

I/ Introduction

“(in spite of persistent fiction, we never write on a blank page, but always on one that has already been written on)” (de Certeau 1984, 43)¹

Social theories on the modern western society have highlighted an increased focus on body appearance and health and have identified a representation of the body as a phenomenon of choices and possibilities (e.g. Shilling 1993, Featherstone 1999). Even though the interest in the body and public health is not new (Foucault in Burchell et al. 1999) one could, according to several scholars stress a new tendency in society, namely an individualization of the body. The individualization thesis has had an important impact on the sociology of the body where several studies with for instance a focus on body modification have pointed at the body as an essential entity for self construction and thereby self-identity. In this perspective, agents are acting through and with the body² and this latter is therefore more than just a biological *a priori*. The individualization of the body implies that body appearance and health can be understood as expressing characteristics of the individual’s identity. The right, healthy and feminine or masculine appearance is appreciated and portrays a pro-active and self-responsible individual.

Health practices are identified as an important part of mass culture where the individual is constantly encouraged to have a healthy lifestyle (Lipovetsky 1983). The sociologist Nikolas Rose developed in the late 90’s the term “Healthism”, first explained by Crawford in 1980, in order to stress the link between the public objectives of good health of the social body (in this sense, the public health) and individuals’ desires for health and well-being (Rose 1999). With the same approach, several scholars have illustrated the dominant health discourses and their impact on individuals’ visions and objectives of good health (e.g. Dworkin & Wachs 2009, Roy 2008, Rysst 2010). In this light body appearance and health is given great importance, and the body is

¹ The brackets in this quotation have not been removed for a precise reason: the brackets reinforce the meaning of the quotation by signalling that the research we produce is only a bracket in relation to all the knowledge produced in (social) sciences, i.e. that the data produced in this research project is a result of former data productions and is data which will produce new questions.

² Several feminisms have highlighted how the body and more specifically body practices are given social meanings (Pitts 2005). In a master thesis, I had the opportunity to work on breastfeeding and the politics developed on that matter. In the master thesis I developed how the act of breastfeeding represented “good motherhood” and how women who could/would not breastfeed were stigmatized in the public discourse on breastfeeding (Thualagant 2007).

approached as a reflexive project, meaning that the body appearance and performance can be modified and optimized by the individual (Crossley 2005, Shilling 1993). Body modification, a term which was developed in the late 90's, has for a least two decades been on the theoretical agenda of the sociologist Mike Featherstone. As he explains, the term body modification covers many different practices where the body is transformed (Featherstone 2005). The list of practices includes practices such as piercing, tattooing, plastic surgery, but also bodybuilding and anorexia. What the several studies on these practices have in common is an account on agents taking control over their bodies (Featherstone 2005). Here the different body practices become signifiers of the individuals' identity.

Inspired by former studies on body modification, this PhD thesis will develop a sociological analysis of bodywork in club-based fitness centres and explore the intentions of individuals' work on and with the body. Focus in this PhD study has been on body enhancement, which in the light of social theories on the body can be approached as way of transforming the body. Embedded in a larger research project on doping as an issue of gender and society supervised by prof. Gertrud Pfister, this Ph.D. thesis has a focus on fitness doping. Besides exploring both men's and women's practices in the club-based fitness centres and their willingness to consume body enhancing means and methods, a main objective has also been to examine the conceptualization of fitness doping.

1. Bodywork in high modern society – a review of existing literature

Being absent for decades in the field of sociology, the body became a subject for humanities and social sciences in the early 1980's. Several social scholars have highlighted how the body has changed status in high modernity. With a focus on the individualization of the body, this latter is approached as "a constitutive of the self" (Shilling 1993, 3) and is portrayed in several social theories as an entity which is maintained, worked upon and modified with the aim of sustaining and producing self-identity. Meanwhile, this is only one sociological approach to the body among other sociological underpinnings. The embodiment of social agents is challenging the many dualisms in sociology as for instance the distinction made between structure/agency and nature/culture. The focalisation on the body as being an entity embedded in social meanings illuminates the dynamics of social relations and relates to the question on how reflexive body practices can be.

Researchers have both in a national and an international context provided evidence that illegal means are used in a fitness context but our existing sociological knowledge of experiences with and opinions about body enhancement, more precisely with body-enhancing means and methods, is limited. Epidemiological studies have pointed to a specific group of young men's use of drugs, in particular anabolic steroids. Little is known about the general use of body-enhancing means among both women and men (Backhouse et al. 2007). Previous studies have elaborated thoroughly on the presence of an idealised strong, muscular and masculine body and thus the prevalence of muscle-enhancing means. The first national survey on doping was conducted in 1999 and, despite a small prevalence of doping, outlined doping as a "health problem", i.e. a problem in terms of public health (Saltin et al. 1999). Another Danish study pointed to the specific culture of bodybuilding,

where men striving to build bigger muscles use illegal means such as anabolic steroids for their body project (Mogensen 2004). Danish studies have especially emphasised that the prevalence of doping is related to variables such as social class (Pedersen & Benjaminsen 2006), gender and training frequency (Benjaminsen & Pedersen 2006). According to these studies younger men from a lower social class who work out frequently (five or more times per week) are more predisposed to doping (Benjaminsen & Pedersen 2002) than others. Men with experience of doping are identified in the existing literature as men who act as their own experts in their search for body-enhancing methods. Men and women are portrayed as having precise body projects, where men often wish for bigger muscles and women often wish to be thinner (Pedersen 2004). The national survey on doping from 1999 indicates that women diet more often than men (Saltin et al. 1999). Previous studies conducted in various Western countries have identified a “slim mania” (e.g. Bordo 1993) and highlight strong discourses of both masculinity and femininity (e.g. Dworkin & Wachs 2009) expressing an imperative of having the “right” gendered body. These discourses produce a hegemonic understanding of masculinity or femininity and thus a narrow definition of what is appreciated as masculine or feminine. The concept of “hegemonic masculinity” has been used in several studies of sport and masculinities. Despite the criticisms voiced about the concept in the early 1980s (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), the term has been used in order to illustrate how men are made responsible for the achievement of health, well-being and the perfectible body (Crawshaw 2007). In this respect, joining the gym is considered a practice where the construction of the self is possible (Gill et al. 2005).

New insights have been developed and introduced since the start of this PhD thesis. Mainly two studies have contributed with new knowledge on the matter of doping with a specific focus on Denmark. A recent study provides new information on the prevalence of doping. According to a survey of 5,010 persons from 15 to 60 years of age, only 1.5% of the respondents use or have used muscle-enhancing means. The vast majority of the respondents reported not to have used or not to consider the use of illegal drugs and means (Singhammer & Ibsen 2010). Another study identified a pronounced interest in doping among users of fitness centres. Using the enquiries³ submitted to the Danish agency for anti-doping as source, the researchers discovered that 15% of the enquiries came from users of anabolic steroids and another 15% came from individuals who considered using anabolic steroids (Bojsen-Møller & Christiansen 2010). The results of these two research projects illustrate that doping may be a problem of a small percentage of the population.

The national anti-doping agency still depicts doping as a current problem but does not provide an exact percentage of the prevalence of doping. The agency presumes a prevalence of 3% of male

³ These enquiries were submitted to the Danish anti-doping agency over a period of 18 months and entailed questions related to recreational exercise and enhancing means and methods (Bojsen-Møller & Christiansen 2010).

steroid users⁴ among the male adult population, a figure which was provided by the national survey in 1999. As explained above the majority found that the users of doping are predominantly younger men from lower social classes. Can we assume then that women are not as tempted as men to use performance- and body-enhancing means in relations to their bodywork? Are they not captivated by the same enhancement discourses?

An explanation of the higher incidence of men using doping could simply be explained by the narrow definition of doping in a fitness context. As elaborated in the second paper of this thesis, there is a national focus on anabolic steroids which implies that other body enhancing means or methods are not in focus in the national anti doping policy. However, what is underlined through the theoretical underpinnings of bodywork in this thesis is a general attempt to enhance the body as a capital and the thesis therefore argues for an exploration on the general willingness to enhance the body in the club-based fitness centres. In this sense, the thesis suggests a broader understanding of enhancement means and measures in a fitness context that encompasses the societal context where focus is on optimisation and enhancement of the body as a capital.

As this review illustrates, it is still uncertain how important the problem of doping is since there are different information given on the prevalence of doping. What is certain, though, is the construction of fitness doping as a problem in society. A phenomenological study on male bodybuilding underlines that not only the wish to build more on to the body but also the body itself is considered to be disturbing in a subjective as well as in a cultural sense (Mogensen 2011, 15). This point underlines what is already suggested in some epistemological discussions on the body, namely that the body in society can be considered as a principal field of political and cultural activity (e.g. Foucault 1976, 1978, 1984 or Turner 1992, 2004, 2008). This interpretation of the body could explain why fitness doping, despite its low prevalence, is on the political agenda. In the light of observing the body as an object for politics, anti-doping policies can be regarded as a political attempt to regulate and control body practices, i.e. to govern the social body.

2. The objectives of the thesis

With the working title “*The cultivated body – a sociological study of attitudes and behaviours towards body modification*” this PhD thesis has been developed through several questions, i.e. theoretical, methodological as well as practical questions. In the early phase of the PhD project issues were raised which were directed towards the interrelated phenomena of doping in fitness centres, body projects and current discursive norms of health, femininity and masculinity. The aim was to explore whether and how gender norms mattered in relation to the different body projects expressed in the narratives of users of fitness centres where bodywork takes place.

⁴ *Om doping* (2008) Copenhagen: Anti Doping Danmark. Retrieved on September 10, 2012, from the World Wide Web: http://antidoping.dk/Om_doping/Hvor_udbredt_er_doping/Undersoegelserne.aspx

This point of departure has led to a thesis entitled “*Fitness Doping and Body Management. An Explorative Study of Body Investment Practices*”. Inspired by a Foucauldian approach to the body, my theoretical pre-understanding led me to understand the body as a cultural and social product which has gained importance in society but which is also of importance for the construction and the care of the self. An underlying question, inspired by a Foucauldian perspective, refers to the legitimacy of the different forms of bodywork and looks into questions of how certain enhancement strategies are made more illegitimate than others through discourses and policies. This question provided motivation in the early phase of the research process and led to the construction and formulation of research questions for the PhD study that were more specifically concerned with how individuals invest in their bodies and how subjects develop different strategies in order to enhance their bodies.

In its more developed stage, the aim of the thesis was – besides investigating current doping research and the national focus on anti-doping strategies – to understand women’s and men’s body practices in club-based fitness centres and their opinions and experiences with body-enhancing strategies. Based on empirical data produced and gathered in this thesis, fitness doping is contextualised, different orientations towards bodywork are identified, and individuals’ experiences with and opinions of body-enhancing strategies are explored.

The questions in the survey and the questions posed during the interviews dealt with the individuals’ motives for and objectives of their bodywork, their relationship to their body with regard to ideal conceptualisations of feminine, masculine, young, healthy bodies and their legitimisation of certain body-enhancing strategies. Respondents and informants were invited to reflect upon these matters in the questionnaire sent out to ten club-based fitness centres and during semi-structured interviews as well as in two focus groups.

The focus in this PhD study was on club-based fitness centres for two reasons. Firstly, the fact that the fitness centres in DGI (Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations) have to have an official anti-doping policy, a decision which was taken by the Danish government (in 2005) in accordance with the national sports organisations, has forced club-based fitness centres to adopt this policy by testing their members and being proactive in providing doping-free environments. The anti-doping policies at the centres raised several questions, among them the question of the implementation of the anti-doping regulations and the users’ opinions about and experiences with doping and the anti-doping policies. Secondly, the focus on the DGI fitness centres enabled us to reach a wide range of users who are engaged in various activities, have different objectives and are in different ways involved in body-investing and body-enhancing practices. The scope of this research project is directed towards a broader perspective on doping, where doping is not only considered to be the use of anabolic steroids or other means of enhancing masculine corporeality, but on the willingness in general to improve or enhance bodily capital. These fitness clubs seemed to be relevant sites for investigation because of their broad population.

Because of the strong focus on prevalence in previous Danish studies and especially the focus on the use of anabolic steroids and other muscle-enhancing means, the aim of this thesis was to explore

the enhancement practices of both genders in order to understand men's as well as women's attitudes towards body-enhancing means and methods which are promoted by and embedded in current society. This focus on gender implicates a broader perspective on objectives and motives for workout activities and on bodywork in general. In a Foucauldian sense, the aim has been to freeze the picture of physically active individuals, destabilise my initial understanding of this picture and question their motives for working out. Moreover, the aim was to explore how the users of fitness centres manage their body in a medicalised society where rapid solutions are made available and where the focus is on health and the right bodily appearance.

3. Research questions

The questions are inspired by and embedded in current enhancement discourses and have a focus on the discursive encouragement to perpetually enhance or improve the body. Focus is directed towards the subject's intentions with bodywork.

The research has evolved around the following question:

What are the rationales behind bodywork in the club-based fitness centres, and what are the respondents and informants willing to do or take in order to enhance their bodily capital?

However, other questions emerged during the research process and have been treated in the writing process of the three papers. Questions such as the problems of implementing a general policy in a specific Danish fitness context have been discussed, as well as the limitations of the current conceptualisation of fitness doping, as presented in the first and second paper of this thesis. Moreover an exploration of bodywork is presented and discussed in the third paper of this thesis.