged’ as women who do look like her, Paula demonstrates the distinct lack of evidence requiring her to even take the stand, let alone approach a conviction or negotiate a sentence.

In another type of age-related defence, women present their self-differentiation in terms of ‘stage of life’. That is, just as the aging process imposes restrictions on their bodies, so too does aging diminish their exercise-related obligations. This is both a function of time’s passing and of socially accepted age-based norms. These ‘acceptance speeches’ draw on discourses of aging and child-bearing/rearing, in relation to their effects on both the ability and the expectation to exercise (and thus maintain a particular size/shape/weight). As Paula declares, after having a child 16 years ago, “at this point in my life I will never have that body” (referring to a slim model in an ad), and then, “at this stage of life weight gain is inevitable.” Her pre-emptive adjusting of the accelerants *ableness* and *perspective* depletes the potential for a guilt flame. In another retrospective comparison, while scrutinising Figure 8.2 (p. 233), Shyla harks back to her “used to” years and the body-related cogmotions she experienced then to differentiate herself from the glossy girl in the magazine (and thus from her younger self) who sparked the recollection:

I used to feel wistful when I saw a picture like this, because I didn’t have a body like that. But in the last few months my outlook seems to have changed. Maybe it has to do with accepting my body’s limitations, developing my intellectual interests...I don’t know. Now I look at this and think that some of the young

people I know would look great in this. The onset of menopause has made me feel old. Not in a bad way. But I no longer yearn to look young. (My emphases)

I sense the psychosomatic ebb and flow in her acceptance speech, as she emphasises the ways in which she has changed, and has now arrived at a time in life when relinquishing achieves what overt resistance may have done for her in the past: protect her from guilt induced by the ‘ought-onomy’ embedded in societal messaging—even seemingly inconsequential, and unrelated to exercise. If the yearning is in the past, so too is her obligation to respond to it with disciplinary exercises.

Andrea gives a similar response to, respectively, another bikini-clad model and the gym mural models mentioned previously:

Don't get me wrong it is not as if I am not drawn into wanting to be like this woman, a desire to look like that, but I think I now don't have any sense that I will be that woman, or any compulsion to try to, I am kind of more accepting now

I don't think any of them are over the age of 40...most of the advertising for this type of fitness is geared to the younger age demographic and I can personally accept that. (My emphases)

Thus, ironically through acceptance (of some discourses), women resist the guilt-inducing presence of and messaging for ‘other women’. Anna’s acceptance speech, by contrast, is delivered to her own imagined reflection in the mirror. She also compares herself to her former, thinner self, but brings out specific pieces of evidence from various life experiences (e.g., “getting old”; “birth of my kids”) as she works to convince the jury of her innocence. She includes a statement from the prosecution (e.g., “I have lost my 25.5” girly waist”)—a flame had been sparked by looking in the mirror—as she weaves together her defence using the guilt-managing techniques of confessing (e.g., “no matter how hard I exercise”) and self-differentiating (e.g., “not a girl”):

I am getting old. No matter how hard I exercise, my tummy is not getting small; I have lost my 25.5” girly waist after the birth of my kids. Oh well, who cares, I have a loving husband and adorable children. I should be proud of myself after all I do not have a sagging body and no wrinkles or stretch marks. I am beautiful. I am a woman and not a girl.

Her concluding arguments draw on discourses that would typically be considered conceptually (and pragmatically) distant from those of exercise-related rhetoric (e.g., “loving husband and adorable children”) but nonetheless ultimately serve to remove her from the witness stand⁷³.

Moving toward the axiological side of things, I notice participants frequently shift the focus of their defense from an Other (i.e., how I am different from them) to themselves (i.e., I am this way). These self-referential defenses don’t necessarily draw any comparison with others, but rather differentiate in the abstract from whatever the immediate scenario re/presents. For example, Donna’s denial of guilt about not running with co-workers, because “I don’t like to run” doesn’t include an analysis, or a comparison with others; rather she simply states a preference. Comments such as, “I’m not into...”, “It bores me”, “I don’t like...”, “I’m not interested in...”, and “I don’t care about...” seem to provide instant relief from any lurking implications of guilt about not exercising (or not exercising enough) that arise implicitly and explicitly in a given situation. Participants show a definitive resistance when employing this type of defence, leaving no room for negotiation or deliberation. Susan’s decision, for example, is unequivocal when she is faced with the opportunity to participate in a yoga class: “No I wouldn’t feel guilty. I am not crazy about

⁷³ I wonder, however, about her references to her lack of bodily flaws (e.g., no “sagging body and no wrinkles or stretch marks”) as reason for her dismissal; it could suggest that she is aware of the imminence of negative comparisons with herself and others, and rather than resist the discourses of weight/shape and appearance outright, she accepts a certain amount of responsibility but shows how she is managing to meet it so far.

Yoga and what it stands for, so I could not possibly feel guilty doing it.” So she is let off on this technicality of distaste, having convincingly differentiated herself from a yoga person, and yoga from her conceptualisation of ‘exercise’ and its imperatives.

Another way participants differentiate themselves in pursuit of defending against exercise-related guilt is by turning the accuser into the accused. That is, by framing exercising Others as “obsessed” (Anna) or “selfish” (Janet), and thus unreasonable, the obligations attached to such behaviours are rendered dubious (and not guilt-worthy). Donna casts aspersions on both the behaviour and the motivations of some of her acquaintances when she describes them as “the high-maintenance women ‘going to the gym’”, who she feels “are into themselves.” These women

... work out at the gym, dye their hair different tones, wear clothes which sometimes look like they sprayed them on, etc. We’re not usually on the same wavelength.

Her summary argument posits that “they should...do something active that will help others, rather than just focus on themselves.” They are not only different, but also defective. Her morally superior position on an alternate wavelength provides undeniable proof of her innocence.

Adjacent to these self-focused preferences I note how participants differentiate themselves from societal discourses of exercise/fitness by referring to their broader cultural and historical experiences. That is, by bringing evidence of an (unconscious) acculturated understanding of—and thus relationship to—exercise, they can show they are not ‘that sort of person’ who can easily pick up habits of exercise or become comfortable in exercise settings. Perhaps they have not so fully internalised these “rules of conduct” (Posner, 1999, p. 36) after all. Shyla emphasises the cultural influences that impact her historicised

construct of her present relationship with exercise:

There is no culture of exercise in my family...Exercise is not really something we grew up with...in the culture I come from, exercise is not something girls do.

So she finds momentary reprieve in her recollections, from the peremptory demands of exercise discourses and the associated guilt flame, which was apparent at other times during our conversations.

Impediments - in-can't-ations

The defence tactic of identifying 'impediments' differs from that of 'analyse' in that it is a construction of material reality, as opposed to the presentation of mores (what *is*, as I see it, versus what I believe); it differs from 'agency' in that it is a rehearsal of external forces, as opposed to the performance of personal resolve; it differs from 'self-differentiation' in that it is absolute, as opposed to relative (to actual and implied others). This mechanism is a particularly powerful one in its ability to snuff out existing and anticipated guilt flames. Participants cite and/or describe the presence of something—tangible or intangible—that prevents exercise, or more accurately renders it virtually impossible. It's often part of a 'Yes, but...' process, but also appears in 'No, because...' scenarios.

Many exercise, sport, and leisure studies refer to "barriers or constraints to participation" (Dixon, 2009; Henderson & Hickerson, 2007; Segar, Jayaratne, Hanlon, & Richardson, 2002) in physical activities, as well as to how people "negotiate leisure constraints" (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997) or "self-regulate multiple valued life goals concurrently" (Jung & Brawley, 2011). The list of 'constraints' given by Diane Samdahl and Nancy Jekubovich (1997), for example, which they interpreted from their interview data, comprises categories based on a classic model of leisure constraints (D. W. Crawford,

Jackson, & Godbey, 1991);⁷⁴ the themes have a familiar ring to me after reading across multiple disciplines: structural (e.g., money, health, work, climate), interpersonal (e.g., family responsibilities, lack of support), and intrapersonal (e.g., personality, self-esteem). Within this wide variety of social, biological, and environmental (Seefeldt et al., 2002) factors, it is rare to find any focus on emotions or feelings, especially on any specific emotion.⁷⁵ So I was intrigued to see guilt identified as one of four “perceived barriers to physical activity, exercise, or sport participation” (Dixon, 2009, p. 39) in a study of working mothers. According to the author, women opted out of exercising when they felt guilty about choosing such a ‘selfish’ activity instead of spending time with their children or partner/spouse. But, I argue, framing guilt as a barrier that should/can be eliminated to open the way for exercise, simply adds to extant exercise-related guilt. In fact, I believe that most sport/exercise/fitness advisors inadvertently pile on guilt by deeming barriers surmountable—and providing how-to steps to that end—thereby demanding an even stronger defence (e.g., more evidence of impossibility) on the part of the accused. What isn’t mentioned in studies focusing on barriers to exercise are the reciprocal and ongoing effects of choosing not to exercise in favour of more responsible acts: the guilt that ensues relative to this alternate transgression. Guilt, then, hasn’t be eluded altogether; the perpetrator has merely exchanged one type of guilt for another (i.e., undisciplined person

⁷⁴ I suggest that my participants conceptualise exercise in one sense as a type of leisure activity, in that it is held separate from ‘real’ work. I think it is interesting, however, that while participants may not think of it as ‘real’ work, they do nonetheless think of it as ‘work’ in the sense that nor does it necessarily sit comfortably in the warm embrace of “enjoyment, freedom of choice, relaxation...and the lack of evaluation” (Shaw, 1985) as per traditional definitions of leisure.

⁷⁵ Perhaps this isn’t so odd, given the assumption often underlying such research that, regardless of context or ethical implications, barriers are to be eliminated, constraints are to be negotiated away *to facilitate regular exercise*. As intangibles, emotions and feelings are difficult to characterise and even more difficult to frame as a Thing to be eradicated (especially for other people); thus, they don’t fit the criteria for a ‘barrier’, which connotes a physical structure and thus aligns better conceptually with tangibles (e.g., event, person, place).

rather than bad mother). Guilt, Marlene Dixon (2009) observed, was “nearly equal to the barrier of time” (p. 40). Time, of course, is a fixed entity (i.e., never more than 24 hours per day), while guilt is fluid and borderless.

While my participants point to many similar ‘barriers’ to exercise as those in other research findings, my interest in these barriers is how women construct them—through their particular adjustments of the accelerants/regulators (p. 151) *knowledge*, *ableness*, and *perspective*—as a defence against feeling guilty (or admitting guilt) about not exercising. That is, their negotiations are with culpability (i.e., their own guilt) and associated feelings, not with the barriers—or *impediments* in my framework—directly. By contrast, much of the research referenced above takes as given people’s (intended or actual) manipulation of and negotiation with their identified barriers (e.g., weather, family commitments, ill health), with little credence given to the emotion work (which, admittedly many people aren’t eager to discuss). So my participants bring certain impediments forward as fact/evidence of their innocence, thus temporarily negating the need for further suspicions or for sentencing. For example, calling on the impediment of an old bodily injury, Susan defends her guilt-free position relative to running co-workers:

No I wouldn’t feel guilty...I couldn’t run period because of my foot...I would wish that I could run like that, but I wouldn’t do it. (My emphasis)

The emotion work—monitoring fuel, managing flames, adjusting accelerants—continues (e.g., “I would wish...”), in spite of declarations of guiltlessness, but this one thing (i.e., her injured foot) in this particular situation removes any moral accusations and provides a haven from exercise-related guilt.

So this managing mechanism involves both the process of citing and/or describing an impediment, and the ongoing dependence on (use of) the perception that is created. Like

Susan, Paula also arrives exonerated at the scene of the crime, explaining that she

would not feel guilty for not running with these women because that is a form of exercise that I cannot participate in due to previous knee injuries. (My emphasis)

Her knee injury is an established impediment to any notion of running henceforth (but not other forms of exercise), and to any guilt about not running. I suggest, moreover, that a guilt flame diminishes as belief in the immutability of the impediment strengthens. In other words, to what extent do I perceive that my decision (to exercise or not) is within my control? Paula, Susan, and Shyla (who “can’t jog without feeling like my bones are shattering”) could all frame their injuries in terms of age, too, but that might invoke other women their age who were *not* slowed down by injuries, thus potentially putting their own self-assessment in a more condemnable light.

Life/body disruptions such as pregnancy are also tricky impediments to cite, as women can easily recall someone they know and/or saw who has also given birth but seems to have ‘gotten their body back’, thus rendering their own impediment less convincing, and opening the way for guilt feelings. However, as an immutable force outside their control, the injury-as-impediment settles in for the long-term, smothering any guilt flames along the way (i.e., whenever running is insinuated).

People (including my participants) also cite work, family, and other commitments as unavoidable givens, and thus justifiable impediments to exercise. I think it is difficult to tease out any one ‘barrier’ from amongst the complex interactions of these multiple life domains, however. ‘Work’ and ‘family’ each involve issues of time and responsibility, not to mention physical energy. For example, Susan calls on all these elements in her descriptive evidence for why she cannot exercise at the moment

...due to working a lot...my work is very time consuming (and somewhat stressful) so it doesn't leave much extra time. [And later] I work really hard and am exhausted in the evening.

Just as Susan sums up the many constraints relating to her work as "it", Sarah reifies "my lifestyle", especially work-related travel, as an external force that "inevitably disrupts" her exercise routines. They don't feel there is anything to be done to change this imposed responsibility; it is immediate in its demands, and represents an important aspect of their overall life. Thus, they don't feel guilty about not exercising in those moments when work is part of the conversation.

Family, too, as a commonly reported barrier to exercise, presents tremendous complexity for women: children and spouses/partners constitute quite different cogmotional impediments for women, but must be negotiated in shared space and time. For example, when faced with the option of joining a free weekly yoga class, which starts at 6:15 p.m., Michelle is unequivocal about not "being away from my family during a significant part of our day, which includes conversations and bedtimes." There really is no guilt-inducing decision for her here about not exercising. Whether she emphasises her set schedule, her children's need for routine, or her belief in the importance of relationships (which she characterises elsewhere as "more important than a session on the treadmill"), the result is a non-negotiable impediment in this situation. Shyla, too, escapes guilt about her exercise failure, but nonetheless experiences poignant emotion work as she builds her defence based on her husband-as-impediment:

When my kids were babies there were times when my husband would tell me to skip an exercise class, or find a way of exercising that fit into their nap times...This didn't make me feel guilty. It made me feel resentful.

Her spouse's imposed restrictions suspend her culpability in those instances in which

she skipped an exercise class, or chose not to exercise in honour of nap time. “The fact that I have always had to give [exercise classes] up because my family needed me”, provides incontrovertible proof of innocence, in addition to a moral high ground, that leaves no room for guilt.

While I have included familiar suspects of injury, work, and family (i.e., physiological, interpersonal, and structural elements), I also want to raise awareness of the moral (e.g., indulgent-to-important) and temporal (e.g., immediate-to-indefinite) dimensions present in the rehearsal of these material realities, external forces, and absolute impediments. They are part of—but not per se—the managing process.

Participants raise the spectre of *indulgent* versus *important* when contrasting exercising for appearance and exercising for health or pleasure, respectively. Posing health as a reason for exercising diminishes guilt feelings in this age of individual responsibility and ‘ought’-onomy. In this present defence, however, women’s definition of *important* shifts, taking on different meanings when contrasted with taking care of children or similar acts of ethical care (e.g., Michelle and the yoga class). They also draw on notions of *now* and *later* to determine the relative importance of exercise in a given situation (e.g., the demands of a work schedule). Compared with immediate ethical concerns, exercise recedes to a hazy background of indefinite maybes. Exercise is, after all, an ever-present imperative that has ‘no finish line’ (to repurpose an old Nike slogan), and thus no particular urgency relative to other-oriented responsibilities and deadlines.

So, in framing choices implicitly as binary, women create immovable impediments, which seem to diminish—if not eliminate—the need for feeling guilty about not exercising (that time). As Paula explains, she doesn’t typically feel guilty “if something came up” (i.e.,

immediate/important) and she couldn't get to her workout, but she would feel quite guilty (i.e., no defence against exercise imperatives) if she

just didn't feel like going...that's just laziness, apathy. It's my problem, there's no one else to blame. I had to make the decision - I chose, and can't point the finger at anyone else.⁷⁶

Previously, Paula's awareness of having an opportunity (i.e., no impediment) to exercise sparks her guilt, and her subsequent decision to not exercise (i.e., self-attributed laziness) ignites a guilt flame. Here I am contrasting that scenario with the alternate one she outlines, in which she feels exonerated due to her lack of choice in the situation. She calls the "something came up" to her defense as an impediment beyond her control; guilt is an impossibility.

Humour - lol-ing about

In this final defence mechanism—humour, or more specifically self-depreciating humour—I see elements of confession, self-criticism, resistance, and agency. Looking at it another way, I detect humour as a presence within many of the other guilt-managing processes. As a sort of rhetorical device, humour could be thought of as an act of persuasion, which fits nicely with my conceptualisation of a defence: I may or may not feel guilty about my exercise habits/persona, but humour deflects or 'softens' the accusations and, with the aid of implicit self-disclosure found in self-effacing comments, works on the sympathies of the jury. I suggest it is a way for participants to manage their negative emotions—including guilt—about their failure to exercise or exercise regularly; or, relatedly, about their body's

⁷⁶ By way of underscoring the interrelated nature of these guilt machinations, recall that I also used this quote from Paula to illustrate the trigger/spark of Opportunities (p.118) in Chapter 5.

expansion tendencies and/or deviations from an idealised norm (e.g., Michelle’s comment + emoticon, “the women all look a lot more glamorous than I do. :o”). It often comes across as a ‘*Yes, but so what*’ response to exercise-related guilt.

More generally, humour has been characterised in the literature as a type of multi-functional resistance (Holmes, 2000)—with positive or negative inflections—or a coping mechanism (Gouin, 2004). Janet Holmes (2000), in her study of workplace humour, attributes “the power of humour” (p. 180) to its flexibility across a range of social functions, including “challenging power and boundaries, expressing dissent and proposing change” (Gouin, 2004, p. 35). Her metaphor of “an incisive weapon in the armoury of the oppressed” (Holmes, 2000, p. 180) resonates with my observations of exercise-related humour, with one qualification: the oppressed often aim their weapon at their own guilt.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assign a ‘why’ to the use of humour about exercise, particularly in the context of self-criticism. I suggest that, for my participants, joking about not doing something they have already deemed important to do (or about doing something they previously condemned) is both a form of confession and a form of resistance. More precisely, I see mostly self-deprecating humour aimed at what they deem the *results* of not having done the right thing, or of having done the wrong thing (e.g., eating too much, moving too little). The results, of course, are confessed by their bodies before they chime in with verbal commentary, once again underscoring the link between appearance and exercise. For example:

Lord, Please let a slim, slender or skinny person sit next to me on the bus. Both of our hips ain’t gonna work. (Judith on Facebook)

Her implicit confession of taking up more than her share of a designated space due to her transgressive hips, combined with self-differentiating herself from ‘slim, slender or

skinny’ others, is couched in self-deprecating humour. What does this performance do for her? Is there evidence of a guilt flame? As I suggested above, there is a sense in which she is appealing to the sympathies of the jury (i.e., herself and her audience) by positioning herself as helpless, symbolically powerless, and dependent on a divine being. We laugh, take pity on her, pray with her for a compatible bus companion, as we imagine our own hips navigating public spaces, and feel a surge of empathy (or some perhaps feel smugness at her smugness). She has acknowledged a guilt flame, sparked by her embodied predicament, and is now watching its wavering light. There are no obvious signs that she is adjusting any exercise-related accelerants (which are merely adjacent concepts in this moment), and yet there is evidence of a defence.

In the following Facebook thread, Woman 1 sparks affinitive responses in four other women with implicitly self-depreciating remarks about her failure to lose weight, despite her exercise efforts:

Woman 1: Muscle weighs more than fat. Muscle weighs more than fat. (Either that or this f***ing scale is BROKEN!)

Woman 2: I maintain that when I gave birth, the surgeon left an entire ultrasound machine inside which has now merged with my intestines. Around the same latitude as my hips.

Woman 1: Exercise your way to weight gain. Lol!

Woman 3: Lol!

Woman 4: I can relate to that!!!! been exercising daily since July 2011 to shed off excess kilos. managed to get rid of 6 kg but the remaining 2 simply dont want to go though i seem to lose in millimetres! so I guess muscle MUST weigh more than FAT ;-)

Woman 5: well that is true...you put on muscle as a result of exercise and since Muscle weighs more than fat... ;-)

Even the popular wisdom of muscle-to-fat ratios doesn’t offer comfort to her and her commiserators, in what I interpret as using one discourse to resist another (i.e., fitness

versus slimness). This is perhaps an example of “the tactical usage of discourses to negotiate new and different subject positions”, as posited by Kerry McGannon and John Spence (2012, p. 47). Implicitly or explicitly, each of these women confesses their flaws and failures to one another, thereby sharing their culpability vicariously. By hyperbole, too, I suggest they tap into the “subversive potential” (Downe, 1999, p. 68) of humour by shoving forward the absurdities of their plight as evaluated through the eyes of dominant discourses (which they’ve failed to live up to), and in doing so, expose those ideologies to ridicule.

In the case of my collaborators, since they were only speaking to me, I also see this defence as a sort of gallows humour, a way of sharing their discomfort with me (usually body related), perhaps with an expectation of mutual self-disclosure and empathy. Like the Facebook women, my collaborators put emoticons to work in their written narratives, conveying a range of emotions. For example, Susan’s ‘smile’ at the end of her comment, “I don’t need to delve into my inner being. I’m good, mostly. :-)” adds a wink-and-nod to her ‘mostly’, suggesting she and I are sharing inside knowledge about the non-mostly aspects of her.

Janet is forthright in subsequent conversations about her compulsion to “make fun of” herself when she ventures onto the golf course, drawing a link between her self-deprecation and feeling “like a complete failure.” I find the parallels with ‘exercise’ useful: exercise for many women is as much a performance as a round of golf; it is often a public presentation of the self, complete with an imagined social gaze; there is an expectation of specialized clothing and/or equipment, which can induce anxiety about its ‘proper’ use; and when exercising, our bodies constantly remind us of our physical attributes and abilities (and

failings). Janet's reference to her sense of vulnerability while under public scrutiny is a powerful hint at what Elspeth Probyn (2005, p. xvi) calls "the shame of being out-of-place":

I feel very conspicuous because I'm thinking I don't belong there because I'm so horrible at the game and anybody who might happen to see me take a swing will think, "omg why is she out here?!"

So, too, when compelled to move or perform physical activities that are unfamiliar, or even when just moving more energetically than usual, an exercising person may feel out-of-place in their own body, or like 'a fish out of water' relative to others around them. Janet attempts to draw generalisations from her golfing fiascos, concluding that her self-deprecating defence (i.e., "justifying") is an effort to negotiate the judgment of Other People by confessing her "suckiness" ahead of any ridicule:

So probably whatever I don't do well at, I feel like I need to in some way Let Other People Know why I'm not doing well at it, thus justifying my suckiness at it. I suppose I feel ashamed that I'm not better at it than I am.

A final thought about humour—especially self-deprecating humour—that I want to note: out of my analysis of unmediated voices, it seemed exercise-related self-deprecating humour was more prevalent in public forums than it was in private conversation (both spoken and written). Given that a self-critical lens is so conscious of the gaze of others, it might be useful to consider this public/private distinction in terms of guilt (and shame) management. Notwithstanding notions of self-presentation and impression-management—both have credence here, I think—if I joke about my misdemeanors, as opposed to just declaring my misdemeanors or remaining silent, perhaps I'm hoping to convince others that I'm not *that* guilty - just a little guilty, and hopefully they'll forgive me. By contrast, in private conversation, in a safe place, I can afford (socially) to confess without fear of public

feedback, and possibly ridicule: 'I am a transgressor, and committed this crime, but I know you'll forgive me' (and anyway, I might know a few incriminating facts about you).

In trying to sum up my thoughts about self-depreciating humour used as a guilt-managing defence, I find the '*Yes, but so what*' ethos still resonates. That is, confessions abound (i.e., 'yes'), evidence of innocence is brought forward (i.e., 'but'), and attempts to gain the jury's sympathy (i.e., 'so what') takes precedence as a defence tactic.

'Coping' versus managing

Foucault (1988) defines the "technologies of the self" as practices

which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 18)

Citing the failure of women's sport as technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988), to qualify as practices of freedom (e.g., Chapman, 1997, Wesely, 2001), Pirkko Markula (2003, p. 101) posits "an important difference between merely coping with the dominant discourses and actually transforming them." Athletes in the studies mentioned 'merely coped' by dieting (G. E. Chapman, 1997), or by engaging in extreme body sculpting (Wesely, 2001) to meet the demands of competition. These practices do little to undermine normative femininity (and gender) discourses, despite their superficial alignment with counter images of powerful females. In another study, this one of female aerobicizers, Markula (1995) also finds that "although critical of the ideal", these women "do not work to change the healthy looking body, but rather continue to adopt practices to cope with it. Neither do they suggest ways of changing exercise practices" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 91). Incidentally, she connects "the ideal thin and toned body" (2006, p. 91) with Foucault's (1980) notion of

“the healthy bodies” (p. 56), through and on which power works. ‘Coping’ in these contexts took the form of accepting, “albeit grudgingly, the bodily discipline required” (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 89) for transformation; not challenging the body ideal itself; reframing “the disciplinary aspects of exercises...as positive, enjoyable, and helpful” (p. 90); “refusing to participate in exercises that made them uncomfortable” (p. 90); criticizing media portrayals of exercisers as “unreal and even irritating” (p. 90); expressing annoyance at “having to continually read how to reshape their bodies” (p. 90); and questioning the efficacy of particular exercises. But ‘coping’, as Markula and others have implied, doesn’t alter the standard on which the ideal is based, nor does it adequately expose normative assumptions. Therefore, Markula argues, we need “to be able to think differently”, which then “creates an opportunity to question the limitations of one’s freedom instead of merely coping with one’s situation” (Markula, 2003, p. 101).

I don’t believe questioning limitations and coping with situations are mutually exclusive choices; they can and do co-exist. Furthermore, I think there is a danger in characterizing ‘coping’ as an inferior response to oppression and/or imperatives, as it can add to a person’s burden of guilt, especially if they are ‘just hanging on’ (e.g., Donna). It’s like saying ‘you’re managing, but you could do better’, which is exactly what most women feel like all the time. ‘Merely coping’, then, can be construed as somewhat derogatory, and perhaps emotionally detrimental. Given that critical change isn’t necessarily sudden, coping might be an essential *phase in a process* of change. As Foucault (1985) has famously asserted, sometimes “the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (p. 8; my emphasis). So what appears to others to be ‘coping’ may in fact

constitute—or at least include—a period of realizing Foucault’s first “if”, a *transition* in perception, or a *moment* of reflection, which can in turn spur curiosity, additional insights, and further reflection.

Based on my participants’ narratives, then, I suggest that *coping* can be more usefully conceptualised as *managing* because managing connotes awareness, acknowledgement, and active resistance of disciplinary discourses and imperatives without, necessarily, idealized expectations of ‘improvement’ (personally or societally). Furthermore, I think emotions—particularly those infused with guilt and shame—are significant actors in “coping with disciplinary practices” (Markula, 2003, p. 89) and negotiating with fitness, exercise, and health discourses. In other words, what might be going on in moments of “not challenging”, “reframing”, “refusing”, “criticizing”, “questioning”, and “annoyance”? (See Markula & Pringle discussion on p. 251) I believe that whatever one’s perception is (i.e., interactions of sparks, fuel, and accelerants) of a particular disciplinary force will manifest in feelings and emotions; ‘coping’ is a reaction to those feelings and emotions *about* the disciplinary force (which they will react to differently across time) and not a straightforward, dispassionate negotiation *with* the force/practice/discourse itself.

For example, a woman sees a thin model in an advertisement; she feels guilty for failing to properly discipline herself to the same extent; she thinks, ‘I wish I looked like that’; she resents that she doesn’t look like that; she imagines how she could change what she does in order to look like that; she implements the prescribed disciplinary practices; she feels inadequate when she ‘fails’ to achieve the expected—and often promised—results; she feels more certain she needs to improve, since she’s now a ‘weak’ person as well insufficiently thin. And the cogmotional cycle continues. In the next section, I expand on

this idea of continuing cycles of guilt by addressing my final research question: *how does exercise-related guilt operate within women's lives?*

Operations of exercise-related guilt

Having outlined sources, manifestations, and the management of exercise-related guilt, I now briefly focus on the interrelated and ongoing nature of these aspects—what I have referred to as *operations*. I have touched occasionally throughout this thesis on the complex ways in which this ‘system dynamic’ implicates many life domains, and here I give a final, extended, illustration for clarity and emphasis.

But first, picture the operations of exercise-related guilt as ongoing oscillations winding throughout a person's life. There are longer and shorter fluctuations, made up of series of still shorter fluctuations (i.e., cycles of guilt sparks, accelerants, fuel, and managing mechanisms). The shortest oscillations represent those mini conflicts (e.g., guilt flames) that proliferate throughout any given day, popping up to impose questions, conflicts, and decisions. Over the course of hours, days, weeks, or months (I'm not suggesting there is an actual temporal cut-off) an accumulation of short-wave guilt events form a slightly longer swell that comprises a larger story; and across a lifetime, there are many, often simultaneous, long waves—storylines or scripts of guilt-related events—forming an undercurrent of physical and emotional memories. As Shyla summarises for herself: “I think this history has a cumulative effect and exacerbates the feeling of guilt when I hear about exercise.”

In the following storyline, I draw on aggregated detail from my participants' narratives to illustrate the operations of exercise-related guilt in one woman's life. That woman is

Cheryl. She is 45 years old, married with three young children, and the protagonist of my vignette (see Appendix A, question #18) who was ‘counseled’ vicariously by my collaborators in her moment of conflict [guilt trigger]: should she run on the treadmill as planned or tend to a suddenly recalled promise made to her mother earlier to deliver her mother’s flu medication? Almost without exception, my collaborators agreed with Gina in advising Cheryl to “pick up the prescription, your mum needs the medicine and the opportunity to exercise is always there, you could do it later.” So that’s what Cheryl was doing when we arrived on the scene...

She gave the treadmill a miss [behaviour: not exercising] in favour of keeping her promise to her mother to pick up and deliver her flu medication [spark: conflict]. Guilt caught flame and started to burn strongly because she knows that regular exercise is required to be healthy [accelerant: knowledge] and because her jeans were feeling tight and she views exercise as a means of keeping slim [accelerant: perspective]. Cheryl swore she would run on the treadmill the next morning before work [managing: promise]; in fact, she mentally planned on [managing: promise: schedule] 25 minutes at 6:30 a.m. This seemed to help her feel less guilty and she reminded herself that the disruption in her exercise plans really wasn’t her fault [managing: defend: impediment]. She delivered her mother’s medicine and stayed for just a brief visit but it was long to be sweetly asked if she’d put on a little weight [spark: cogmotion]. Her jeans suddenly shrank another size, and she mentally reaffirmed—vowed actually—to exercise tomorrow morning first thing no matter what. Out loud, she found herself rehearsing [managing: defend: trying] to her mother⁷⁷ her many

⁷⁷ One person’s managing mechanism becomes another person’s guilt trigger as her mother is reminded of her own need to get back to regular water aerobics once her flu symptoms (currently an impediment) have gone...

efforts to fit exercise in and to eat right, despite the many disruptions [managing: defend: impediments] caused by her kids' school projects and...well, her kids. Her equilibrium was mostly restored as she headed home. And she felt Organised [managing: promise: plan]. The next morning came impossibly quickly and debilitating fatigue made hitting the snooze button [behaviour: weak behaviour] the only conceivable option. Eventually staggering from bed Cheryl glanced out her window just in time to see her neighbour (also a mother of three) returning from her run [spark: people]. In dismay she realized that she had missed her treadmill session [behaviour: not exercising; spark: opportunity] and would now barely have time for the morning scramble. She couldn't believe it. Now racked with guilt she grabbed a low-fat yogurt in place of her favourite muffin [managing: act: substitute], and made a mental note to just eat a small salad for lunch [managing: act: substitute]. She casually avoided her reflection in the mirror [managing: act: avoid] as she got dressed, reaching for her 'fat skirt' [managing: act: compensate], and renewed her vow to definitely, absolutely run [managing: promise] on that treadmill [spark: cogmation]...

In this extension of the Cheryl vignette, I have sought to illustrate exercise-related guilt in operation - a simplified version of a complex phenomenon. Beginning with a spark that sets off a flame of guilt, Cheryl manages her guilt through promising, but fails to meet her promise, so feels the guilt flare again, which she manages with more promising, and fails another time, etc... Her string of broken promises threatens to swell into a longer oscillation of guilt, creating both an immediate burden and a future threat to her sense of ableness (i.e., the 'weak behaviour' has become established fuel).

Concluding thoughts

Guilt often plays a negative role in the oppressive discourses out of which women construct meaning about gender and exercise, and guilt is frequently active in the structural constraints in their lives, but my participants do not appear to be powerless ‘victims’ when managing their exercise-related guilt. Their techniques of confessing, promising, acting, and defending work to provide (temporally variable) relief from guilt feelings, and to facilitate a sense of control amidst personal and societal contradictions in the complexity of their daily lives. Yet, “because some discourses are more powerful than others” (Cox & Thompson, 2000, p. 5), and because cogmation is unruly and unsettling, these managing efforts—often in the form of emotion work—are necessarily wide-ranging and multifaceted. Societal discourses, guilt triggers and accelerants, guilt-managing efforts, physiological realities, and interpersonal relationships all interact, and comprise the operations of exercise-related guilt. As I have shown, exercise (and thus the related guilt) does not exist in isolation from all the other societal obligations women face. The concept of a ‘system dynamic’ in which exercise-related guilt operates adds another dimension to the metaphoric imperative pathway, and fleshes out the complex web of interactions and decisions women negotiate daily.

Finally, I see traces of the aforementioned ‘coping’ mechanisms in my guilt-management framework. But rather than evaluating these resistant practices in terms of how far short they fall of ultimately transforming dominant discourses, I have looked for more (linguistic and cogmotional) clues in those points of resistance and struggle. I trust my foregoing framework provides some insights into such processes.

9 END POINTS

In this final chapter, I bring together insights I've accumulated over the course of this thesis, and provide a summarised view of my contributions. As part of this summary, I briefly recap the questions that guided my inquiry, review the themes relating to the sources and management of exercise-related guilt, and highlight interpretations of particular significance. I also outline ideas for future research directions.

Chapter contents

- Questions
- Pointing
- Emotional outcomes
- High points
- Pointers
- Other pathways
 - Coda

Questions

In this thesis I have explored the concepts of exercise, guilt, and in particular, exercise-related guilt as experienced by mid-age women. My inquiry has been guided throughout by four main research questions; they were:

1) *What are the sources of women's exercise-related guilt? (and how do they articulate those sources?)* In other words, what do women say are the sources of their guilt?

Can they unpack/critique that general feeling of obligation or expectation; and if so, how?

2) *How does exercise-related guilt manifest in women's lives?* That is, aside from the term 'guilty' that shows up in conversation, what does this guilt look like? Are there identifiable clues or indicators of it?

3) *How do women manage their exercise-related guilt?* This question sought insights into the meanings women assign to exercise-related guilt (if any), and also aimed to shed light on any forms of resistance they might use, and on the affective/emotional toll of exercise-related guilt (e.g., what are the "affective investments" (Fullagar, 2009, p. 392)?)

4) *How does exercise-related guilt operate within women's lives?* This question reflected the impact they feel it has on their relationships, behaviour, and health, thus it highlighted the close connection between emotional and physical well-being.

Throughout my inquiry, I have used a holistic approach, arguing that exercise is just one of many societal expectations imposed on women; therefore exercise-related guilt is better understood by looking at both individual and societal contexts. The foregoing questions address the individual. At the societal level I have sought to "further deconstruct and understand fitness and morality narratives surrounding women's bodies" (McGannon et al., 2010, p. 101), particularly their implied moral imperatives. I have shown how women draw on these narratives and discourses to create an internalized baseline by which they judge themselves and people around them. Taking the concept of the 'imperative pathway', explicated by Jennifer Hargreaves and Patricia Vertinsky (2007a), my concern has been to raise awareness of the potentially emotionally damaging effects of discourses that impose unrealistic views of, and implicit expectations on, the female self.

Pointing

In the first two chapters I laid out groundwork for thinking about guilt, basing my construction on definitions and descriptions found in a variety of literatures. I emphasised the complexity of what is (un)known about guilt and of its embodied nature to suggest that when someone says they ‘feel guilty’, I cannot assume an inert and universally pre-defined experience. My neologism, *cogmotion*, helped me understand and explain guilt as a personal and fluid phenomenon, combining the cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects of guilt. Applying this concept throughout as I observed and analysed exercise-related guilt, and asked people about their experiences of it, I was able to appreciate and account for the apparent contradictions and fluctuations they conveyed and reported. Notwithstanding my reluctance to label guilt as just ‘an emotion’, I am in agreement with Sara Ahmed (2004), that emotions *do things*. The women I interacted with evidenced a powerful response to *guilt*, however they described it, and in whatever situation they experienced it. Whether anticipating feeling guilty, remembering feeling guilty, feeling ‘guilted’ presently, or discussing guilt in the abstract, participants were clearly moved by this unseen—and often ineffable—force. To re-quote Shyla: “If only it could be as simple as ‘guilt feels like a tummy ache’.”

In Chapter 3 I used the concept of the imperative pathway (fitness = goodness = success) to portray the social milieu in which women in Western(ised) societies have come to understand *exercise*. I showed how the moral imperatives embedded in fitness and health discourses carry a guilt formula, which imposes norms and expectations on women; this in turn affects their perceptions of their own bodies, and influences their decisions and experiences relating to exercise. I also explained the guilt potential of *interacting*

expectations embedded in socially constructed notions of fitness, health, and femininity. This background created a social context in which to situate my participants and, importantly, their exercise experiences and exercise-related guilt (if any). Notably, I positioned exercise as just one imperative within the multiplicity of life domains women navigate.

In Chapter 4 I introduced my participants and the collaborative process through which I engaged with them. I also gave a sketch of the mediated voices I listened to, to provide a sense of the breadth and depth of my discursive reconnoitring, and thus some background for my understanding of societal discourses. I also described the theoretical lens I've 'peered' through in my interactions with mediated and unmediated voices, invoking my conflagrative analogy for a holistic view of exercise-related guilt, and my judiciary analogy for the social aspects of exercise-related guilt. Both of these analogies guided my developing theoretical understanding throughout the remaining chapters, as I listened to a multiplicity of women's voices in pursuit of a rich holistic picture of exercise-related guilt in their lives.

In Chapters 5–8, I described my analysis and synthesis in the process of discussing particular embodied experiences of guilt shared by women in this study, and those I analysed in print and online media. In Chapters 5 and 6, I addressed my research question about the *sources* of exercise-related guilt, explaining my findings using a model comprising triggers as sparks, behaviours as fuel, and regulators as accelerants. In combination with judiciary concepts, this evocative analogy was especially useful in its ability to convey the embodied nature of guilt.

I continued my analysis based on my analogies of fire and law in Chapters 7 and 8,

where I addressed my research question regarding the *management* of exercise-related guilt. My findings from these chapters took the form of managing mechanisms, which I characterised as a loose continuum from confessing, to promising, to acting, and then defending; each category comprised multiple aspects, all of which included some variation of *confession*. Underscoring the nonlinear nature of managing mechanisms, I discussed the range of responses from acquiescence to varying intensities of resistance. I concluded Chapter 8 with a discussion of the *operations* of exercise-related guilt, highlighting the ‘system dynamic’ of reciprocating and interweaving cogmotional and social elements in a story exemplifying one woman’s ‘day-in-the-life’.

In the next section I highlight my key findings, drawing from an aggregated view of all my chapters. In so doing, I also offer a brief example of a ‘theoretical possibility’ or ‘possibilities’ for each observation.

Emotional outcomes

- 1) The metaphor of a flame to illustrate the complexity of guilt feelings is a useful contribution to our understanding of exercise-related guilt. Using the notions of sparks, fuel, accelerants, and retardants, flame conveyed the fluctuating nature of guilt. References to height, temperature, and intensity of flames accommodated guilt’s blend of the psychological, physiological, and sociocultural.

Theoretical possibility: the idea of a flame provides a linguistic and conceptual means of conveying an otherwise ephemeral, invisible, and yet tacitly and somatically significant phenomenon. For examples of potentialities in the fields of philosophy, communication, and education, respectively, see Averill (2012), Cowie & Cornelius

(2003), and Immordino-Yang (2011).

- 2) The diversity of responses about exercise-related guilt suggests an ambiguity of meanings; meanings fluctuate for the individual across time and situations—they are personal and fluid, and thus defy measuring (Ahmed, 2012).

Theoretical possibilities: the diversity of responses supports the need to develop concepts that capture “the ambiguity of affective and emotive life” (Anderson, 2009, p. 78), that could stimulate a deepening of reductionist accounts of affect and emotion relative to exercise (e.g., Ekkekakis, 2009), and of guilt measures generally (e.g., Tangney et al., 2009).

- 3) Discourses of health and fitness that hold the individual solely responsible for their own wellbeing—gained through, among other things, exercise—play a significant role in inducing and perpetuating guilt that causes ongoing emotional discomfort. The impact of a ‘failed’ attempt to achieve a promised health outcome does not start or end with that attempt; rather the emotional memory endures, and adds to the memory of previous and subsequent ‘failures.’

Theoretical possibilities: failure to achieve health outcomes within a discourse of individual responsibility underscores the importance of guilt in the production of an ‘exercise identity’ (Whaley & Ebbeck, 2002)(or lack thereof); these insights can inform theorizing about “ways to transgress, not to affirm, the limitations of neo-liberalism” (Markula, 2014, p. 151), particularly theories about the self and subjectivity.

- 4) The decision to exercise (or not) involves complex negotiations with oneself and others, in which guilt is active and fungible: competing requirements of time, energy, resources, other responsibilities, and emotions imposed choices, which women deemed ‘right or wrong’, ‘good or bad.’

Theoretical possibilities: the immutability of time and energy are important factors often overlooked in health promotion research and leisure studies; the threat of self-imposed moral attribution adds to their significance. This research provides evidence in support of taking guilt more seriously in considerations of exercise-related concepts such as ‘motivation’ (Bauman et al., 2013), wellbeing (Greco & Stenner, 2013; Sternberg, 2001), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and of the ‘shoulds’ embedded in health advice generally (Lupton, 2012; Metzl & Kirkland, 2010).

- 5) Guilt plays an active, but multifaceted, role in women’s negotiations with exercise itself: choosing to exercise as a way to ‘burn off calories’ could be viewed as both a sentence for a crime and an anticipatory atonement for future sins. Exercise ‘allows’ someone to ‘be able to’, for example, eat things (or more things) that their internalized rules would otherwise reject; these are linguistic clues to guilt’s presence and operation.

Theoretical possibilities: this framing of guilt’s role in women’s exercise negotiations opens avenues for exploring exercise-related guilt in the context of religious beliefs, and building on research such as that produced by Sharon Wray (2007), who found evidence that “ethnic and religious beliefs proved to be a more significant influence on

exercise participation and diet than health promotion advice” (p. 141).

- 6) Exercising doesn't 'cure' guilt, rather guilt expands with rising standards and expectations. Thus, advising someone that they should exercise if they feel guilty about not exercising, not only can induce guilt for feeling guilty, but also sets the stage for future guilt when, a) the exercising fails, or b) the exercising is not enough.
Theoretical possibilities: this introduces a new angle to conversations around technologies of the self (Foucault, 1979) and so-called practices of freedom (G. E. Chapman, 1997) in the context of women's sport and exercise. More specifically, it raises questions regarding the *nature* of a person's experience or 'freedom', and the *nature* of the cogmotional cost of meeting standards and expectations, however well-intentioned or normalised.
- 7) Guilt lends itself to *intersections of contradictions*: Exercise can be 'selfish' while being disciplined; and 'selfless' while being 'undisciplined.' For example, running (disciplined but selfish) instead of tending to one's children (selfless but undisciplined) or staying late at work (selfless and selfish, disciplined and undisciplined, depending on the discourse). This is a clash of an ethic of care, an ethic of self-care, and our 'cared-fors' (Noddings, 2003), and has guilt as its outcome, irrespective of scenario—a common conundrum for many women.
- 8) Managing exercise-related guilt isn't simply an occasional psychological script played out in someone's head; it's not just a matter of whether someone feels guilty or not

(about not/exercising) after having managed their guilt in a particular situation. Rather, managing is an ongoing, oscillating process without well-defined start and end points to any given flare-up.

Theoretical possibilities: collectively points 7 and 8 suggest a need to “surpass the psychologically based objectivist interventions and the socioculturally based inscriptions of the body either as dominated or resistant to examine the possibilities for change emanating from the microlevel” (Markula, 2014, p. 151). Acknowledging the role of guilt at the microlevel can help us appreciate and better understand the complexity implicit in actions of resistance and domination, and help us visualise what ‘change’ might look like.

- 9) Embodied practices and actions relating to exercise are often interwoven with other body practices and techniques (e.g., clothing, hair, and the face), which many women incorporate into their decisions about exercise, and include in their accounts of exercise-related guilt.

Theoretical possibilities: additional body practices introduce important facets to notions of ‘body techniques’ and embodiment relative to exercise practices (Crossley, 2007; Leeds Craig, 2010); this observation suggests the inseparability of aesthetic sensibilities from understandings of exercise and fitness, and could be applicable in discussions of identity (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992) and of women’s production and conversion of physical capital (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988; Shilling, 2003).

High points

Many participants expressed present exercise-related guilt about past behaviours.

Regardless of current exercise practices, some pointed to injuries incurred or perceptions of over-exercising; and some pointed to a perceived lack of fitness, or some other physical issue they attributed to not exercising enough. So there is a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't conundrum surrounding exercise imperatives that do not typically get written into the 'Just Do It' discourse. The short- and long-term emotional impact is also left out of fitness and health discourses, something that my concept of operations of guilt has brought forward. Another of my key points in this theorising is that *physical* bodies participate in the guilt cycle, and their biological presence plays a role in the social and psychological creation of, and reaction to, exercise-related guilt. Thus, I suggest it is important to avoid deeming emotional pain inferior to more easily quantified (and often visibly persuasive) physical pain, given the distributed and dynamic nature (Nicoletis, 2011) of bodies-in-cogmotion.

On a more optimistic note, as I discussed in Chapter 7, many women do seem to find spaces between the blame, self-blame, and guilt that give them hope and courage (e.g., manifested in resistance, agency, defiance, and defence). I argue that the sense of individuality and responsibility that helps women maintain resistance to norms and stereotypes, and to read normative messages critically, might paradoxically (or just ironically) be the very same sense of individual responsibility that is denigrated by critics of neoliberal rhetoric (Tischner, 2013). 'Neoliberal' typically signals a call for individually responsible citizens. For example, Irmgard Tischner (2013) refers to "neoliberal discourses of responsibility, shame and guilt" (p. 125).

As just one of many unmediated voices in this study, I can say that for me the ability to think more critically has resulted in a more peaceful interaction with societal discourses that invade my world. That is with exposure to the expanding vistas that history provides (including that of women's exercise) and to the increased peripheral vision that comes with additional perspectives, I feel more sanguine when I engage with conflicting discourses or with people who embody discourses that trigger guilt in me. What I covet for myself more than intellectual scope, however, is a transference of what I've learned into pragmatic use especially when interacting with women who are presently suffering from the effects of discursively inflicted 'social terror.' If our flames of guilt are fanned by the combination of (as per my analysis-synthesis) what we 'know', how we frame an exercise situation, and how we perceive our own ability to handle that situation, then arguably that is the complex psycho-socio-physiological ecosystem in which new ways of thinking—and critical thinking—can be effectively put to use. As Patricia Vertinsky (2012, p. 479) encourages her readers to ask: "Can one imagine conceivable futures beyond the control or limit of the past and present?" I think this is an excellent question to break the inertia of the 'hear' and now. Michel Foucault (1982) offers a glimpse of what might be achieved through critical examinations and for what purpose we might bother with such efforts:

A critique does not consist in saying that things are not good as they are. It consists in seeing what kinds of self-evidences, liberties, acquired and non-reflective modes of thought, the practices we accept rest on...Criticism consists in...showing that things are not as obvious as we might believe, doing it in such a way that what we accept as going without saying no longer goes without saying. To criticize is to render the too-easy...difficult. (p. 33-34)

So while researchers have long shown links between social ideals, stereotypes, and women's oppression (both external and internalised), they tend not to question the whole *premise* of exercise as a social construction. Rather, it 'goes without saying' in that the *idea*

of fit-ness (and some kind of health standards) remains, and scholars work to problematise how it's viewed and how it affects women. In other words, they try to help women deal critically with what *is* (which I applaud). But without the possibility of somehow eliminating the present concept of *exercise*—perhaps in a palimpsest sort of way—I submit that there will always be a need for women to deal with how they measure up (or not) to whatever standards are imposed, however 'easy.' Thus, the guilt potential will remain an active participant in women's perceptions of themselves and others. While I'm not advancing a systemic solution to address individual contradictions (to borrow the words of Ullrich Beck (1992)), I suggest that imagining other trajectories for 'what we know' and thus might become can beneficently render the too-easy more difficult.

Whatever the extant rhetoric, then, embedded norms of aesthetic approval still remain and allow for ongoing stigmatisation and oppression at the individual level: preferences impute power (e.g., my outfit is 'in', and yours is not); 'peer review' perpetuates societal stereotyping (e.g., I am a 'fit person', you clearly are not). So at the end of this journey down the imperative pathway, I ask: is it possible to eliminate obligation, expectation, or guilt feelings from the exercise equation? Is the confessional aspect, the 'improvement' aspect, the ritualistic aspect, too embedded? Regardless of what the answers to these questions might be, I maintain that disseminators of fitness/health messages have an ethical responsibility to their target audiences and to the general public (Carter et al., 2011).

Pointers

Through this research, I have come to believe that women are afraid of trying and failing (repeatedly) at exercise (and other practices of the self) and eventually can stop believing

change is possible (and convince themselves they don't want it). I don't wish to perpetuate the idea that they *should* change, but rather that there is no fault to dole out if they don't/can't effect the change they imagined. There is no moral imperative (despite ubiquitous suggestions otherwise) relating to their body that they *must* literally answer to. However, I recognize this isn't a simple idea; for example, one's peer group can be the most morally demanding evaluator in one's life, and in many socially constructed realities they essentially *do* have to be answered to given the high risk of social consequences.

Providing a vision of how various forces—social, psychological, physiological, cultural—come together reciprocally to act on and in one's person, can be a good alternative to the typical prescription and activist approaches we're used to. Such approaches often ignore the complexity of daily life and the emotional energy required to deal with even the smallest conflicts of time and duty, all of which have accumulating effects. I encourage listening to women when they talk about the challenges around, and impediments to, exercise; and when they talk about what they enjoy and what inspires them; thus, validating their emotions while helping them see their particular situations through different lenses. A key point is that exercise exists as a socially imposed (and constructed) notion/thing within a wider ecosystem of daily life. Therefore, talking about *exercise* can arguably be done more critically by first disrupting it as a given, and also questioning the assumptions within it that 'go without saying.' Based on reactions I witnessed in conversation with collaborators, I encourage sensitivity when discussing guilt because of its motility. However, discussing exercise-related guilt can help bring relief if done with an empathetic ear tuned to the nuances of an individual's context: what exercise means to them, how they *feel* about how it fits into their life and interacts with other tasks,

duties, obligations, and people.

Without my collaborators' words mine would be sadly incomplete, so I think it fitting that they should have another opportunity to speak. In conversation one day, I asked Shyla what she would like me to tell her in my thesis conclusion. Here is her typically eloquent reply:

I'd like you to tell me (I know it sounds new agey) that if I take the time to listen to my body, I actually already know what I need. Or, in any event, if professionals do want to get involved, part of their job should be to peel away the messaging and find real solutions, not create more problems and add to the congealed mass of guilt-inducing scientific discourse.

Other pathways

Arriving at an end point of this thesis, I am aware that questions have proliferated, rather than abated. Several areas of interest that seem to be pushing to the front of the queue for me include: issues of identity in women's exercise-related guilt experiences; the destructive dimensions of guilt; the guilt-managing affordances of self-deprecating humour; exercise-related guilt triggers in the lives of older women; the significance of particular family relationships on mid-age women's exercise-related guilt; religious beliefs and exercise-related guilt; the accusing power of (exercise-related) artifacts; relationships of physical capital and guilt currency in daily lives. In addition to stimulating sensitivity to the ubiquity and power of guilt relating to exercise, I think each of these research areas could offer insights into possible 'solutions' (as per Shyla) for individuals struggling with "the disagreeable feeling that we call guilt" (Posner, 1999).

Coda

I argue that women's exercise-related guilt is often induced by the well-meaning, blamed on the less culpable, and is discomfiting for more than the obviously vulnerable; it inhibits many of the intended positive outcomes of the inducers, and drives a self-perpetuating bio-psycho-social cycle of self-incrimination. Resisting this cycle, I suggest, will require a combination of more ethical sensitivity, less blame, and more critical interrogation to inform the inducers and empower the accused. Ideally this coordinated resistance will result in significantly less traffic on the imperative pathway.

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Appendix A: Online interview

The following screen captures of the online interview (pp. 301-320) show the pages and associated progress bars as my collaborators saw them. Note that the Information Sheet and Consent Form are supplied in Appendices C and D, respectively.

E-Motion: emotions, exercise, and you
Page One

Welcome!

If you are reading this, you have already read the Consent Form and Information Sheet associated with this study, and have therefore agreed to the conditions of privacy. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to email me: anita.harman@otago.ac.nz

Please answer any of the questions you wish to, using as many or as few words as you like. There are no wrong answers. I realize there is potentially a lot of thinking and writing for you, so please don't feel you must finish all the questions in one go. In any event, whatever you're willing to share will be very helpful and greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Next

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1. What is your age?

2. Do you live alone or with someone?

Do you have children? [include age and gender if you wish]

3. Please tell me a little about your background. Anything you feel like sharing about your family and early experiences will be helpful.

Examples of topics you could include:

- a. environment in which you grew up (e.g., rural, urban, etc.)
- b. number/gender of siblings; relationship with them
- c. parents' attitudes toward physical activity
- d. first 'sports' memory

4. When (if ever) did you first become aware of 'exercise' as something distinct from 'just playing'? Try to describe any impressions you recall having formed of exercise at that time.

5. Which of the following items do you currently own? Please select all that apply. [Might not have been purchased exclusively for your use]

- Shoes specifically for exercising
- Activity-specific 'exercise' clothing
- Stationary bicycle
- Mountain or road bicycle
- Downhill or cross-country skis
- Skipping rope
- Weights
- Exercise ball
- Yoga mat
- Ice skates
- Tennis racquet
- Exercise video
- Gym membership
- Treadmill

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Next

11%

E-Motion: emotions, exercise, and you

New Page

6. What do you picture now when you hear the word 'exercise'? (For example, when the topic comes up in conversation) Does your reaction to your idea of exercise tend to be positive?

7. Who and/or what are your main sources of information about health and fitness? In general, what is your reaction (emotionally) to their suggestions and advice? [Examples: doctor, TV, books, friends]

8. Have you ever participated in a group exercise class?

Yes

No

If you answered yes, describe the least pleasant memory you have of an exercise class experience.

If you answered no, do you think you might attend a class sometime? Explain.

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E-Motion: emotions, exercise, and you

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9. Fitting exercise into a busy daily schedule can be frustrating. If you've ever felt
- guilty about not exercising
 - guilty about exercising instead of doing something else
- try to describe those feelings more fully.

10. Think about some of the women you interact with regularly. What do you think they tend to be most critical about with respect to other women? [Not just exercise-related]

The following photo shows a variety of women's magazines. In the space provided below the photo, please describe your initial impressions of these magazine covers, and answer the accompanying question.



11.

11. Your impressions?

If any, which magazine would you most like to skim through, and why?

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33%

The following five photos represent content typically found in women's magazines like the ones you just saw. In the spaces provided below each photo, describe your emotional reaction to the messages that you feel are being conveyed by each content sample. Be as brief or as wordy as you wish.



15 FIGURE FIXERS

Want longer legs? Maybe a leaner midsection? Meet the wardrobe wonders that do the work for you

2. HIDE A BIG TUMMY with a man-style blazer

The number one area that causes women body confidence issues is the tummy. The key to disguising a larger middle is to hide it with tailoring (not swamp it with tent-like clothing). The man-style blazer is a great choice; it's longer with a more structured volume, creating a streamlined look from shoulder to hip. Make sure sleeves are tapered and well-fitting to create balance.

Field blazer, \$437, Salasai.



1. SLIM FULL CALVES with a chunky heel



Darius heel, \$399, Kathryn Wilson.

Many women complain about the size of their calves but few realise you can disguise their fullness and create shape by wearing the right style shoe. Sporting a thicker heel makes calves look less chunky as the leg-to-shoe transition is less obvious than if you're wearing a stiletto. A block heel that tapers at the bottom is the ultimate choice. It's not only comfortable to walk in but the



3. CAMOUFLAGE A CURVACEOUS BACKSIDE with a long, slim top

Length is your friend here. Avoid any top where the hem finishes in the middle of your derriere, as it is the same thing as holding a measuring tape across your butt to show everyone how wide it is. Go for the



13.



14.



GET BEACH READY THIS summer

Who can afford constant trips to the beauty salon? Getting bikini beautiful doesn't have to be a hassle – the latest Bikini Trimmer from Gillette® Venus® provides a no-fuss de-fuzz in the shower

Summer is well on its way, meaning women across the country are prepping their bodies in time for the warmer weather. The sunny season is all about flaunting fabulous, silky smooth skin in a gorgeous new bikini. A bikini-beautiful look is easy with the launch of the new Venus® Bikini Trimmer, a quick tool designed to help you look your best on the sand and in the sun.

An easy alternative to waxing, the trimming tool features a pivoting, single blade to easily navigate the curves of the bikini area and cut bikini hair. The blade is encased with a special comb that provides a protective layer between

15.

[Each of the questions 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16, had an answer space provided like the one shown below.]

15. Your reactions:

FIVE FOOD MYTHS

When it comes to food and weight, there are a lot of theories out there, not all of them to be taken seriously. Here are five you shouldn't swallow:

- 1 Bread and wheat make you feel bloated.** Sorry, ladies, not true; you probably just feel uncomfortable because you ate too much.
- 2 Fresh vegetables are better for you than frozen.** Not necessarily. If you grow your own, or they are grown locally, then sure. However, all produce begins to lose nutrients once it has been picked, so if your fresh vegetables are imported or stored for a period of time, then frozen vegetables are a better option.
- 3 If you work out, you can eat what you want.** Nope. Rubbish food is not balanced out by squats and the treadmill.
- 4 Wine is a superfood.** If only! If there were a food that made you feel that bad even when you've only slightly overdone it, you'd consider yourself allergic or intolerant.
- 5 More than half the people in the world have food intolerances.** False. There is zip credible scientific evidence supporting this.



body news

The latest buzz from the world of health and fitness

GO YOU!

Want to break a bad habit? You need your own cheerleader. Recent research published in *The Lancet* showed motivational text messages doubled the chances of giving up smoking. One group of participants was sent positive texts such as: "Quick result! Carbon monoxide has now left your body!", while another group received texts thanking them for taking part. More than 10% of the former group quit, compared to 4.9% of the latter.



GREEN BANANAS ARE FULL OF A CARBOHYDRATE KNOWN AS 'RESISTANT STARCH' THAT CAN MIRACULOUSLY HELP YOU LOSE WEIGHT

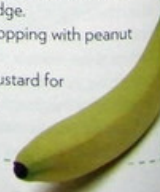
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Banana bonus

We're all for going green – and now we've gone bananas about it. According to the bestselling tome *The Carb Lovers Diet*, green (unripe) bananas are full of a carbohydrate known as 'resistant starch' that can miraculously help you lose weight. It not only 'resists' digestion – making you feel fuller for longer – it also helps your body burn more calories, keeps your blood-sugar levels steady and makes you feel more energised.

Easy ways to include banana in your diet:

- Throw in a blender with orange juice, berries and ice for a delicious fruit smoothie. Or for a dairy version, mix with milk, honey and ice.
- Add to your favourite breakfast cereal or stir into your porridge.
- Slice and use as a topping with peanut butter on toast.
- Add to a bowl of custard for a delicious, fuss-free dessert.



16.

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44%

17. Picture yourself getting dressed in the morning. You catch sight of yourself in the mirror and think _____.
Please 'fill in the blank', and then describe the emotions that typically accompany these thoughts.

Please read the following story, and answer the accompanying questions:

18. Cheryl is a 45 year old woman with three children. She works as a substitute teacher, which gives her enough time off to make regular trips across the city to check on her elderly mother who is living alone, and has recently suffered several bouts of flu.

Cheryl is worried about her mother, and found it difficult to sleep last night. So she's extra tired this morning, but is feeling motivated to check as much off her list as possible. Two of the kids have dentist appointments in the afternoon, but she's hoping to fit in her treadmill run and a shower before she has to leave to pick them up.

She was making good progress with various household tasks when a neighbour dropped in hoping Cheryl could spend half an hour helping her with neighbourhood watch plans. A friend called just as the neighbour was leaving; she wanted to talk. Cheryl didn't feel she could rush the conversation, but was keeping one eye on the clock. Feeling pressed for time, she ran out to the store for a few groceries as soon as the neighbour left, and was relieved to see she still had time left for her treadmill workout and shower when she got back.

As she started to change into her running clothes, she suddenly remembered she had promised to pick up a prescription for her mother. If she skipped the treadmill time, she could fit in a stop at the pharmacy on the way to pick up the kids...but maybe her mom could wait one more day...and her exercise routine had been slipping lately...she felt fat. She hesitated, weighing the pros and cons of her choices, and then decided...

- a. What would you have encouraged Cheryl to do?
- b. How would you 'justify' your decision?

19. Do you consider yourself a regular exerciser? Briefly describe the sort of physical activities you typically do, if any, and how often you tend to engage in them in a given week.

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56%

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I took the following set of pictures while out walking in the city where I live. Picture yourself walking along with me and discussing each of these scenes/images as we pass them. I'm particularly interested in your emotional reaction to each image.

Please answer the questions that correspond to each photo.



20. What is your emotional reaction to 'you need us'? If you walked past this advertisement, what aspects of the messaging do you think might have attracted your attention? Explain.



21.

21. Your thoughts and emotions:



22.

22. These women were out running during their lunch break. Suppose you worked in the same office with them; do you think you would be inspired to join them on some of their runs? Would you feel guilty sitting at your desk while they're out exercising? Explain.



23.

23. Anita: "I'll have one, but I'm going to take the long way home to get more exercise and burn off the calories..."

You: _____.



24.

24. Would you feel guilty about turning down this convenient, free offer? Explain. Conversely, are there circumstances in which you might feel guilty about participating?

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67%

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25.

25. This image covers one outside wall of a gym, and is part of their advertising. Every time I walk past this place, I feel out of shape and a bit embarrassed about the idea of being around people like this. What is your response to this photo and to my feelings?



26.

26. Which aspects of this image are most likely to cause you to feel guilty about your exercise habits? Explain.



27.

27. What are your thoughts and emotions in response to this implicit suggestion that both inner and outer aspects of your Self should be 'developed'?



28.

28. Your thoughts and emotions as you catch sight of your reflection in this window...



29.

29. What did you notice first about this woman? [Don't worry, no one's judging you] Now describe your reactions to your first impressions.

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78%



30.

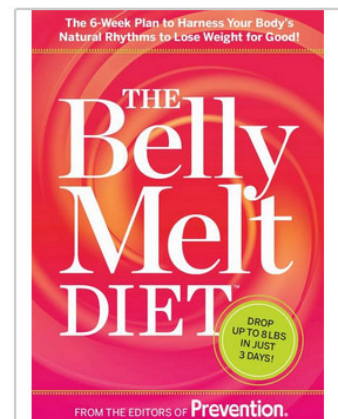
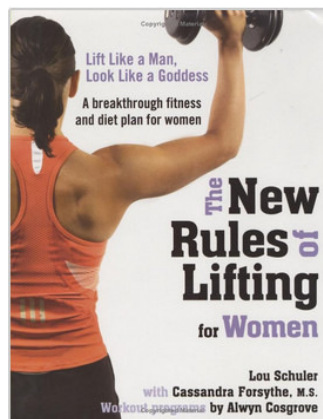
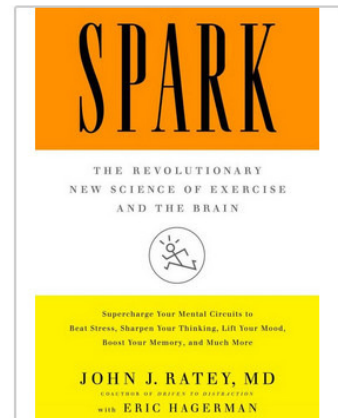
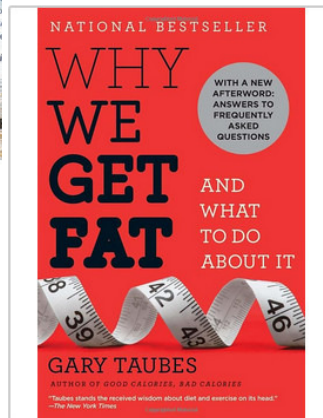
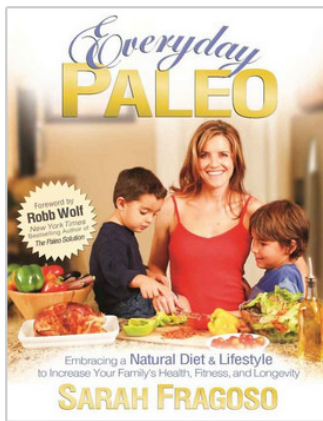
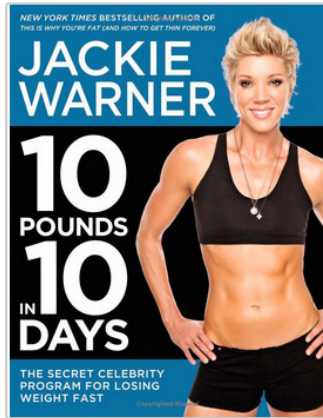
[I supplied fourteen responses to the above image from which participants could choose, covering a range of emotions (as constructed by me); e.g., “That woman probably exercises more than I do”; “If I lived in that place I’d probably exercise more”]

31. These titles are among the 50 most popular books in Amazon's 'Exercise & Fitness' category.

Select:

- a. one that makes you feel guilty, or badly, about your exercise habits, or anything else
- b. one that you'd like to read, if given the opportunity

Explain each choice in the next question (space provided below).



32. Type the names of the books you chose and answer the corresponding question:
- a. What about that book makes you feel guilty, or badly?
 - b. What about that book makes you want to read it?

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Submit

89%

E-Motion: emotions, exercise, and you

Thank You!

Thank you!

I truly appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me.

100%

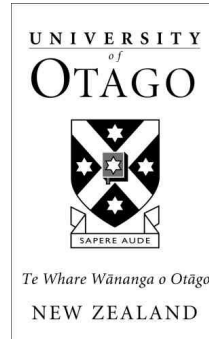
Appendix B: *Daily Mirror* cartoon

Figure 9.1: 'Changing ideals in feminine beauty', *Daily Mirror* 1927 [London]



(Also, in the bottom margin: "changing ideals, the cult of emaciation - where will it end?")

Appendix C: Information sheet for collaborators



*An invitation to participate in research about
Exercise and Emotion in an Urban Environment*

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you do decide to participate, I truly appreciate it. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and I thank you for considering this request.

What is the aim of the project?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for a PhD degree at the University of Otago, School of Physical Education. The purpose of this study is to examine urban women's experiences of emotion relating to exercise. Specifically, it will explore the thoughts and emotions surrounding the idea of exercise, the physical experiences of it, any challenges relating to it, and the physical and emotional effects of it on women's daily lives.

What types of participants are being sought?

I am seeking English-speaking women, aged 30-65 years old. They must be citizens of New Zealand who have lived in or near downtown Auckland for at least three months. There is no requirement to be currently actively exercising.

How do I become a participant?

If you would like to be a part of this research - or just want to ask some questions - please contact me (Anita) via email: anita.harman@otago.ac.nz

What will participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to:

Take part in at least one face-to-face interview with one researcher (Anita Harman), at a time and place convenient to both participant and researcher. The length of the interviews will vary depending on the quantity and quality of the emerging conversation, but it is estimated that they will

last between 1-2 hours. Each interview will be digitally recorded (audio only) and transcribed verbatim.

Before proceeding with the initial interview, you will be asked to sign a Consent Form. The interview will begin with a discussion of some background information, including family history and personal history relevant to experiences of physical activity and exercise. It is possible that topics of a sensitive nature may emerge and thus cause emotional discomfort or anxiety.

If you agree, there will be at least one follow-up email for clarification, confirmation, and/or continuation of the discussion.

If requested, your interview transcript will be returned to you for verification, at which point you will have the opportunity to delete or alter any of your comments made during the interview.

What data or information will be collected, and what use will be made of it?

The data collected through interviews will include some personal information, such as name, age, family members, daily routines, and potentially identifiable characteristics. Every precaution will be taken to anonymise personal information throughout the research process and in the final report.

The data collected may also be used in research articles and presentations within universities and at academic conferences.

The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed (typed out) by the researcher only. No one other than the researcher and the participant will have access to that participant's audio recordings and raw transcription data for the duration of the project. Sections of transcribed data considered for inclusion in the research report will only be included with permission from the participant in question. Those sections included in the final report will be anonymised to minimise the likelihood of personally identifiable information being detected by the readers of the research report.

This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes topics relating to past and present experiences of physical activity and emotions associated with those experiences. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or to terminate the interview at any point without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and destroy data gathered by email. However, the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed. Caution is advised in the electronic transmission of sensitive material.

The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time prior to 28 February 2013 without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What if participants have any questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Anita Harman

Department of Physical Education
University of Otago
Telephone: 022 643 4499
anita.harman@otago.ac.nz

and/or

Dr. Richard Pringle

Centre for Sport, Health and Physical Education (SHaPE)
School of Curriculum and Pedagogy
The University of Auckland
University Telephone: +64 9 623 8899 Ext 48462
r.pringle@auckland.ac.nz

and/or

Professor Douglas Booth

Department of Physical Education
University of Otago
University Telephone: + 64 3 479 8995
doug.booth@otago.ac.nz

This study has been approved by the Department stated above. If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479-8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix D: Consent form for collaborators

Exercise and Emotion in an Urban Environment

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time prior to February 2013;
3. Personal identifying information [*audio files*] will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years, after which time it will be destroyed;
4. This project involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning includes topics relating to past and present experiences of physical activity and emotions associated with those experiences. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops, and in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s), and/or may terminate the conversation, and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind;
5. There is a potential risk of emotional discomfort caused by the discussion of personal and sensitive topics during the interview(s);
6. The results of the project may be published and available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

I agree to take part in this project.

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)



This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Physical Education, University of Otago.