Fitness Cultures and Environmental (in) Justice?

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Abstract

This paper is a critical essay on the environmentalist agenda in fitness cultures. Involvement in outdoor military fitness regimes and a series of visits to activity holiday centres and health/fitness spas in the UK all of which make some claim to being 'green', 'environmentally friendly', and/or 'natural' provided the empirical context for the discussion in this paper. The essay is tentative and limited to an analysis of the key principles of political ecology and environmentalism and the concept of sustainability in understanding the emergence of an environmentalist agenda in fitness cultures marked by shades and grades of green consumerism. It argues for further research from the political ecological field, exploring human/non-human dynamics of the environment, to advance an understanding about which sports and fitness cultures get developed where, how and in whose interests.

Key Words

Sports people and sports cultures have been connected with resource depletion, reduction in air and water quality, land use degradation, habitat loss and species extinction. The detrimental environmental impacts of international sport and particularly mega-events have also been assessed in relation to problems of waste management, energy consumption, pollution and biodiversity. There is, then, a growing awareness of the potential ecological threat posed by the continued and unmanaged economic growth and development of sport and fitness cultures and in the UK such work is evident in the emergence of strategies for green exercise and the promotion of acclaimed 'environmentally friendly' and 'natural' credentials of sport and fitness activities. However, as will be discussed, such approaches represent environmental reforms that tie sport and fitness to a green and sustainable lifestyle agenda focusing on managing existing production and consumption practices that may not be sufficient in resolving environmental problems created and exacerbated by involvement in sporting practices. This paper emphasises that the complexities of human/non-human relationships can be further understood through analyses of the politics of ecology; a field of enquiry that has not yet been fully explored in relation to sport, fitness and environmental issues

Sport, Fitness and the Environment

In 1998 a special issue of the International Review for the Sociology of Sport on Sport and the Environment highlighted the paucity of scholarly activity on the complexities of sport/environment relations. Papers addressed a range of issues such as "corporate environmentalism" at the Olympic Games (Lenskyj, 1998: 341), ecological awareness amongst ski tourists (Weiss et al., 1998), emotional, ethical and political relationships between humans, animals and the sporting environment in hunting and angling (Franklin, 1998), feminist politics in the nature/sport dynamic (Humberstone, 1998) and feminist ethnography work in experiences of outdoor wilderness living (Pederson, 1998). Since then questions about the environmental impact of sport have come to the fore in policy development and decision-making

processes central to the organisation and structure of sport (see for example, Collins and Flynn, 2007; Collins et al., 2007; Jarvie, 2006;Lenskyj, 1998; Maguire et al., 2002; Richardson 2000; Stubbs, 2008;). Despite such work, the significance of theories and concepts connected to political ecology; a field of enquiry that has been central in organising and legitimizing research, policy, legislation and activism concerning the political, economic and social dimensions of the environment in the UK since the latter half of the twentieth century, has remained only marginal to understandings of sport and environmental problems.

Recognising the historical specificity of fitness cultures and environmental issues, this essay offers a critical account of the key principles of political ecology and environmentalism, and the concept of sustainability in understanding the emergence of environmental reforms in fitness cultures and concomitantly the development of green consumerist practices in selling fitness. The biological perspective defines fitness in terms of cardiovascular capacity, strength, endurance and flexibility; categories that can be measured and evaluated against set criteria. But fitness is also connected with qualities such as looking or feeling certain ways that cannot be so readily quantified and which vary between and within groups of people (Maguire and Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 1995; Markula and Pringle, 2006; Mansfield, 2005; Smith Maguire, 2008). Contemporary fitness involves many different settings and includes a growing fitness media, a range of fitness goods and services and fitness consumers (Smith Maguire, 2008). Fitness can be problematized variously in relation to consumption, politics, economics, bodily aesthetics, corporeal function and morality. This essay presents a commentary about the political ecology of fitness cultures by discussing the way in which fitness is being increasingly shackled to a green and sustainable lifestyle agenda, and the consequence of an environmentalist approach to fitness for human/non-human relations.

The "landscape" upon which contemporary fitness cultures take place represents interplay between human beings and both the built and natural

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environment (Bale, 1994: 9). Fitness landscapes can also be understood in terms of the relationships between humans and non-human organisms. Referring to sporting landscapes, Bale (1994: 10) argues, "Impressions of nature and the environment are important elements of the athlete's experience, relations of nature being full of emotions and memories". People come into close contact with natural habitats through their engagement with fitness practices. These human/non-human relationships are not neutral but reflect complex struggles over particular political and social ideologies some of which are connected to environmentalism and political ecology. Prior to exploring the significance of political ecology in understanding the environmental agenda in fitness cultures let me briefly outline the way that I have collected evidence to inform the discussion in this paper.

Doing Green Fitness: Outdoor Exercise, Activity Holidays and the Health Spa Experience

My research interest in fitness cultures and questions of the environment have arisen out of a long-term involvement in fitness cultures. My engagement with the fitness endeavour initially emerged through my participation in elite level sport and concomitant involvement in strength, endurance and speed regimes. But I have also instructed others in fitness activities in a variety of settings from church halls to private gyms. My previous work has centered on questions about fitness, female participation and femininities and has, thus, been marked by a feminist approach which will be discussed further on in this section in terms of the significance of a critical and reflexive approach in this research project. More recently I have observed an increase in the promotion of exercise taken outdoors and I enrolled on a programme of exercise with British Military Fitness (BMF) as part of my on-going ethnographic work in fitness settings. Encouraging their clients to "Get fit outside – feel good inside" BMF classes are based on military style circuit training and operate in outdoor parks across the UK (British Military Fitness, 2008a).Involvement in outdoor military fitness classes organised by British Military Fitness (BMF) sensitised

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me to a growing consciousness on the part of fitness service providers about the impact of exercising outdoors on the non-human environment. The environmental ethos of the regime is twinned with a focus on military discipline, control and regulation and whatever the weather participants, from all ages and abilities, join together and commit to get fit the army way. I participated in weekly classes of BMF for a year (2007-2008) and during this time I began to see a world of 'green exercise' emerging and developing in the UK fitness market. As I explored the increasing range of fitness cultures that made express claims for being green, 'environmentally friendly', and/or 'natural' a sense of environmental sensitivity appeared to be important in the promotion of fitness. Different language was used to express ideas about environmental justice in different fitness settings. So while outdoor exercise classes like those offered by BMF espoused the virtues of green exercise in terms of feelings of well-being, the promotion of healthful activity in parks, woodlands and coastal settings were more closely tied to a sense of living in harmony with nature and environmental preservation, and the idea of the 'natural' or 'organic' provided the foundation for claims to environmental sustainability in the fitness/health spa and beauty settings. I had secured some funding from the University to complete the project within a one-year period. Given the constraints of time, two other fitness settings; holiday activity parks and the health/fitness spa, which appeared to explicitly embrace environmental agendas as unique selling points were selected as part of this ethnographic approach to understanding fitness and environmental issues.

Along with my weekly involvement in BMF, two four day visits to holiday activity parks and four one day visits to health/fitness spas in the UK over a one-year period enabled me to begin, at least, an exploration of the environmental ethic within fitness cultures and identify and critically assess the green consumerist practices that became apparent as the research developed. I would not claim this research to be strictly ethnographic but it took the central feature of ethnography; participant observation, as a key method (Sands, 2002; Walsh, 1998). The research can

perhaps be best defined as a series of ethnographic visits. The work involved me participating in so-called green fitness activities, watching, listening, asking questions and collecting any information from any source that might shed light on the research problem (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989). As I participated in the activities on offer in each of the settings I spoke with other participants and to some extent was able to observe how people live their fitness lives in the context of environmental concerns. Such observations were recorded as field notes; the "symbol of the ethnographer" (Sands, 2002: 75). The evidence was collected in a fairly unstructured manner. I did not set out and follow a detailed plan, nor did I fix the themes of analysis from the outset. I wrote detailed notes in a notebook immediately after the BMF sessions in my car before I drove home so that I could remember as accurately as possible things that were said and done when I typed up the full accounts. In the holiday park environment and the spa setting there was more time to keep field notes that were more immediate in terms of the time lag between participating and observing and writing, and there were more opportunities to directly type them into a lap top computer. I collected brochures, adverts, articles from newspapers and magazines and conducted searches of relevant internet sites that provided information about how outdoor exercise, holiday parks and health spas embraced and expressed an environmental message. While such field notes have been invaluable to the analysis in this paper, they still remain partial in terms of building a picture of the relationship between fitness cultures and environmental issues. It was not possible, within the timeframe, to develop and execute a series of formal interviews with key informants in any of the fitness cultures, nor did I collect a visual record via photography or video/DVD, and I did not keep any kind of audio record of events and occurrences. Such methods would be useful in further research. Having said that the field notes I do have were recorded with accuracy and rigour. I am always mindful of the need to collect precise factual references even when the evidence is collected in "as raw a form and as wide a front" as possible (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989: 2). The field

notes, then, are a valuable resource which can be compared with other documents and artefacts to provide a foundation for a critical essay such as this.

The research focused on a small number of fitness cultures and was centrally concerned with the interpretation of the meaning of green fitness/health in each setting. As previously noted my on-going research is marked by my feminist sensibility towards a critically reflexive approach. This means that my interpretation of fitness and environmental issues is not simply a description of events and occurrences but a translation of a particular reality in fitness cultures in which I, as the researcher, am involved. In Wheaton's (2002; 248) terms such critical sub-cultural ethnography is best described as "the researcher's written representation of that culture". I was always mindful of the impact my involvement might have on interpreting and understanding the green fitness agenda (Mansfield, 2007, 2008). Throughout the research the challenge has been to balance my involved position with the subject matter with an appropriate degree of distance from the fitness activities themselves and from my own personal and environmental politics. A feminist sense of critical self-reflection has been important in this regard to managing my-self in the research setting, in balancing the tasks of sociologist as participant and inquirer and in bringing an appropriate balance of passion and reason to the analysis (Mansfield, 2007, 2008). Such a reflective approach is also a hallmark of critical ethnography and this research can be thought of in light of such an approach.

Critical ethnography is founded upon a reflective process of examining conceptual frameworks and interpreting meaning whilst recognising the limits of the knowledge claims being made (Rogers and Dippo, 1986; Thomas, 1993; Van Maanen, 1995). At the same time as researching the power relations in environmental politics in the context of fitness cultures, the research strategy underpinning the discussion in this paper includes continuous self-reflection and engagement with the concepts of political ecology as a way of making a contribution to an understanding of fitness cultures and environmental justice. Moreover, the

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critical ethnographer embraces a political purpose in identifying and challenging social injustices, an approach that once again blends with my broad feminist political and ethical framework for doing research. The approach, in terms of research method and analysis, then, has been to draw jointly on my observations, interactions and discussions in the selected fitness settings, the documents collected from different media sources and political and cultural theories about the environment in a critical examination of the contradictions of environmental politics and consumption in the context of fitness-related environmental strategies in the UK. Having outlined the methods and the approach to analysis in this paper, I now turn to the concepts and theories from political ecology and environmentalism that have been significant in interpreting my observations.

Principles and Values in Political Ecology

Environmental awareness and ideas about the relationship between ecological politics and social justice has shifted and changed over time (Dobson, 2007; Lipietz, 1995; Selman, 1996). Since the late 1960s an environmental consciousness has gained momentum with the assembly of the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983 and the subsequent publication of the Brundtland report; Our Common Future in 1987, marking a watershed in global concerns about human deterioration, depletion of the earth's resources and sustainable development. In addition, the United Nations Earth Summits of 1992 (Rio de Janeiro) and 2002 (South Africa) witnessed commitments by increasing numbers of nations to addressing global environmental problems (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994; Lipietz, 1995). During the 1980s the need for environmental justice became less intensive as a focus on economic growth and development became more pervasive. In the latter part of the twentieth century there is evidence for resurgence in the importance of ecological values in social and political thought and the formalisation of green politics. The environmental agenda, in the UK at least, is now part of a well-established and legitimated social movement (Lowe and Flynn, 1989).

Yet the definition of ecology and its relationship with political ecology reflects complex and competing positions.

Ecology can be understood as a scientific discipline, which is the preserve of academic and applied biologists and of particular significance to those working in professions connected to the management of forests and wildlife. Notwithstanding on-going debates about differing approaches to ecological science largely based on the role of traditional modern scientific approaches, ecology in this first sense is about the relationships between organisms and their environments (Hayward, 1994). However, ecology can also be understood in much broader terms. Ecology, as it has been embraced in social thought represents a political movement (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994; Lipietz, 1995; Porritt and Winner, 1988).

Hayward (1994) identifies three interconnected general principles that are common to ecologically grounded political values. The *first* is a concern to live in harmony with nature emphasising that human beings can only be understood as interdependent with nature. Under this first precept, there is an assumed requirement for humans to develop relationships with nature that are not based on attempting to master and subdue the natural environment. The *second* principle is to overcome anthropocentric prejudice, an ethical imperative that serves to challenge the dominant mode of thinking that values human life over and against the rest of nature. For Hayward (1994: 31) principle 2 means "relativizing the value" of human beings rather than affording them a "privileged moral status". This does not mean that ecologists do not recognise that human beings have faculties distinctive from other organisms, for indeed they do. For example, the capacity for human language, referred to by Elias (1991) as 'symbol emancipation' has emerged within a complex of interconnected social and biological processes and has consequences for the pattern of ecological life and our understandings of human beings and the environment. Ecologists insist that specifically human capacities should not equate with superiority (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994). If the value of human life is

relativised then there is space for Hayward's (1994) third principle that is to recognise the intrinsic value of beings other than humans. Instead of reducing non-human nature to a human-worth value usually measured in economic or legal cost-benefit terms, non-human nature is valued for its own sake independent of its use-value for humans. The key tenets of political ecology have emerged out of concerns about ecological devastation and deterioration of the quality of human life but while knowledge and understanding of the causes and effects of environmental exploitation are expanding solutions to environmental problems are contested and reflect competing positions about the need for and nature of change in human attitudes and values about the relationship between human and non-human life.

Environmental Reform versus Radical Ecology

Broadly speaking there are two opposing positions in the debate about the need to transform human/non-human relationships. The first is environmental reform or "environmentalism" and the second is radical ecology or "ecologism" (Dobson, 2007: 2-3). Environmental reform is founded on the view that modifying or managing existing production and consumption patterns, practices and values will be sufficient to solve environmental problems (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994). Reformist approaches suffuse contemporary politics and economics remaining shackled to the need for and desirability of growth through technology and service societies, thus, maintaining the centrality of consumption which becomes tinted with green capitalist strategies for selling goods and services. In a consumer economy where success is measured in terms of the growth/increase in production and consumption green capitalism or green consumerism is based on reforming current production and consumption practices with the environment in mind. So, for example, strategies such as monitoring/reducing greenhouse gas emission or managing waste through recycling are employed by industry and green products are presented to consumers that promote ecological sensitivity through so-called ethical or green buying practices (Porrittt and Winner, 1988)**.**

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The contrasting view to environmentalism is a radical 'dark green' ecological approach. Proponents of radical ecology call for a break with the social, political and economic arrangements of capitalist cultures because they are considered to be unsustainable. Proponents of "ecologism"; argue that sustainability requires radical shifts in human/non-human/environment relationships in all aspects of social and political life (Dobson, 2007: 3). The fundamental principles of an ecological perspective: the need to understand all organisms as interdependent with their environment; the need to challenge the human domination of nature; and the need to transcend the idea that human beings are the only organism of value in the world, appear to be directly oppositional to the prevailing rationality of modern Western cultures connected to an enlightenment value system in which only human beings count and whereby the purpose of science is the domination of nature, growth and the emancipation of human life (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994). Ecologism, unlike environmentalism is a political ideology that represents a challenge to dominant political paradigms. Explaining the differences between environmentalism and ecologism, Dobson's (2007: 7) view is that ecologism is a type of politics which

> "seeks explicitly to decentre the human being, to question mechanistic science and its technological consequences, to refuse to believe that the world was made for human beings – and it does this because it has been led to wonder whether dominant post-industrialism's project of material affluence is either desirable or sustainable. All this will be missed if we choose to restrict our understanding of green politics to its dominant guise: an environmentalism that seeks a cleaner service economy sustained by cleaner technology and producing cleaner conspicuous consumption."

In Dobson's (2007) view, environmentalism and ecologism differ in both type and degree. It is ecologism rather than environmentalism that represents a form of political ideology, separate and distinct from existing political perspectives. In contrast, environmentalism rests on a belief in adjustments to existing technological

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and moral frameworks in societies to resolve environmental issues. The central tenet of ecologism is sustainability and an emphasis on the scarcity and finitude of the earth's resources and the need to restrict growth. Ecologists specifically question existing consumption practices and patterns. Thus, one of the consequences of environmental reform; green consumerism or green capitalism, presents a "moral dilemma" for those arguing for ecologism (Porrittt and Winner, 1988: 193). Green consumerist practices are questioned by ecologists in terms the extent to which they represent environmental responsibility. Green consumerism, it is argued is characterised by anthropocentric prejudice; the intrinsic value of humans and the instrumental value of all other nature, in the service of human ends (Hayward, 1994: 58). By this view, rather than resolving environmental problems, green-consumerist strategies continue the detrimental effects of production and consumption on the environment. Ecologism embraces a vision of sustainable communities based on reduced consumption, a value system connected with enough, rather than more, and a focus on the quality rather than quantity of wealth (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994) Next I draw on the principles of environmentalism and ecologism and the concept of sustainability in examining the ways that contemporary forms of fitness cultures reflect a trend for eco-exercise, green health and 'natural' corporeality that embrace selected (convenient/practical) values of ecology primarily as a means of selling fitness goods and services.

Eco-exercise and Green Fitness: Environmentalism in Fitness Cultures.

In fitness cultures there is an emerging environmentalist agenda that embraces the idea of a "quest for a viable future" developed through the formation and reformation of "culturally defined responsibilities" (Milton, 1993: 2). Recognising the social, economic and political profile of a broader set of green issues, such as the depletion of natural resources, recycling, destruction of the ozone layer and pollution from motor vehicles which have become familiar topics of local and worldwide debate the environmentalist agenda for fitness cultures reflects some awareness of the

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damaging effect of human behaviour upon plant, animal and, indeed human life even if the extent to which that damage is being controlled is limited.

The holiday park environment in the UK is one that in some instances offers an experience of the non-human as part of a holiday package. There are small, hideaway parks located in designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty where the landscape has been deemed as distinctive and beautiful in character and, thus, worthy of preservations (National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2008). The focus is on woodland living, cycling and walking on trails located in rare open heathland and enjoying a diversity of flora, fauna and animal life. Parks such as Kelling Heath on the North Norfolk Coast (UK) are engaged in a national schemes for conservation and preservation such as the programme for captive breeding of Red Squirrels, a breed in decline due to the introduction of the Grey Squirrel from the USA as early as 1880 and Parapox virus to which Red Squirrels are susceptible. But larger holiday centres based on built leisure facilities such as sports halls, spas, leisure pools, restaurants and bars are also demonstrating caring and responsible policies towards conservation and environmental preservation. Such policies include the use of food in restaurants that is locally sourced, recycling strategies in restaurants and self-catering accommodation, pedestrian only environments and the use of low energy light bulbs. One large commercial outfit, Center Parks™, are located in acres of forest with lakes, streams and woodland areas and several activities are provided that allow for guests to enjoy such surroundings through walking, cycling and sailing and through demonstrations with wildlife such as falcons and owls. The accommodation in 'villas' and 'lodges' uses architecture and interior design that aims to "bring the forest inside" using natural building, flooring and lighting techniques to fit the acclaimed ecologically sound, health promoting holiday lifestyle (www.CenterParks.co.uk). At one Center Parks™ site, a small hay meadow has been developed; a traditionally managed flower rich meadow which aims to restore wildlife and habitats lost to intensive agricultural

practices of ploughing, draining, re-seeding and fertilising (Doherty, 1997). A hay meadow is a field that has no livestock during the main growing season encouraging meadow flowers such as globeflower, wood cranesbill and melancholy thistle to grow and from which hay is farmed in the summer to feed to livestock which return to the land in winter and spring. (Doherty, 1997). These types of environmental practices and projects have been recognised for their contribution to environmental management through the development of a range of established awards schemes such as the Green Tourism Business Scheme, the David Bellamy Conservation Awards, and the England for Excellence awards.

Apparent in the environmentalist agenda for fitness is some concern to be at one with nature or live, to some extent, in harmony with it; a driving principle of ecology. Like the holiday park experience, the outdoor fitness market make claims to bringing people closer to the countryside and to non-human nature and to the potential for obtaining pleasure and health gains from such environments. British Military Fitness (BMF) is one example of a growing range of fitness regimes that extol the virtues of exercising outdoors marketing their brand of fitness as a way to "Get fit outside – feel good inside". And participants express a strong sense of pleasure in mixing the health and fitness benefits of the gym with 'the great outdoors' (Maggie, late 40s, advertising executive). During warm up and cool down periods when people were chatting together there was much talk about the aesthetics of the natural environment. As Steve (late 30s, computer technician) expressed it:

> what a great day for a work out, it's such a beautiful day, crisp and light and look can you see the deer watching us? – I feel privileged sometimes to do this kind of work out in this park – you feel at one with nature".

Several participants explained the outdoors as an environment to boost/enhance mood and act as a motivator as well as saving money in comparison to the fitness gym. In an informal conversation, Major Robin Cope, founder of BMF, explained his rationale was based on ease of access and cost-effectiveness of exercising

outdoors. He has also argued that BMF is an alternative to the "lycra clad, swiss ball using, fountain world of gyms!" (British Military Fitness, 2008b). BMF is one example of the trend for harnessing the pleasurable, motivational qualities of outdoor exercise that includes residential fitness bootcamps, meditative detox resorts, running, walking and cycling clubs, orienteering groups, outdoor pools and spas, Nordic Walking, Tai Chi classes and advancing technological innovations like the treadmill bike.

The expanding market for outdoor fitness in the UK is founded on the concept and strategies of Green Exercise. According to Natural England's Walking the Way to Health Initiative (Walking the Way to Health Initiative, 2008) Green Exercise is any physical activity that takes place outdoors. The importance of Green Exercise is laid out in Natural England's strategy of "connecting people to nature in their local areas" and it is promoted as "one of the most cost-effective ways of improving the nation's physical health and well-being" (Walking the Way to Health Initiative, 2008). There is an embryonic corpus of academic literature, mainly from the field of psychology that supports claims for the health benefits of Green Exercise (see for example Sempik et al., 2005a, 2005b; Pretty et al., 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007). The promotion and provision of Green Exercise is a part of the UK Government's strategy on claims for ethical exercise that aims to promote sustainability in physical activity environments utilizing outdoor spaces as a means of improving physical and mental health and fitness in exercise that enables people to connect with nature and with other people.

Exercising in outdoor parks watching the horses, ducks, and deer can certainly be a pleasurable experience. The BMF classes that I attended in London (UK) included men and women from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, ages and physical abilities and disabilities in a community of exercisers working out apparently 'in harmony' with the natural environment. But the 'naturalness' of green space parks, particularly in urban cities can be questioned. We ran and jumped and did press-ups on well-trodden paths created for human consumption of the environment. Cars drive through these parks albeit at slow speeds and with the exclusion of commercial

vehicles but nonetheless, the quality of the air is compromised to an extent by exhaust fumes. The military nature of the exercise means that for a whole hour one has to endure the bawling and shouting of an army officer insisting on more sit ups, burpees and sprint intervals arguably disturbing the peace of other park users whilst the exercise activities of participants have the potential to disturb animals, grass land and habitats. In my time at BMF one weekend class expanded to more than 80 participants trampling over paths and grassland. The group was then divided into two classes, using twice the number of instructors, each class growing every week with more people, paying more subscriptions and using more green space. The dominant ethic of such fitness regimes is commercial where profit maximisation matters and regard for the environment tends to shift away from any ecological sensitivity to environmentalist marketing strategies. Arguably the advantage of using outdoor space for commercial exercise classes is that there are few limits to growth, limited overhead costs and potential for profit maximisation.

While such regimes may take place outdoors in aesthetically pleasing environments and contribute to a person's sense of well-being the extent to which a claim for being *ecologically* sensitive is questionable. The brief examples that I have provided are founded upon reformist principles of environmental protection and critics argue that reformist strategies result in a type of green consumerism or green capitalism that reflects and reinforces an obsession with economic growth in contemporary industrial societies (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994; Porrittt and Winner, 1988; Yearly, 1992). Fitness cultures are bounded by a "managerial approach" to environmental issues, one that has led to the emergence of an environmentalist agenda in almost all areas of social life (Dobson, 2007). Such reformist practices may be seen as lighter shades of green in terms of a commitment to the environment.

There are some examples of fitness cultures that are striving to make more radical turns towards alternative means of production. The British Trust for

Conservation Volunteers has 50 years experience of practical conservation and now includes a 'Green Gym' programme for promoting the health benefits of working on conservation projects in the outdoors (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, 2008). The Green Microgym (Green Microgym, 2008) in Portland, Oregon (USA) uses a combination of solar and human power (the human dynamo is connected to fitness equipment and generates electricity when used which is stored in special batteries) for ventilation and lighting as well as non-toxic soaps, cleaning products and recycled flooring and towelling. Nevertheless, the evidence in this research illustrates that the greening of fitness is dominated by the 'cleaning up' of current production and consumption practices and the co-option of environmental concerns and ecological ideas as marketing strategies for selling fitness. Contemporary fitness cultures have emerged and developed since the 1970s into a commercial industry of goods and services characterised by a neo-liberal ideology of volunteerism, individualism, self-reflexivity and personal consumption. Fitness, in lifestyle terms is a re-presentation of contemporary middle-class values based on respectability of corporeal discipline, self-fulfilment in consumerist body cultures and private/preventative health practice (Ingham, 1985). These standards of respectability and consumerism now appear to include the commercialisation and moralization of the environment and define fitness cultures in green consumerist terms. In the final part of the paper I turn to the significance of the ecological principle of sustainability for understanding the green consumerism of fitness cultures, examining them as dominated by the principles of a growth economy which in their attempt to address and resolve environmental problems have the potential to construct and reconstruct continued and arguably extended environmental degradation.

Sustainability in Ecological Thought

The concept of sustainability is "now one of the most contested words in the political vocabulary" (Dobson, 2007: 53). Selman (1996) argues that in ecological terms,

sustainable development is characterised by (1) intergenerational equity; a need to pass on the earth to future generations in a condition equal to that inherited, (2) intra-generational equity; the implication that methods of sustainable development should take into account the needs of all people around the globe regardless of social status, and (3) trans-frontier responsibility; a requirement for individuals to live within the limits of their local resources rather than exploiting those of others. The idea of human development as heeding the limits of human and non-human nature is at the core of notions of sustainability and for Brundtland (1987: 54) it means meeting "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This is a rather different conceptualisation of development than the one that prevails in contemporary Western social life where development or growth is defined predominantly in economic terms; a defining feature of contemporary fitness cultures.

The dominant view of human progress and preservation is so closely tied to the idea of economic growth that some argue that the economy has been elevated above ecology and the economic concept of human development is an antithesis to ecological perspectives (Daly, 2008; Hayward, 1994; Lipietz, 1995; Suzuki and Marchant, 2008). By the dominant view, growth is seen as key to the quality of human life and human welfare is measured by production and consumption of goods and services. The growth of the economy and, in particular, the pursuit to maximise production and consumption of goods and services has been criticised by political ecologists for over using the earth's resources, destroying habitats and disturbing ecosystems (Daly, 2008; Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994). And, as previously noted there is criticism of the ecological deterioration caused by sports people. In contrast to the need for growth view is the Limits to Growth Thesis, the fundamental framework within which dark green political ecologists work and the belief that the finitude and scarcity of the Earth's resources will limit industrial growth (Dobson, 2007; Hayward, 1994; Lipietz, 1995). Along with certain objections to

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anthropocentrism, such a belief is central to both a critique of green consumerist practices as an environmental strategy and visions for sustainable living.

In Dobson's (2007) view, the key principles guiding the limits to growth thesis are (1) that technological solutions to problems of growth; those based upon existing social, economic and political arrangements will not help in developing sustainable societies, (2) the proposed that rates of growth are exponential in character, harnessing the potential for catastrophic effect, and (3) that there is an *interaction* effect of the consequences associated with growth meaning that growth problems cannot be dealt with in isolation.

Sustainable Fitness: The Moralization of Corporeal Consumption

Since the latter half of the twentieth century the rapid growth of goods and services industries like fitness have depended on technological advances for their existence and in order to market themselves effectively. Techologization characterises the rise of the fitness gym, expansion of the fitness goods market and continued (scientific) developments in fitness equipment and services. In health and fitness spas, for example, the therapeutic aspects of hydrotherapy pools, saunas and steam rooms rely on technological advances in heating and pumping water. The use of beauty creams and oils in spa treatments such as massage, reflexology, facials, make-overs, pedicures and manicures reflects scientific advances in the pharmaceutical, biomedical and chemical industries often relying on imported products distributed globally and leaving enormous so-called carbon footprints. Much of the production of beauty goods remain based upon the use of non-renewable, non-sustainable petrochemical ingredients. For example, many pigments in eye-shadow are manufactured as a derivative of petroleum or coal-tar and even mineral-based alternatives are produced by extensive mining techniques that contribute to the usage of what some feel are finite mineral resources (Cowan, 2008; Stacey and Fairly, 2008). The beauty industry of which health/fitness spa experiences are a part has more recently been the subject of debate about the extent to which some

products may have negative health impacts rather than the assumed health benefits embraced in mass marketing of beauty products. Questions over the toxicity of parabens; a group of chemicals used in cosmetics (and foods) for their preservative qualities, for example, have been found to penetrate the skin and have been (tentatively) linked to breast cancer and the disruption of the endocrine system (Cowan, 2008; Stacey and Fairly, 2008). Here, the quality of human health, a principle debate in questions about sustainability, is potentially compromised in a fitness/beauty culture that purports to enhance health and concomitantly the quality of life, in aesthetic and functional ways. Questions are raised about the 'naturalness' of bodily products made using synthetic/chemical additives and responses to such doubts appear to reflect a re-signification of the concept of the 'natural'. In contemporary health and fitness cultures 'naturalness' is increasingly defined in relation to ethical choices about consumption of beauty treatments and products reflecting an environmental consciousness regarding where and how products are made, how they are distributed and the contribution they make to health, fitness and beauty. In the beauty industries "'Natural', 'pure', 'organic' and green are the new buzz words" (Stacey and Fairly, 2008: 6). The natural has become re-conceptualised as an ethical and moral choice about environmental issues. Aveda's™ 'green science' range is one example marketing beauty products as ecologically aware and environmentally friendly through organic credentials such as using lokta paper made by indigenous people of Nepal. Aveda's™ green claims include the use of "post-recycled", "post-consumer" packaging as a way of reversing Himalayan deforestation and improving the quality of life by employing people living in the Himalayan regions of Malika and Dalika (Aveda, 2008).

In determining an answer to questions about the integrity, diversity, and health/fitness of organisms in the ecosystem the reliance on a narrow set of values, ecologist or environmentalist or naturally healthful or otherwise, leads to such questions becoming ones of moral imperative; of a socially mediated "moral ought"

(Hayward, 1994: 34). 'Green' or 'environmentally friendly' or 'natural' or ecologically

sensitive behaviour such as exercising outdoors, experiencing wildlife, recycling or

the use of renewable resources whether that be in energy consumption or beauty

product use becomes a moral obligation sanctioned by social and political processes.

Discussing the role of science in shaping what counts as an environmental issue and

the interwoven nature of politics and science, Taylor and Buttel (1992: 406) propose

that "in global environmental discourse, two allied views of politics- the moral and

technocratic-have been privileged". Whether moral and technological obligations

reflect a "traditional ethical injunction to value human life" and, thus lead to reformist

approaches to ecological issues or employ a more radical shift in thought and action

from human-centred values to ones concerned with the relative value of human and

non-human nature, a process of moralization of ecological action emerges. Both

moral and technological social action emphasise shared reformist environmental

efforts that tend to be convenient and practical and serve to preserve existing

production and consumption practices (Taylor and Buttel, 1992). The result is the

marginalization of the more complex ecological politics of difference in human/non-

human relationships marked by global and local cultural variations (Hayward, 1994;

Taylor and Buttel, 1992).

Some ways of doing fitness and being fit are presented as morally superior

and ethically and politically correct. Fitness represents a type of ethical consumption

that has been developing more broadly since the 1980s. Ethical consumption is

marked by a shift from traditional relations of work and production to consumption

patterns that are negotiated between consumers and producers and where,

sometimes, consumers are able to exert pressure and experience relative degrees of

freedom to express and fulfil their needs in the production-consumption dynamic

(Bauman, 1992). Some of the most striking changes in patterns of consumption in

fitness cultures have come in relation to beauty and health with, for example, the

emergence and development of the Body Shop as one of the most ecologically

sensitive cosmetic companies, and the rise of 'natural', 'healthy', 'organic' foods (Porritt and Winner, 1988). Other industries including those connected with food, cars and banking are characterised by ethical consumption practices. Discussing the emergence of a "New Moral Tourism", Butcher (2003; 106) argues that contemporary tourist behaviour is a "conspicuous expression of morality" and there are parallels with the fitness industry, some of which is tourism related. Buying and selling contemporary fitness is marked by the outward expression of ethical and moral values based upon the ideology of being able to make a difference. The ethical consumer is a reflexive consumer drawing together pleasure and fairness and embodying a sense of choice and discernment in the personal responsibility of consumption (Adams and Raisborough, 2008). Yet, making a difference comes at a premium since most green products and services are more expensive than their non-green counterparts. Green fitness and health and its moralising tendencies is, to some extent, based upon contemporary affluence in consumer societies supported by the "green yuppies or 'guppies', who eat expensive organic food and can be counted on in the future to drive their Porsches with catalytic converters and lead-free petrol" (Porrittt and Winner, 1988: 190). A green ethical agenda connected to claims for sustainable living, then, has become incorporated into the contemporary idea of a healthy, fit lifestyle marked by neo-liberal values of individualism, affluence, morality and consumption. Sustainable fitness practices based upon ethical consumption are, perhaps, the embodiment of the twin discourses of late modernity; neo-liberal democracy and consumer capitalism identified in the growing work on sport spaces and consumption (see for example, Andrews, 2001; Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Jackson and Andrews, 2005; Silk and Andrews 2001, 2006). Following Silk and Andrews (2006; 315) some of the examples from this research on outdoor exercise, holiday park environments and the beauty spa reflect a type of fitness and health-orientated symbolism in "spectacular consumptive environments" promoting consumer freedom in a realm of elite consumption practices. Such fitness

worlds, then, are a spatial expression of neo-liberal social order and capital accumulation (Silk and Andrews, 2006).

Conclusion

My intention in this paper was not to argue for and against environmentalism and ecologism, nor was it to set up two alternative positions that people who are producing and consuming fitness should choose. Rather, the aim of the paper was to illustrate that fitness cultures are dominated by an environmentalist approach that tends to lead to green consumerism; a position heavily criticised by ecologists for a focus on the "strong meaning" of anthropocentrism as "human instrumentalism" which views the non-human world entirely as a means to an end for human beings and for its failure to recognise in any meaningful way, the possibility of the finitude of the planet, the need to curtail growth and concomitantly the need to rein in existing consumption/production practices in order to construct sustainable societies (Dobson, 2007: 42). But, economic growth and development on human terms are not inherently or by necessity destructive in an ecological sense.

This paper has illustrated that different fitness settings reflect different shades and grades of green consumerism and, thus, can be defined differently in terms their green credentials. For some proposing the virtues of sustainable societies and sustainable communities there is a possibility of reconciling the division between economic growth and the environment by simultaneously fighting for the rights of the non-human environment and respecting the rights of present and future generations of human and non-human life to establish and maintain the material conditions in the quality of those lives. Here there is recognition that anthropocentrism of a "weak" kind defined as "human-centredness", is an unavoidable and necessary part of the human condition since "any human undertaking will be (weakly) anthropocentric, including the green movement itself" (Dobson, 2007: 43). It is impossible to discount human beings from environmental questions - we are involved.

Quilley (2004: 54) argues that one consequence of human development and expanding culture is the Promethean quest for "ecological expansion and domination". But at the same time, the human capacity for communication based on language and the concomitant complex of social development that goes hand-in-hand with symbol emancipation also involves a capacity for self-regulation. For Quilley (2004: 54) "it is possible that the species with the greatest capacity for destabilizing impacts on non-human nature, may yet prove to be the only species capable of exercising evolutionary self-restraint – the semi-political and semi-conscious internalization of restraints in relation to nature and the environment". Notwithstanding criticisms about environmental reformism and green consumerism, the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable societies and green lifestyles perpetuated in fitness cultures might be illustrative of such self-restraint and may provide a foundation for re-thinking the relationship between human and non-human nature.

Understanding the greening of fitness cultures requires an examination of the significance and impact of economic growth, technologization, moralization and ethical consumption, and the role of values in calls for reformist and radical ecological politics. But the simple and uncritical replacement of one set of values (in this case modern Western enlightenment values of growth) with another set (in this case radical ecological values of the limits to growth) is unlikely to lead to a more adequate understanding of the character of the world and the place of human beings in that world and cannot guarantee to be a basis for an appropriate guide to human action (Elias, 1987). Human life cannot be understood in ecological terms alone, rather human qualities of life as well as non-human preservation/conservation are both key features of social and political ecological thought. There is some evidence of policies and practices that attempt to address environmental problems associated with fitness cultures and these, arguably, represent some awareness or even conscience about the sustainable development of leisure activities. But the paradox

of sustainable development means that in fitness cultures, like other commercial spheres, environmental concerns often become sidelined in favour of economic growth where the latter is "more convenient, more commercially attractive and supported by more powerful interest groups" (Maguire, et al., 2002: 96). Further research exploring human/non-human dynamics and drawing on theories and concepts from the field of political ecology might expand an understanding about sport-environment relationships and further knowledge of the emergence and significance of the environmental agenda in sport and fitness cultures. Moreover, such knowledge might be enhanced by future examinations of the relationship between political ecology and neo-liberal agendas for promoting health and fitness practices, developing health policies and regenerating and revitalizing urban and rural spaces as healthy ones. To this end, the discussion in this paper may provide a bridge between work on sport, fitness and the environment and that on the cultural politics of neo-liberalism, sport spaces and consumption.

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