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Article

Exploring Women's Experiences: Embodied Pathways and Influences for Exercise Participation

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Abstract: It has been well-documented that women face pressures to conform to a slim, toned, and athletic body, becoming “tyrannised” by beauty ideals. Under these contemporary ideologies of perfectionism, women are placed under constant surveillance, evaluation and, objectification and are thus reduced to “being” their bodies. However, there is little known about the potential relationships between different types of exercise, body image, and exercise motivation. With this in mind, this paper contributes towards a small but developing body of research that utilises feminist phenomenology to reveal twelve women’s early embodied motivations for exercising and draws upon material gathered from a three-year ethnography into the embodied experiences of women in fitness cultures. This paper delves into the influences on their continued participation over time and explores how these experiences shape their understandings of the embodied self and the broader constructions of the gendered body. The discussion provided illuminates how early influences on exercise participation and how pressures on women to conform to dominant notions of the “feminine” body are imposed by structural, cultural, historical, and localised forces in ways that affect and shape future physical activity participation, and the physical cultures where these tensions are played out.

Keywords: feminism; exercise participation; physical education; embodiment; feminist phenomenology; body image

1. Introduction

It has been suggested that many young women place a significant emphasis on their weight or shape; this, in turn, has been associated with disturbances surrounding body image and higher disordered eating behaviour [1–5]. Prichard and Tiggemann [6] note that in particular, women become dissatisfied with their physical selves the more they exercise, regardless of the associated benefits of health and fitness. Additionally, whilst exercising, it has been suggested that women focus on emerged mechanisms such as weight loss, the improvement of body tone, and attractiveness [6]. It, therefore, seems that motivations women have to exercise may play a fundamental role in the development of body image concerns. However, there is little known about the potential relationships between different types of exercise, body image, and exercise motivation [7].

The information surrounding fat and fit within mass media and other circulating discourses has been critically scrutinised [8]. The surrounding ways in which the presence and symbolisation of fatness has constrained women’s behaviour, either to conform to normative thinness ideals or to be “good feminists” by attempting to reject such ideals, has been explored [9,10]. Previous media representations of fit, feminine bodies typically find three interrelated themes: the ideal fit, feminine body, which is characterised as narrowly thin, toned, and young; the ideal fit body, which is intertwined with the notion of health; and the responsibility for obtaining such a body, which is left to the individual woman [11]. The cultivation theory suggests that the more media an individual is exposed to, the more they will begin to view the images they see as realistic [12]. Tiggeman and Pickering [13] (pp. 199–200)

note that the media “presents women with [a] constant barrage of idealised images of extremely thin women that are nearly impossible to achieve”.

Research delving into the perceived barriers of females and their lack of engagement within sports is extensive [14]. Issues surrounding females’ disengagement within sports have become prominent within literary analysis, particularly concerning female participation rates [15]. Distinct barriers that females relate to include the male-dominated culture of sport and the visible gender inequality within schools [16]. It has been noted that 51% of females mention a significant reason for them to disengage and to dislike sports is due to their experiences within school sports and physical education [17].

Alternatively, Gottlieb [18] suggests that women turn to exercise for a variety of reasons; this includes the feminist ideology that features an attitude of physical strength and fitness and was understood as necessary to counterpart an increase in social empowerment and influence. Hargreaves [19] believes that empowerment is a development whereby people gain power over their lives; specifically, empowerment enables women to do things for themselves surrounding their own interests rather than at the command of someone else’s benefit. Empowerment, therefore, involves the ability to resist pressures to conform to gender-stereotyped notions regarding presentation and behaviour; it also allows women to be more socially assertive. Due to this, welcoming empowerment enables women to become more proactive in terms of what they do within their lives, so they become active agents. Whitson [20] suggests this could be overcoming oppressive constraints that women face surrounding femininity and cultural normalisation, that is, overcoming “power-over”. This empowerment type is often thought of in terms of physicality.

Empowerment as a concept has a notable association with the essentially contested concept of power [21]. Firstly, suggesting that a woman is empowered signifies that she has power over her life. To “empower” is often defined in relation to “enable”, to “authorise”, or to seize or give power. Secondly, beliefs surrounding empowerment imply personal power or the ability to control others based on the characteristics of an individual, such as physical strength [22]. These definitions indicate that agency and personal power are identical to a woman having power to her life. “Power-to” entails the autonomy, capability, and potential surrounding an individual [23]. Feminists usually approach power from a “power-top” position. Although power-to approaches are usually at odds with “power-over”, which is a more traditional approach that connotes power, domination, and authority.

Furthermore, it has been noted that fitness and sports also increased through the second wave feminist movement, and few researchers have asked about the lived experiences of women or about the circumstances that shape their exercise-related decisions [24]. Notions of gender are highly influential in the decision-making and behaviours of females and their chosen physical activity and sport. Lloyd and Maguire [25,26] express that exercise, health, and fitness settings reflect and reinforce the dominant patriarchal images of femininity. McGuigan [27] proposes that sport can be universally viewed as a male-dominated endeavour that ultimately marginalises and restricts females from entering the field, therefore hindering their potential. Additionally, men’s participation within sports is traditionally regarded as a natural phenomenon, whereas female participation in a typically androcentric field can be viewed as anomalous [28]. In the midst of two decades of research, this is beginning to change with more females venturing into “male-regarded” sports; however, the struggle for equality is still at the forefront of debate and practice [29].

Objectification and Shame

The objectification theory (OT) can provide an overarching theoretical framework to enable the understanding of the relationship between body image concerns and exercise motivations. This theory is based on the suggestion that within Western cultures, women are continuously “looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified” [30] (p. 177). This ubiquitous objectification can promote a process deemed self-objectification, where women come to embody an outsider’s perspective of their physical selves. Throughout this process, there is an increased value placed on a women’s outward appearance, resulting in high self-surveillance. Consequently, some women experience higher anxiety, body

dissatisfaction, and body shame [31–34], as well as lower self and body esteem [35,36], and symptoms of disordered eating and depression can also increase [37].

Dolezal [38] describes how shame is an individual and necessary body experience, resulting from intersubjective relations. It is always contained in a nexus of political and sociocultural norms and reveals our most personal parts—our hopes and aspirations. It is suggested that shame and the body often go hand-in-hand. Competition, or the social value placed on upon competition, creates an environment where a constant need for an individual to contemplate their bodies in relation to other bodies is present [39]; additionally, Probyn [40] identifies shame as a competitive drive.

There are also different ways for our bodies to exist and different ways for people to live their relationship with their own body. Within society, widely accepted forms of objectifying an individual's body include treating it primarily as an object of accomplishing goals; regarding it as a physical object to be used, viewed, and manipulated; and treating it as a material possession to be explored. Individuals require control of their bodies to maintain its suitability as an object [41].

Taking into consideration the above literature, the aim of this paper is to develop a meaningful insight into the women's experiences that are lived and felt in the flesh; to explore the nuanced pressures women face surrounding the reasons, influences, and motivations to participate within physical activity; and to explore further the conventional ways in which women overcome potential barriers whilst engaging with physical activity and exercise.

2. Methodology

This paper takes an empirically driven, inductive approach to explore women's embodied pathways and early influences for exercise participation. The reflections and research for this paper were taken from a larger PhD study, which explored the embodied experiences of women in fitness cultures. Combined with ethnography, feminist phenomenology as a methodology provides a powerful way to capture the lived experiences of the female exercisers, as it illuminates the voices and experiences from the lived female body [42]. By utilising feminist phenomenology, this research delves into the socio-structural location of women in a patriarchal system of gender relations, where women as a social group are commonly underprivileged in comparison to men as a social group. The understanding of the body has been established through recent knowledge incorporating feminist phenomenology, as a form of embodied "sociologised" phenomenology [42,43]. The "sociologised" perspective acknowledges and analyses the structurally, culturally, and historically located nature of gendered embodiment. This paper employs the feminist phenomenological tradition rather than a philosophical base, in order to provide rigorous, insightful, and grounded analyses of female sporting embodiment, which can display the development of sporting experiences—both cognitive and corporeal [44].

The reason for this is that traditional philosophical phenomenology has often excluded biological sex and gender within other forms of social-structural "situatedness" and has tended to focus on specific "essences" of central lived experience structures. Despite phenomenology emphasising the environmental situatedness of the body, it can be argued that there is a lack of analytic attention to the *sociocultural* and *structural* influences on lived-body experiences and embodiment. It has also been criticised for its neglect surrounding imperative sociological variables such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and so on. Consequently, feminist phenomenology can be used to shape and acknowledge such "differences" [45]. Feminist phenomenology incorporates a gendered lens when taking in to account the influences and pressures of social structures upon the lived experience and the particular corporeality of bodies within specific cultural spaces and times, therefore challenging such philosophical claims head-on [44,45]. It is worth noting here that although feminist phenomenology is incorporated in this research as the main theoretical approach, because of the inductive and empirical nature, additional theoretical explorations (explored previously above) are acknowledged where appropriate and relevant to support the analysis of the corporeal aspects of the lived body.

I have been working in the fitness industry sector for over 8 years; this "insider" role allowed for excellent access into the variety of fitness spaces and enabled further opportunities for conversations

with the women. Fieldwork took place for roughly three years, and on average, I spent around 16 h per week observing the gym environment, exercising, and instructing classes. This was mostly in the peak hours of the gym (between 8–11 a.m. and 4–7 p.m.) [46].

Ethnographic fieldwork involved thirteen semi-structured interviews, (observations were used within the wider study) within the gym culture; these occurred at the research location based in the south east of England. Due to the phenomenological nature of this research, the thirteen women interviewed were selected based up “criterion-based sampling”, where I had predetermined the criteria for selecting the place, site, or case [47]. The ages of the women ranged from 22 to 54 years. All the women are dedicated to the gym and frequently attend group exercise classes, work out in the main gym, or participate within both. All of the women are white British and employed within the public sector. Most of the women are in heterosexual relationships, and six of the women have children. All of the women have spent the majority or their entire life living within the local area of the gym, and this was their overall decision to attend this particular gym premises [48]. They were willing to talk about their experiences and were diverse enough from one another to augment the possibilities of rich and exclusive stories from their specific experiences in the culture [49,50]. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Canterbury Christ Church University, and was assigned the following code: 15/SAS/235C. All interviewees gave informed consent before participating within the study. The original names of the women have been changed in order to abide by the best practices of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality [51].

The style of questions from the semi-structured interviews allowed for the identification of individualism for each women which also facilitated new and interesting topics to arise [52]. The use of semi-structured interviews were highly standardised and allowed the women to have greater control than other interview forms (such as structured). This allowed a certain degree of flexibility and revealed deeper, more corporeal knowledge of the interviewee [53].

Due to my long employment at the gym, trust and respect with the interviewees had been gained and a firm rapport already existed. This enhanced the intimacy of the interview and allowed for the sentient, embodied, lived, and en fleshed realities of the women to be explored further [26]. Most interviews lasted around one hour, some were 45 min, and others were conducted for up to two hours. The exact duration of the interview was determined by how much information and experiences the women were willing to reveal. The interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim; they were conducted at the gym (research site) to enable a sense of familiarisation so the women could feel comfortable in a familiar environment and therefore reveal further experiences [54].

I analysed the data by exploring emergent themes. I organised and described the rich data collected in detail through identifying, analyzing, and reporting the patterns that arose [53,55]. It was a straightforward and flexible form of analysis and highlighted the similarities and differences across the data. Considering its strong emphasis on interpretation, I was able to divulge towards a deep, aesthetically satisfying and freewheeling interpretation of the data. Furthermore, a thematic analysis does not adhere to a specific theory, so I, therefore, was not restricted on my interpretations [53].

Consequently, the most pertinent themes that emerged from the interview data formed the main basis of discussion for this paper, with the application of relevant literature surrounding gender and embodiment additionally incorporated. The discussion that follows below explores the nuanced pressures women face surrounding the reasons, influences, and early motivations to participate within physical activity and explores further the conventional ways in which women face and overcome potential barriers whilst exercising.

3. Discussion

3.1. Fat Stigmatisation and Media

The influence of the media through magazine discourses can be viewed through Katie’s early experiences, she demonstrates how this affected her:

Katie: “I was probably looking back; when you’re younger and you’re a size sort of 12—erm, I’m 5 ft 4—I think I just thought that I, I was too big too, too heavy, and I really wanted to be a size 10.”

Amy: “Is there anything that influenced you to think that way?”

Katie: “I used to like the Freemans catalogue! So, probably clothes and seeing models wearing clothes, and then, I’d order them and didn’t look like that in them! So, yeah . . . at secondary school I really wanted to be skinny, like, I was envious that someone came in with anorexia, and you know I thought ‘Oh I’d like to do that; I’ll have a go at doing that.’”

Whilst it can be seen above that Katie is attempting to conform to normative thinness ideals [9,10], she is also aligning herself to media representations of the fit, feminine body, which is characterised as narrowly thin, toned, and young [11]. Urbanska [56] observed that women start to dislike their bodies due to the erroneous belief that the perfect beauty ideal is attainable, and women’s magazines continue to connect body hatred with low self-esteem. Markula [57] highlights how in particular, fitness magazines can enhance body image problems and distortion and suggests, in turn, this can be remedied through exercise regimes. Markula [57] also suggests that beauty is now judged mainly on an individual’s positive attitudes surrounding themselves and having a positive attitude towards their body shape provided the individual with overall confidence.

Bartky [58] suggests that the female body should conform to a specific range of gestures, postures, and movements that revolve around constriction, grace, and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty. Several feminist researchers have demonstrated that a “perfect body” is closely connected to fitness and ideal femininity, such as body shape emphasises thinness and tightly toned muscle [9,59–63]. In Katie’s reflection, not only does she reveal her envy of those who are skinny, she is also aware that her body does not align with the ideological feminine appearance that the media illustrates. Georgina additionally reflects on her experiences of viewing the media and comparing the bodies portrayed to her own:

Georgina: “I got to probably 18. I started getting body conscious because I started putting weight on, but I noticed it then before anything else; that’s when I realised I needed to start getting into the gym.”

Amy: “So did you compare yourself to other people when you approached 18? You were more aware?”

Georgina: “Yeah, I started reading magazines and looking at pop stars: ‘Oh, look she’s got a six pack. I haven’t; I better.... I want that.’”

Amy: “Yeah, is physical activity a key aspect between now and when you were 18?”

Georgina: “Yeah.”

Amy: “Why?”

Georgina: “Body image again. Everything to do with body image.”

Georgina and Katie’s policing of magazine discourses suggest that from an early age, they were aware of the influences of women’s magazines on the subjectivity of their bodies. The cultivation theory is distinctly demonstrated within Georgina and Katie’s experiences. Through this lens [12], Georgina and Katie have become barraged with images of thinness, and this has led them to believe that the ideal body type is desirable, *realistic*, and, by virtue of this, obtainable [64] (p. 197). The more they have been exposed to the idealised images through magazines and catalogues they have read, the more they have believed they can attain them. This attitude also emerges within Becky’s reflection:

Becky: “Media has got a big part as well that you’ve got to look a certain way. . . . They, I think they make everybody think that they should be a stick and look like Victoria Beckham and Cheryl Cole, um, and that’s not, that’s not the average woman nowadays.”

Wolf [10] (p. 58) contends that women’s magazines offer the closest thing women have ever had to collective subjectivity:

The images in women’s magazines constitute the only cultural female experience which can begin to gesture at the breadth of solidarity possible among women, a solidarity as wide as half the race. It is a meagre Esperanto, but in the absence of a better language of their own, they must make do with one which is man-made and market-driven and which hurts them.

The anti-fat attitude of magazines are fuelled by the culturally constructed embarrassment of women about their own naked bodies. This embarrassment is heightened by methods of the pornographic camera, where the “fat” parts, such as the buttocks, hips, and breasts are major aesthetic elements within pornography [65]. The thinning of fashion magazine images is part of an attempt to change the meaning of the naked body given by patriarchy. Within contemporary culture, the “independent” woman has paved the way for many diets, which have been accompanied by thin images in women’s magazines [65]. Georgina and Katie almost seem to suggest that they hold a certain ambivalence towards their bodies; on one hand, reading through the magazines triggered the negative feelings surrounding their bodies, but they also were happy with how they looked initially before being influenced into losing weight and shaping their bodies to the anti-fat culturally constructed body. This can be further reinforced from Hayley’s reflection whilst she views magazines:

Hayley: “You know, like, when you see in, like, magazines and things and, like, they’re all toned and, like, erm—You know, like, all, like, this [(points to legs)], like, definition, and I’d like to have a body like that. It’s not that I’ve got anything against being really skinny, or really fat, it’s just, that’s what I would say I wanna be: really toned.”

Mansfield [66] reports that the tendency of contemporary Western culture life is for individuals to perceive that their bodies should be worked on and worked out as a means of representing and expressing the individual self. The body is central in looking and appearing fit, and this, in many ways, is as important as actually being fit within a contemporary society. In conjunction with being influenced by the media, Georgina reinforces this by suggesting that she started to exercise purely due to the changed perception of her body image. She wanted to lose weight, and this was her main reason for continuing with physical activity to this present day. Bovey [67] suggests that for a woman, being fat is an around-the-clock awareness of knowing that a fat body overflows strict boundaries imposed by Western cultural and social norms. A fat woman carries a double burden; she is expected to conform to a more rigorous and stereotypical ideal of the aesthetic female body, and being fat means hatred and contempt from others can be experienced.

3.2. Negative Comments

It appears that some of the women in this research self-objectified [36] and were pressured into looking a certain way from a young age due to the men in their lives preferring slimmer partners:

Jenny: “I started seeing a marine who actually said to me, ‘If you put on any more weight, I’ll dump you.’”

Amy: “Oh wow, how did that make you feel?!”

Jenny: “That was the start of everything. [. . .] So, that started my bulimia, um. . . . I started purging, throwing it up, purging, throwing it up, um.”

Amy: “How long did that go on for?”

Jenny: “Er, that went on for, erm, probably, probably about a year. . . . Yeah, probably about a year.”

Amy: “Can you remember how you felt at the time?”

Jenny: “Er, pretty—well, I was just desperate to be thin, absolutely desperate to be thin, erm, because I thought [if] I was thin [(claps hands together)], people would want to be with me. Coz obviously, he didn’t coz I, you know . . . and people would want to be with me. And, I felt guilty about it, but I hid it very well. I was taking something like, er, 30 laxatives a day, 40 laxatives a day. I was in agony all the time; my periods stopped, erm. I didn’t want to go out because if I went out and there was food about, I knew that I would just pig out and then I’d panic thinking well I’m in public now, I can’t, I can’t, where can I puke, you know?”

Jenny’s shocking confession of desperately wanting to be thin for her to maintain relationships with men shows that she was willing to go to an extreme length to lose weight. It has been discussed for a long time how the development of women’s bodies, particularly within heterosexist and sociocultural contexts, regulate the ways in which women’s bodies will be treated and evaluated [68–73]. The objectification theory is evident within Jenny’s experience [36]. Her reflection reveals how her partner objectified her at the time as an object of his desire to lose weight; due to this, her body dissatisfaction increased, and she self-objectified and embodied her partner’s preference for a slimmer woman. She, therefore, spiralled into a radical decline of succumbing to bulimia in order to achieve a slimmer body. Jenny has also demonstrated how she has experienced a form of hostile sexism; women are exposed to this when they strive to maintain the ultrathin body, purely to receive praise from men [74,75]. This is also evident within Katie’s reflection:

Katie: “I had a boyfriend; I had big boobs definitely, and I had a boyfriend who—his boss used to call me thunder thighs. And, I would hate that and think, ‘Oh, I really need to lose weight’, but my boyfriend was never that bothered about it or anything, and erm, I did always want to lose weight. And, I think I tried different diets but only for a day or two, and then I’d go back to doing just what I wanted to do so it wasn’t until I was—yeah, I went on the pill as well, and that put, I seemed to put quite a bit of weight on there. But, it coincided with a boyfriend’s family that were really sort of good cooks and were into cooking and stuff so I think I, my food was sort of probably overdoing things a bit—contentment, being on the pill—and he actually finished with me because I was too fat!”

Amy: “How did you feel when he finished with you because of that?”

Katie: “I was really upset, really upset.”

Bordo [9] suggests that women within our culture are more tyrannised by contemporary ideals of slenderness compared to men as they have typically also been by beauty ideals in general. It is far more important to men to have slim partners than for women, as demonstrated in the above experiences. Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson [74] suggest that particularly romantic partners play an important role in the ongoing reevaluation of weight, shape, and general appearance satisfaction. This reevaluation is palpable in Katie’s reflection:

Katie: “If I let myself go, I would literally look and hate what I’m looking at, and I think I’d, you know, I’d start wearing baggier clothes. And, I know that’s not—I’d be depressed; I wouldn’t want to be in a relationship coz I wouldn’t want anyone else to see it or, or whatever, and even if I was with someone that said to me ‘I don’t care what you’d look like,’ I might be alright for a little while thinking ‘Oh that’s alright’ and then I’d end up looking at myself and just hating myself. [. . .] It would be nice to be with someone that says, ‘I don’t care what you look like,’ but unfortunately I’m with someone shallow who does care what I look like.”

It has been suggested that women are set against themselves and made to chase their own tails in a hopeless attempt to escape the trap patriarchy has built surrounding their own bodies; this is apparent in Katie's reflection above [65]. Furthermore, masculinity literature has identified consumer discourses that place gender emphasis on the "fit body" for men as well as women and on the notion of the body and youth discourse where the sexual lived body is objectified. Dieting, exercising, and starvation are self-imposed controls that reflect changes within women's role, especially through their greater independence from male domination [12].

Foucault's [76] concept of "docile bodies" (as a discipline of power) suggests that the omnipresent gaze of authority consequently disciplines the subject to monitor their own behaviours in a manner that contributes them as docile: they, in effect, become their own supervisors. Docile bodies are subjected and practised bodies through disciplined procedures; they are defined through how an individual may have a hold over another's body not only through doing what someone may wish but also to operate as they wish. This includes the techniques, efficacy, and speed that has also been determined [76].

This is evident through Jenny and Katie's experiences, their actions of going to extreme lengths to lose weight could imply, in this case, that the gaze of authority attributes toward the men in their life who have said this. Consequently, they have re-disciplined their lives to learn new techniques to lose weight in the gym and have somewhat been within a timeframe to do this before being "dumped". Due to the construction of a docile body, this, in turn, creates another discipline of power termed "self-surveillance" [76]. By commencing with physical activity and exercise after their experiences, the constant working surveillance of exercise practices turns into a technique of discipline without physical pressure or material constraints, which in turn controls. Power is exercised continuously and with minimal expense due to an inspecting gaze only being needed that each individual directs into him/herself [77].

According to Thompson et al. [78], women report higher levels of interpersonal guilt and body guilt in comparison to men. It has additionally been noted that shame arises from appraisals of one's core self as negative or inadequate, and this leads to unresolved negative effects and avoidance. Alternatively, guilt arises from appraisals of one's specific actions as wrong, leading them to take reparative action [79,80]. This is distinct within Hayley's experience whilst she discusses her relationship with her body and going to the gym:

Hayley: "I get really down, and I feel really fat and really disgusting, but then the next day I think, 'Right, I'll go to the gym.' But then, I go to the gym, and I feel normal again."

An addition to Hayley's experience, Jenny's feeling of guilt as she tried to hide her bulimia served as an indicator as to what she should do in order to attain a positive outcome. Shame and guilt have been consistently correlated with each other within literature [81], and scholars have confirmed that they are quite distinct phenomenological experiences [82–84].

Although it is frequently acknowledged that cultural pressures make women particularly vulnerable to eating disorders, it is not necessarily all individuals who are exposed to these pressures that develop eating anorexia or bulimia. It is, therefore, important to recognise that other "non-sociocultural" factors contribute to creating circumstances where a disorder in a particular individual may occur. These sociocultural factors (frequently listed as "deficits" in autonomy perfectionist personality traits: tendency to obesity, defective cognitive patterns, biological factors, perceptual disturbances, and emotionally repressed familial interactions) are weighted alongside sociocultural factors as equally conclusive of disorders [9]. This same discrepancy can be applied to dieting and body size; women are expected to manage these more stringently than men are. Similarly, the controlling of appetite and weight is considered virtuous, suggesting women must control these more than men must. Women, once again, are expected to be the custodians and embodiments of virtue for the culture [85]. Fallon et al. [65] (p. 275) also mention that most women who focus on dieting and improving their appearance tend to do this in order to feel more powerful in a world that "denies them true power".

In addition to the above factors, women are additionally more likely to perceive themselves as too fat. Due to this, women and girls are far more vulnerable to succumb to a higher engagement with crash dieting, laxative abuse, and compulsive exercising [86,87]. Several studies suggest that “self-starvation” is not driven by a “fear of fatness”; it is, however, a drive to influence the achievement of self-determination when an individual is confronted with conflicting cultural demands [88]. This is evident within Victoria’s reflection of her younger self:

Victoria: “When I was younger, erm—this is true actually—I used to, erm, starve myself all week so I was really slim for the weekend to get into a nice tight little number. And then, once I had been clubbing on a Saturday night, I used to pig out, binge. And then during the week, I’d take laxatives and, you know, diet.”

Amy: “So, do you think that was because of pressures of everyone else?”

Victoria: “It was purely just to look good at the weekend; god that’s mad isn’t it? [. . .] I think I had a bit of problem there [(laughs)], but as I say, I grew out of it, you know?”

Researchers have identified body shame, whereby women feel ashamed of their bodies and hold a perception that they are falling short of feminine beauty ideals [89]. This shame has also been suggested as a key emotional consequence of self-objectification [30,78,79]. Body shame regularly negotiates the effects of self-objectification on disordered eating [32,90–93]. Self-objectification in the context of its theory is expected to predict more body shame, which in turn predicts more disordered eating due to habitual body monitoring. This can be recognised within Victoria’s reflection; she has compared herself to an impossible internalised appearance standard and, therefore, inevitably falls short of this. Her feelings of body shame add to the efforts of avoiding a “defective” body, and she then manipulates her food intake to meet oppressive social mandates for a thinner and more feminine appearance [10,11,94,95].

3.3. Negative Physical Education (PE) Experiences

Not only does it seem that women are self-objectifying due to men preferring a slimmer partner, several women within this study were also told from an early age that they needed to monitor their weight and to control their food intake by authority figures such as their PE school teachers. Consequently, this led to experiencing self-objectification throughout their secondary school years and engaging with exercise [6]. Penny’s experience reinforces the ideology of girls having to maintain femininity through their weight:

Penny: “I was always watching what I ate; I can remember that, erm, where, like, the PE teacher—I remember her commenting to a few of the others, like, after the summer holidays, how they had put on weight and different things. Yeah, she was quite, like, abrupt and would say, you know, ‘You’ve been eating too many chips’ or ‘You’ve put on weight over the summer holidays,’ so you was always, I was, like, always aware and trying to, like, eat, like, what was best for you. You know? And, I used to say to my mum, like, get her to cook me what I wanted, erm, coz I didn’t want her pinpointing me. And, it would be in front of the whole of the girls, so it was quite, yeah, yeah, I can always remember her doing it, so, yeah. I was always careful about what I ate.”

Amy: “Did you find that you compared yourself to a lot of other girls in the changing rooms?”

Penny: “Yeah, definitely, and like, erm, coz I was never like tiny, tiny, but, like, my best friend was. She was a lot smaller, so I’d always look at her and think, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve, you know, I won’t eat as much’ or ‘I’ll change things to try and like be her size.’ Erm, so yeah, I think everyone, like, would do that in the changing rooms: compare themselves, and try and get their perfect figure.”

Within the United Kingdom, traditional sporting structures including PE have been mentioned as inappropriate in relation towards the needs of many girls and young women [19]. It has been argued further that ideologies within the sporting and PE cultures alienate and demotivate girls in sport and physical activity in general and particularly in PE [96]. There are various consequences, but it has been agreed widely that girls and young women are not only missing out on vital parts of their education and experience but also losing out in terms of their rights to access the beneficial areas of sport [97].

Given this feminist phenomenological research views gender as a social construction, it can be asserted that the centrality of inequalities of access, opportunities, and outcomes potentially oppress and restrict girls and young women throughout their experiences of physical education in schools. Characteristics associated with the stereotypical views of femininity and masculinity strongly reinforce the expectations of what is appropriate for girls and women and boys and men, across all ages. In institutions such as schools, these images are centralised and reinforced ideologies, which form the basis for the political management in a wider society of gender divisions. Definitions of masculinity and femininity may vary; the extent of gender-specific assumptions collectively lend to support powerful dominant ideologies, and these have an abundant impact on cultural and institutional practices. Within physical education, dominant ideologies of femininity and masculinity have consequences and are reinforced by priorities, policies, and practices within schools [98].

Penny's experience above reinforces the description by Coward [99] surrounding physical education being concerned with the quest for the "ideal" feminine appearance. Within Penny's reflection, a central emphasis remains on appearing and presenting the self within "acceptable" feminine standards. These standards are not only internally reinforced within Penny's experience, but her PE teacher also comments towards other girls on the acceptability of their femininity. The attempt to impose this ideological construction of the "ideal woman" is clear within the PE teacher's comments and through the comparison of bodies within the changing rooms. Another example of this is illustrated within Lily's reflection:

Lily: "There was always better girls than me. [. . .] The girls that were all like 'Ooo, I don't wanna do it' always looked better than I did. Like, they had bigger boobs and, like, slimmer waists, and I was flat chested and didn't really have anything. . . . I always used to look at them and think, 'I wish I looked like that', but that wasn't why I done well in it, I don't think; I dunno."

Amy: "So, you think when you were at school, you always compared?"

Lily: "Yeah, and like, coz obviously, there's a massive group of you in the changing rooms, and you have to get changed together; you sort of see it don't you? You see, like, what other people look like, and you see what you look like. There was always girls I looked at and thought 'Oh, I wish I looked like that.' [. . .] I used to really, really wanna look like them."

Bradshaw [100] suggests that physical activity may cause feelings of worthlessness and unhappiness if women participate within physical activity purely for beauty benefits. This can be distinguished within Lily's reflection, as her focus is surrounding her "beauty" rather than her health, which reinforces the discourse that exercise is for beauty rather than health.

As seen within Victoria's reflection previously in this paper, her shame was embodied through other people's perceptions and comments towards her appearance, resulting in self-objectification [6,38]. In this instance, the experiences of having to use the changing rooms can be recognised as a space that enhances shame and reveals Lily's and Penny's hopes and aspirations within the reflections whilst they were at school, specifically wanting to obtain the "perfect body" due to comparing their own to other girls. The changing rooms within the gym environment are a space where certain body practices occur, such as undressing and direct body care. These are usually powerful signs of a private situation and are exclusively confined within this space [39]. Probyn's notion of shame can also be applied to Penny and Lily's comparisons whilst in the changing rooms [40]. They have constantly directed their contemplation

towards their bodies (either consciously or unconsciously) and compared themselves to other bodies. This, in turn, can be directed towards the previously stated gender relations, whereby the ideal feminine appearance is seen as more socially acceptable [101].

Puhl [102] suggests that weight stigmatisation begins within youth during early childhood and is prevalent within the school setting by adolescence. The school setting is a particularly salient environment for weight-based victimisation to occur [103]. Longitudinal studies demonstrate that weight status dramatically predicts the likelihood of victimisation for youths in the future, and the heaviest youths are at the highest risk for future stigmatisation [104].

A factor that has been identified as a potential risk factor for body image and eating disturbances is appearance-related teasing [105,106]. Studies have indicated that this is significantly related to body dissatisfaction, weight concerns, eating disturbances, drive for thinness, depressive symptoms, bulimic behaviours, and suicidal ideation and attempts [107].

Furthermore, recent research has proposed that adolescents report weight-based teasing as the most common form of teasing experienced and observed in sport, with obese youths being targeted by bullies regardless of gender, social skills, race, or scholastic achievement [108]. There has also been substantial evidence suggesting that criticism and teasing regarding weight is emotionally harmful for overweight adolescence and children [109]. Not only are obese youth vulnerable to stigmatisation from peers, there is also an increase within studies that indicates educators are additional sources of weight stigma in obese youth, and teachers' perceptions and expectations of their students are influenced by youth body weight [110–112]. It has also been suggested that educators report a lower expectation towards overweight students in comparison to normal-weight youth; this is across a range of abilities and performance domains, and they endorse negative weight-related beliefs and stereotypes towards obese individuals. Recent work has highlighted that the negative attitudes are also among physical education (PE) teachers in particular [113,114]. This is further demonstrated within Alice's experience:

Alice: "I can remember my PE teacher [. . .] pulled me aside and said, 'You know, look, if you carry on with this,'—you know coz they were quite blunt in those days—'if you carry on like this, you will be dropped [from the netball team]', and that was a shock. I was devastated but devastated not obviously to allow myself to go the other way because there were obviously girls that were at school that were anorexic, that were binge eating, and you know, things like that."

Bordo [9] argued that being fat in contemporary culture is an unbearable weight for women; being fat makes physical education an unbearable lesson for many students, and in Alice's experience, this was through the comments of her PE teacher. Another important aspect to highlight is that team games for girls such a netball allowed for energetic activity, but they were also controlled through restricted direct contact with other players. They were seen as acceptable because there was an agent between the ball and player. For girls, physical contact was not permitted, and netball whilst allowing contact with the ball was adapted for girls in its restriction of space, decline in speed, and its avoidance of physical contact. Even within PE, girls were responsible for maintaining modesty and connections between femininity, asexuality, and childhood.

Within Alice's extract, the gendered stereotypes were accepted and were viewed by her PE teacher as being "natural". This "naturalism" is defined as either biological or culturally inevitable. Alice and Penny's teachers have a clear expectation surrounding girls and young women's notions of femininity. This femininity contains ideas surrounding physical ability (through threatening to drop her from the team due to this diminishing if Alice was overweight), sexuality, motherhood, and domesticity. The similar PE experiences shared by Penny and Alice also suggest that they have been under the gaze of authority, in this case, from their PE teachers. Although enduring this experience from a young age, they have always remembered the comments made about "being fat" and being told to "lose weight"; as a consequence of not wanting to be humiliated or ridiculed, they have monitored their food intake and appearance, thus, rendering them "docile" [76].

3.4. *Showering Away the Shame*

An aspect of physical education that was additionally considered an issue within school was the negativity surrounding the shower facilities and changing rooms that were available and had to be endured after physical activity; this has been importantly identified in other research [115]. A reflection from Becky surrounding the compulsory procedures of showering after class illuminates the worry and tension she experienced in relation to her body during her changing room and shower experience:

Becky: “When you get older, I remember the PE teachers having to make you go in for showers, and I think that is where self-esteem got really bad for girls. Because, they force you, and when you’re going through puberty, your kind change a lot and you kinda, it’s not about being confident about yourself, it’s about ‘You don’t wanna.’ You don’t want to stick out like a sore thumb, and the teachers doing that to you, I think was a bit mental cruelty, but that’s my personal opinion. [. . .] I think that all starts when, I think it kind of starts between when year nine and going up. Definitely because . . . puberty—yeah I do think that—if I look back on it now, I do think that, and I think we [were] forced to go for showers—I think that was just totally wrong. I think there should be a choice: you either do or you don’t. At school, I do because it’s not private.”

For a long duration of time, young women have had anxieties concerning physical education experiences and commonly surrounding the negative memories of showers as shown by Becky. Whilst she reminisces about her former shower experiences, the problems she faced are clearly surrounding “exposure” and are grounded in physiology and the physical changes of puberty. There is, however, an interaction of physical development and cultural expectation; Becky is not worried and anxious necessarily about the overall actual physical changes of her body but the culturally determined response to these changes. It has been suggested that those who meet the average expectations or the desired body shape and development can cope within this situation; however, those who deviate from the expected desired shape face embarrassment and often unkind comments [16].

Given that there is a societal emphasis on the desired adult physique for adult femininity, it can be suggested that Becky is aware of her differences during adolescence, and this caused anxiety which led her to want to “hide” or retreat from scrutiny. Traditionally, PE has provided the context in which physical differences have been made public and unmasked. In adulthood, women are not expected to expose their bodies and are encouraged to dislike their body shape unless it conforms to the “ideal” feminine stereotype. Unfortunately, within PE, this involves confronting a culture of femininity that creates embarrassment and concerns whilst attempting to encourage attitudes that are positive to hygiene and the perception of girls’ own body images, and the emphasis on this can be distinguished within Becky’s extract [16].

3.5. *Outside of the School Changing Rooms*

Many of the women in the previous stories above have discussed the negative comments experienced surrounding their bodies, in particular, with Penny, Becky, and Alice’s experiences; these were imposed on them at school through specifically physical education environments. It seems that when many women were younger and attending school, they became aware of the societal pressures surrounding being a girl and the struggles of how their bodies were portrayed. This reinforced the expectations to remain feminine and have the “ideal” feminine appearance within the school environment. Hayley’s extract illuminates how these pressures surrounded her even outside of the changing rooms at school:

Hayley: “I used to enjoy doing sports at school and things like that, where a lot of girls would have notes not to do it. I did get a bit like that when I got like in to year 11, but its coz you start worrying about your hair and things like that don’t you? It becomes more important.”

Amy: “Do you feel there was a difference when you were at school with how you compared yourself to others?”

Hayley: “Yeah, when I was at school, but now I don’t care. I think I’m a bit of a different person now. Like, things like I used to worry about my hair—I used to take my straighteners into school, and I’d straighten my hair at school and things like that; now, I don’t even brush my hair when I go out.”

It is evident within Hayley’s reflection how within her lived reality, she has succumbed to popular discourses surrounding gender and the portrayal of her feminine appearance. These popular discourses refer to a discursive field that proposes dominant ideologies of gender. These can be through popularised media, such as newspapers, magazines, television, and advertisements and through the entertainment industries [116]. It has been well-documented that discourses reinforce stereotypes for teenage girls and young women. The stereotypes portrayed by these discourses are often given to consumers (in this case Hayley), as highly commercialised and totally packaged cultural commodities through television, magazines, and so forth [117]. Hayley has normalised the stereotypes she viewed and has adapted her body in order to adhere to these expectations.

Mead [118] (p. 58) asserts that “the self has a character which is different from that of the physiological organism with a development all its own. The self is not even present at birth but arises later in the process of social experience and activity.” Young women, therefore, have to learn how to “be a body” [119], suggesting that what a woman observes in a cultural mirror is often a way to measure her social worth. The focus of her body comes through interactions with friends, family, and peer groups and through the messages received from outside of these circles [120–124]. This can be noted within Charlie’s reflection of when she was at secondary school:

Charlie: “I was fat at school, so for me, sport was a way of, it was losing weight and trying to hide the fact I might have been fat, but I am really good at sport. When I did javelin, I was quite large but, like, started to lose weight in kind of correlation of the more, the better physique I got, the better I became at doing javelin and being more competitive. [. . .] In primary school, I remember just looking at pictures and being on holiday. I was one of the tallest and really slim, and then, I remember a picture from year 7. I looked like I had a perm. I was probably about ten, eleven stone in year 7, and then when I got to kind of year 10/11, like, all my friends had boyfriends, girlfriends. All my friends were quite pretty and slim, and then, there was me who was quite loud and kind of, I suppose my loudness took over my insecurities of being the bigger person in the group, so yeah, I suppose again that was just another, erm—I can’t think of the word—motivational tool for me to do better at sport for me to get slimmer, to be more attractive. I suppose [. . .] I liked being the centre of attention, and the more that happened, the more comfortable I felt. And, my friends were always really good with me, so.”

Within this reflection, Charlie expresses how participating within a competitive sport (javelin) was slightly different than the sports at school because it gave her an avenue to justify having a body that fell outside of the norm. Research supporting this suggests that athletes who compete at a competitive level are at risk for body image disturbances due to task (e.g., weight requirements and performance advantages) and social (e.g., judging, coach, and teammates) pressures that are required to attain an ideal physique [125]. Additionally, the industries surrounding diet, food, and fitness, aided by the media, adopt the message that women for independence must have self-improvement and self-control and that it is her responsibility to achieve the ultra-slimmer body ideal, while alternatively, the opposite of this relates to laziness, indignity, lack of control, moral failure, and self-indulgence. The family peer group and school often reflect and enhance these messages, which often take the form of punishments and rewards that motivate women’s bodies towards slenderness [13]. This pressure is evident within not only Charlie’s reflection above but also in Joanna’s experience at school:

Joanna: "I didn't really care I guess; well, I dunno, growing. Like, when I was younger, I didn't care; in, like, secondary, it was a bit like, 'Oh, now I care.'"

Amy: "So, what made you care about your body more in secondary school do you think?"

Joanna: "I was like, 'Well, everyone really, everyone was competing to look the best.' Yeah, probably that. I wanted to change all of it, yeah, wanted a nice toned stomach, small arms, small legs, boobs. That wasn't going to go anywhere was it? Yeah erm, yeah, probably my hair as well. I knew what I wanted; I just didn't have the time to go and do what I wanted."

Furthermore, within Alex's interview, there was a definite sign of her challenging and resisting masculine superiority with sports and PE:

Alex: "I really wanted to box, and there was a lad that boxed, and um, but I said, 'Oh, where do you go? I wanna box.' And, he said, 'Girls don't box,' and I said, 'Why not?', and he said, 'Coz they don't; girls do not box.' So, I went along to the gym, and they wouldn't let me in coz I was a girl. So, and, I tried later as well, and yeah no, you just didn't do it. And, I tried to get into a football team. I couldn't even play football; in the playground, the boys would, erm, ostracise me. They'd sort of gang up and wouldn't let me in. I tried to get into game; they just kept shouting at me basically, so I learnt not to do it."

Scraton [16] (p. 124) suggests that PE is not "a straightforward process of gender ideology and identity reproduction". Alex's reflection supports the notion that some teenage girls and young women infrequently refuse the choices forced upon them by enthusiastically taking part in sports. Although from an early age, Alex remembers being ostracised for being a girl in school and wanting to play football and to box, throughout her life, she has resisted against this, and boxing at the gym is now a fundamental aspect of her life. The extension and application of Foucault's work to feminism has highlighted the body as being a central position surrounding the construction of femininity and masculinity [126]. This significant development has allowed Alex, in this instance, to view her behaviour as firstly taking control of her body and, secondly, changing her body from a site of oppression into a site of resistance. This resistance (or struggle) forms the foundation of potentially empowering the "transformative change" that feminism strives for in order to question the (hetero) sexist status quo that is produced largely by society [116].

3.6. Empowerment through Physical Activity

An important aspect to highlight from the stories of the women in this research is Stephanie's experiences of physical activity. Interestingly, out of the thirteen women, Stephanie was the only female in this research who did not speak of any negative experiences associated with her body or surrounding her early memories as a reason for her to be physically active and to attend the gym. Stephanie reflects:

Amy: "So, when you were at school, can you remember how you felt about your body?"

Stephanie: "No issues. None what-so-ever. No."

Amy: "Do you think looking back, there is a reason for that?"

Stephanie: "No, I just think that I've always been quite fortunate as I didn't have weight issues, if that's—in today's society, everybody is weight conscious about—we didn't have that, and I suppose being like—I'm 53 years old now so being bought up 43 years ago when I was 10, erm, [. . .] we were always out playing, and the way our road was situated if we wanted to, if there wasn't much traffic, we would play tennis in the road, right in the middle of the road because of the way it was. We used to have bike races round the circle with the boys as well. We was always out; we had a big, um, like playing field called the rec. We used to go down there a lot."

Although Stephanie did not experience any negativity as an influence to engage within physical activity, she refers to not having weight problems and how she was fortunate to not be conscious of her body. Stephanie also seems to have been blessed with a body that could fit the ideological norm; therefore, she experienced less of an issue in relation to her body issues due to possessing the thin ideal of feminine beauty [127]. This additionally suggests that Stephanie relates body dissatisfaction with only being overweight due to how she perceives society's ideal standards to be, therefore conforming to the discourses surrounding this. When I further asked her if physical activity is still a key aspect in her life now and the reasons for going to the gym, she explained:

Stephanie: "Not only for my health issues, but I enjoy doing it as well. [. . .] I'm . . . it makes me feel better; it makes me feel better. . . . I enjoy the social side of it."

Stephanie's early experiences of socialising whilst playing tennis in the road and the memories of her playing outside as a group are the much-loved experiences that she gleans from being interested in physical activity when she was younger. This socialisation for Stephanie could be suggested as a tool of empowerment and hence the reason for why she likes going to the gym now and likes socialising, as this is, for her, to remain empowered and confident through her body and to remain physically active. As Bradshaw [100] implies, sports and fitness that is organised make women feel good about themselves and their bodies; they liberate, give autonomy, and empower them. This is illuminated within Becky's experience:

Becky: "I suppose it's a sense of achievement, that you've actually got up and you've done it. Sometimes you can drag yourself to do it, but yeah. So, probably a happy achievement, feeling. It's just a certain, yeah, it's just a nice feeling I can't, how can I explain? You know, when you've, erm—I suppose it's like when you thought you wouldn't be able to do something and you've done it; that's the sort of feeling."

The experience above elucidates how Becky feels achievement and liberation whilst exercising and pushing herself. Within the experiences discussed, power and empowerment are major themes. Many of the women recognised that power for them was being in control of their exercise choices, taking pride in their physical achievements, and having a body that responded to challenges:

Jenny: "I feel like I can go on forever. I love that feeling; I absolutely love that feeling, erm, you know. You train, you train hard, you can barely walk out of here [the gym], and you just think, 'Yep, [(nods head)] that was a good workout.'"

This power includes physical strength "as a source of confidence and personal security—the opposite to the vulnerability of patriarchal femininity" [128] (p. 21). This view refers to more of a "power-to" approach, which has been neglected by traditional political theorists [89]. "Power-to" in contrast refers to capacity and ability, which relates to some kind of freedom. Feminism emphasises the significance of women (and men) finding their own "power-to" in the world [23]. This approach views power as something based on the capacity to do things and to achieve goals specifically in collaboration with others, rather than domination or subordination [129].

Bradshaw [100] notes there are a number of paradoxes and contradictions that can arise from the assertion that sports and physical activity empower women. These contradictions not only involve the discourses and practises that surround physical activity and sports but also are inherited within discourses surrounding the female body. Women do not always have the freedom to recognise their "power-to", due to this sometimes being undermined by "power-over". This can specifically be seen within the reflections towards the beginning of this paper where the negative comments the women had experienced were from their PE teachers and partners at the time.

The cultural images and imperatives convince women that to achieve the ideal female body is to be empowered. The development or quest for the ideal female body through diet and exercise does

not necessarily engender empowerment. Alternatively, it can distract women by ensuring that they focus on their presumed flaws [100]. Not only do Stephanie, Jenny, and Becky's reflections suggest that they feel empowered whilst exercising as it makes them feel good [100], but this is explicitly evident throughout the other extracts explored within this paper too. Many of the women turned their negative experiences into empowerment and in the form of taking control back of their own bodies through exercising. The experiences of the women using exercise as an empowerment tool also suitably aligns with Foucault's process of "technologies of the self" [130], whereby the women have chosen to transform their identities by emerging in resistant practices. The women have changed the dominant discourses imposed on them; however, engaging within "technologies of the self" does not necessarily lead to transformation power. In these experiences, it is evident that "power-to" is present, therefore entailing autonomy, capability, and the potential surrounding the women and their bodies in the gym [22].

The decision to remain physically active and to participate in exercise can be seen as a practice of resistance, where the woman have overcome and ignored the cultural norms, imperatives, and images that coerce them into pursuing the ideal female body; this could also be suggested as "power-to" or empowerment [131]. The decision to continue and engage within exercise spaces can be viewed as a site where these women have resisted commonly held notions of female inferiority. Through their involvement within these, the women are able to know their bodies free of patriarchal definitions and control and to cultivate this as a sense of self-respect for their physical capabilities [132].

4. Summary

This paper explored women's embodied experiences in relation to their various reasons and influences for exercise participation. The application of feminist phenomenology implemented both a theoretical and methodological pathway to research the sensuousness of the experiences through the lived, moving body. Moreover, employing this framework in conjunction with ethnography also granted a suitable contribution to the limited but existing literature, indicating that bodies are also lived through cultures, times, and locations and hold social meanings.

Furthermore, this paper acknowledged how within certain environments, the female body can become docile and controlled. It appears that the pressures to conform to the contemporary ideologies of female perfectionism (e.g., slim, toned, and athletic) are imposed by structural, cultural, historical, and localised forces in ways that affect and shape future physical activity participation. By choosing to immerse themselves in varying exercise spaces, this appeared to offer the women resilience towards their early experiences surrounding their reasons and influences for exercise participation and demonstrates they were not reduced to "being" their bodies. This displays that a range of physical and emotional sensations are associated with the individual body, as well the social context, time, and space in which the experiences occur, demonstrating the appropriateness of employing a feminist phenomenology framework. This paper additionally highlighted how although most of the women initially experienced negativity in relation to their bodies, they specifically chose physical activity and exercise participation as a way of resistance and empowerment, and this was a key aspect for them to continue and immerse themselves within physical activity to this present day.

Further research that incorporates an embodied approach to explore the potential relationships between different types of exercise, body image, and exercise motivation within differing physical cultures would be most beneficial within the current literature surrounding this research. Finally, it can be suggested that the experiences of the women in this research are not adequately explained through confining heteronormative discourses. Embodied approaches that consolidate feminist phenomenological readings offer the space to additionally think and challenge the limits situated upon women's bodies (and bodies in general) [48].

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