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Introduction

People acquire knowledge through observation, participation and reflection in gym environments which function as literacy spaces. The physical nature of gyms does not prevent them from functioning as spaces where people learn social skills, technological competencies and emotional intelligence. People learn gym literacy by mastering unspoken social rules, using digital tracking systems, by handling emotional elements which affect their drive and personal sense of self. Research on these literacy skills remains vital because fitness facilities expand their role as public learning spaces which attract increasing numbers of college students. The research investigates how people learn in gyms to expand writing and literacy studies through its analysis of nonstandard physical and digital learning environments. The research investigates three fundamental elements of gym literacy which include social rules, digital fitness systems and emotional growth of personal identity. Research has studied each gym literacy domain separately but there is limited investigation into their combined effects on gym learning experiences. The research investigates these connections to develop better comprehension of how people handle information, build identities and establish communities in fitness environments.

Review of the Literature

The unspoken rules which exist in gyms determine how members behave and interact with each other while learning new things. The authors of Andreasson and Johansson demonstrate that gym culture follows masculine principles which create environments that seem to exist for male members only. Their research shows that men often shape the tone, pace and expectations of the gym floor through dominance, confidence displays and equipment control which makes women and beginners adjust their behavior to avoid judgment or conflict. These unspoken norms affect whether members attempt new movements, how they ask for help and whether they even feel welcome in the space. Women and beginners learn their expected gym behaviors by watching others instead of receiving direct guidance which affects their sense of community and their ability to use the gym with assurance. The research also establishes that gendered expectations influence everything from clothing choices to where individuals position themselves during workouts. Research by Rapport et al. demonstrates that university gym members need to understand social norms which affect their comfort levels and their readiness to attempt new exercises. Students rely on peer observation to determine what counts as acceptable form, acceptable noise levels and acceptable rest times which means they develop literacy skills through constant environmental reading. Rapport et al. also show that university gyms function differently from commercial gyms because students carry academic stress, social pressure and time limitations which shape how they learn gym behaviors. These norms affect whether students join group classes, explore weightlifting areas or stick to the same machines every visit. When social pressure increases, beginner students often avoid areas crowded with advanced lifters, which slows their learning and limits their confidence.

The research conducted by Lamarche et al. demonstrates that social approval strengthens motivation and self-assurance because people evaluate their emotions through their gym environment. People who receive nods, smiles and casual encouragement tend to become more motivated to face physical challenges. The research by Lamarche et al. demonstrates that body image strongly affects emotional literacy because students who maintain positive self-perceptions achieve better training results and maintain consistent performance and show interest in new exercise methods. The fitness space identity reveals itself through body language and clothing choices according to Cole's embodied literacy theory. According to Cole physical appearance functions as a communication method in gyms because members use body language and clothing choices to understand member confidence levels and skill abilities and sense of belonging. The research shows that gym social literacy demands members to understand their environment while following established rules to develop physical and social presentation abilities which define their identity. The advancement of digital tools and new literacies requires fitness technology development to create gym literacy. Users can monitor their physical activity through self-tracking technologies which track their steps, heart rate, calorie burn and strength development but these systems present challenges to users who lack technical abilities. Users who fail to understand their tracking data will experience confusion or discouragement which affects their ability to assess their progress. Riswandi found that Generation Z gym members learn gym apps quickly because they possess advanced media literacy abilities which makes digital tools seem instinctive to them. Generation Z gym users demonstrate fast data interpretation skills and they excel at interface navigation and system updates without experiencing any negative reactions which leads to increased motivation. The digital anxiety experienced by older beginners and non-technologically skilled individuals results in reduced

gym attendance consistency. Users experience different emotional responses when they view their tracking data because the information they see either motivates them or creates overwhelming stress and frustration. Users experience validation through improved numbers but their motivation wanes when their progress stops or they start comparing themselves to unattainable benchmarks. The datafication process transforms how people perceive themselves because it replaces their personal self-image with statistical data according to Couldry and Hepp. People now build their identities through metric-based evaluation instead of physical sensations according to research findings. The practice of datafication makes people view themselves as numerical values which produces increased emotional stress in fitness environments. Users who share their tracking data enable others to learn from their information because it provides valuable guidance according to Pink and Fors. The research demonstrates that users form small online communities through digital content sharing because they exchange measurement results and seek answers and receive assistance which develops their gym knowledge. Users learn to read numbers and track patterns and make workout changes through data-based feedback. The research by Kristensen et al. shows that sharing data creates relational bonds because members develop connections through their ability to read each other's digital profiles. Digital tools operate as communication platforms which support learning activities in fitness centers. Research shows that gym members require knowledge about digital feedback interpretation to apply this knowledge for fitness improvement. People who misinterpret heart-rate zones, calorie burn estimates or workout summaries may train inefficiently which creates frustration. Lupton's work on data selves shows that users build identities around digital measurements which influences their emotional and social behavior in fitness settings. Her research argues that digital literacy in gyms now requires emotional awareness, critical thinking and technological skill

which together shape how individuals understand their progress. Student participation in gym activities depends on their emotional literacy which functions as the base factor. Research by Lamarche et al. demonstrates that people who have a positive body image tend to be more motivated because they feel capable instead of ashamed. Emotional literacy affects how members handle comparison, failure, social judgment and self-criticism which appear constantly in gym environments. The research by Andreasson and Johansson shows that people experience emotional pain because society forces them to follow gender norms which limit their behavior. These pressures influence whether individuals join group training, lift weights publicly or participate in social fitness communities. The research by Rapport et al. demonstrates emotional intelligence creates better social bonds between community members but Tiggemann and Zaccardo establish that fitness idealization causes self-esteem damage until members learn emotional self-awareness for protection. Their research on fitpiration imagery demonstrates that exposure to idealized bodies reduces self-worth for many individuals unless they develop emotional skills to resist negative comparison. Atkinson's theory of empathic fitness shows that emotional learning helps people build social connections which result in community membership. His research explains that gym environments encourage emotional exchange through shared struggle, routine-building and mutual encouragement which creates a sense of belonging. The research by Salvatore and Markula demonstrates that people need to learn how to handle their emotions including frustration, pride and comparison to maintain their motivation levels. Their work shows that emotional literacy acts as a fundamental base which allows gym members to access the space for personal identity development. Emotional literacy influences how people interpret progress, handle setbacks and relate to other gym members. Without

emotional literacy, members struggle to build sustainable fitness routines or join community-oriented gym spaces.

To summarize, research shows that gym literacy develops through three connected areas which include social norms, digital tools and emotional responses. The three domains shape how people acquire fitness participation skills and develop self-assurance while learning to receive feedback and create their fitness identities. The existing research investigates these domains independently which creates a major knowledge gap about their combined effects on fitness learning experiences.

Methodology

This study will use two research methods: semi-structured interviews and an online survey. These methods together provide both depth and breadth, allowing the project to explore how gym members learn through social interactions, emotional experiences, and digital tools. This combined approach helps reveal individual perspectives while also identifying broader patterns in gym literacy development. The methodology focuses on how people interpret their environments, manage expectations, and form personal identities in fitness spaces. The first method is semi-structured interviews, which will be used to explore how participants understand gym rules, emotional responses, and the role of technology in their training. I will interview UCF students and local gym members between the ages of eighteen and thirty, as this group is typically familiar with gym culture and comfortable with digital fitness apps. Each interview will last approximately twenty to thirty minutes and will be conducted either in person or on Zoom, depending on participant preference. Interview questions will invite participants to explain how they learned gym rules, whether they have felt judged or uncomfortable in gym environments, how digital tools have influenced their perception of progress, and how their emotions affect

their motivation to continue training. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to speak openly and reflectively, offering personal stories and emotional insights that would not be visible in survey data. This method captures important moments of vulnerability, pride, frustration, and confidence, all of which illuminate how individuals understand their place and identity within fitness spaces. The second method is an online survey, which will make it possible to collect data from a larger number of participants. The survey will be distributed through Instagram, Discord, and UCF fitness communities using Google Forms. I expect to collect around one hundred responses, providing a broad dataset for identifying trends across different types of gym users. The survey will include multiple-choice questions as well as open-ended prompts so participants can share personal viewpoints while still generating comparable data. The sample will include gym users who are eighteen or older to ensure they can provide consent and describe their experiences accurately. Individuals who do not currently attend the gym will be excluded, as the study focuses on actual gym experiences rather than hypothetical ones. Participants will be recruited both in person and online to ensure a diverse range of fitness levels, backgrounds, and gym routines. Data collection will follow a clear sequence. After recruitment, I will schedule and conduct interviews and then transcribe each interview for analysis. The survey will remain open for a set period, and responses will be collected anonymously. After gathering all data, I will analyze interview transcripts for recurring themes such as motivation, comparison, emotional pressure, digital tracking habits, and social awareness. Survey data will be examined using percentages, averages, and recognizable patterns that show how frequently certain experiences occur. I will compare the themes emerging from the interviews with the trends shown in the survey responses to build a fuller picture of how digital tools, emotional reactions, and social norms interact to shape gym literacy. This mixed-methods approach will allow the study to

capture both personal narratives and broader trends, producing a comprehensive analysis that contributes to research on literacy, identity formation, and modern gym culture.

Significance and Conclusion

The research contributes essential knowledge to literacy studies because it broadens the definition of literacy to include physical spaces, social environments and digital platforms. Research shows that gyms function as more than physical facilities because they contain multiple social expectations, emotional requirements and technological elements which affect member learning and conduct. The research proposal investigates these different elements as a complete system which solves an existing academic information gap. Research studies about gym participation, digital tracking and emotional experiences exist separately from each other but no study has investigated their combined effects on gym member identity formation and motivation. The research of these connected elements has become vital because literacy now encompasses physical actions, digital displays and emotional reactions. The research findings will create effects which extend past academic discussions. The research findings will enable gym staff, fitness instructors and university recreation departments to develop better support systems for members who experience gym intimidation or confusion or lack of preparation when using fitness facilities. The research results about social expectations and confidence levels will lead gyms to change their member orientation procedures, display information and peer assistance programs. The research findings about emotional literacy as a vital factor for maintaining student involvement will motivate teachers to create training sessions which include reflective activities and motivational elements. Fitness centers need to modify their technology onboarding process for new members because digital tools improve learning but create challenges for users who are new to technology. The research results will assist individuals who want to develop healthy

routines by providing functional gym-based methods which overcome cultural and emotional obstacles. The research findings will help scholars develop new methods to study multimodal literacy. The research supports fluid literacy development because it demonstrates that learning needs various support methods which depend on particular learning environments. The research findings about emotional intelligence and gym persistence will demonstrate that emotional responses need to be studied as fundamental learning elements in non-academic learning environments. Scientists will analyze how quantification affects sports, healthcare and educational literacy practices through research on data tracking effects on self-perception. The research project will establish a foundation for studying young adult learning through physical activities and digital tool effects on their achievement and advancement perceptions. The research study delivers social value to society in addition to its academic and institutional worth. The gym environment creates exclusionary spaces which make members experience feelings of being judged and feeling unwelcome. The research project will create fitness areas which support emotional health and physical development through its findings about member social perception and identity management. The research supports modern health initiatives which focus on mental wellness, body acceptance and community-based support systems. The research shows that fitness spaces need to create community areas which offer emotional support because gym literacy affects member motivation and fitness community connection.

Overall, the research findings will demonstrate the learning processes which occur through everyday activities of people. The study proves that gyms operate as learning environments which enable members to develop their identity, confidence and acquire knowledge through social interactions, emotional understanding and digital media usage. The research unites different academic fields to study fitness literacy in non-traditional settings which provides

essential knowledge about contemporary fitness space meaning creation. The research results show that physical environments establish educational settings which promote personal growth, build social connections and sustainable health advantages.

Appendix A

Sample Interview Questions

- 1) How do you feel about the social expectations in gym environments?
- 2) How do digital tools influence your motivation or perception of progress?
- 3) What emotions do you experience most often while working out?
- 4) How do you interpret feedback from tracking apps or wearable devices?
- 5) How has your identity changed through your gym participation?

Appendix B

Sample Survey Questions

- 1) How often do you go to the gym?
- 2) Participants may select:
 - a) daily, b) 4–6 days a week, c) 2–3 days a week, d) once a week, e) a few times a month, f) rarely
- 2) How comfortable are you with gym equipment?

Participants may select:

- a) very comfortable, b) comfortable, c) neutral, d) uncomfortable,
- e) very uncomfortable

3) How often do you use fitness apps or wearable tracking devices?

Participants may select:

a) daily, b) several times a week, c) once a week, d) rarely, e) never

4) How would you describe your confidence level in gym spaces?

Participants may select:

a) very confident, b) confident, c) somewhat confident, d) not very confident,

e) not confident at all

5) What motivates you to continue working out?

Participants may select:

a) physical health, b) mental well-being, c) appearance goals, d) social support,

e) digital tracking feedback, f) personal enjoyment

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