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UN2200 Introduction to GIS Spring 2019

10 May 2019

## Demography and Distribution of SLT, Barry's Bootcamp, and SoulCycle Studios in Manhattan

The goal of my final project is to explore the geography of Manhattan fitness studio locations and the demographics of these areas to better understand how exercise culture is predicated on certain markers of cultural capital and habitus. Since data on the specific clientele of the studios is not readily available, I looked instead at the demographic constructions of the areas in which these studios position themselves in order to understand which populations have access to these studios and, more generally, the target audience of the wellness movement. It is my hope that my research will draw attention to the socioeconomic basis behind access to health and wellness. I believe this is an important field of inquiry because it has the potential to shed greater light on how cultures of wellness and leisure are predicated on class and other markers of privilege. My intended audience, most ambitiously, includes the leadership of the very fitness companies my project focuses on as well as the clientele of these companies. My proposal is to enhance awareness surrounding both the privilege implicit to, and the broader value of, fitness culture.

To conduct my study, I chose three well known and popular fitness studios that each have at least five locations in Manhattan. SLT, Barry's Bootcamp, and SoulCycle offer three

different kinds of fitness options at approximately the same price point: SLT is a pilates class costing \$40 for a 50-minute class; Barry's Bootcamp is a high-intensity treadmill and strength training class costing \$36 for a 60-minute class, and SoulCycle is a spinning class costing \$36 for a 60-minute class. These studios are part of NYC's burgeoning wellness movement, of which a key part is exercise. It is also important to note that studio fitness represents only one kind of fitness option in NYC—there are also personal trainers and gyms such as New York Sports Club, Planet Fitness, and Equinox (furthermore, many people use gyms based out of their apartments or offices, or use the parks to run, etc.).

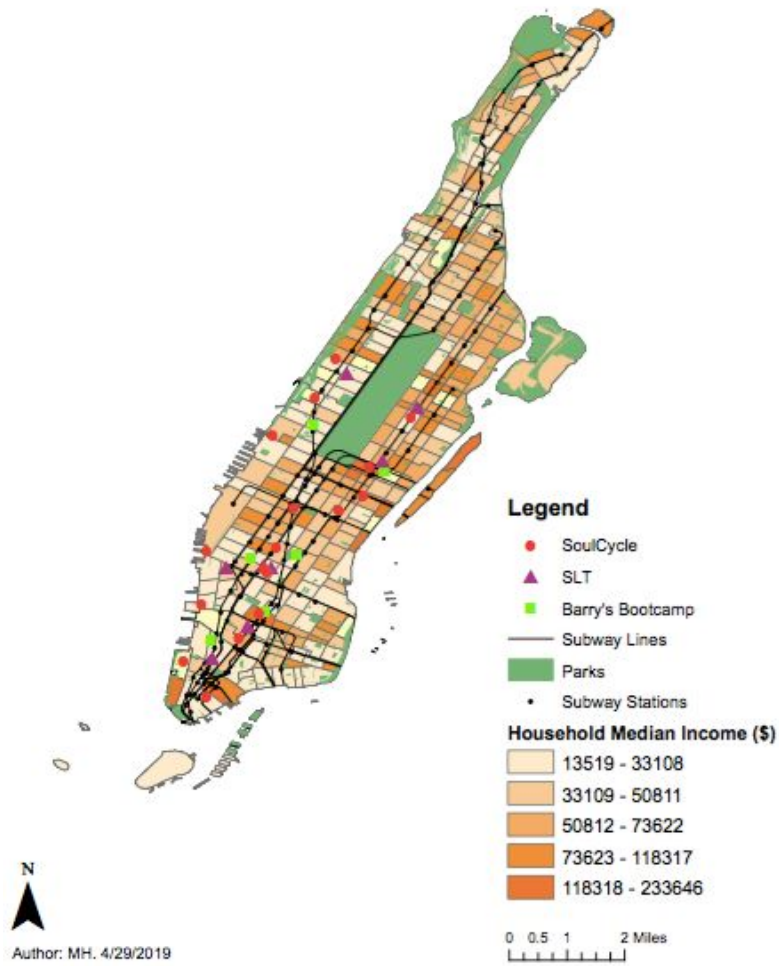
This project is largely inspired by Sociology literature and my interest in the embodiment of privilege. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that the body is becoming a site of work and capital for the upper classes. He argues that the upper classes enjoy “greater distance from necessity” in order to pursue form over function (197)—i.e., focusing less on the basic maintenance of the body and more on the aesthetics of the body. Nikolas Rose claims that we are in a time with a strong “will to health” discourse where health becomes the personal responsibility of the individual (6); failure to be healthy—whether by exercising or eating right—is deemed distasteful and diminishes an individual's cultural capital. The wellness movement has taken the benchmarks of health to new heights and is in large part predicated on the social unevenness of privilege: The upper classes have the economic freedom to pay to exercise their bodies for \$40 an hour, while in contrast many blue-collar laborers likely have little or no time, or excess capital, to exercise at all. Informing this project is also the notion of the “third space,” a key concept from critical urban theory connecting to questions of social inclusion and exclusion, space and identity (Routledge). This project is about access to a kind of

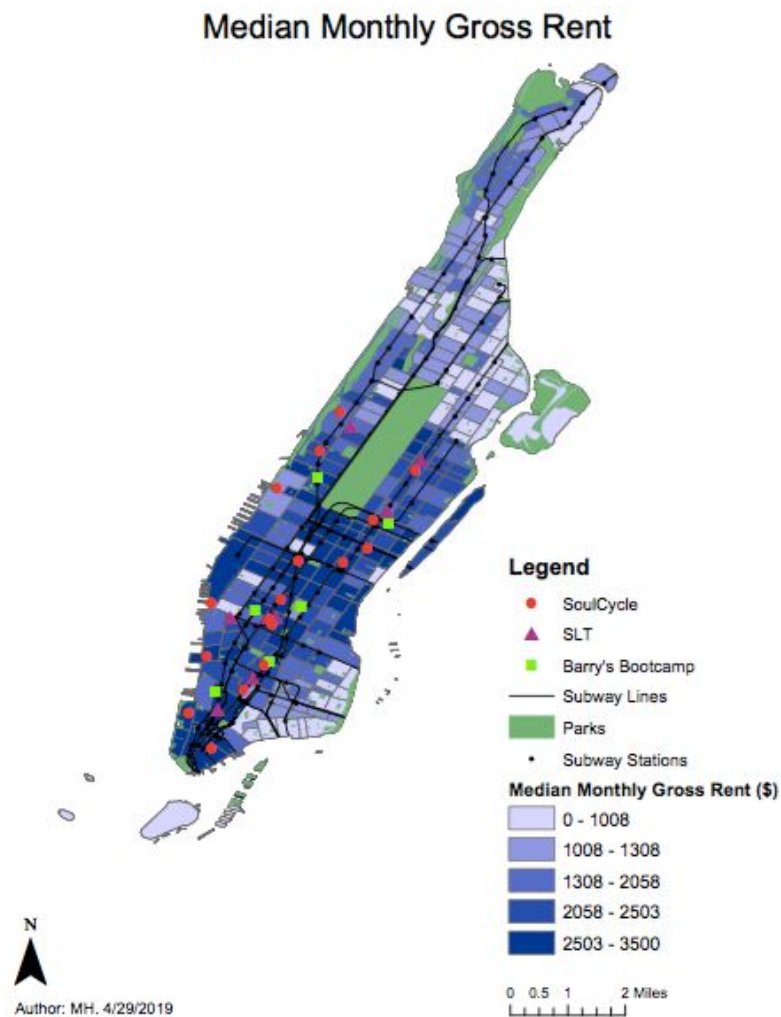
cultural capital that is tethered to the fit body. These studios may have a kind of potential as social spaces that is not being fully realized for the good of individuals, of the community, and possibly of business. For this project, I obtained all Manhattan locations for SLT, Barry's Bootcamp, and SoulCycle studios from their websites. I used NYC Open Data to find open space (park) data as well as subway line and station data. I also used the 2017 TIGER/Line Shapefiles and 2017 census information (median household income, median monthly gross rent, age, gender, and number of families) from American FactFinder. To construct my maps, I turned to the 2017 TIGER/Line Shapefiles for the census tract boundaries and joined all my other Excel tables to this; however, before joining the census information to the shapefile, I cleaned the data in Excel. I was able to map the NY Open Data directly because it comes in shapefiles, and I used this data to create an overlay with park and subway information. I geocoded the fitness studio locations and selected different shapes and colors to differentiate among SoulCycle, SLT, and Barry's locations. In addition to one map with just the overlay of park and subway data, I made five more choropleth composite maps with census information on age, gender, number of families, household median income, and median monthly gross rent.

Because of my focus on the relationship between privilege and wellness, I was most interested in mapping markers of class (as measured by household median income and median monthly gross rent). As I theorized, my maps provide evidence that studios are located in upper-class neighborhoods. I found a positive correlation between fitness studio location and household median income, which makes sense given that the upper classes have more disposable wealth, or "greater distance from necessity," as Bourdieu argues. Interestingly, there are no fitness options in two of the wealthiest areas in the city—the Upper West side and the Upper

East side. This could, of course, be due to the very limited size of my studio dataset and the possibility that these studios simply have yet to expand further north. I also thought this could be explained by the presence of more families in these areas; however, my map with number of families supports this explanation for the UWS, but not for the UES. It is likely that the UES has such high wealth that these populations are using even more expensive means of exercise, such as private trainers or in-home gyms. A fitness studio might disrupt the pristine residential nature of these most elite neighborhoods. When I mapped median monthly gross rent, I noticed that fitness studios tend to sit on the boundaries of high rent neighborhoods, which suggests that the studios want to take advantage of the populations that live in these high cost areas without having to pay such high rent prices themselves.

# Household Median Income





My maps also show that these fitness studios are clustered downtown—in fact, there are no studios above 92nd Street. The studios tend to be situated along the midline of the city; however, there do appear to be more studios on the West side than the East side. They are also predominantly located around major subway lines and stations, which promotes greater accessibility. I decided to map gender because the wellness movement tends to be marketed towards women. Thus, for each area, I mapped whether there is a male or female majority. The results of this mapping show that the city is female-dominated; and, in terms of studio placement, SLT, Barry's, and SoulCycle appear to be in areas where they have access to male

and female populations (as evidenced by the pink and blue coloring of the west downtown areas). One thing I found interesting is the dominance of men in the upper northeast of the city where there is also a complete lack of studios. I was also interested to see whether there might be any association between the number of families in a particular area and studio location. I theorized that this might yield an inverse correlation as people with families have potentially less time to attend fitness classes; however, my maps suggest no strong correlation between studios and number of families.

Distribution of SLT, Barry's Bootcamp, and SoulCycle Studios in New York City



# Gender Majority: Male vs. Female







Originally, I made a map showing whether an area had more 20-40 year olds or 40-60 year olds (if there are more 20-40 year olds in an area, it was lighter grey; if there are more 40-60 year olds, it was darker grey). With this representation of age, I found no strong correlations between population age and fitness studio location (I did find, however, that Manhattan is dominated by people in their 20-40s). Based on feedback I received during the final review, I decided to be more specific with my exploration of age by parsing the classifications for age groups more. To do this, I made four separate maps illustrating the percentage of a particular age range in every neighborhood; I broke age down by decade and mapped percentage of 20-29 year olds, 30-39 year olds, 40-49 year olds, and 50-59 year olds in each area. Based on this new

representation of age in my maps, it now appears that studios cluster around areas with more people aging 20-29 and 30-39. This makes conceptual sense since younger populations are generally more able to participate in regular exercise than older populations who are more prone to injury, stiff joints, and chronic pain.



Percentage of 40-49 Years







There are several notable limitations to my study. The most recent census data I had access to was from 2017, and thus might be slightly inaccurate for present times. Using a larger sample size of studios would also strengthen the findings of this research. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the people who are using these studios live in the areas in which they are located or if they are traveling to the studios (i.e., the extent to which the demographics of a studio's neighborhood match with the demographics of the studio's clientele). In a future study, it would be interesting to explore the demographics of these studios' clientele, in order to learn more

about the people specifically using these types of fitness options (and to note any differences between the clientele of each studios—do SLT, Barry’s, and SoulCycle attract different types of people?). I wonder if certain professions would be particularly represented among these studios’ clientele. It would also be fascinating to explore the popularity of these studios—how frequently people take classes (are the majority of people taking classes once a week or once a day?) and how they pay for them, i.e., buying individual classes, a pack of classes, or a monthly membership (I tried to gather this information from the studios but had no luck). Additionally, it would be interesting to look at the earnings of these studios and the ways they make money other than by selling fitness classes (water, food, apparel, towels, etc.). This would provide a more accurate representation of the amount of money people are spending on fitness, as charges for water and towels add up quickly. I am also interested in how these studios promote and profit from other aspects of the wellness movement, whether by selling healthy food items, post-workout smoothies, or even skin cream, and how the selling of apparel and other branded items aids in the development of studio loyalty and the cult-like mentality that characterizes so many studios. Along this line of inquiry, it would be illuminating to look at the kind of social component that these studios serve: Are people using studios to connect with friends or even to meet potential partners? Might the corporatization of fitness be countered by what we can learn from “third spaces” that nurture a bond of affinity that challenges capital of other kinds?

In conclusion, this research shows that studios are generally located in downtown Manhattan and cluster around major subway lines (no doubt as a means to increase their accessibility). Mapping particular demographic features alongside studio location has allowed me to explore which populations have the most access to these fitness modalities and, by

extension, the target populations of the fitness studio market (and, more generally, the wellness movement). In addition to a correlation between studio location and a higher concentration of 20-29 year olds and 30-39 year olds, I have found a notable correlation between class and studio location, which is supported by Bourdieu's theorization on the embodiment of privilege. Indeed, this research suggests that the wellness movement, which has moved beyond ensuring basic health to a goal of becoming increasingly "well," is predicated on the economic freedom of the upper class, as well as "distance from necessity" that allows the pursuit of "form over function." Thus, this research provides greater evidence that access to health resources is unevenly distributed by class and contingent on different perceptions of what it means to be well or healthy—perceptions that are themselves founded on class distinctions.

For those of us who are able to attend classes at studios like SLT, Barry's Bootcamp, and SoulCycle, it is paramount that we remember our privilege in participating in these studios and, more generally, the enormous privilege of having a body that is able to participate in activity. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the wellness movement focuses on the promotion of health among populations that are usually already healthy, thus potentially taking resources away from populations at high-risk. Indeed, we must consider how participation in the wellness movement stratifies standards of health, thereby further marginalizing and vulnerabilizing populations without the access to participate in this drive towards health. The ramifications of this study might be both individual-based, strengthening the awareness of those who participate in these spaces, and a healthier corporate culture based on a greater commitment toward ethical capitalism, which, in turn, can increase the number of healthy individuals enjoying greater opportunities for wellbeing. Ethical capitalism focuses on profitability that is also

community-minded and sustainable. These studios have a right to locate clubs in the most profitable areas and to market to these populations, but there are capitalist benefits associated with serving the greater good. Studios such as SLT, Barry's, and SoulCycle might consider community outreach in underserved communities in order to provide fitness modalities to a wider socioeconomic range. This kind of commitment to the larger social body might actually help the profitability of these studios; as the primary tenet of ethical capitalism explains, doing good can also generate good business by aligning a brand with the value(s) of social justice.



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