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Adult Women's Perceived Facilitators, Barriers, and Health Benefits of Sustaining a Membership in a Commercial Fitness Facility

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

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**Adult Women's Perceived Facilitators, Barriers, and Health Benefits of Sustaining a
Membership in a Commercial Fitness Facility**

(Thesis Format: Monograph)

By:

Shawn Slade

Graduate Program in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study was to gain in depth knowledge on the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a commercial fitness facility (CFF) amongst active and less active adult women between the ages of 35 – 55.

Method: This qualitative focus group study segmented participants into those who met Canada's physical activity (PA) guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA and those who did not. Inductive analysis of the focus group data was carried out after deductively creating codes. Measures were incorporated throughout the study to ensure data trustworthiness.

Results: The analysis led to the creation of barrier-related themes. Less active women desired a more welcoming and friendly staff and environment, and wanted more support to facilitate sustained membership, than did active women. Active women had one less barrier than less active women. Less active women perceived there was a lack of support and programs for their current ability level, and active participants seldom mentioned this barrier. Both groups shared similar perceived health benefits to the CFF membership in comparison to other forms of exercise and venues for PA, and the active women cited one additional benefit than did the less active women (i.e., having a variety of equipment and services to choose from).

Conclusions: Health was an important facilitator and benefit to using a CFF membership for the women of this study. Less active women identified that the CFF environment needs to be more supportive and welcoming in order to minimize barriers and facilitate sustained membership. A less intimidating environment and more access to professional support without additional cost

would make the CFF space more favourable for the women of this study. Recommendations from the findings of the current study are presented and directions for further research are provided.

Keywords: Women, Facilitators, Barriers, Health Benefits, Commercial Fitness Facility, Gym, Health Club, Physical Activity, Structured Exercise, Focus Groups.

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Chapter 1: Purpose and Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine adult women's perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a Canadian Commercial Fitness Facility (CFF). More specifically, women participated in focus groups that were segmented by physical activity (PA) level; this was done in order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which different factors were perceived to facilitate, be barriers to, and/or might benefit the health of both active and less active women. Through focusing on the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF, an important demographic was addressed. This age and gender segment is important because women between the ages of 35 - 55 have been shown to have more barriers to leisure time PA than men and younger adult women (Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2004; Sternfeld, Ainsworth, & Quesenberry, 1999). At the same time, it is interesting to note that more women are members of fitness facilities than men (Mullen & Whaley, 2010).

Research Questions

The following three research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the perceived facilitators of sustaining a membership in a CFF by women aged 35 - 55?
2. What are the perceived barriers of sustaining a membership in a CFF by women aged 35 - 55?
3. What are the perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF by women aged 35 – 55 in comparison to other forms of PA and venues for exercise?

Introduction

Regular PA plays an essential role in improving and maintaining one's health while decreasing risk factors associated with chronic disease, especially as people age (Haskell, Lee, & Pate, 2007; Spirduso & Cronin, 2001). Health promotion efforts in recent years have made the invaluable health benefits of regular PA and the potential consequences of inactivity better known to the public. There is a plethora of evidence that supports the health benefits of regular PA and exercise; these include, but are not limited to, lowering the risk of developing: coronary heart disease, hypertension, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers (Pate, Blair, Haskell et al., 1995; Thune & Furberg, 2001; Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006; Wendel-Vos, Schuit, & Feskens et al., 2004). Warburton et al. (2006) stated that the greatest improvements in health status are realized when individuals who are least fit become physically active. It is also well established that regular moderate or vigorous intensity PA will lower the risks and symptoms associated with the comorbidities of obesity (American College of Sports Medicine, 1998; Kruger, Galuska, Serdula, & Kohl, 1998).

Despite this relatively new health consciousness in society, 85% of Canadian adults do not meet the recommended guideline of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA on a weekly basis (Colley et al., 2011; Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2012). The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) operationally has defined sufficient PA. This organization has prescribed 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week in order to obtain the health benefits associated with PA and exercise (CSEP, 2012). The percentage of Canadians who do not meet these guidelines has been rising since the beginning of the 21st century when it was estimated that two thirds of Canadians were not sufficiently active to achieve a desired health status (Craig, Russell, Cameron, & Beaulieu, 1999). Furthermore, sedentary lifestyles are

part of the myriad of factors that lead to the astounding statistic that 5.5 million adult Canadians are obese (Starky, 2005). The importance of getting more Canadians sufficiently active is compounded when one looks at PA from an economic perspective.

Research by Janssen (2012) calculated the total health care cost of physical inactivity in Canada to be \$6.8 billion in 2009, a figure that was up from \$5.3 billion in 2001. Katzmarzyk, Glendhill, and Shephard (2000) found that \$2.1 billion, or 2.5% of the Canadian health care budget was attributed to direct costs associated with physical inactivity at the end of the 20th century. Ten years later, in 2009, direct costs of physical inactivity reached \$2.4 billion, or 3.8% of the Canadian health care budget (Janssen, 2012). The vast amount of research on the health benefits of PA in the late twentieth century and the concurrent economic burden of inactivity make clear the need for social support in increasing PA; such support might be provided through private enterprise and government health promotion programs (Smith-Maguire, 2008).

For the purpose of this paper, the terms PA and exercise will be used interchangeably to discuss the behaviour that is carried out in a CFF. This is because PA includes but is not limited to exercise, and both are carried out in a CFF. Caspersen, Powell, and Christenson (1985) define PA as any bodily movement that creates a metabolic change resulting in an expenditure of energy, and exercise as specific movements carried out which will elicit an enhancement of physical fitness. Although it is more common for a CFF to provide a space for exercise (weight training, cardiovascular equipment, and aerobics classes), the CFF is also a place where physical activity such as dance classes, swimming, and walking around an indoor track is also carried out. Again and for this reason exercise and PA will both be referred to in this paper, as it is common for both to occur in a CFF. Furthermore, CFFs commonly encourage exercise that falls in line with CSEP's guidelines for moderate to vigorous PA.

The CFF industry is an important provider of services for Canadians looking to increase PA and overall health through regular exercise in a structured and safe environment (Schmidt, 2012). David Harvey, the president of the Fitness Industry Council of Canada, stated that, “the fitness industry as a whole is invested in positively impacting public health” (2012, para. 3). Membership in fitness facilities has increased dramatically throughout the last decade. In 2004, industry experts reported that 4.3 million Canadians held a membership in a fitness facility at a time when there were 5000 facilities operating. (Ablondi & McNeil, 2005). Almost ten years later, Ablondi and McNeil (2013) found that fitness facility membership in Canada was 6 million with nearly 6000 facilities operating. The rise in fitness facilities over the last decade can be attributed partly to the rise in CFFs, namely women’s-only facilities and corporate franchised facilities from the United States entering the Canadian market (Ablondi, & McNeil, 2013; Mullen & Whaley, 2010; Schmidt, 2012). Examples of prominent CFFs that have recently entered the Canadian market include: LA Fitness, 24 Hour Fitness, and Anytime Fitness to name a few (Daly, 2014). In addition, CFFs make up the majority (54%) of fitness facilities in the North American market, followed by public fitness facilities (International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association [IHRSA], 2010). Due to this strong presence in the industry, the CFF is an appropriate setting for inquiry into perceptions about the fitness facility industry.

A CFF is operationally defined as either a low- or high-end facility with a business structure that is either a sole-proprietorship, partnership, franchise, or private or publicly owned corporation. A low-end facility is defined as having standard amenities, such as cardiovascular and resistance training equipment, free weights, group exercise classes, personal training, and a locker room and shower area (IHRSA, 2012). It is important to note that the number of these standard or low-end amenities might vary by the specific facility. A higher-end facility might

include a spa and childcare services, full sized gymnasiums and/or pools, retail area, and a juice/snack bar. Examples of CFFs operating in Canada, which manage both low- and high-end facilities include: GoodLife Fitness, The Athletic Club, LA Fitness, Curves, and Gold's Gym, to name a few (Ablondi & McNeil; 2005).

The initial reason for joining a CFF is publicly estimated (by the fitness industry itself) to be due to a desire for health-related benefits, especially as an individual gets older (Ablondi, & McNeil, 2013; International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association, 2012). CFFs are preferred places for individuals looking to increase PA because they offer a variety of services for customers who seek to improve their health and fitness through regular exercise (Chelladurai, 2010; Schmidt, 2012). Demand for CFFs is projected to continue to rise as the public becomes more health-conscious and the aging population, concomitantly, places a greater importance on the health-related benefits of PA and exercise (Ablondi & McNeil, 2013; Mullen & Whaley, 2010; Schmidt, 2012). However, even in the face of the potential benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF on PA levels, 50% of people who undertake structured PA programs (including membership in a fitness facility) drop out within 6 months of joining (Dishman, 2001).

It is the assumption of the primary investigator that both public and privately owned fitness facility memberships are attained and sustained because they warrant access to a safe space where one can more easily achieve the health related benefits of regular moderate to vigorous exercise. Membership in a CFF has the potential to offer a multitude of benefits that would address some of the barriers to regular PA and undesirable health consequences of not meeting Canada's PA guidelines. For example, CFFs typically have certified personnel on staff (personal trainers and group fitness instructors) who can assist clients with exercise program

design, equipment use, and proper exercise technique (Smith-Maguire, 2008). For example, Maloof, Zabik, and Dawson (2001) found that a personal trainer positively influenced the health related outcomes (waist circumference, body fat percentage, and maximal oxygen consumption [VO₂ Max]) of their clients over a six-week period. Furthermore, CFFs provide a comfortable place for people to exercise during times of inclement weather, which, in turn, has been shown to decrease motivation and PA levels in adults (Struber, 2004). CFFs also provide a safe and social environment for members to exercise with others who have similar health and fitness goals. Daley and Parfitt (1996) conducted a study that found that members of a CFF had better psychological mood states, physical well-being, and fewer days absent from work than non-members. Despite the potential benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF, when Canadian adults were asked why they might not be achieving recommended PA guideline levels, the top three responses were lack of time, disliking exercise, and not enough money to join a CFF or purchase exercise equipment (Ablondi & McNeil, 2013). The astounding amount of Canadians that are not meeting recommended PA guidelines and the fact that CFFs offer competitively priced services for those looking to increase PA, warrants further investigation into the perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in the CFF setting. Furthermore, since there is a large number of Canadians who belong to a CFF and half of those who join drop out within six months, a deeper understanding of the factors that facilitate and are barriers to sustained membership in this type of facility require substantive study.

It has been reported that Canadian women of all ages are more likely to be inactive compared to Canadian men of all ages; moreover, as women age the amount of leisure time physical activity in which they participate declines (Ablondi & McNeil, 2013; Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2004). Adult women have been shown to have more barriers

regarding leisure time activity in a number of different exercise settings (Sternfeld, Ainsworth, & Quesenberry, 1999). Kowal and Fortier (2007) found that common barriers to PA amongst active and inactive middle-aged and older women were fatigue and daily activities. These findings point towards the challenges adult women face when participating in regular leisure time activity, let alone sustaining a membership in a CFF. Additionally, inactive women reported more barriers to PA than their active peers. From the start of young adulthood and throughout middle age, the amount of PA in which females participate decreases substantially (Luke et al., 2004; Plotnikoff, Bercovitz, & Loucaides, 2004). Thus, this is an important area of research because of the far-reaching implications that a decline in PA levels can have on one's health, and due to the increased rate of women using CFFs yet lagging behind men in overall levels of PA.

Women make up 57% of CFF memberships in North America and are the largest and fastest growing section of the fitness club industry (Mullen & Whaley, 2010). Furthermore, “members [male and female] over age 55 have increased 562% since 1987” and research has shown that health-related reasons for exercise increase with age (Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, & Kaus, 2000; King et al., 1992; Mullen & Whaley, 2010, p. 25; Whaley & Schrider, 2005). While these findings show that more men and women are becoming members of a CFF as they age, they also show that adult women are the most predominant demographic using the CFF setting, yet adult women still have lower levels of PA overall.

These statistics illustrate the need to examine why women are joining CFFs, yet are not as physically active as men. Most of the literature on perceived benefits of using a fitness facility is not in a Canadian context; it focuses on many different fitness facility settings (public, private, etc.); and it is not disaggregated for age, gender, and PA level. The limited amount of

research concerning age, gender, PA level, and fitness facility membership is quantitative in nature. More qualitative studies are needed because they would allow more in-depth understanding of the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits that active and inactive adult women have in regards to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Therefore, the current focus group methodology study aims to gain more in-depth knowledge and understanding about this issue. By specifically focusing on adult women's perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF, a deeper understanding will be gained concerning a population that has an identified need to increase PA levels while at the same time determining their collective experience in the CFF setting. Furthermore, this proposed focus group methodology study will enrich our understanding of the perceived health benefits of membership in a CFF and has potential to facilitate the effective development of PA health promotion campaigns for adult women as well as potential use for physicians, policy makers, and the fitness industry.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

This review of literature is organized into four sections: (a) a brief overview of the perceived and actual health benefits of a fitness facility; (b) perceived benefits and usage of the fitness facility setting across age, gender, and PA level; (c) women's perceived facilitators and barriers to the fitness facility setting; and (d) a section summarizing what is unique about this study in the context of the literature review.

Perceived and Actual Health Benefits of Membership in a Fitness Facility

As of 2014, there has been little academic research into the perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF. Ready, Naimark, Tate, and Boreskie (2005) posit, "membership in a fitness facility promotes PA, yet little is known about its relationship to health" (p. 200). Research in Canada shows that hospital-based fitness facility member's self-rated health status was significantly better than non-member participants (Ready et al., 2005). Ready et al. interpreted these findings to the actual membership the participants held in a fitness facility and not to the increased participation in PA. The same authors found that fitness facility membership was associated with increased health responsibility and health promoting behaviours. Since these findings were deemed to be true regardless of PA level, it was suggested that belonging to a fitness facility was one aspect of health promoting behaviour that allowed a person to achieve the health and fitness benefits of PA. Daley and Parfitt (1996) determined that members of a CFF had better psychological mood states and physical well-being than non-members. Members of a workplace fitness facility have also been shown to have lower medical costs and higher job satisfaction (Breuleux, Heck, Hollenback, & Kinzer, 1993). The findings mentioned in this paragraph are applicable to the current review because they show that

membership in a fitness facility is related to greater perceived and actual health status.

Costello, Kafchinsk, Vrazel, and Sullivan (2011) studied motivators, barriers, and beliefs regarding PA in a population of adults over the age of 60 years who had easy access to a community centre fitness facility. The study used homogeneous focus groups based on PA levels and found that both active and less active groups shared similar motivators to PA in a space offering similar services to that of a CFF. The most frequent motivator to PA in a fitness facility was to achieve health benefits, followed by the opportunity to socialize and make use of expert staff/programming (Costello et al., 2011). The findings from Costello et al. are similar to that of another study that looked at individual and contextual factors that contributed to initial involvement in a CFF. Mullen and Whaley (2010) conducted quantitative research composed of a web survey sent out to 326 random individuals, across age and gender, in the United States. These researchers found that the top motives for initial involvement and sustained participation in CFF membership were health and physical functioning, and appearance. More participants rated health and physical functioning higher in the middle aged (34 – 54 years) category than the younger (18 – 34 years) and older (55 and above years) age groups. The study also found significant (in terms of mean scores) differences in regards to gender and the benefits of belonging to a CFF. Gender differences in general are discussed below in the section focusing on the relationship between gender and perceived benefits and usage of the CFF setting.

This section has reviewed the extant literature on the perceived health benefits of a CFF and other fitness facility settings. After reviewing the literature, we now know that fitness facility membership is associated with: a significantly higher perceived and actual health status; increased health responsibility; and more participation in health promoting behaviours than non-members. Furthermore, belonging to a fitness facility allows an individual to attain more easily

the health benefits of PA, and have better psychological mood states and physical well being than non-members. Literature reviewed in this section also shows that health reasons for becoming involved in a fitness facility are the primary motive for individuals over the age of 34. This health facility involvement is also true across the variables of activity level and gender, with women between the ages of 34 – 54 rating health and physical functioning higher than other demographics. These findings warrant the inquiry into what the perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF are in comparison to other forms of PA and venues for exercise amongst active and less active women over the age of 34. The next section addresses the literature on the perceived benefits and usage of fitness facilities in the context of age, gender, and PA level.

Perceived Benefits and Usage of Fitness Facilities Across Age, Gender, and PA Level

Miller and Miller (2010) determined that women believe that exercise in a fitness facility setting will improve their health more than men. The same authors found health and physical functioning to be the top motives for joining a CFF regardless of gender. Mullen and Whaley's quantitative research showed that appearance motives were more important for the young and middle-aged adults and more critical for women than men. Middle-aged female participants in the study also ranked feeling in control and the qualities of the club, ones such as convenience, extra amenities, and hours of operation, higher than any other demographic cohort in the study. These results provide insight into the complex and dynamic perceived benefits for initial use and continued commitment of membership in a CFF to young and middle age women.

Participation in CFFs is more common for younger than older adult Canadians (Abundi & McNeil, 2013; Stephens & Craig, 1990). Miller and Miller (2010) conducted a study with a goal of obtaining the attitudes of overweight and normal weight adults (ages 19 and above) about

exercise at a CFF. Findings highlight the preferences of adults to exercise in a CFF is less among those aged 35 to 60 than those 34 and younger. Furthermore, another study by the same authors found that those over age 35 have less social pressure than those under 35 to exercise in the CFF setting (Miller & Miller, 2009). These studies confirm that the individual and contextual perceived benefits of membership in a CFF differ by age group. The perceived benefits of sustaining a membership that are evident from the studies examined above show that motivation to acquire and sustain membership in a CFF decrease overtime and, in turn, that motivation has been shown to impact the reasons for sustaining a membership in a CFF.

According to research by Corti, Donovan, and Holman (1996), the use of paid fitness facilities is a result of a combination of personal and contextual factors with proximity and accessibility of the facility ranked as the most important by participants of the study. This research from Australia found that “the use of pay fitness facilities changes according to necessity, preference, perceived ability, perceived age barriers, changing social circumstances, and competing commitments” (Corti et al., 1996, p. 16). Perceived age barriers and competing commitments are examples of personal and contextual factors that impact the use of a CFF especially for those in the middle age cohort (Corti et al., 1996). The authors reported that middle-aged participants in their study felt left out of options that met their needs in pay facilities because the exercise programming often was tailored to the younger and senior citizen groups (Corti et al., 1996). In addition, those in the middle-aged cohort who have parenting responsibilities often reported competing commitments that created a challenge to using pay facilities frequently. These findings were similar to a study that found that the usage and perceived access to a CFF was highest among adults age 34 and younger, and individuals of all age and gender cohorts with higher PA levels (Kruger, Carlson, & Kohl, 2007).

The relationship between physically active and inactive individuals in the context of membership in a CFF has received some attention in the academic literature. A large number of hospital-based fitness facility members (88%) reported that they exercised frequently compared to only half (53.5%) of non-members who reported exercising frequently (Ready et al., 2005). Furthermore, members of a hospital-based fitness facility ranked their level of fitness significantly higher than non-members, and fitness facility members also exercised at higher intensities and for longer durations than non-members (Ready et al., 2005). This study is one of the few that specifically examined the relationship between fitness facility membership and PA levels in a Canadian adult population.

Beliefs about the reasons for using a fitness facility in the context of PA levels have also received some scholarly attention. In a small qualitative study, where the mean age of the participants was 40.8 years old, it was found that inactive participants believed CFFs were used by individuals who were younger and more fit than themselves (Corti et al., 1996). Differences were also noted between active and inactive older adults with easy access to a fitness facility in regards to their construct of PA, barriers to participation in regular PA, and the components of an ideal PA program in a fitness facility (Costello et al., 2011). Active individuals in the study mentioned the social benefits as well as the benefits of support from staff. It was noted that inactive participants valued PA that was “purposeful and fun” (Costello et al., 2011, p. 138). Inactive participants also defined a physically active older adult as being less active in a structured setting (such as a CFF) than active participants. Both active and inactive groups shared the belief that health and socialization were benefits of PA in the fitness facility setting (Costello et al., 2011).

The literature reviewed in this section shows the complexity and dynamic nature of the

benefits and usage surrounding fitness facilities that exists across age, gender, and PA level. Specifically, the literature reviewed shows the complexity that personal and environmental factors have on the decision to use a fitness facility initially and continually.

Perceived Facilitators and Barriers to Joining and Sustained use of the Fitness Facility Setting

Factors that facilitate and create barriers to joining and sustaining a membership in a fitness facility have also received some attention in the literature in the context of age, gender, and PA level. Facilitators and barriers are said to include interpersonal and situational or environmental factors (Nies, Vollman, & Cook, 1998). A facilitator is “that which makes an action or process easy or easier” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013a). A barrier is the opposite and is defined as “a circumstance that keeps people or things apart or prevents progress or access” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013b). Barriers also have a social, physical, and/or environmental component and can become a reality based on the individual’s perception of the importance of these factors in a given situation (Heesch, Brown, & Blanton, 2000). The next section specifically addresses studies that explicitly examined facilitators and barriers to joining and sustaining a membership in a fitness facility.

Facilitators

Mullen and Whaley (2010) found that the facilitators to continued commitment to a CFF were dependent upon seeing physical changes and feeling in control. These findings were consistent across age and gender. Notably, the middle-aged participants rated these two factors higher than both young and older adults in the study (Mullen & Whaley, 2010). Further differences were recorded for the middle-aged participants when the qualities of a CFF that facilitated initial involvement and sustained use were examined. The young and middle-aged participants rated factors such as convenience, extra amenities, and hours of operation as more

important than older participants, with women rating these factors as more important than men (Mullen & Whaley, 2010). Likewise, Szumilewicz's (2011) research showed qualities that facilitated women's initial choice of a public fitness facility to be ones where highly qualified instructors, fun sessions, and a comfortable atmosphere were provided.

The qualities and extra amenities (showers, daycare, cleanliness, etc.) a CFF has that facilitate use of this space decreases in importance with age while the health and physical functioning benefits of participation increase with age, according to several studies (Costello et al., 2011; Mullen & Whaley, 2010). In addition to the health benefits attributed to PA by older adults with easy access to a fitness facility, there are also the social benefits and motivation from staff that facilitate the use of a fitness facility as one ages (Costello et al., 2011). Furthermore, active and younger individuals perceived to have easier access to a fitness facility, and reported using a fitness facility more than those who were moderately active, inactive, and aged 75 or above (Kruger, Carlson, & Kohl, 2007).

Barriers

Perceived barriers to joining a fitness facility can be identified as anything an individual perceives to prevent access to joining and sustaining a membership in a fitness facility. Therefore, not seeing physical changes and having a perception of a lack of control over exercise behaviour can be examples of barriers of sustained membership in a CFF. It is worth noting that these barriers are also more prominent for young and middle-aged individuals (Mullen & Whaley, 2010). Szumilewicz (2011) described the barriers to the use of a public fitness facility as unqualified instructors, sessions are not fun, and an uncomfortable atmosphere. The barriers found in this study were specific to women and specifically focused on the use of group exercise classes within a public fitness facility. Miller and Miller (2010) also reported barriers to the use

of a CFF that were specific to women regarding body perception concerns. Their research found that overweight women were more embarrassed/intimidated about exercising in a CFF than women of 'normal' weight and overweight men (Miller & Miller, 2010). Women in the study also felt less comfortable exercising around the opposite sex and being exposed to perceived complicated exercise equipment than did men. Exercising around fit people was also more of a barrier to overweight women than overweight men (Miller & Miller, 2010).

As mentioned above, PA level has an impact on the perceived ease of access and actual usage of a fitness facility and can be seen as a barrier to individuals with lower PA levels. This is supported by research from Kruger et al. (2007) in which the researchers found that 37% of active individuals used a CFF compared to only 6% of inactive individuals. The most common barrier to the use of a CFF reported in the study was cost (Kruger et al., 2007). Furthermore, women were significantly more likely than men to report that cost was too high for their budget as well as a lack of transportation to access a CFF. Corti et al. (1996) had similar findings and stated that cost discouraged the use of pay facilities for both males and females, along with the perception that fitness facilities are too large and crowded. Lack of peer support, body image concerns, negative past experiences, and fitness facilities more suited to other types of people (younger, more fit, and those with flexible work schedules) were also reported as barriers to the use of pay facilities for both high and low socio-economic groups (Corti et al., 1996).

The findings from the studies reviewed in this section show, once again, the complexity of how age, gender, and PA level interact and can influence the perceived facilitators and barriers to the fitness facility setting. Specific facilitators to initial and sustained use of fitness facility membership for women as they age were: seeing concrete, physical changes (losing inches off midsection, firming and toning, etc.); feeling in control; and having qualified

instructors. Social benefits of the CFF setting and having a higher PA level were facilitators specific to adults; these two factors increased in importance as they aged. Barriers discussed in this section included: not seeing changes; not feeling in control of their health behaviour; unqualified instructors; sessions were not fun; and an uncomfortable atmosphere. In addition, research in this area shows that women who are overweight and have lower PA levels noted more barriers to the fitness facility setting.

Summary

After reviewing the literature presented above, it is apparent that age, gender, and PA level have an impact on the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF and warrant further inquiry in order to increase PA and exercise in this type of venue. The literature focusing on fitness facilities above involves a number of different fitness-industry sectors; these can be grouped into commercially and publicly operated facilities. This study has chosen to investigate further the CFF setting due to the fact that the commercial setting is leading the growth in fitness facility memberships and has the largest number of facilities operating in Canada (Ablondi & McNeil, 2013; International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association, 2010). In addition, studying this one market segment might provide implications for all settings because the services offered across facilities in the commercial and public settings are very similar. Regardless of the form of the facility, the literature shows that membership offers the opportunity to acquire health benefits through the potential to increase or maintain adequate PA levels. After reviewing the literature above, it is evident that there is a need to know what the perceived health benefits of membership in a CFF actually are amongst different age groups and between genders.

Prevalent within the fitness facility academic literature reviewed are the differences in perception of this setting across ages and genders. The literature and industry statistics mentioned within this review show that even though women make up the majority of fitness facility membership, there is still a need for women to increase their levels of PA because they do not meet the recommended guidelines prescribed by CSEP and women also fall behind men in overall PA (Mullen & Whaley, 2010). Women also reported more barriers to PA than men, yet use CFFs more than men, making women's perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits an important area of study. The research presented above also shows that the reasons for the sustained use of fitness facilities are dynamic and change in relation to life stages. For example, motivation to exercise in the CFF setting drops at age 35; this indicates that there are likely barriers women over 35 face in using a fitness facility. This could equate to women not meeting the recommended PA guidelines and achieving the associated health benefits. Furthermore, the literature reviewed above highlights the perceptions middle-aged women have about the CFF setting, and how they stand out and differ from other female age groups and demographic cohorts. Therefore, investigation into the perceptions of women about the CFF venue is especially important because there are dynamic personal and environmental factors that seem to govern these women's perceived barriers and facilitators to membership in a CFF.

Justification for the Study

The need for the present study is justified when considering the importance of segmenting research based on PA level because of the difference between active and less active individuals in the fitness facility setting. The importance of segmentation between active and less active is compounded when one considers the differences in perspective that can occur between ages and genders in this setting, especially when studying the perceived facilitators,

barriers, and health benefits of the CFF setting. After reviewing the literature above, it is also apparent that segmenting participants in fitness facility research based on body weight and socioeconomic status can also be appropriate. However, based on the amount of literature that highlights differences between PA level, the current study examines the similarities and differences between active and less active women in order to acquire a better understanding of both groups. The focus of this study is what makes it unique and allows it to expand on the current academic literature on sustaining a membership in a CFF. Moreover, given the many quantitative studies reviewed above, the present qualitative study will add voice and rich description to the research questions being studied. This study will be potentially beneficial in developing health promotion campaigns, directing public policy and future research, and informing industry how to better serve this important demographic. For example, finding out what facilitates the sustained use of the CFF space for those who are meeting Canada's PA guidelines might potentially help industry and health promotion campaigns inform less active women about things that make it easier for active women to sustain membership in this space and achieve the health benefits of PA associated with membership.

Chapter 3: Method

Introduction

This chapter outlines in detail the study participants by relaying the inclusion criteria, sample size, and recruitment methods. In addition, this chapter will include an explanation of the study's design and procedures, followed by an in-depth review of the method of analysis used to interpret the data. The strategies used to ensure data trustworthiness and methodological processes are presented in the section on data analysis and interpretation. Within this section there is discussion on reflexivity and the role of the primary researcher.

Participants

A purposefully selected sample of 28 women between the ages of 35 – 55 participated in this study. Purposeful sampling, as described by Patton (2002), was specifically used to select women that were able to provide rich, in-depth information related to their experience in the CFF setting, namely the barriers, facilitators, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF. In total, 55 participants made first contact with the primary researcher and expressed their interest in the study. Of the 55 who made first contact, only 45 met the inclusion criteria (see below, following Table 1) for the study and were invited to participate in one of the focus groups. Of the 45 who met the inclusion criteria, only 28 actually participated in a focus group. This attrition was deemed by the primary researcher to be due to poor weather and road conditions during which the primary researcher had to cancel two focus groups. There were also a number of no-shows and last minute cancellations. The demographic data of the participants is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information on Focus Group Participants

Active

Less Active

Total Participants Who Actually Participated	16	12
<u>Age</u>		
35-39	2	6
40-44	4	3
45-49	4	3
50-55	6	0
# Of Participants With Active CFF Membership	12	1
# Of Participants With Non Active CFF Membership	4	11
Mean Length of Time Elapsed Since Holding a CFF Membership	7 years	3.5 years
Mean Length of Current PA Level	10.7 years	5.1 years
Mean BMI (Calculation: Body weight in pounds divided by height in inches squared and multiplying that number by the conversion factor of 703)	25.05	28.32
<u>Mean Household Income</u>		
\$0 - \$30,000	2	3
\$30,001 - \$60,000	2	5
\$60,001 - \$90,000	0	4
\$90,001 - \$120,000	1	0
\$120,001 - \$150,000	9	0
\$150,001+	2	0
<u>Highest Level of Education Completed</u>		
High School Diploma	0	0
College Diploma	2	2
University Bachelors Degree	11	7
University Graduate Degree	3	3
Note: CFF = Commercial Fitness Facility PA = Physical Activity		

The inclusion criteria for the study consisted of women between the ages of 35 – 55 years residing in either, but not limited to, the city of London and nearby communities of South

Western Ontario. Participants had to be either past or present members of a CFF in order to add relevant data to the discussion on the CFF setting. Past membership was defined as sustaining a membership in a CFF for at least three months. This limit of having at least three months of membership in a CFF was set to allow a larger amount of the 35 – 55 year old female demographic to participate in the study. It has been determined that many people who sign up for fitness facility memberships drop out within six months (Dishman, 2001). By setting a limit of at least three months' membership, individuals who may have cancelled their memberships within six months would still be able to participate, while also allowing participants who have spent what is considered sufficient time in the CFF setting to add to the discussion. For all non-member participants, no limit was set on how long it had been since they needed to have held a membership in a CFF. This decision was made in order to enrich the focus group discussions through having a more heterogeneous sample of participants. In addition, participants in both groups had to self-report during first contact as having easy access to a CFF in order to enhance CFF accessibility homogeneity between members and non-members. Easy access is operationally defined as having a CFF in close proximity to the participant's place of residence or place of work and having transportation to a CFF on a regular basis. Participants also had to speak English as their first language and have transportation to Western University.

Since the purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of women aged 35 – 55 years regarding their experiences pertaining to sustaining a membership in the CFF setting, the exclusion criteria for this study included men of all ages, women 34 years of age and under, and women aged 56 and over. Having only past or present membership in a public fitness facility, such as the YMCA, community recreation centre, or hospital-based fitness facility, were also exclusion criteria for this study. This exclusion delimitation was set in order to gain more

in-depth knowledge on the CFF setting specifically. Finally, having past fitness facility or organization membership experience in community or privately run PA programs (bootcamps, learn-to-run groups, etc.) or having experience working with a personal trainer outside a CFF were also grounds for exclusion.

Due to the nature of focus group studies, only a small number of participants (six to eight in each of the six focus groups) were recruited for this study (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1993). Seven participants in each group was the target for this study and so the goal was to over recruit by one participant to cover for no-shows (Miller & Crabtree, 1999; Ramirez & Shepperd, 1988). For this reason, and based on the resources available to the primary investigator, the goal was to recruit eight participants per group during the recruitment stage (Morgan, 1993). The number of participants in the first, second, and third active focus groups were 3, 7, and 6, respectively. The number of participants in the first, second, and third less active focus groups were 6, 3, and 3, respectively. Snowball sampling was utilized by asking participants who already agreed to participate to identify individuals who met the inclusion criteria and were interested in participating in this study (Patton, 2002). The participant was then forwarded more information about the study via email to circulate to would be participants.

After the primary researcher received ethics approval for the study through Western University's Ethics Review Board (see Appendix 1), participants were recruited through the approved recruitment material listed below from a number of different businesses and organizations in London (for a list of these businesses and organizations see Appendix 2). All local CFFs and business were contacted to ask if a poster could be placed in their facility. All businesses were contacted by phone or in person by the primary researcher and given information about the research study. However, not all facilities that were contacted were able to

accommodate the request for poster placement. Posters were then distributed to those that agreed to help recruit participants in their business or organization and were placed in visible, high traffic areas within their organization. Posters were made with tear-off tabs that carried the primary researcher's contact information (Appendix 3).

Recruitment also took place through social media via the creation of a study-specific Facebook page in order to reach more participants through individuals 'liking' and 'sharing' the page. The page created was separate and independent of the primary researcher's personal Facebook page. In addition to advertising through posters and social media, an informational email newsletter with the primary researcher's contact information and a link to the Facebook page was sent to businesses and organizations to share via their email lists and social media (Appendix 4). This email was also sent to Western Graduate students via the University's mass email system.

Study Design and Procedures

The review of literature presented in chapter 2 has identified that qualitative research on the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits to a CFF is scarce; conversely, there are many quantitative studies that have been undertaken in this area. This study used an explorative qualitative design that was employed to add richness, voice, and in-depth knowledge to the existing quantitative research in this area of study. Specifically, a focus group methodology informed by the post-positivist paradigm was used.

Focus groups are useful in health promotion research as target group interaction and discussion of shared experiences generate the relevant data (Ramirez, 1988; Morgan, 1993). The focus group methodology was useful for the purpose of this study because it provided the opportunity to explore homogeneous group knowledge, experiences, and forms of

communication used in day-to-day interactions in a specific social setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kitzenger, 1994). Specifically for this study, focus groups were useful in looking at the experience of women with similar PA levels. Ivonoff and Holtberg point out that, “participants in focus group methodology are seen as products of their environment and influenced by the people around them” (2006, p. 127). The effectiveness of focus groups lies in the informality of focus group discussion, which allows for participants to explore and clarify their thoughts in a way that would be less explicit with one-on-one interviews (Kitzenger 1995). Furthermore, informal group discussion is also effective in empowering women as the methodology “decenters the authority of the researcher allowing women a safe space to talk about their lives and struggles” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 550; Kitzenger, 1995). In focus group research, interaction is encouraged by a moderator and allow for the creation of new ideas that provide insight into not only what participants think, but how and why they think the way they do, all of which the researcher may not have considered (Kitzenger, 1995; Ramirez, 1988). Moreover, the data obtained through the group interviewing process allows for the attainment of group interactions and dynamics that one-on-one interviews cannot achieve (Morgan, 1998).

The current study’s design and data collection procedures were adopted from a study that used focus groups with a multiple-category design to collect detailed information on PA attitudes, beliefs, and barriers of older adults with easy access to a fitness facility (Costello et al., 2011). A multiple-category design was used for this study to allow the primary investigator to make comparisons that would address the gap identified in the literature on both groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Therefore, focus groups were homogeneous based on PA level in order to answer the research questions that came from the review of literature. For this reason, focus groups were segmented into active and less active groups. The active group was composed of

participants who met or exceeded Canada's PA guidelines and the less active group was composed of participants who accumulated less than 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week (CSEP, 2012). Upon first contact, the potential participants were asked to self-report as either meeting Canada's PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA a week or not, so they could be placed into the appropriate focus group. In addition, the goal of creating groups based on PA level was to also assist the moderator in creating a comfortable environment that facilitated discussion amongst the participants and the sharing of their individual experiences.

In order to ensure that groups were homogeneous based on PA level and that participants understood how a CFF was being operationally defined, the primary researcher provided a verbal definition of Canada's PA guidelines and a CFF definition to potential participants on the phone during first contact. Moderate-intensity PA was defined as a rate of personally perceived exertion that is usually a 5 or 6 on a scale of 10 (with 10 being the highest perceived exertion possible). (i.e., "If you are doing moderate-intensity activity you can talk, but not sing your favourite song, during the activity and you are working hard enough to raise your heart rate above your resting heart rate.") Vigorous-intensity PA is defined as a rate of personally perceived exertion that is usually a 7 or 8 on a scale of 10. If you are doing vigorous-intensity activity, you would not be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath and your heart rate would go up quite a bit (meaning close to a perceived maximum heart rate; CSEP, 2012).

When potential participants made first contact with the primary researcher, they were asked the inclusion criteria questions to determine if they were eligible to participate (Appendix 5). If the potential participant was eligible to participate, she was given multiple dates for focus

groups for which she was eligible based on her PA level. To facilitate focus group attendance, a small incentive of a \$10 gift card to a local restaurant was offered to participants as a thank you for volunteering their time to participate in the study. Parking costs up to \$5 were also reimbursed to all participants who parked in a Western University parking lot. The participants were also informed during first contact that they would receive a reminder call 48 hours before their focus group and a reminder email outlining all logistics for the day of the focus group (Morgan 1995). A file of extra participants and those who met the inclusion criteria but could not make one of the proposed focus group dates was kept in the event that more focus groups were needed to provide more data over and above the planned number of focus groups.

There is no consensus on the appropriate number of focus groups that constitute a study and sufficiently answering the research questions being asked is the fundamental principle that determines the number of groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morrow, 2005). Morgan (1988; 1993) states that the goal in focus group research is to do only as many groups as is needed to deliver adequate answers to the research question that is practicable given the size of the research team. Because the proposed study was for a Master's thesis, and had limited resources (time and money), holding three focus group sessions for both active and less active groups was the initial goal (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Given this dynamic of sampling in qualitative research and the resources available to the research team, a higher degree of moderator involvement was used to ensure the research questions were adequately answered (Morgan, 1993; 1988). A higher degree of moderator involvement was achieved through being consistent in the member checking process and through continually asking the other participants if they had shared a similar experience. A higher degree of moderator involvement was also appropriate in that, even in homogenous groups divided by

PA level, the groups may have been heterogeneous based on weight, household income range, and education level, so the moderator was encouraged to explore and probe all participants to develop the discussion (Morgan, 1988; 1993). Furthermore, research that is exploratory in nature and aimed at attaining a group perspective, as is the case with this study, can be achieved with relatively few groups and a higher degree of moderator involvement (Morgan, 1993).

Focus groups were held on campus at Western University in the Labatt Health Science Building's Health Promotion laboratory. The primary researcher set up the interview room one hour before each focus group and met with the two female moderators 30 minutes before each session in order to answer any questions the moderators may have had and to prepare for the focus group. The primary researcher provided the audio and video recording equipment that was used to assist the data collection process. A Samsung Video Recorder (model number HMX-W200RP) and a Sony IC Recorder (model number ICD-UX522) were used to video and audio record each focus group.

When participants arrived, the primary researcher gave them a copy of the letter of information in Appendix 6, instructed participants to fill out consent forms in Appendix 7 and anonymously fill out the demographic form in Appendix 8. Income and education were collected as there is literature that points towards income and education level as having an influence on an individual's perceived access and usage of a CFF (Kruger et al., 2007). The significance of the demographic data was to provide an accurate sense of who was participating and the degree to which segmented groups were homogeneous (Kitzenger, 1995).

At the beginning of each focus group, a moderator and moderator assistant, both with experience conducting focus groups, discussed the format of the focus group, and went over the purpose of the study to ensure participants were clear on what was required of them (see

Appendix 9 for script for commencing focus group). All questions from participants pertaining to the focus group method were answered before moving on to the group discussion. Each focus group started with an opening question that allowed the group to interact and open up with one another on a personal level (Krueger, 1995; 2000). The moderator in charge of facilitating the discussion had a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 10) containing the research questions and she was responsible for guiding discussion amongst participants in a non-judgmental way (Kitzenger, 1994; Miller & Crabtree, 1999).

The moderating team did a member check between each question and again at the end of the focus group to enhance the credibility and confirmability of the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Patton, 2002). The moderator assistant was in charge of making notes that summarized participant responses, which, in turn, aided in the member checking process. The moderator assistant also checked audio and video equipment to ensure it was operating with no errors or disruptions, and assisted the moderator when needed (Morgan, 1988). The focus groups ran for 90 minutes. At the end of each focus group, the moderating team did their final member check and thanked the participants for their time and for sharing their experiences. Immediately after each focus group was completed, the primary researcher met with the moderating team in a debriefing session to update the discussion and themes the moderators may have framed or determined after their time in the group discussions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Also, any biases the moderators may have had were voiced and recorded to ensure the analysis was not influenced by researcher bias. The primary researcher made notes during the debriefing for the purpose of creating an audit trail and to help the process of data analysis.

The primary researcher was not present for the focus groups, as having a male in attendance might potentially threaten the trustworthiness of the data should the female

participants feel uncomfortable opening up and participating with a male present (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Morgan, 1993). Also, it was the goal of the research team to have experienced moderators conduct the focus groups to enhance the trustworthiness of data collected. It was for these reasons that four female moderators assisted in the facilitation of the focus groups. The moderators' names were Tara Mantler, Andrea MacDonald, Leigh Vanderloo, and Rebecca Fried. Two females were assigned to the active focus groups and two females were assigned to the less active focus groups. Also, in light of having moderators that were not the primary researcher, focus group sessions were video recorded to enhance the trustworthiness of the data collection (Morgan, 1988). Having not been present, video recordings allowed the primary researcher to get a sense of the group dynamic during the discussions from body language and other visual cues and aided in the analysis process (Morgan, 1988). This was necessary as it is most beneficial if the moderator is part of the research team and the data analysis stage, though that was not feasible for this study. With one focus group the primary researcher had to take part as the moderator. This was because one of the moderators called the primary researcher two hours before one of the focus groups because she was unable to attend due to a family emergency. No other female moderator was able to cover and, for this reason, the primary researcher needed to cover the vacant role for that focus group. There was no sense from the primary researcher or the other moderator that having a male present had a deterring impact on the data collected.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative analysis and interpretation in the focus group methodology is an iterative process, in which the depth and intensity is determined by the purpose of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002). The result of this process is transforming group data into findings.

For this study, Crabtree and Miller's (1999) editing and template organizing style of interpretation was used for data analysis. This was appropriate for this exploratory study and involved the interpreter entering the text with a goal of segmenting the data by identifying the information most pertinent to the research question with no use of preconceived codes (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This method of analysis is congruent with Krueger's method for the analysis of focus group data in the focus group methodology (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In accordance with the focus group methodology, differences and similarities were constantly compared within and across the segmented groups (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2000).

In accordance with Western University's Ethics Review Board, all participants were de-identified and given pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities. Furthermore, all data were kept in secured computer files and external storage devices that were locked in the primary researcher's office desk on Western University's campus. Data will be destroyed in five years after the study results have been published and all audio and video recordings from the study will be permanently deleted.

Trustworthiness of the Data and Findings

Parallel criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of post-positivist qualitative inquiry was used in this study. The four areas of assessing qualitative research (discussed below) are known as parallel criteria because they are similar to the criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, which are used to assess post-positivist quantitative research (Guba, 1981; Morrow, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Credibility is a term used in the appraisal of post-positivist qualitative work and is parallel to the term internal validity in the post-positivist paradigm for quantitative work. Credibility deals with internal consistency and how the researcher ensured rigor in the research

process and communicated that with the reader (Morrow, 2005). Conducting peer debriefing immediately after the end of each focus group enhanced credibility of the data being collected in this study. Peer debriefing was carried out by the primary researcher by meeting with the moderating team to summarize each focus group. At this debriefing, the moderators were asked to note any themes that they saw emerge from the discussion and to make the primary researcher aware of any biases that the moderators may have from their time in the focus groups.

Credibility was also achieved by member checking between each question during the focus group sessions and at the end of each focus group meeting. Member checking helps to confirm and verify that the moderating team heard the respondents correctly and is a crucial technique used to establish the credibility of qualitative data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

To further enhance the credibility of the study, the primary researcher made use of consistent observation by becoming immersed in the data through listening to audio recordings and watching video recordings of the interviews together with transcribing the data verbatim to ensure accuracy. The observation was consistent in that the transcription process involved three phases. In the first phase, the primary researcher watched each focus group video immediately after the conclusion of the focus group and debriefing meeting. This phase involved adding to the assistant moderators' notes while viewing the video at regular speed. The second phase involved the actual transcribing of the focus group through watching the video recording in slow motion and making note of body language and the group dynamic during the focus group. The third phase was used to ensure accuracy of the transcribed focus group and involved listening to the audio recordings at regular speed while reading through the transcription and making corrections or additions, if necessary. This process used to transcribe the focus groups allowed the opportunity to for the primary researcher to attend closely to the group's feelings,

perspectives, and points of view, all of which are important as each group is the unit of analysis, not the individual participants (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Transferability is a term used to appraise post-positivist qualitative work and is parallel in meaning to the term external validity and/or generalizability in quantitative research.

Transferability is defined as the extent to which the reader is able to generalize the findings of the study to other contexts and settings (Guba, 1981). The responsibility of transferring the findings is placed upon the researcher doing the transferring and should address the core issue of how far the researcher is able to make claims about his/her research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings from the present study, a rich and in-depth description of the research context and processes (participants, recruitment, etc.) have been laid out in detail in this paper. This has been done to enable potentially interested parties to determine whether the results are transferable to other settings. However, due to the small sample size used in qualitative research, it is not the primary researcher's intent to imply that the findings from the current study are generalizable to other populations and settings. In addition, the attention to the reflexive process, presented below, has been included to provide the reader with a better sense about who the researcher is, which can be useful in determining the degree to which the findings are transferable.

Dependability is a criterion of trustworthiness and is a parallel term to reliability used to appraise quantitative research. The term dependability refers to how consistent a study's research process was in determining the findings. A study's design and procedures should be consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques (Morrow, 2005). In other words, the research process should be "explicit and repeatable as much as possible" (Morrow, 2005; p. 252).

Dependability of the data for this study was carried out through the use of multiple audit trails that other researchers are able to view to assist them in understanding any changes the study underwent and key design decisions the primary researcher made. Specifically, an audit trail was kept for the following processes: study design decisions; influences on data collection; analytic memos; and emerging themes. All of these processes are delineated within this study. Some examples of study design decisions recorded in the audit trail include the decision not to limit participation only to those who currently have a membership and to include individuals who may have held a gym membership for only three months. Some examples of changes that could possibly influence data collection and were recorded for the purposes of an audit trail were: adapting to last minute cancellations and no-shows in each focus group; cancelling focus groups because of poor weather; and having the primary researcher fill in for one of the moderators at the last minute. Analytic memos were used during the coding process by each of the coders to record emerging themes as they became evident. First, broad question-specific codes were created by the primary researcher and two graduate student coders (Paulina Ezer and Rob Haile) through an analysis of the focus group data. After the team conducted their open-ended observation, the primary investigator created overarching themes for both the active and inactive participants. Patton (2002) has described this method of qualitative analysis as *inductive* and orientated toward exploration and discovery; the goal of this inquiry was parallel to Patton's description. Memos were used again during the final stage of analysis that was carried out by the primary researcher to identify themes emerging from the codes created.

Confirmability is synonymous with the idea of neutrality on the part of the research team and is parallel to the term objectivity used in post-positivist research (Guba, 1981). Creating confirmability in qualitative research helps the reader look at the design and procedures used and

confirm that the study's findings are true (Morrow, 2005). To strengthen confirmability and the overall trustworthiness of this study, the primary investigator recruited two fellow graduate students (Rob Haile and Paulina Ezer) who had no primary interest in the study to create individually and simultaneously a first round of broad codes from the transcripts. The use of several different coders is known as triangulation (Patton, 2002). Patton has stated that this step is helpful in limiting researcher bias during the coding process while enhancing the trustworthiness of the analysis. This is an important step because the initial coding of data helps to sort and categorize data and becomes the framework for making subsequent analytical comparisons (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The two graduate students that assisted with the coding were asked to review the transcripts and broadly code the perceived facilitators, barriers, health benefits, health pros and cons, and overall benefits to sustaining a membership in a CFF. This was done by using the comment tool in Microsoft Office by selecting text and giving it a broad question specific code. These broad question specific codes were derived from the five key questions in the semi-structured interview guide used by the moderators. Some segments of data were placed under multiple broad codes in order to be as inclusive as possible in incorporating any and all important data. For example, health cons could also be coded as barriers, and health pros could also be coded as health benefits. After coding independently, the coders and the primary researcher met to discuss their analytic memos and see if codes created matched. If the codes created did not match well, then the coders and the primary researcher examined why this was happening before reaching a consensus as to the appropriate code to assign to that piece of data under dispute. It was assumed that by using more than one coder, researcher bias was controlled and confirmability was enhanced.

Confirmability was improved in a few other ways. Quotations from participant discussions are provided in the results and helped substantiate the findings. The use of a semi-structured interview guide and the use of more than one moderating team increased the confirmability of the data being collected. Also, as mentioned above, the primary researcher participated in reflexive journaling throughout data collection and analysis to help bracket personal biases that arose from becoming immersed in the data and the literature.

The primary researcher engaged in reflexive practices throughout data collection and analysis; this was done in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings through giving the reader a better sense of who the primary researcher is. Reflexivity is considered as an “essential” aspect of qualitative research as it allows for a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied and the research process carried out by the research team (Watt, 2007, p. 82). Engaging in reflexivity ultimately keeps any preconceptions in check and limits theories that are not grounded in the data from emerging during the analytic process (Patton, 2002). Reflexivity was especially important for this study as the primary researcher is approaching the phenomenon with both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives. The emic perspective stems from the primary researcher’s ten years of experience working as a personal trainer inside and outside of the CFF setting. However, since the primary investigator is not female, there is also an etic perspective brought to the study. The importance of practicing reflexivity is further amplified for this study as post-positivist studies attach themselves to “traditional scientific research criteria such as objectivity of the inquirer and attempts to minimize bias” (Patton, 2002, p. 544). Thus, reviewing reflexive notes and engaging in reflexivity while reading and analyzing data has allowed the primary investigator the opportunity to assess whether the research question is being answered and whether personal bias and subjectivity is influencing data collection and analysis.

The primary researcher kept a reflexive journal from the start of data collection until the project's completion. Reflexive thoughts were recorded on paper or electronically via laptop computer and smartphone and were revisited throughout the research process. Examples of preconceptions, which stemmed from the primary researcher's professional experience in the CFF industry include: a biased assumption of the value of personal trainers and fitness instructors; a close attention to the financial cost; and environmental aspects of the CFF (namely exercising around men) as a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. It was important to engage in reflexive journaling when coding segments of the transcripts that involved the preconceptions listed above. Journaling allowed the primary researcher to bracket any personal bias and attend to the words being used by the participants. Being as descriptive as possible when creating codes allowed the primary researcher the opportunity to remove personal bias and ground the codes in the language participants used. Examples of primary researcher preconceptions that evolved out of reviewing the literature were an over estimation of the importance of losing weight and the aesthetic benefits of exercise (i.e., trimming inches, toning arms, looking good, etc.).

Self-awareness regarding the reasons for, and methods of gathering and analyzing data, has allowed the primary researcher to assess the effectiveness of the research process more acutely throughout this study. Having recently retired from the personal training industry to focus on this Master's thesis, it was a concern of the primary researchers that he would be contacted by old clients who wanted to participate in the study. This was not the case and the primary researcher had no personal relationship with any of the participants in the study. Recruiting female moderators to help with the facilitation of the focus groups also safeguarded for the possibility of the primary researcher having a personal relationship with participants. The

reflexive process undertaken for this study was also helpful for the primary researcher in understanding personal ontological and epistemological assumptions during the first research study he has ever conducted. In addition, the process of reviewing a reflexive journal has proven to be an invaluable skill to attain and something that the primary researcher can apply and develop in future qualitative studies.

Lastly, QSR NVivo qualitative software was used to aid the primary investigator in organizing, storing, and accessing coded data. QSR NVivo was used after the broad question specific codes were made with the help of two graduate student coders (PE and RH) and during the initial round of line-by-line coding that was carried out by the primary researcher. Similarities and differences were compared constantly between the active and less active groups while the primary researcher remained reflexive throughout this stage of analysis.

The results are presented in the following three chapters: (a) perceived facilitators, (b) perceived barriers, and (c) perceived health benefits. Each chapter is split into two sections in order to address the results for the active and less active focus groups. Each chapter is concluded with a summary and comparison the results for each of the segmented focus groups. Overall themes that have emerged from the data analysis stage are presented within each chapter. Participant quotes have been selected and presented in each chapter to illustrate and explain how each theme was developed, and to provide justification for the results that have originated from this focus group study. All participants were de-identified in order to protect their identities. All names of CFFs used by the participants have been replaced with the pseudonym *Canadian Commercial Fitness*. All name brand equipment mentioned by the participants was also given the pseudonyms *fitness X machine* and *fitness Y machine*. Any participant that could not be identified through the audio and video data collected was given the name *Participant X*.

Chapter 4: Perceived Facilitators to Sustaining a Membership in a CFF

This chapter will report on the perceived facilitators of sustaining a membership for the active and less active participants of this study. Active participants ($n = 16$) were defined as those who self-identified as meeting or exceeding Canada's PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week. Less active participants ($n = 12$) were defined as those who self-identified as not meeting Canada's PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week. The themes mentioned below have been formed by grouping like quotations together within each segmented group. The themes discussed for the active participants are: *health benefits; variety; support with progress and goals; and welcoming and friendly staff and environment*. The themes discussed for the less active participants are: *health benefits; variety; more support with progress and goals; and more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment*. The chapter identifies the active participants' perceived facilitators and then the less active participants' perceived facilitators. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings where similarities and differences across the segmented groups are discussed.

Active Participants' Perceived Facilitators

Active focus group participants revealed their perceived facilitators to sustain their membership in a CFF. Although the participants' opinions on the perceived facilitators differed, there were some common themes that were evident. The themes derived from the perceived facilitators are presented below and include: *health benefits; variety; support with progress and goals; and welcoming and friendly staff and environment*. Please see Table 2 for a complete list of the keywords, which led to the creation of each theme for the active participants' perceived facilitators.

Table 2

<i>Active Participants' Perceived Facilitator Themes and Keywords</i>	
<u>Theme</u>	<u>Keywords</u>
Health Benefits	longevity, health, fitness for daily activities/sport, maintain independence/control, mobility, role model for children, strength, endurance, mental health, attain results, remain youthful, aging gracefully, doctor recommended.
Variety	variety, choice, group exercise class, equipment, services, programs, locations, hours of operation, amenities, schedule, convenience, diversity, quantity, options for when needs and goals change, instructors to choose from.
Support with Progress and Goals	safety, support, injury prevention, health risks, certified, knowledgeable, personal trainer, fitness instructor, guidance, initial orientation, measurements, motivation, goal setting, knowledge on healthy lifestyles, exercise program design, educated staff, check up on members, imitate fit members.
Welcoming and Friendly Staff and Environment	friendships, family, community, small town vibe, welcoming, friendly staff and members, recognition, social, positive environment and people, connection, locations culture, inclusive atmosphere.

Health Benefits

When asked what they perceive as facilitating sustained membership in a CFF, multiple participants across the three focus groups said, in a word, “health.” This was also confirmed through the member checking process; for example, Lola stated, “I would say for health.” (Group nods in agreement), to which the Moderator responded, “Is that the general consensus?” (Group nods in agreement). Sixteen participants shared this perspective. Within this overarching theme, there was specific attention to health in the context of longevity and health

being important as one ages for such lifestyle elements as: mobility; independence and increased control over health; the ability to achieve the desired health benefits one is after in the CFF setting; the opportunity to be a good role model and influence the healthy behaviour of family members (especially children); and increasing health and fitness for life events and daily activities. These different contexts were confirmed through group dialogue and conversations between participants in each focus group and are discussed below.

Participants expressed that health and longevity were facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF. This was because they perceived that sustaining a membership allowed them to achieve the health and fitness goals they desired. Participants often spoke about how their reasons for sustaining a membership in a CFF had changed over the years, with health being the most important to the participants at their current stages of life. Notably, the first active focus group spoke about health as a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF as almost an obvious fact. As Haily stated, “Health” to which Isabella agreed, “Yes, health and longevity.” Maintaining control over one’s health and fitness was a common, shared reason for sustaining a membership by the majority of participants and is represented by the following dialog:

Monika: Like for me my biggest motivation is my own health. Because that is pretty important to me, like I lost a substantial amount of weight and I feel if I stopped working out that it is going to come back on. (Laughs). Because I too love food and I do like to eat, and I do not want to be totally limited on what I eat, so I work out so I can, you know... Like I do eat better now than I used to, um, but yeah probably my biggest motivator is staying on that healthy track.

Betty: I am going to bounce off that and not just keeping the body weight down but aging. I know that years ago when even turning 30 and people say once you turn 30 you start to get these aches and I wasn’t. I did not really work out for that but as time has gone on I am glad that I did. Because that is what motivates me is staying youthful as I age. I still don’t get the aches and pains like people my age talk about at 30 or 35.

Participants also expressed that the CFF setting facilitates the control over their health by allowing them to achieve the health related benefits they desired at their particular stage of life.

This was evident from conversations like the one below:

Kristin: Like I think our body's change you know? When I first started going to the gym it was on my doctors recommendation like I said before to get myself healthy. When I reached my goal I started tanning and you know in my mid forties I began travelling and started dating again. I was going to the gym then because I wanted to look buff and sexy and that. Than five years later I started to age and was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. I had a health crisis when I was first diagnosed and I couldn't walk. So I had to keep my flexibility up and my energy levels up and to help me combat depression. And I find my needs always change as to why I go to the gym. Right now I don't care so much about what I am doing or body image because I am not wearing mini skirts at 45, I am now 55 and I find I go because I have to have focus to my week. I have to because it helps my joints and keep my muscles so I can control and live independently. Because I am sure I will start to age more in the next years and I want to be as independent and mobile as I can, you know?

(Group nods in agreement.)

Participant X: Yeah!

Kristin: And so your needs change...

Rosie: It is true.

Kristin: These people that want to be ripped, buff and tanned are often the young people going to the gym. But at my age, it is more like yeah.... You know your needs just change and my health is most important now.

(Group nods and laughs in agreement.)

Overall, the quotations presented above identify the major components of the theme *health benefits* as all participants across groups agreed with and contributed to conversations around health as a major facilitator for sustaining a membership.

In addition to participants indicating that achieving health benefits was a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF, being a role model of good health behaviour for their children was also important across groups. Thirteen participants shared this perspective. Though this theme was generated from participants with younger children, even the participants without children or with children who have already grown up, agreed that staying healthy and exercising regularly in a CFF was good behaviour that should be emulated by their children and was a

facilitator to sustaining a membership. Participants with older children spoke about the opportunity a CFF membership provides them to bond while exercising together. Some of the salient comments around this theme included the following:

Maya: And I just would like to say that to me it is important that I model fitness for my kids. My daughter especially.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Participant X: Mhmm.

Maya: She looks at her mom and says look at you.... And she is a real skinny slug. She is 14 and my son is more active because he plays hockey. He is a busy nine-year-old boy and he is a stockier, rolly polly guy.

Moderator: Yes that is important to model fitness for our kids. Does anyone else agree with that?

(Group nods in agreement)

Participant X: Oh yes!

Kristin: Yes childhood obesity is an epidemic, mhmm. It is good when parents are active, the kids will be active.

Rosie: Like my daughter joined after I joined and she is quite petite and very little. She won't do the same things that I do though. Like I do the spinning class and the weight class and class X and yoga class. Kind of high impact, like, "Agh, Let's do it I am working out!" (Makes mean face) Where as class X drives me crazy... I am like, "yes I can breathe I just don't want to do it!"

(Group laughs)

Rosie: But she totally joined right after me and started coming with me but then adapted her routine to what she actually wanted. Which was yoga, hot yoga, class X and some of the machines and stuff like that. So we are totally different but I got her into it. Which I am so surprised...

Moderator: Well I agree with that because that is very much what I study, so start early.

Maya: Yeah and then you can be active as a family.

Madison: My 19 year old daughter comes with me because she likes what I do. She is 5'10" she is overweight and 230 pounds but the good thing, again what we don't get at Canadian Commercial Fitness. We were at Canadian Commercial Fitness together but she gets the nutrition help where we are now. So her weight actually started coming down where like at Canadian Commercial Fitness it wasn't. It even brought my daughter and I closer together. For being a 19 year old girl with weight issues and that. We now have a healthy competition. I can't let my daughter out lift me right. So we have a bond now and we go to the gym together. When before she was kind of at the age like, "look I know it all" kind of thing. So now we have this bond, which we do together.

Moreover, participants mentioned health as a facilitator because of its positive impact on handling stressful life events. Participants spoke about many situations in which sustaining a membership in a CFF allowed them to be able to put more effort into family relationships and

accomplishing daily activities/chores more easily because they were better able to handle stressful life events through regularly using their membership. Fourteen participants shared this perspective. The following conversation shows how one participant was able to overcome mental illness through acquiring a membership in a CFF:

Kristin: Well that is what happened to me, like I said when I started I was obese and just had a marital break down and my doctor virtually said to me... either, you know, I am going to put you in south street hospital on the second floor, because I was a real mess, because we ended very sudden after X years of marriage. Or she goes, you have to join a gym and get healthy and blow off all this anxiety and horrible stuff you are going through. So that is when I walked into the Canadian Commercial Fitness.

The following quote adds to how the theme of *health benefits* was perceived to be a facilitator by showing how sustaining a membership allows participants the freedom to stay active in their daily lives and do the activities and other things they love most. These situations ranged from continuing to play sports to playing with children without aches and pains. Emma commented, “The fitness that I gain from the gym I use in the summer. My fiancé and I we do a lot of races. Like obstacle course races and a bit of running. So the gym is basically my training for that too.” Participants from another focus group had the following conversation, which strengthened this element of the overall theme:

Macey: But I like to play volleyball so in order to play well I need to workout in a gym setting. I need to do the strength training and the cardio and flexibility that I can do in one spot.

Lola: So to keep yourself strong for the things you love doing in life?

Macey: Yeah.

Lola: Me too.

Variety

When active participants were asked to share their perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF, another common theme that emerged was *variety*. Variety encompassed having options to choose from within the CFF setting in regards to choice of equipment, group

exercise classes, class times, hours of operation, and locations. Variety in equipment and classes to choose from were most commonly cited as facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. The following participant quotations exemplify the focus given to a variety of equipment and having choice. One participant stated, “And the equipment for me, there’s so much diverse equipment. I can go to the free weights or go to the Fitness X Machine or the Fitness Y Machine. There is so many different styles of equipment and there is multiple. Like there is choice! Choice is a big necessary.” This was supported by an active participant who said, “I would say that they have a wide amount of cardio machines. A variety if you want to choose different things so if you want to do classes or weights. Lots of resistance machines. So there is a large variety of things to do.” The following conversation strengthens this theme by showing in more detail the attention given to having a variety of equipment from which to choose:

Emma: And for free weights if they have a lot of free weights because that area is always so busy. And I know like, some of the clubs like Canadian Commercial Fitness you can never find a set of 10’s. You just can’t, like somebody has one of them or both of them. Or some jerk personal trainer has taken it to the personal training area. Um, and it is having lots of different stuff available. That really helps and is definitely important.
 Moderator: Right. So choice, diversity, quantity as well as to what you’re able to do and the type of workouts you can do and then again flexible schedules. So gyms being open 24/7 or 24/4 and then also I having different classes being offered at multiple times throughout the day and night.
 (Group nods in agreement.)

In addition to many conversations about the importance of having a variety of equipment from which to choose, participants also had many opinions about the importance of variety for classes and class times. For example, Hailey said, “Tons of class times. That’s the biggest sell for me.” To which Emma responded, “Right, the schedule and availability are huge and at some clubs their classes have a horrible schedule or sporadic and if you can’t make it you are out of luck.”

The common link between each one of the elements of this theme, such as variety of equipment, locations, classes, class schedule, and hours of operation, is convenience. Active participants perceived that having a variety of activities, schedules, and locations from which to choose increased the convenience of using a CFF and thus allowed them to sustain their membership in a CFF. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. The following quote highlights the common link of convenience that the overall variety theme. “Where I go they have a lot of classes so whether you want to go at 5:30 in the morning or 8:30 at night it is really convenient for me.” Having a variety of locations from which to choose adds to the aspect of convenience and was often mentioned by participants because having access to multiple locations was perceived to add variety to the classes one can attend, instructors with whom one can interact, and equipment to which one has access. One participant mentioned the following, “like my sister joined Canadian Commercial Fitness and there is nothing wrong with it but there is only X locations and so there is limited classes. Whereas I can find almost any class at anytime of the day to go to.” The following quote confirms the importance of convenience when it comes to class times and hours of operation:

Maya: And now I am all about classes and that is just because of my time, I am busy so I just pick the most convenient times. So for me since I am a teacher I get out of work at 3:30 or 4 and there are a few 4:30 classes that are perfect for me. I can still get home and get dinner ready for six and then I can still get the kids off to where they need to go. So for me it is all about lots of classes to choose from and lots of locations to choose from.

The following conversation expands upon this theme and the importance of convenience for the active participants, while shedding light on how participants also perceived variety to be a facilitator by allowing them the opportunity to change the type of exercise they do depending on what their exercise goals were:

Corey: The other bonus and I don't notice it as much in my gym now just because of all the options but more so at my old gym in Toronto. There was a studio I belonged to and

at different stages I belonged to different studios to get what I wanted. So I think the advantage of the commercial setting is if you can find a place where you like the instructors. Than you get it all in one. You don't have to have multiple memberships. So I had to pick other facilities because I did not like the commercial facilities so I would do six months of spinning and then six months of yoga. So I just felt like I was forced to choose different activities whereas the commercial fitness facility or most of them... they offered everything I wanted for a price point that I was willing to pay.

(Group nods in agreement)

Corey: And I think that is what the advantage of this is. I wanted to join Canadian Commercial Fitness for that reason. Because I was like, great, you have everything all in one.

Moderator: So kind of like a one stop shop.

Participant X: Mhmm.

Corey: Yes.

Alanna: Like a Wal-Mart. (Group laughs.)

Another common relationship between the different aspects of this theme was that having a variety from which to choose allowed participants to try new activities and become active in a form of exercise that resonated with them on a personal level. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. It was also noted by the participants that having a variety of activities to choose from in the CFF setting allowed them to sustain a membership throughout the years as they aged and as their focus and goals with exercise changed. The following sentiment illustrates how participants shared the perception that they can use a CFF membership for whatever they want or need they had:

Betty: And that is kind of what my thoughts were um, it is kind of self-directed really. What ever your interests are there are a number of places you can go. Like if you like the group stuff they have that there or if you are more independent, you have that there, like I am a solitary worker outter and nobody bothers me and I used the club to suit my schedule and my needs so that is what I would say they are like. A lot of accessibility.

Support with Progress and Goals

Participants across focus groups mentioned that the potential to attain support with their progress and goals in the CFF setting makes it easier to sustain a membership. Within the overarching theme of *support with progress and goals* there was attention to the many different

forms of support they received or can potentially receive in the CFF setting; this included support from knowledgeable and certified group fitness instructors and personal trainers; support on the safe execution of exercises; and advice on healthy lifestyles from staff and other facility members.

Knowledgeable and professional group fitness instructors play a major role in creating a supportive environment, which, in turn, facilitates sustained membership in a CFF for the participants. Though not all participants mentioned that they require support from knowledgeable professionals in the CFF setting, they still confirmed that having the option to obtain support if needed is a facilitator to sustaining their membership. Fourteen participants shared this perspective overtly. Rosie mentioned, “I have found that the instructors are very good and very encouraging.” To which Kristin confirmed, “Yes that is right.” Participants from another focus group thicken the theme of supportive instructors by saying, “And I have been a member at a number of gyms in the city... and I would say location and hours, but I also do the fitness classes and I have switched gyms because of the director of the classes switched locations and I just really liked his style of classes.”

Within this aspect of the theme of *support with progress and goals*, participants also stressed the need for personal trainers and group fitness instructors who are knowledgeable and certified. Eleven participants shared this perspective. Active participants spoke to the difference between supportive and non-supportive staff. Participants mentioned that having knowledgeable and certified professionals available makes it easier to sustain a membership because it allows them the peace of mind to know that they are exercising safely and minimizing their chance of injury. For example:

Faith: Yes I really appreciate instructors who are knowledgeable about the human body. So... I had a really bad car accident too, so there are some things I can't do and I really

appreciate when an instructor says, “if you have an issue with your shoulders, here is another way you can do this move. “

Kristin: They are good for that in the yoga classes...

(Group nods in agreement.)

Faith: Yeah. In a few of them I find, even in the group exercise class X which just came out. It is tough...

Group: Yeah group exercise class X is tough.

Faith: But they are still really good at saying, “here are two levels, here is another way you can do it,” and then I find I... at least feel safer in there. And more willing to keep going.

Moderator: Which is huge because you want to make sure that your body can be protected from further injury.

Faith: Mhmm.

Moderator: That could debilitate you from your daily routine.

Faith: Yes.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Likewise, participants from another group commented on the support that is available from personal trainers. In addition to safety, the support available from knowledgeable and certified professionals was perceived to be a facilitator because of the extra motivation one can receive from these professionals;

Isabella: So you should have the proper people working there at least on the exercise side of things. So that you know the people who are taking care of you physically like you said, um, are people who are going to know what they're doing. So let's say you have a question you can ask them, as young as they maybe, um, you can ask them and they will know what the answer is. You know I think one of them will come over and stop me from some of the exercises and because they are the ones (exercises) that I did when I started personal training and they have changed by now. They give out that knowledge and they have to be recertified every year.

Emma: Yeah. But um, maybe for people who aren't as exercise-y as we are, you wouldn't know that right? Um so, you get so many different forms of exercise available to you. Also if you want, if you are one of those people if you don't mind spending the money you have access to a personal training which is...

Hailey: Some people really need that, yeah!

Emma: Some people really like it. It can make it less scary for some and help them stick to it.

Hailey: Some people need that push.

Isabella: I used to love having personal training. If I could afford one I would have one every time I go in. Because you work your hardest when you have someone who knows what they are doing kicking your butt.

Group: Yeah!

Support in the CFF setting was perceived to be available in many forms. In addition to receiving support from group fitness instructors and personal trainers, participants spoke about the support they received from fellow members of the CFF. Thirteen participants shared this perspective. This form of support had the common theme of being offered and exchanged through informal conversations, and through imitating exercises other members were doing. The focus of the informal conversations that active members perceived as a facilitator was on broad healthy lifestyle skills such as diet, physiotherapy, and exercise technique. The quotations below provide an example of how this aspect of the theme of support was created:

Rosie: I have found that I have learned so much more about how diet affects your weight, and not your weight, your fat. I don't even look at weight anymore because I look at measurements. I was picking out women at the gym and ok she is super fit and looks like she knows what she is doing, she has good form and she is conscientious of what she is doing. Whatever class happens to be and then asking what is your diet like and then getting it from them. What they do. And I get, "Oh I eat no carbs after 4pm." Yeah right! We know what we should and shouldn't eat but we eat it anyway... we are hungry.
 Moderator: So that is going back to the facilitators. Having those extra people and resources to learn things from other than fitness and exercise.
 Rosie: Yes.
 (Group nods in agreement.)

The following sentiment shows how the active participants obtained support and knowledge to do different exercises through watching other members and imitating them:

Kristin: And what I used to do because I was totally unfit and I wasn't a very physical person and I couldn't even go grocery shopping on my own that is how unfit I was. My husband always went with me because he would do all the heavy carrying. I couldn't even carry a case of pop that is how unphysical I was. And I remember when I started with the athletic club I did not know how to do anything. And yes they showed me how to work all the machines. They were very welcoming but I would just look around and I was petrified. And I would look and see the fittest person like you say, and watch what they were doing for a while and then I would try and imitate their movements and then a few months later I would say I got small successes, I was fit enough to start going to the classes and I would put my mat, and set up my mat right next to the person in the front that looked like they knew what they were doing, I wouldn't hide in the back. I would go right to the front and watch to see if they know the moves and you know. Three or four years later I am one of those people so it is important, and I was one of those people that was too shy and I couldn't afford a trainer. I was going through this horrendous

expensive divorce. But I would watch the fit people and saw what machines they would use and what classes they would go to. And imitate them.

Welcoming and Friendly Staff and Environment

When active participants were asked to share their perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF, another common theme that emerged was *welcoming and friendly staff and environment*. A welcoming and friendly environment includes relationships with other members in the CFF, as well as the cleanliness and aesthetics of the facility, which if perceived to be favourable and up to their standards, facilitated sustained membership in a CFF. Also included in this theme is the relationship the participants have with staff; that relationship seems to be an important motivator toward sustaining their membership in the CFF if staff members are perceived to be welcoming and friendly. Active participants appear to have a social motive for sustaining membership in a CFF as it was common for participants to talk about feeling happy after spending time in a positive environment. Moreover, active participants perceived the CFF setting to be filled with like-minded individuals all working towards a common goal in a safe, friendly, and welcoming environment. Sixteen participants shared this perspective:

Isabella: We are all there for the same reason so you are all there trying your best and everyone is looking out for each other. If I see somebody struggle with something I am going to go up to you. I am not going to try to out do you or this isn't a competition to you know be a better person this is just all a very positive environment. And I think that is probably one of the reasons people continue to go back because it makes you feel happy, not just exercise but being in the gym makes you happy. It is a positive drug. Because when you go in there as much as you might be tired or you don't want to workout today or you are having a bad day or whatever. Everybody there is there because they want to feel better and they want to do better you know, it is very positive. No body is there to bully you, nobody is going to comment on how ugly your dress is or the bad hair day you are having. I go first thing in the morning, with it all curly and I throw the headband on and nobody says that. You know everyone is off at 6:30 in the morning. It is wonderful to just feel comfortable going into an environment like that because everyone just wants to get the job done.

The common association amongst the different elements of this theme is the shared perspective that a CFF is like a community or second family for the active participants of the study. Twelve participants shared this perspective. Notably, a few participants felt that not all CFFs were like a community or family because they have not always received the same level of friendliness as other participants in their focus group, though they still perceived a welcoming and friendly staff and environment to be an important facilitator. However, the majority of active participants spoke about the staff and environment being a facilitator to sustaining a membership because of the connections and community vibe they have experienced in that setting. For example:

Emma: If you walk in the door and people are like, (energetically) “hi how are you? Have a good workout!” And then like opposed to a club where you scan your key card and you have to wait and stand there for the girl to grab your towel.

Isabella: Mhmm, or they are reading a book behind the desk. Yes.

Hailey: You are right mhmm. Recognition is good.

Emma: And when you go to leave, if they say goodnight like, “have a good night!” That makes me feel good. I am like, I have family here! Yeah, these people are nice.

Hailey: Recognition is good, when they call you by name.

Isabella: Or when they are like, “hey you are back, we missed you.” Or, “where have you been?”

Moderator: I see so sort of like that friendly community vibe and a connection.

Group: Yeah!

Emma: Definitely like, um, I have made long lasting relationships with very positive people in a positive atmosphere and they have had a very positive influence on my life. If you make friends at work or wherever people do that, um, they could be good influences, they could be bad influences. Well at the gym 99% of them are um, will push you to be a better person and to be healthier and fitter. And it, for me everything that we talk about we talk about food we talk about training, you talk about um you know preventative stuff.

Hailey: Yes definitely.

Emma: Even if I am having a terrible day um, I go to the gym even if I don’t want to. I go there and I see my friendly faces and it is like party. I am not even kidding sometimes I get there and I am like, “oh my god you are here, hi!”

Hailey: That is right if you love it, you love it. You love it, you love it.

The friendships that are made in the CFF setting are not only with staff, but also with other members and these relationships were also perceived to facilitate sustained membership in a CFF. The following conversation highlights this component of the overall theme:

Lola: For me it is I see the same people every week and if I miss they are wondering where I am. Or I miss them.

Betty: It is like a family.

Alanna: Yes for me too!

Lola: Why I would keep going, um would be for the friends that do belong to those gyms.

Moderator: So the relationships.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Within this aspect of the overall theme was a focus on active participants being able to overlook certain situations in the gym that may make the environment seem less welcoming and friendly. The following sentiment highlights this facet of the theme:

Kristin: The instructors were always really helpful and really motivating and warm and welcoming you know trying to fit in all types of bodies. I stayed at Canadian Commercial Fitness because I really like their environment. You have to overlook something's like the guys and that kind of thing. I work out in both the women's and in the mixed because I am so comfortable at the gym. But I have found it is a really good environment to workout in.

Another commonality that this theme encompasses is the attention to location and how that can impact how welcoming and friendly a CFF is perceived to be. Specifically, the degree to which a CFF is perceived to be friendly and welcoming can change from facility to facility. Therefore, this theme is not extended to every CFF and is dynamic based upon the individual's perception. For example one participant said, "It depends on each location as everyone has their own vibe. The club where I am currently at and spend most of my time is one of the most welcoming, inclusive places that I have ever been to." Another participant added, "It is easier to be a member of a corporate club in a small town. When you go into a small town like Woodstock, Sarnia, and Windsor they have a small town feeling than coming to a big city like Toronto."

Lastly, within the theme of *welcoming and friendly staff and environment* is attention to the aesthetic appeal of a CFF, which was perceived to be a facilitator of sustaining a membership. Participants mentioned that having an aesthetically appealing environment to exercise in motivates them to continue using the facility. Fourteen participants shared this perspective overtly. Within this element of the overall theme was a focus on the cleanliness of the facility. The following conversation was selected to show how the aesthetic appeal and cleanliness of a CFF adds to the welcoming environment about which active participants spoke:

Macey: Yes that is one thing I would like to say more on is the atmosphere of the actual gym because I know my gym is fairly new and it has nice tiles and the showers don't smell like mold anymore. And it is bright and you come alive when you go in there.

Group: Yeah.

Macey: And I have been to another gym where it is not, the building wasn't built for that purpose so you are running around like a rat maze going, "how do I get there again? Am I going up or down?" And the colour scheme is meh and kind of depressing.

Corey: That does make a difference.

Macey: Yeah, where there are no windows or no lights.

Moderator: So there is certain stuff with the facility structurally that you would expect to make the environment more welcoming?

Macey: Yeah.

Less Active Participants' Perceived Facilitators

Less active focus group participants provided their perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Although the participants' opinions on the perceived facilitators differed, there were some common themes that were evident and those are presented in this section. The themes created for the less active participants' perceived facilitators presented below are: *health benefits; variety; more support with progress and goal; and more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment*. Please see Table 3 for a complete list of the keywords, which led to the creation of each theme for the less active participants' perceived facilitators.

Table 3

Less Active Participants' Perceived Facilitator Themes and Keywords

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Keywords</u>
Health Benefits	improve health, disease prevention, role model for children, strength, mental health, fitness for daily activities, active as a family, self-care, setting boundaries for health, doctor recommended.
Variety	variety, choice, equipment, services, programs, daycare, amenities, group exercise class, beginner classes, services, women's only, hours of operation, schedule, convenience, diversity, quantity.
More Support with Progress and Goals	safety, support, injury prevention, health risks, certified, knowledgeable, personal trainer, fitness instructor, workout partner, guidance, initial orientation, measurements, motivation, goal setting, knowledge on healthy lifestyles, exercise program design, track progress, check up on members, imitate fit members, ask questions, less intimidating.
More Welcoming and Friendlier Staff and Environment	more welcoming, friendlier staff, social scene, more privacy, recognition, not fake or phony, more caring staff, less intimidating.

Health Benefits

When less active participants were asked what their perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF were, a majority of participants identified obtaining the health benefits associated with exercise. Twelve participants shared this perspective. Within the overarching theme of *health benefits*, there was a focus on a CFF membership improving health (namely the physical and mental health benefits of PA); being a role model for children, and setting boundaries for personal health and self-work; and life events and disease prevention as motivators.

Less active participants stressed that a CFF membership allowed them the opportunity to improve their health. Moderators commonly received relatively short answers when probing participants, and asked them to say more about how improving health is a facilitator to sustaining a CFF membership. For example, when asked what the perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF were, Jada said, “Improved health, (Group nods in agreement) and improved, like feeling good about your self and a sense of accomplishment.” Matilda added, “Like, mental health.” To which the group collectively responded, “Yeah!” A participant from another focus group strengthened this theme by saying, “Health, a healthy heart!” Physical and mental benefits were also mentioned without a lot of descriptive detail into why or how participants felt that sustaining a membership in a CFF would allow them the ability to improve their physical and mental health. The quotation below shows how participants spoke about how a CFF membership was perceived to be a means to improving their health:

Shannon: The physical and mental benefits again.

Shelly: Mhmm.

Moderator: So in terms of the health benefits?

(Group nods in agreement.)

Rachelle: Can you re-word that because that sounds similar to the other one?

Moderator: So the difference here is all things considered what do you feel are the primary benefits of sustaining a membership in a commercial fitness facility?

Shannon: Well improved endurance, improved cardiovascular health, improved strength, conditioning.

The conversation about improving health almost always revolved around the need to stay healthy for their children. Eight participants shared this perspective. This aspect of the overall theme was stronger in one of the focus groups though it was mentioned in all three to some degree. By reading the following conversation, it is evident that health as a facilitator was an external motivator for the less active participants because of the attention placed on participating in PA for their childrens’ sake. The conversation below also shows how the less

active participants often put parenting and family responsibilities before their own needs even though the participants mentioned that being a role model for their children was a facilitator to sustaining a membership:

Scarlett: Yes. Something I had to learn more recently were that my expectations on myself about being a mom and because I did everything because that is what I thought I was supposed to do. I was setting boundaries around that so my husband didn't think that he needed to pick up the slack. So more recently I have made some major life choices that now he is taking a lot more responsibility. Where years and years went by where I was doing it. So I think that whole mindset thing you were talking about earlier. Like, when we start, we can love our children and want what's best for them but ultimately what is best for them is to have a healthy mother.

Olivia: Yes for sure.

Scarlett: And I had to set some boundaries with other things other than fitness but ultimately to affect my health. So I think as much as we do love our children I think a part of that is to put their mother in that priority. And a real priority.

Moderator: So do you feel that that membership is part of that putting yourself first to ultimately help them and the health of the whole family?

Scarlett: Huge!

(Group nods in agreement.)

Scarlett: Huge yeah, if you can afford to financially. But I think part of us as parents is negotiating those roles. If you have a spouse who is there with you or even loved ones who would be able to support you so you can support the children and be healthy ultimately.

Olivia: That is the one thing it is the guilt you feel too. To use a membership... well mine are older now but when they are little and when you work all day, oh gosh I am now going to go to the gym and have mommy time and my kids are in daycare. It's like, "oh I haven't seen you all day, ok let's bounce back and go to the gym." That is not exactly their idea (laughs), of wanting to see you after work.

In addition to the quote above, a facilitator for less active participants would be to be able to make sure that their children were also getting the health benefits of PA while they used their membership in a CFF. Furthermore, a perceived facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF was the opportunity to improve the health of the relationship participants have with their children. The quote below shows how even though the less active participants had the best intentions to be physically active and sustain a membership in a CFF for the sake of her children, sometimes the motivator of knowing the health benefits of PA and being a role model for their

children was not enough for this person to remain consistently physically active and sustain a membership in a CFF:

Matilda: That is an interesting concept. Did not mean to interrupt but working out with your children. They should have a family package. That would be a motivator.

Olivia: Yeah I mean she just turned 16. So it was nice the summer before last where she was old enough for this program and we like, it was awesome to show her all that stuff and bond. And again I would have to join for a year, like I know I just wouldn't commit to that or do that this summer and we moved ridiculously close to a fitness centre, I could throw a baseball and hit it. And I want to be a role model for my kids and be healthier, I do, it is just hard sometimes.

Another aspect of the theme of desired *health benefits* was the attention to life events and disease prevention. Less active participants spoke about reacting to life events as a motivator for attempting to sustain or become involved in a CFF membership for the purposes of preventing disease:

Olivia: You know what is sad though listening to all of this is that it is going to be some life lesson that is going to make one of us say, you know what, I need to get in shape because of such and such, and that happens a lot. Where I would see, um when I worked at the gym decades ago, you know what so and so in my family had a heart attack, or somebody I know was diagnosed with breast cancer or whatever and it is like... You know what, I need to get in shape, but until then it is just the status quo.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Olivia: And just listening to everyone I don't think it will be like that for all of us for ever but unfortunately when that scale gets up there, it is still hard sometimes to make a positive change.

Moderator: So a facilitator to the gym membership somehow is like having those type of events that might make you... or make you have to...

Olivia: Yeah, unfortunately.

This feature of the theme of *health benefits* was strengthened by a participant in another focus group; Shannon stated, "Yeah, physical activities' health benefits, they are finding more and more profound effects on reversing Alzheimer's and other diseases. Things that you don't think of are associated with physical activity but, surprise they are. Thinking about this motivates me to go to the gym."

The health benefits theme had nuances of a lack of willpower to use and sustain a membership despite health being viewed as a motivator for the participants. The conversation below summarizes this feature of the theme *health benefits* for less active participants:

Olivia: The road to health is paved with good intentions. So you are right I am sitting here and I am like I trained people for ten years you know another lifetime ago for me. But I am thinking like, that is part of it, like how to make it work. And again it goes back to what are your priorities. So for me this is beneficial because I am sitting here like overwhelmed with guilt. I am like oh my goodness am I that person. I need to figure something out better than what I have been doing the last year and half/ two years. So whether it is in the gym or learning swimming lessons like that. I do believe it is like what Jada said too, like there is a cycle. So though this is important, it just comes down to who you are and what you value and not what you are willing to do, but what you are willing to give up at the end of the day. I would do more in a heartbeat. I micro manage my life but I obviously can't do more so what am I not going to do to make this work is what I need to look at.

Brooklyn: Yes

Scarlett: I think you are so right about the tragedy. Like when you come face-to-face with a doctor that says you have a blocked artery that is, you know 90% blocked. You are going to make some hard and fast changes and you are going to set more boundaries in your life.

Olivia: And that is what scares me about being this age is that I don't want to get to that point being a single parent. Like I want to be the fittest and healthiest I can be and not putting my kids in the position that, you know, being obese or overweight had to contribute to that.

Variety

Less active participants spoke about variety being a facilitator for a number of reasons. Variety for less active participants encompassed having options to choose from in regards to equipment, classes, class times and hours of operation, and payment options. Locational differences were seldom discussed and when they were, the focus was on having access to a co-ed facility that also had a private women's only section. The variety theme emanated from the grouping of statements surrounding having a variety of equipment and classes from which to choose. Ten participants shared this perspective. This was evident from quotations such as, "I'm gonna say that um, lots of options, whatever way you want to go there's lots of options.

Lots of different things to do, as far as human activity, machines, free weights, and um, swimming, hot yoga classes.” Another focus group mentioned that having a lot of choice facilitated membership by saying:

Maya: I think one pro is there are a lot of options so you don't have to stick to doing the same thing day after day after day so... When you are motivated to get there that can keep you motivated.

Olivia: Yeah you can do weight training with the group exercise X class, or with the personal trainer, or you can do your cardio with another thing so it is really easy to mix it up.

Within the theme of variety for the less active participants, many of the discussions gravitated towards the importance of having a selection of group exercise classes and times from which to choose:

Scarlett: Classes

(Group nods in agreement.)

Moderator: So what is it about the classes that are a facilitator for you?

Jada: Well it is just the variety that you can choose from.

Maya: I like the variety of them too instead of just going to lift weights as that can get a bit monotonous, where as most gyms offer different variety so you can do a different class everyday if you want.

Participants from another focus group discussed the importance of having the option to choose from new fitness classes, which helped by adding variety to their workout routines:

Shannon: All those fitness trends that come around, it's nice that whenever a club, helps you and jumps on the bandwagon. And all of a sudden there's kettle bell classes.

Trendier. So it's appealing and new. So having that variety of classes and new...

Moderator: So that they are up to date and variety. And so class schedules that are useful for all types of lifestyles.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Shannon: I would be more apt to trying new things to. Um, like when you get into a regular routine there and then they throw up a new class or a new whatever.

Shelly: Yeah, like something that maybe you wanted to try that you wouldn't know how to do otherwise. And if there is a class for it you would try it.

Rachelle: Mhmm.

Shelly: Even if you don't try it, if you could see the class than you would be like, ok yeah, I would like to try that or...

Within this theme, it was common for the less active participants to want more variety than what they experienced in the past in regards to payment options. Ten participants shared this perspective. It was noted in all focus groups that having more options for how one can pay for a membership would be a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF:

Matilda: Yeah pay-per-use.

Scarlett: Yeah, I am sure there are a lot of people in the same situation that would appreciate like pay-per-use like you were saying.

Jada: Yeah I totally would.

Matilda: Yeah like going back to this whole pay-per-use thing like if you have to sign up for a year and she is in the boat where all you have is the whole other week than why do you have to pay for those weeks you are just not using, it just doesn't seem logical at all. But it would be beneficial to have the opportunity or the option to do a pay-per-use type deal.

One characteristic of the theme *variety* was an element of wanting access to a private women's only space within a co-ed facility in order to facilitate sustained membership. The less active focus groups spoke often about having the choice of exercising in a women's only area for certain exercises and for convenience purposes, which is evident in the following conversation.

Nine participants shared this perspective:

Maya: With the women's only though, I really prefer the clubs that have a co-ed club with the women's attached.

Scarlett: Yeah that is what this one was.

Maya: Ok, because some that are just women's only. Like right now, the closest gym to me is a women's only so my husband and I can't join that one together. We have to drive further if we are going to go to a gym. Like I like that they have that I just wish it was co-ed so we had more choice.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Scarlett: Yeah location is important.

The following dialog adds to the conversation above and is representative of the groups' perspective surrounding the importance of having multiple locations to choose from as well as different amenities available at these locations that make using a membership easier for them:

Shannon: If parking is crap then I want the gym to be close to my house, right.

Moderator: It could be further if there was good parking.

Rachelle: Parking is huge.

Moderator: What is it about parking?

Shannon: Convenience. I'm a driver, I drive a lot for work.

Rachelle: I even remember one time, at certain times you couldn't even get spots so you had to park on the street. So I would just drive around the parking lot. So it is more so the convenience, it needs to fit with my life and not make it more complicated.

This comment sheds light on the importance of convenience for the less active participants, as it was perceived that having a variety of activities, private space, and class times to choose from made sustaining a membership easier. It was important for the less active focus groups to have variety in activities because it was more convenient and more likely to fit with their schedules and daily routines. The quote below was selected to show how having a variety in class times and hours of operation is a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF for the less active participants because it made using their membership more convenient:

Lily: Yes hours that suit my schedule. Yeah. And when they are offering yoga was when I was not available so that deterred me. So it was like at 7pm at night only. Not in the morning or in the day. It was like...

Moderator: So availability of classes it was like...

Lily: Yeah has to fit with your life.

Charlotte: I would just want them to be available when I have time which is usually... it would depend on my schedule and classes I am teaching or am taking. All that sort of stuff. So they need to be flexible.

Moderator: Flexible in terms of personal training or hours they are open?

Charlotte: Both.

Lily: Yeah.

More Support with Progress and Goals

Participants from each of the less active focus groups spoke about the potential to attain support in the CFF setting from staff, facility members, and friends and family. It was common that the less active participants specifically spoke about wanting more support than what they have previously experienced. Eleven participants shared this perspective. There was attention to the many different forms of support members of a CFF can potentially receive and they included support from group fitness instructors and personal trainers, support on the safe execution of

exercises, support during the start of a membership, and support from having a workout partner to meet at a CFF. Also within this theme was considerable attention to having support and its ability to facilitate sustained membership in a CFF by making the environment less intimidating by increasing their knowledge of exercise techniques and program design. Having support ultimately made the less active participants feel more comfortable and aided them and/or might aid them in sustaining a membership in a CFF.

Knowledgeable personal trainers and group fitness instructors were a facilitator for less active participants, who perceived that exercise was more safe when they had the support and guidance of professionals. Eleven participants shared this perspective overtly. Participants also spoke about the benefit of having extra motivation from professional personal trainers and group fitness instructors as a facilitator. The dialog below exemplifies this further:

Matilda: A personal trainer absolutely helps, absolutely. You know that person who says just one more, just one more and knows what they are doing.

Olivia: Yeah that is it.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Brooklyn: I could use one of them, especially with help for my back.

Matilda: And having a facilitator is just somebody who you can ask questions to each time you go to make sure you are doing it right. They get to know your face, which is nice, but their knowledge is super useful and helps you get what you are going for. As opposed to just walking in there and doing whatever you want and not getting results.

Olivia: Yeah I agree, just being mindless. You can go and they are going to yell at me for an hour in a class and I am going to do my best and I am done. It is easy peezy that way. Love professional help.

The conversation below is from another focus group and strengthens the theme of attaining support for safety reasons as well as the importance of personal trainers and group fitness instructors being knowledgeable about exercise. The following quotation also exemplifies the overall tone of this theme, which suggests that the less active participants wanted more support than what they perceived they had:

Moderator: Right that makes sense. Anything else to make it easier?

Rachelle: Well we can go back to the personal touch. That would be awesome

Moderator: Like what you described before?

Rachelle: Yeah, like when someone's there to help you if you need help. It was a huge motivator to see your measurements and everything, and how much weight you increase, like weight lifting, not weight gain, but yeah it's huge.

Moderator: So having that person to also help motivate you to keep going and stay connected. Having someone available and not having to fight through crowds for them.

Rachelle: Yeah. That was huge. That would have been the only time I went to the gym consistently ever in my life.

Shelly: Yeah and can I add? And not just any person, someone who knows health and fitness and isn't going to make you do something where you would hurt yourself.

Because like you said, a lot of these gyms have young staff who do not know anything... ugh! (throws hands up in the air.)

Moderator: That says a lot about how important it is. So someone who is there to help and is more professional.

(Group nods in agreement.)

The following quote ties together the two common characteristics of each aspect of the support theme by highlighting how less active participants wanted more support than what they have previously experienced in a CFF and how obtaining more support would be a facilitator by helping them with a gap in knowledge on proper exercise techniques and program design:

Lily: Or just help with form. Like I would never know this stuff by myself. Like 'cause my only thing is I will just add more weight and that is not always the best option but I don't know that. So maybe there are other options out there but there is no way for me to know.

Moderator: So staff that encourages and maybe offer other options?

Charlotte: Yeah, for safety's sake.

Moreover, the quote below illustrates how support was perceived to be important in the early stages of holding a membership in a CFF and is imperative for the sustained use of a membership for the less active members. Twelve participants shared this perspective. Again, the language used below illustrates how the support that the less active members experienced in the past was not quite enough to facilitate sustained membership and was not always delivered as effectively as they perceived it was supposed to be:

Maya: I think a facilitator for me is most gyms when you join they give you like a free fitness type assessment so that you have starting point and again usually you meet

someone, hopefully um, it is a professional and that person sometimes follows up with you keeps up with your progress... sometimes. It would be nice if that always happened. But it is nice when you are helped out in the beginning.

Moderator: So we have the free fitness assessment with someone coaching you or guiding you and being another motivator if you don't have a friend to be there with?

Maya: Yes.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Matilda: So I like that part and having that instructor there is a motivator too. Because I am fine with working out on my own and know what to do, but the instructor there helps.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Participant X: Yes, for sure.

Less active participants put a substantial amount of stock in having a workout partner meet them at the gym as a facilitator. Twelve participants shared this perspective. The following quotations are examples of how having the support of a workout partner can facilitate sustained membership in a CFF for less active women. One participant indicated, "I probably would not have gone without my girlfriend because that environment was always intimidating to me. And that is also why we joined the women's only." The following quote is also an example of how having support and a workout partner is helpful in making the CFF setting less intimidating for the less active participants:

Hannah: Well I think that, that can change it. I think, I don't like working out period. I get really irritable because I don't like the pain. I have come to realize this. I do not like pain, at all. I make mean faces when I workout so... It does make a difference when you go with family like I know with my mom she goes to Zumba and she has a group of girls that all go and they have a great time. It seems less intimidating that way.

Similarly, the following quote is a very representative example of how having support from a workout partner facilitates sustained membership in a CFF amongst the less active participants:

Scarlett: I did better when I had a friend I was going to meet. I found my accountability was better. For me having a friend that is going to meet you there, who you go with, I find those times I commit longer periods of time before falling off when I have that other person that I am accountable to.

Moderator: Mhmm.

Matilda: Unless someone comes and physically takes me from my house and takes me to the gym and says lets go. That would work.

Moderator: So the buddy as a facilitator?

Matilda: At least somebody is going to miss you if you are not there.

More Welcoming and Friendlier Staff and Environment

Much like the previous theme (*support with progress and goals*), the theme about *more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment* also had a common characteristic within it, namely that less active participants wanted a more welcoming environment and a friendlier staff than what they had previously experienced in order to facilitate sustained membership in a CFF. Ten participants shared this perspective. Though the overall theme was that the staff and environment could be friendlier, not all participants shared this perspective and some participants acknowledged that they have been able to make friends and have felt welcomed in the CFF environment. Within this theme, there was a focus on relationship with staff, relationship with members, and having an aesthetically appealing environment. The following quotation encompasses the language often used by the less active participants when speaking about how a welcoming and friendly staff and environment was a facilitator. Maya said, “Just like what I said before, I like when you are greeted.” To which Brooklyn replied, “Yes that is big for me, they need to be real and not fake or phony and give you a genuine greeting.” Maya then confirmed, “Yeah when you come in the door it makes you want to come back again.”

Another aspect of this theme was a desire to have staff that exuded a greater sense of caring than what the less active participants initially perceived them to portray. Ten participants shared this perspective. It was common for the less active participants to perceive that staff only really cared for the members whom they personally knew because they were “regulars.” The overall sentiment toward staff is evident by the group participant quotations below:

Lily: So a personal fitness instructor for the whole gym not for individuals would help.
Charlotte: Yeah and I think they have that but also someone who is not there 24/7 but someone who you can go to ask questions. You know if you make eye contact with one

of these people and they don't turn and walk away but they ask you if you need help. They won't go out of their way to say do you need help.

Moderator: So a staff member that will check in and help you out and just seem to care.

Charlotte: Yeah, that would motivate me!

Additionally, participants commented on how staff that was more welcoming and friendlier is a motivator for sustaining a membership in a CFF. The quote below shows how the less active participants did not feel they were a part of any community or family within the CFF setting:

Moderator: So staff that creates a sense of community?

Maya: Yeah, I can't say I have ever felt like it is a community but yeah at least recognition.

Moderator: Recognition okay.

Maya: Yeah like you said, I think they have to do that, (laughs). Because it was obvious as soon as you walked in the gym someone at that desk turned around and greeted you. But it is good, even if it is forced. It's good, it is good.

Brooklyn: Yeah I guess it is.

Maya: They had to do that, because you know even if they don't care at least you got a greeting.

As mentioned above, not all participants felt as though CFFs were places where they were outcasts and could not make friends. In fact, one participant commented on how making new friends can facilitate sustained membership in a CFF:

Shelly: You don't feel as intimidated. I find that all the time. Once I develop that rapport with a few people that go the same times as me, even if we don't talk and it's just eye contact and you see each other at the same time every day. Even if I went at a different time. I wouldn't feel as out of place or intimidated to be there. So it can help if the crowd is friendly.

A clean and aesthetically pleasing environment was perceived as more welcoming and was understood to be a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Ten participants shared this perspective. Some participants spoke about cleanliness and aesthetic appeal as though they have had good experiences and some spoke about bad experiences they had encountered and the need for a more aesthetically appealing environment to facilitate sustained membership. The following quote demonstrates this facet of the overall theme:

Scarlett: I really like when the facility is clean.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Scarlett: Like you feel like the change rooms and the showers and all the equipment are well taken care of and you just feel like it is a place you want to go back to.

Matilda: I agree a clean facility is definitely important. And yet few seem to be consistent with this from location to location.

Finally, the conversation below is very indicative of the manner in which a more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment can facilitate sustained use of a CFF membership for the less active participants. It is apparent that creating a more welcoming environment and having a more friendly staff is a facilitator because it allows the less active participants to feel more safe, less intimidated, and like they are part of the community within the CFF. Though the participants quoted below were more extreme in their views than others in the less active groups, the conversation below is useful in illustrating the extent to which some less active participants felt like outsiders within the CFF setting:

Hannah: I don't feel like it's a safe place to practice exercise when it is all glass and all mirrors.

Moderator: So if we were to flip that to a facilitator that would be the removal of mirrors? Or if they had a more private space?

Hannah: If they had a more private space for the classes where there is no mirrors or windows. Like I don't have to hide but I think I deserve respect. And they think that when I am new at something. I am not a narcissist I don't need to somebody to see if I am doing good or bad. And that is what I see when I see glass and mirrors all the time, right? So if they had a space where there is no mirrors and no, um... like within reason right. Like no glass for people to see in. If there was that than I would feel a lot safer in that environment and it would make it easier.

Moderator: So I am hearing that it is just that you are valuing that privacy and that is important. And not wanting to take away from others who want the mirrors but just more respect.

Hannah: And dignity. Like it is hard to keep your dignity and you are doing zumba and you are 220 pounds. And you are like... you think you are like Shakira until you try Zumba.

(Group Laughs.)

Moderator: So privacy and dignity would be a facilitator?

Hannah: Yes privacy and dignity.

Moderator: Any other facilitators? We talked a lot about assets and structural things. And then we talked about mirrors and wanting privacy, would help.

Charlotte: On that note, I don't know how to make this work, I'd say friendlier staff but... friendlier staff that aren't motivated by, "hey are you going to hire me as your personal trainer?" but rather, if they are walking by they say, "hey let me show you a few exercises that might help you reach your goal." And help just help you out. You know, those types of things. And like just more people that genuinely want to help you out and that would help me not feel so isolated. You know? After that first introductory, "welcome to the gym" I literally never saw another trainer there again unless they were with someone who hired them. There was no checking on me to make sure I was okay or was making sure I was getting out of it what I should have been getting out of the gym. Though it would have helped.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the results of this study pertaining to active and less active women's perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF. The themes that emerged for the active focus groups were: *health benefits; variety; support with progress and goals; and welcoming and friendlier staff and environment.*

The quotations used to reflect the theme of *health benefits* included discussions on longevity and the importance of staying mobile as one ages; maintaining independence and control over health; the ability of a CFF membership to facilitate the attainment of personal health goals; the opportunity to be a good role model for children; and improving physical fitness for daily activities.

The theme *variety* was comprised of conversations surrounding how having a variety of equipment, group exercise classes, class times, hours of operation, and locations available to choose from facilitated sustaining a membership for the active participants. This theme had an overall tone that suggested that variety was perceived to be a facilitator because it increased the convenience of using a CFF membership as well as allowed the participants to try new and different forms of exercise that resonated with them as they aged or as their health and fitness goals changed.

The theme *support with progress and goals* was derived from conversations surrounding the ability to receive support from certified personal trainers and group fitness instructors. Specifically the motivation, safe execution of exercises, and knowledge on health and fitness that is available from certified staff was perceived to be a facilitator. Also within this theme was a focus on the ability to receive advice on healthy lifestyles, exercise technique, and program design from other members of the CFF.

Lastly, the theme titled *welcoming and friendly staff and environment* was formed from discussions about building positive relationships with fellow members and staff, and the aesthetic appeal and cleanliness of the CFF. It was apparent within this theme that there was a strong social motive that facilitated sustaining a membership for the active participants. It was also evident that active participants agreed that there was a need to overlook certain situations and to find a location that was perceived to be welcoming to them in order to attain the sense of community and form a family like bond with other like-minded members and staff.

The less active participants of this study engaged in conversation that was examined for collective themes. The themes that developed were: *health benefits; variety; more support with progress and goals; and more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment*.

First, the theme *health benefits* was created by the grouping of quotations surrounding improving mental and physical health; being a role model for children; increasing physical fitness for daily activities; and preventing disease; all of these were perceived to be facilitators to sustaining a membership in CFF whether or not the less active participants did or did not sustain their memberships. The creation of the theme *variety* was from dialog about having a diversity of equipment, group exercise classes, class times, hours of operation, payment options, and having access to a private women's only space. Having a variety from which to choose in

regards to the different elements of a CFF was perceived to facilitate sustained membership because it increased convenience and allowed the opportunity to try new and different types of exercises and programs.

Another theme that was evident for the less active participants perceived facilitators was titled, *more support with progress and goals*. This theme was comprised of gaining support from knowledgeable and certified personal trainers and group fitness instructors; support on the safe execution of exercises; support during the beginning stages of holding a membership; and support from having a workout partner to meet at a CFF. Within the theme of *more support with progress and goals* was the common characteristic of the less active participants wanting more support, even though the majority of participants perceived the support they had experienced in the past to be a facilitator to sustaining a membership, they would still like to see more. It was perceived that having more support would create a less intimidating environment, especially in the beginning stages of joining a CFF.

The last theme, *more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment* consisted of such elements as relationship with staff, relationship with other members, and the aesthetic appeal and cleanliness of the CFF environment. A collective feature of this theme was that the participants wanted a more welcoming environment and friendlier staff than what they had previously experienced in order to facilitate sustained membership in a CFF; it was perceived that these qualities would make the CFF setting less intimidating, more safe, and help them feel more noticed and part of the community.

It is important to compare the results derived from the active and less active focus groups in regards to their perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF. The discussions carried out in each group contrasted each other in several notable aspects. First, active

participants were able to mention what has personally facilitated their sustained use of a CFF membership whereas the less active participants often spoke about what they would like to see more of in order to successfully facilitate the sustained use of a CFF membership. When active participants were asked to share their perceived facilitators to sustain a membership in a CFF, it was common for them to mention things that have worked for them based on their experiences with holding a CFF membership. It was also common for a large number of the participants to speak about sustaining a membership as though they were experts on the subject, especially considering many of them have been members of CFFs for a number of years. (See Table 1.) When asked about the perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF, less active participants often spoke about experiences that they would like to see more of in order to facilitate sustained membership in a CFF. This attribute of the less active participants' perceived facilitators can be attributed to the fact that many participants in the less active group have not been able to sustain a membership in a CFF or consistent PA levels and therefore were, for the most part, only able to speak towards experiences that have helped them in the past or things they would like to see more of in order to facilitate sustained use of a CFF membership and more consistent PA in the CFF setting. This was especially true for the themes *more support with progress and goals*, and *more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment*.

The themes *health benefits* were similar in many ways but also had slightly different characteristics. For example, the active participants saw health as a facilitator because a membership allowed them to increase longevity, maintain mobility and independence as they age, and have more energy for their daily activities/routine; the less active participants were motivated to sustain a membership to improve their health and prevent disease and/or poor health. The theme of *variety contained* similar aspects in many ways across the two groups; in

fact, they differed only in the attention the less active participants placed on wanting more variety in terms of payment options and access to women's only facilities. The themes *support with progress and goals* and *more support with progress and goals* were similar in regards to the potential to acquire additional support from staff and other members, while also receiving support on a broad list of topics that support the adoption of a healthier lifestyle. Specific group differences were that the less active participants wanted more support on the safe execution of exercises, setting goals, designing exercise programs, and more support during the beginning stages of joining a CFF and from a workout partner. The theme concerning *(more) welcoming and friendly(ier) staff and environment* had noteworthy differences in regards to the perception of a CFF being a welcoming and friendly environment. Though not all less active participants perceived a CFF to be unwelcoming and unfriendly, the majority of the participants did not feel as though they had been a part of a "community" or "family" whereas many of the active participants perceived the CFF to be like a second home or community of like-minded individuals where they almost always felt welcomed and experienced friendly interactions with others. The active participants also spoke about the need to overlook certain situations that they perceived to be intimidating or made the CFF environment feel less like a tightly knit community. The locational differences that influenced the degree to which a particular location was perceived to be welcoming and friendly also garnered some attention from the active participants, whereas this was seldom mentioned by the less active participants.

Chapter 5: Perceived Barriers to Sustaining a Membership in a CFF

This chapter will report on the perceived barriers of sustaining a membership for the active and less active participants of this study. Active participants ($n = 16$) were defined as those who have self-identified as meeting or exceeding Canada's PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week. Less active participants ($n = 12$) were defined as those who have self-identified as not meeting Canada's PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week. The themes mentioned below have been formed by grouping like quotations together within each segmented group. The themes discussed for the active participants are: *cost and strong sales tactics; personal/life commitments and motivation; intimidating environment; and crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities*. The themes discussed for the less active participants are: *cost and strong sales tactics; personal/life commitments and motivation; intimidating environment; crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities; and lack of support and programs for ability*. The chapter discusses the active participants' perceived barriers first, and then the less active participants' perceived barriers. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings where similarities and differences across the segmented groups are identified.

Active Participants' Perceived Barriers

Active focus group participants provided their perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Although the participants' opinions on the perceived barriers differed, there were some common themes that were evident. The themes that were created from the keywords in data collected included: *cost and strong sales tactics; personal/life commitments and motivation; intimidating environment; and crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities*.

Please see Table 4 for a complete list of the keywords, which led to the creation of each theme for the active participants perceived facilitators.

Table 4	
<i>Active Participants' Perceived Barrier Themes and Keywords</i>	
<u>Theme</u>	<u>Keywords</u>
Cost and Strong Sales Tactics	expensive, cost, pay extra, additional services, financial barrier, value, money, too pushy, aggressive, negative, personal trainers, sales representative, trained salespeople, market directed, competitive.
Personal/Life Commitments and Motivation	life, work, school, commitments, deadlines, group class times, schedule conflict, hours of operation, lack of flexibility, routine change, family/children responsibilities, inconvenient location, tired, motivation, seasonal, weather.
Intimidating Environment	intimidating atmosphere, confusing, scary, first experience, exercising with men, weight room, locations culture, overlook, no support/guidance, self-conscious, insecure, judgmental, uncomfortable, body image, confidence, unfriendly, uncaring.
Crowded Facilities and/or Lack of Amenities	crowded, busy, January, weight room, cardio machines, no space in class, broken equipment, not enough equipment, change rooms, showers, dirty, pool, turn off, poor quality instructors, lack professionals, uncertified personal trainers, daycare, de-motivated.

Cost and Strong Sales Tactics

Participants in the active focus groups shared common experiences pertaining to the cost and the sales tactics used within a CFF as perceived barriers to sustaining a CFF membership. Within the theme of *cost and strong sales tactics*, there was attention to the initial and monthly cost of a membership; extra costs associated with additional services; perceived value; and aggressive sales staff and personal trainers in an environment of fierce market-directed competition. Overall, the attention within this theme for the active participants was almost always on the cost of additional services once already having purchased a membership rather than the initial cost of the membership. Fourteen participants shared this perspective. The focus on the cost of additional services and not the initial cost may have been due to the higher reported household income of the active participants than the less active participants.

The following sentiment from the active participants captures the essence of the overall financial barrier to sustaining a membership, as well as the extra cost of any additional services over and above the initial membership:

Betty: I was just going to add that it depends on um, just the financial barrier.

Monika: I was just thinking that.

Betty: But it depends on what can be happening in your life. Sometimes that can be a little more challenging for some people.

Lola: Yeah like I would love to do personal training and TRX but... that costs a lot extra to do that where I am.

Moderator: So a financial barrier depending on what you want to do there over the membership. So that can make it hard to get the most of what you want to do there. Is that correct?

Monika: Yeah, so more practical services and perks.

Betty: And the initial or monthly cost barrier.

The foregoing is an example of the fact that when active participants spoke about cost, the conversation almost always turned to the specific cost of additional services. The following quote amplifies how cost was a perceived barrier in regards to extra services that active

participants wanted more access to without any extra cost. The services mentioned often were daycare services, specialty group exercise classes, and personal training. Fourteen participants shared this perspective overtly:

Madison: The other thing I don't like about many of the bigger gyms is they want your membership and they want your money and they want you to workout but they don't tell you the (makes quotation symbol with fingers) type of fitness and nutrition part of it. That is extra because you have to sign up with a trainer. To learn how to eat properly while you are working out.

Julia: Or even the best exercises.

Madison: And that is why again I don't go there and I go somewhere else is because I get the nutrition advice when I go to my gym. I did not want to pay extra for somebody to tell me how to eat, yet I am paying all this money for my membership so why can't you tell me how to eat?

Often, the cost of additional services dealt with the perceived value of that service.

Active participants liked when they had access to more equipment, services, and programs and saw it as a barrier when they had to pay additional money for extra services that were not included in the initial membership. Twelve participants shared this perspective. In the same vein, conversations surrounding perceived value frequently turned into active participants talking about different payment options they would like to see in order to get more value for any additional services available to them:

Emma: Something else that I really like in the gym is when they have that magic body fat scale and it is out in the open and you can use it instead of tucked away in a closet. The same thing with the scale in the change room or wherever so that you can monitor your own progress and you don't have to sign up for some fancy package to, like a personal trainer to come and measure you.

Isabella: But if you don't pay than you don't value that machine. That is what they are saying. You know so if you saw the value in the machine you would pay to use it. So I think what they should incorporate for that machine is a pay-per-use. It's like I don't like paying for air for my tires but if I need it...

Hailey: Every time they mention buying a package it just puts me right over the moon. (Makes angry face) I'd pay a couple loonies maybe.

Emma: They could make it valuable like if it was a different price and if the guy or girl measures you and gives you the magic body fat reading and you know like something that is of actual good value for the money. All the extra costs make it tough sometimes.

Isabella: 15 minutes session and this is what you get out of it and it costs you \$15, \$10, \$5 whatever, would probably be more appreciated than here is \$55 dollars for an hour and all you do is measure me and put me on the scale, which I can do if you leave the room. But it has to be the perceived value of using the machine otherwise if you can just use it than they won't make any money.

Emma: You should not even get me started on the value of personal training. Because it is (makes a scrunched up face and points two thumbs down).

(Group laughs.)

Isabella: Yeah we won't start on that one.

Hailey: Next talk.

(Group laughs.)

Common throughout the discussion on cost as a barrier was the sentiment that a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF was the strong or “aggressive” sales tactics used by membership sales representatives and personal trainers. Fifteen participants shared this perspective. When active participants spoke about the sales tactics used, their comments were often accompanied with an element of disgust and/or anger about their experience with the degree of harshness used to sell memberships, personal training, and additional programs and services. The higher the degree of strong or aggressive sales tactics used, the more the active participants perceived that to be a barrier to purchasing that program or service. The conversation below has been selected to demonstrate this component of the theme:

Faith: Well I come from a background of a public facility, which is um, very different in years past and I have spent a lot of time with triathlons as my background so I spent a lot of time training outside of the gym setting. And I think what I was surprised about when I came to a commercial facility is um, all the marketing that is going on. Like even having a person come around and potentially interrupting your workout to try and sell you on a training program.

Julia: Yeah!

Rosie: Yes personal training.

Faith: That bothered me. I did not really appreciate that.

Maya: Oh yeah, they still have that!

Kristin: Really?

Julia: Oh yeah that happens a lot. They do try to push the personal training a little much, yeah...

Faith: Yeah I had someone come up on a treadmill beside me.

Kristin: Are you kidding?

Faith: No... Yeah I was thrown off.

Rosie: Yes it is always the personal trainers.

Madison: That is because it is expensive. They have to sell you on it...

Rosie: Oh it is so expensive. It is too expensive.

Kristin: Yeah it is, yeah...

Julia: Yes I have found that too.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Julia: Yes I have found that too even if you are on the bike reading a book or on the machine and she comes over and she says; "How long have you been here?." And I go fifteen years. And she says; Oh, um, do you want personal training? Just like that! "No," and it annoys me. Ya and if I wanted personal training I would ask you.

Faith: Exactly, I will go and look at the board of personal trainers.

Julia: But I thought that is what they push a lot of there or push you to get other friends to join.

Kristin: Well I know they have a sales quota to fill but honestly I have never had that. Isn't that something.

Rosie: That is surprising (that you never had that).

Maya: They also always do the promotions where they get you to refer three friends and you get a t-shirt. And it is like, woo-hoo a t-shirt (sarcastically).

(Group laughs.)

Julia: And you can read all the signs everywhere but I find they push it a bit more and it is a real turn off.

(Everyone except Kristin nods in agreement.)

Rosie: Well that is when you remember that it is a business.

Julia: Yeah.

Madison: Right.

Personal/Life Commitments and Motivation

When active participants were asked to share their perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF, another common theme that emerged was *personal/life commitments and motivation*. Within this theme, there was a focus on a lack of personal motivation, a lack of motivation during different seasons, and personal and life commitments interfering with using their membership the way they wanted to use it. When active participants spoke about their personal and life commitments and lack of motivation, rarely did this barrier ever seem to stop the participants from sustaining a membership. In this aspect, the barriers within this theme were perceived more commonly as a potential roadblock for many participants rather than a barrier. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. Another attribute of this theme is an element of

convenience. Much as the theme *variety* created for the section on perceived facilitators carried with it an element of convenience, active participants saw personal and life commitments as instances that came up that make sustaining a membership less convenient. It was often mentioned that it was inconvenient when the scheduled-times group exercise classes were offered interfered with other personal and life commitments. Fourteen participants shared this perspective.

Participants mentioned that periodically they would lack interest or motivation to exercise. Fifteen participants shared this perspective. Participants almost always acknowledged that having a lack of motivation to be physically active came from their own mental attitude. The quote below also shows how the active participants shared the perspective that sometimes there was nothing that a CFF could do to eliminate the barrier of personally lacking willpower or motivation to use their membership:

Kristin: Lying on the couch on a nice afternoon eating chips.

(Group laughs.)

Kristin: And then you think gosh I should go to the gym.

Rosie: Anything that refrains me from going to the gym is in my noggin. (points to her forehead). It does not have anything to do with Canadian Commercial Fitness.

Kristin: No.

Rosie: Because I am kind of addicted to my location. Even though Canadian Commercial Fitness is not the best location. It is not a glamorous one, it is just a gym. It doesn't have a pool or anything like that. The only factors about not going to the gym are me going, "Ugh, (makes frown and slouches in chair). I will watch Netflix." Or, I am going to read the newspaper this morning instead of going.

Within the element of lacking motivation is a seasonal component, one that often deterred active participants from going to the gym. This barrier was present for the winter months; for example one participant stated, "Weather too. Like if I have to put my boots on that makes it tough. But I will still go." This barrier was also present in the summer months when it was perceived to be too nice outside to be indoors:

Faith: The advantage to it (sports) though is that for some of them you are outside.
(Group nods in agreement.): Yeah!

Faith: And when it comes to summer I would rather, I don't want to be inside at the gym.

Participant X: Mhmm.

Kristin: Gyms should have an outside courtyard.

Faith: Yeah.

As mentioned above, the active participants often cited life commitments as barriers, though rarely did these barriers ever seem to demotivate participants from sustaining a membership. These types of barriers were different for every participant, but shared a common bond in that adult women often had certain personal and life responsibilities and priorities that were sometimes hard to manage while still finding the time to be physically active or exercise at a CFF. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. The quote below demonstrates how the active participants worked through this barrier to re-think their schedules and routines so as to be able to continue using a CFF membership:

Julia: Well also I would say the number one factor. Would just be working out in general. Like all the other things you are doing in your life.

Moderator: Mhmm.

Julia: Not so much the gym itself but you just don't have time sometimes to fit it in and something has to go... and most women that is your family is not going to go, your work is not going to go, so your gym time is going to go. Whether you are happy or you are not it sometimes just has to be that way. Your priorities are unfortunately a major barrier.

Moderator: Yeah that is a great point.

Maya: Yeah that is what I think. Anytime I lapse. Like I have had a membership now for 15 years but anytime I started to go for a little lull where I don't go very often. It is always because my routine has changed or gotten busier.

Julia: My worst is right now.

Maya: And then it is like you have to rethink how to make it work...

(Group nods in agreement.)

Julia: Yeah.

Maya: Like now my son has hockey on Tuesday so I can't go to class on that day. It is always just any change in my routine or I am too busy for a period of time it becomes a challenge.

Julia: Yes. This PhD now, I had to lose one day of the gym. Because now I am forced to choose between lit review or gym. Ugh I have to choose lit review. That is my major barrier and it is not gym related it is just life related.

Within the theme of *personal/life commitments and motivation* there was a considerable amount of attention on when life gets in the way of their PA routine, especially the routine of participating in group exercise classes. The reciprocal of this theme is the facilitator motif (discussed in chapter 4) titled *variety* wherein participants spoke about having plenty of class times to make it more convenient and easier to sustain their membership in a CFF:

Emma: I did a program last summer or the summer before. I bought a coupon for this small fitness club, like just like a one guy kind of place, with very limited equipment and you could only go to three classes and you had to go at 6 o'clock in the morning on these certain days. And it was very hard to get up in the morning to get there and if you missed you just missed, your money is gone and that is... I would not have stayed there.

Hailey: It's not easy enough. It doesn't fit into your schedule. It needs to be flexible.

A participant from another focus group echoed the theme with the following sentiment:

Rosie: Like you were saying... The one thing I do not like about my particular location is they don't have all the classes. So this new fitness celebrity program, I had to go to the north end to do it. It is not always at the time I can do it either. Um so that doesn't persuade me to not go, but kind of irks me when I can't do all the classes at my location or because of my schedule.

Intimidating Environment

Participants from each of the active focus groups spoke about the CFF environment as being intimidating and to a lesser degree feeling self-conscious in a number of different situations. Mention was made about many situations where participants said they felt intimidated or self-conscious, which made it harder to sustain a membership in a CFF. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. These situations included being new to a particular CFF; exercising with men and in the weight room (explained below); exercising with younger members; dealing with unfriendly staff; and the cultures of different CFFs. Furthermore, not having support from staff with progress and goal setting was a small aspect that added to the overall theme of intimidating environment. Similar to the previous theme above, active participants spoke about the CFF setting as an intimidating environment and this was perceived

to be more of a roadblock and something that had to be overlooked in order to sustain a membership in a CFF. Also it is important to note that the degree to which a CFF was perceived to be intimidating was almost always dependent upon the context of the culture of the location and where in the CFF participants were spending most of their time exercising (i.e., in group exercise classes or in the weight room). This is evident from the following participant quote, “If you are into the other thing (not group exercise classes) where you have to be motivated to do your own thing in the gym, that environment can be intimidating like you said. I have even noticed that before and like, I never get intimidated like that.”

The quotations presented below reveal the dynamic of how the context of locational characteristics, and comfort level exercising with the opposite sex and different age groups impacts active participants perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF. The following quote exemplifies how it can be intimidating going to a new facility. Sixteen participants shared this perspective:

Emma: Even as, like, I am a total gym goer and a total Canadian Commercial Fitness goer and even if I go to another gym in another city I still get those butterfly feelings like where do I go, where is the door, where is the group exercise room.
(Group Laughs.)
Emma: If I bring a towel do I look stupid?

Later on in the focus group the same participants added more to the barrier of feeling intimidated in a new facility:

Emma: I remember going to Canadian Commercial Fitness and um, that environment was really confusing for me. Like confusing and scary. Like you hear about these classes and you're like, can I go to these classes? What time do I go? Do I show up early? And then you stand by the door and you're like to do I grab a ball or grab a mat? Am I looking stupid? Like it is so scary. It's sad because I see new people come in now and I think, everyone had a first time and you are so nervous and I remember feeling like that, um, just scared and really out of place. I think it would be so nice if everyone had like a gym buddy, here is your gym buddy they are going to show you what to do.
Isabella: You are supposed to have that. Clubs are supposed to show you around to make sure you know where everything is, but they don't always follow through.

Participants from another focus group spoke about the perceived barrier of exercising with men and in the weight room. Fifteen participants shared this perspective. When participants spoke about the weight room, it was almost always implied that that was where the men exercised and together these characteristics added to the theme of intimidating environment. The quotations selected also show how the active participants do their best to overlook certain experiences in order to sustain their membership:

Leigh: And I think um, occasionally I get mad at the guys who leave all their giant weights on the um, equipment.

Faith: Yeah, and then you got to take them off, like, ok, let me just take this 45 pound plate...

Leigh: Yeah or on the machine.

Group nods: Yeah

Faith: Yeah it wouldn't make me leave but it does annoy me. Sometimes to the point where I think, I am not in here to do this.... It can be a little much.

Madison: See and I left Canadian Commercial Fitness because when I lift. I am a heavy lifter.

Faith: Oh cool!

Madison: So that is why I left Canadian Commercial Fitness because I couldn't do that there. Because you always had the big intimidating muscle guys that were around right?

Julia: Yeah, mhmm.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Madison: And they would be talking and hanging on the machines and you could not do your free weights with the bar bells or the back squats because the vibe these guys put out. And I pay just as much as I pay at Canadian Commercial Fitness but I get to do what I like to do without the muscle men, when I like to do it.

Rosie: Cool!

Madison: And I don't have to waiting in line or wait my turn. Or some guys sweaty body staring at himself in the mirror.

Julia: Yeah I know what you are saying when it comes to lifting weights at Canadian Commercial Fitness and the bigger places I am like, "No!"

Madison: Yeah exactly.

(Group nods in agreement.)

The following quote deals with the element of exercising around younger members, a dynamic which can have a similar impact to that of exercising with men in the weight room. Feeling uncomfortable around younger members is something that active participants spoke

about across groups, though to a lesser degree than exercising in the weight room and around men. Nine participants shared this perspective:

Kristin: And I don't like anyone bothering me or talking to me. And you know I will see people I know outside, like people I work with at the restaurant or at the hospital and I will say hi and then sorry I got to go workout and I will walk away. So I am a bit different that way that I don't go for the, you know, social. I like to go really, really late at night because the gym is quiet. The gym I go to is 24 hours so I'll often not go there until 8 or 9 at night and I love it because there is not a lot of people and no offense not a lot of the younger kids. Because I find that the young girls and my body drives me nuts. (Group laughs and nods in agreement.)

Madison: Yes.

Kristin: Especially in the change room, you know... And yeah, or when I am on the machines they are just doing their yacking and doing all this and all that and they are just sitting there with their thumbs (makes motion of texting on phone) and I want to use the machine. So I tend to go later because I am more comfortable then. But there is also the social side because I do personally know the people at the desk and I like to go on a Sunday and do that kind of thing.

Though it was more common for active participants to speak about all the support they perceived to have in a CFF and that they felt more welcomed by staff and other members, there was some attention paid to having no support and dealing with unfriendly staff, which added to the barrier of intimidating environment. Eight participants shared the following perspective:

Monika: And I just really like having knowledgeable guidance now. So one of the barriers for me in your typical bigger commercial fitness facility is that I am just sort of lost and wandering around. They could do a little six week check in where they go over your program with you and stuff but... You actually don't know until you get it but I actually need someone to correct my form and stuff because it feels like I am doing it right. But I wasn't doing it right for the last six weeks that I have been doing it.

(Group laughs.)

Lola: That is true what you said even for me and even though I do classes. When I think about the reason I don't do other things is because, it is not, I mean I know how to do the machines and do proper form but it is... going amongst all the other people while doing something I am less sure about, it is like, where do I start?

Monika: It can be intimidating...

(Group nods in agreement.)

Active participants stated that a CFF environment that is intimidating is a barrier to sustaining their gym memberships and often carries with it a component of feeling self-

conscious. The degree to which an individual felt self-conscious was dependent upon the locational differences between different CFFs:

Rosie: If you have a lower self-confidence maybe Canadian Commercial Fitness downtown or Canadian Commercial Fitness in the North isn't for you, you know there are the women's clubs might be better.

Madison: See how conscious they are of their body first if they don't like the coed than maybe working out with men isn't for you. I would say go to the women's only if you are a self-conscious individual because I have plenty of friends who won't go with me because of that.

The conversation below exemplifies how active individuals sometimes perceive others in the CFF setting, which can add to participants feeling self-conscious and intimidated in CFFs:

Emma: Just, I feel like people are looking at me, and I don't think I am making that up either.

Isabella: Do they recognize you from the class you teach?

Emma: No, I think that people are judging me. People are judgy, judgy, judgy! I think people are judgy in the weight room. You know and I hear it all the time. This would be my biggest complaint about commercial fitness. Um, people are always, Ugh, that person has bad form. This is a way of insulting people in the gym without insulting them, you say they have bad form. That is bad form. Their butt is out to far out. They are not going low enough, they are blah, blah, blah. And it, that's the modern gym insult, like, right? (Group nods in agreement.)

Crowded Facilities and/or Lack of Amenities

The fourth and final theme that was created for perceived barriers for active participants was *crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities*. This theme dealt mainly with how a CFF that was perceived to be crowded and busy was a barrier to sustaining a membership in that facility. Also contained within this theme was attention to a CFF having a lack of amenities, such as lack of equipment and services with specific regard to daycare and change rooms. Also implicit in this theme was a focus on a lack of access to professional instructors. A crowded CFF and a CFF with a lack of amenities were connected and inseparable in one way. If a CFF was perceived to be busy, participants also spoke about the lack of amenities available during times that the facility was busy. Active participants perceived a crowded CFF with a lack of amenities

to be a potentially limiting barrier because when this perceived barrier was present, it was a challenge for participants to use the CFF for the reasons they signed up.

The following quotations are examples of how a lack of amenities was perceived to be a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Essentially anything the participants wanted a CFF to have and it did not have was a barrier. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. For example, one participant said, “I do sometimes miss the pool. So eventually I could see myself leaving to be at a place that has a pool.” The conversation below adds to this sentiment by highlighting how a lack of equipment or certain amenities was important to active participants:

Julia: And they don't even go past. Because and they don't even go past 20 pounds so if you want to do more than 20 pounds you can't and if you want to do 20 you have to stand there because someone else has them and you have to eye ball them until they put them down.

Faith: Wait, like the dumb-bells only go up to 20 pounds?

Julia: Yeah

Faith: Oh...

Julia: I think 25 max. But there is only one set of everything and you can't get so that is a deterrent.

Rosie: Is that because of the women's facility?

Julia: I guess, yes.

Rosie: Oh.

Matilda: I guess women don't lift weights I guess? (Sarcastically.)

On top of the structural amenities that one would expect to find in a CFF, participants also spoke about the barrier of not having changing rooms that were up to their standards. Fourteen participants shared this perspective:

Corey: The availability of hot water matters and actually there was one that I was living at in Toronto that I had to leave because the hot water was sporadic and I was like, guys, I am sorry, this is something you need to fix because there is a gym a half a block away from here and I might have to cancel my membership and go there simply because when I am done I need to shower and need a place I can plug in my hairdryer.

Participant X: Mhmm.

Corey: Right so that becomes important. I can't just go home after so that is different for me. So for me a barrier is the opposite of things that I already mentioned. So broken equipment, that is so irritating. I hate it when they do not have enough alternatives.

Probably one of my biggest turn offs is if I go to use an elliptical (cardiovascular exercise machine) and then it is broken.

The following quotations illustrate how when a CFF is crowded and busy, it can be a barrier for active participants. Within this component of the overall theme there was a seasonal component that made this barrier even more prevalent. One participant said, “For me it is timing and crowds. Like in January. Don’t go in January because it is too busy. Classes are nuts.” (Group nods in agreement). Another focus group conversation adds to this aspect of the theme crowded and lack of amenities:

Isabella: January is a big barrier. I refuse to workout, well I did this year because there was no body there this year in the morning, which was nice. But January sucks between their specials on... just too busy.

Hailey: The Christmas break was off putting. I was there every day except for Christmas day and whatever day but it was um, all the students are home and they should, if they are making suggestions they should add some extra classes during that time. Because they were out of control.

Isabella: January is the worst. You have all the New Year’s resolution they want to work out in January so I always say don’t go in January because it is just too busy.

Emma: For anybody who uses the machines, the treadmill and stuff, those are packed. Like you, I don’t think you can even find a treadmill in January.

Isabella: At the downtown club when it opened, when it first opened the limit was 1000 people and they would hit that every night in January.

In addition to not having certain amenities during busy hours and busy times of the year, active participants spoke about not having daycare services as a barrier. This barrier was mentioned only by participants with children and for this reason may not have been as strong an issue for more group members as other aspects of this theme. Eight participants shared this perspective:

Isabella: Yeah, I think it can be a barrier for young moms or moms with young kids. Like when I wasn’t working and had younger kids I was like yeah I want to go to the gym, like I am off, let me workout and try to get back in shape and that is something that you look for. I have a club right around the corner from me and it doesn’t have a child minding in the morning but they had a child minding spot. You know? And location of the child minding, like the one at my club is right by the door when you come in and it is not safe.

The following two quotations emphasize how having a lack of professional group fitness instructors is a perceived barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF for active participants. Considering that a majority of the active participants who reported sustaining a membership in a CFF use group exercise classes, this element of the overall theme was something that participants admitted to cancelling their membership over because they did not like the instructors or felt that the instructors were unknowledgeable or unprofessional. Fourteen participants shared this perspective:

Maya: Yeah, sometimes I get turned off by some of the part-time instructors. Like there is one woman who does spin class and she does like Miss. Olympia or something or whatever it is. And so she is incredibly fit. I mean she is a body builder, and she almost looks bizarre, but I find it almost, I just... because she is talking, like you know... "sculpt your abs" and I am like I am 45 years old grandma... sculpting my abs?"

(Group laughs.)

Maya: The only way I am going to be sculpting anything is if I you never eat a carb again for the rest of your life.

Rosie: Never again!

Maya: And I am like, no I want to be slim look good in my clothes but... Sometimes when they get on to those things I am kind of like, "meh... meh... aaaalright I will sculpt my abs." (Makes sad face and pretends to do an abdominal crunch.)

(Group laughs.)

Kristin: They really need to be more professional sometimes (shakes head in disapproval).

This sentiment was reinforced when participants from another focus group had the following conversation about poor quality group fitness instructors:

Corey: Yeah, I will say crappy instructors!

Moderator: So bad instructors?

(Group laughs and nods in agreement.)

Lola: Yes!

Betty: So what is your definition of crappy?

Moderator: I was just going to say that, can you tell us more?

Corey: I guess in terms of a variance in qualities so I, the reason I didn't go to Canadian Commercial Fitness was because the instructor was so bad. I had a two months trial membership.

Alanna: What class was it?

Corey: It was Pilates class, I think. And taught it like a drill Sargent. I was like, whoa, this is Pilates, not a drill Sargent class. I have had yoga taught by a come on feel those abs burning.

Macey: Seriously?

Corey: I am like, ugh... this is a yoga class. So I was actually like I can't handle your instructors, like they drove me nuts. So I specifically, I had a two month membership and there were other things. But I thought that maybe I will try this time joining a gym to do classes because I don't normally do them. So I will try it, but I did not like the instructors.

Lola: Yeah for me to, I will try on a Saturday morning. Like I will do step class. And I like going on certain days for certain instructors or friends and if they are off beat or they pause too much or just... gets mixed up sometimes. It is not to often that you get an inexperienced instructor like that but it makes me, I would never go to that again.

Corey: But if that was your only option?

Lola: If that was my only option like on a Saturday. It is not likely but if it were, than there is one less day that I am not going because I don't like the instructor. They need to be knowledgeable!

Moderator: So either based on how they run the class or there knowledge base?

Corey: They should have a good knowledge base and not just be super passionate about exercise.

Moderator: Right so, the fact that they can motivate you and they know what they are doing, makes you want to either go to those classes or if they don't know how to run their class that demotivates you.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Lola: Yeah.

Less Active Participants' Perceived Barriers

Less active focus group participants discussed their perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Although the participants' opinions on the perceived facilitators differed, there were some common themes that were evident. The themes presented in this section included: *cost and strong sales tactics; life/personal commitments and motivation; intimidating environment; crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities; and lack of support and programs for ability*. In all focus groups the less active participants spoke about having a lack of support with their progress and goals in the CFF setting, and a CFF lacking programs for their current physical fitness abilities. This resulted in the creation of a fifth theme titled, *lack of support and programs for ability*.

Table 5

Less Active Participants' Perceived Barrier Themes and Keywords

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Keywords</u>
Cost and Strong Sales Tactics	expensive, waste of money, cost, pay extra, additional services, financial barrier, payment options, pay-per-use, sign-up fee, year membership, value, money, too pushy, aggressive, negative, personal trainers, sales representative, trained salespeople, advertising, competitive.
Personal/Life Commitments and Motivation	life, work, school, commitments, deadlines, group class times, schedule conflict, hours of operation, lack of flexibility, routine change, family/children responsibilities, too busy, fit physical activity into daily routine, housework, chores, inconvenient location, tired, will power, motivation, seasonal, weather.
Intimidating Environment	intimidating atmosphere, confusing, scary, afraid, overwhelming, language, exercising with men, weight room, mirrors, younger members, isolating, regulars, invisible, social scene, conforming, self-esteem, clicky, ego, meatheads, superior, self-conscious, insecure, judgmental, uncomfortable, condescending, poor customer service, bad attitude, body image, confidence, unfriendly, uncaring.
Crowded Facilities and/or Lack of Amenities	crowded, busy, January, weight room, cardio machines, no space in class, parking, broken equipment, not enough equipment, change rooms, showers, dirty, pool, turn off, poor quality instructors, lack professionals, uncertified personal trainers, daycare, de-motivated.
Lack of Support and Programs for Ability	no support/guidance, injury, uncoordinated, skills, outside of scope of ability, accessibility, group exercise classes, beginner/advanced classes, limited

by old injury, no fitness background, no knowledge, unsure, no help, orientation, check-up, goals, progress.

Cost and Strong Sales Tactics

Participants in the less active focus groups shared common experiences pertaining to the *cost and strong sales tactics* used within a CFF, which were perceived as barriers to sustaining a CFF membership. Within this theme there was attention to the initial and monthly cost of a membership; extra costs associated with additional services; perceived value; payment options; aggressive sales staff and personal trainers, and an environment of fierce market directed competition. These findings were similar to that mentioned above by the active participants in this study.

The following quote exemplifies how initial cost was perceived as a barrier together with the element of perceived value. This sentiment is representative of less active participants' perceived barrier of cost in relation to wanting more support for the amount of money paid for a membership in that twelve participants shared this perspective:

Shelly: Price.

Shannon: Definitely.

Rachelle: Cost.

Shannon: Mhmm.

Moderator: Cost meaning?

Shannon: Oh the cheaper the better, but still get personal help and friendliness. Not a bunch of minimum wage kids who just don't care about you.

(Group laughs and nods in agreement.)

Shannon: Well if you're spending money then what are you getting for your dollars? Value versus... spending money on membership dues.

Moderator: So you want to see more value in the money that you are spending?

Shannon: Yep.

Additionally, the following dialog amongst less active participants articulates how cost was seen to be a barrier for them. Nine participants shared the following perspective:

Shannon: I'd also prefer to not contribute to a giant company like Canadian Commercial Fitness. To be honest. It is the Wal-Mart of the gym world. Right? Poor quality service at an affordable price.

Rachelle: I'm going straight there after this to cancel.

(Group laughs.)

Moderator: Okay so it's the big corporation that you don't want to be apart of. You'd rather be apart of something that has more community in it... is that accurate?

Rachelle: Yeah, there's a huge sales thing now. Big sales.

Shannon: A smaller one, a one person or a couple people together facility, I feel, keep your money low. A small business normally has closer access to professionals. It's not all about numbers. That appeals to me.

Moderator: Instead of a big corporation?

Shannon: Commercial where they try to sell you everything...

Moderator: Right.

Less active participants in the study also spoke about the cost of additional services as a barrier. Twelve participants shared this perspective. These services ranged from personal trainers, daycare services, and specialty group exercise classes. The quotations below show how the less active participants in this study did not partake in additional services because the initial cost of the membership was perceived to be expensive enough and they did not want to spend extra money on additional services:

Matilda: I did feel that you paid for the membership and then if you want a personal trainer its more, and if you want daycare its more and it really adds up. And I should stop there? Because I could go on about the money grab.

(Group laughs.)

Maya: That's mine in one word. Expensive. But there is a lot of options to try to meet everyone's preferences I could say. I do find at the beginning stages when you go in there to find out about a membership that they're pushy, from my experience. And I just find that for me personally it ends up being up a waste of money because I go for a little bit and I stop going. And they don't say, "oh Maya your not going anymore, how about I give you back your money."

Jada: Also, if childcare were included in your membership instead of them trying to suck more money out of you.

(Group laughs.)

Matilda: Yeah that would be nice.

Moderator: So childcare was another one, that if it was included. So I guess since it is not included it is sort of a barrier?

Matilda: Yeah it is a barrier because if you add that to the membership cost, the amount that you are spending annually on childcare is a lot of money.

In regards to cost, less active participants almost always spoke about the lack of different payment options as a barrier to attaining and sustaining a membership in a CFF. Nine participants shared this perspective. The quote below shows how the less active participants discussed different ways a CFF membership could be attained more easily through having more affordable shorter-term memberships and pay-per-use options:

Jada: I mean belonging to a gym for a year, which they make you sign up for, it should be like three months at a time right?

Matilda: Mhmm.

Jada: Because that is probably as long as I would go for.

Olivia: I really wish and somebody brought it up earlier and it is I wish you could memberships that were shorter term without costing you a ton extra because um, in the summer me and my daughter, she is now old enough, that I think Canadian Commercial Fitness does a free membership for teens in the summer, and I would love to be able to go with her, we did that two summers ago before I gave up my membership and it was so great, right? We had a lot of fun and I made her get up early in the morning before I went to work and there is that buddy system coming into play and hers was free so it wasn't anything huge for cost for me at the time...

Within the theme of *cost and strong sales tactics*, much in-depth attention was paid to the staff of CFFs being too aggressive in regards to getting members to buy the initial membership and additional services. Eleven participants shared this perspective. The quotations below demonstrate how sales staff and personal trainers who were perceived to be too aggressive often resulted in making the less active participants in this study feel uncomfortable and made it harder for them to sustain a membership. Less active participants also perceived that aggressive sales people were a part of the culture of CFFs and the participants felt the staff were encouraged and trained to use such strong sales tactics:

Shelly: Something that... I used to belong to Canadian Commercial Fitness, and I found it so salesy that I didn't want to go. Every single time I checked in they were like do you want personal training or this about personal training...

Rachelle: So salesy, these personal trainer things...

Shelly: And I was like, I'm just here to work out, and I don't want to be hounded to buy more things. Because I am already paying for my membership.

Shannon: Yeah they are really sales oriented and competitive. It is wrong.

Rachelle: Yep, and its changed now... cause even if you ask to show me how to use these machines, every time it is, "well you know you can get a personal trainer?"... nah just show me once.

Shannon: Yeah, or when they call, and say "you haven't been here in two weeks, just wanna go over your goals." I think that is the worst most repelling customer service technique.

Shelly: Like you already know you haven't been to the gym in three weeks you don't need a phone call.

(Group laughs.)

Moderator: So you find it insulting right, that they are really salesy and on you all the time. That's not useful. And you ask for help and it turns into sales pitches rather than just help.

Rachelle: Don't care! Or it's free but you have to sign up for a class. But I don't wanna do that, I just wanted the help now...

Shelly: Well the thing about Canadian Commercial Fitness is you don't get anything for free. If you ask for anything of anyone you're going to try to get sold personal training. No matter what. Even if you ask where the bathroom is... you are getting personal training.

(Group laughs.)

Moderator: So it seems to me that it is just way over the top. None of that is included in the membership and every opportunity is spent trying to do a sales pitch.

Shannon: Yeah I don't want any of that.

Moderator: So would that help if they got rid of that sales side of things that is right in your face?

Shelly: Mhmm.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Shannon: I probably wouldn't return even then.

It was common for less active participants to speak negatively towards larger multi-chain CFFs or fitness facilities with a corporate business structure. This was because less active participants often felt that they did not get the support that they felt they were paying for in larger CFFs and because of the perspective that the larger corporations were primarily concerned with profits and not their individual health and fitness goals.

Personal/Life Commitments and Motivation

When less active participants were asked to share their perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF, another common theme that emerged was *personal/life commitments and motivation*. The less active participants perceived barriers around life commitments, time constraints, and a personal lack of motivation as inflexible and concrete. This element of inflexibility and an inability to work around personal/life commitments and time constraints was a common theme in the less active focus groups and made it more difficult and demotivated less active participants to use and sustain a membership in a CFF. Furthermore, there was a great deal of attention placed on family responsibilities, the attempt to fit PA into their daily lives, and weather as a de-motivator. A reoccurring element within this overall theme was convenience, with reference to life commitments, time constraints, and personally lacking motivation; each and/or some combination of these elements made sustaining a membership more difficult and less convenient.

The following quotations exemplify how life commitments were perceived as a barrier to sustaining a CFF membership. Life commitments were often seen as inflexible by the less active participants and often revolved around family commitments (namely taking care of children) that kept them too busy to get the most out of their membership. Nine participants shared this perspective:

Scarlett: At the beginning of each term whether it be in school or when I was a teacher, um... I would always get motivated to start and I would get about a month and a half in and then midterms or report cards or final exams or big commitments came into my life and it was just a habitual pattern of realizing I literally don't have enough time. I did better when I had a friend I was going to meet. I found my accountability was better. But depending on the environment I am in at any given time or if my schedule doesn't fit in with the class schedule and having kids now makes it more difficult.

Less active participants spoke about time constraints as a barrier and were

perceived to be inclusive with having other personal/life commitments and family responsibilities. Twelve participants shared this perspective. Time constraints also encompassed group exercise class times that did not fit with the participants' schedules, thus making it less convenient to use a membership at exactly the times they wanted to use it:

Rachelle: Yeah Canadian Commercial Fitness only has a 6 am class. If I want to go before work, then I have 2 hours to kill in between that before I actually start work. So I would be better for a 7 o'clock class.

Moderator: So something that is more conducive to work/life schedules?

(Group nods in agreement.)

Shelly: Or if they have some sort of ridiculous sign up sheet for classes. I never... I just want to go when I go. I don't want to have to sign up 3 days in advance for a specific class and maybe I will get a spot maybe I won't. Like I just won't go then.

Rachelle: Yes.

Shelly: For a specific class maybe I'll go maybe not. But probably I just won't go.

Moderator: So these barriers are about sign up sheets and classes at the right time?

Rachelle: Mhmm, yep.

Shelly: (Nods head in agreement.)

The following quote is a useful illustration of the overall tone of this theme for the less active participants. It shows how time constraints and personal/life commitments made using a membership less convenient, which, in turn, impacted the less active participants' motivation to use and sustain a membership in a CFF. Twelve participants shared this perspective. The following quote also shows how the participants in this study felt as though their PA and exercise routine were the first thing to get pushed to the side when life commitments, time constraints, and schedule conflicts came up unexpectedly. The conversation below also shows how the less active participants spoke about trying to fit physically active into their lives though it was rarely ever consistent:

Maya: Time constraints for me being a full time student but I am sure it relates to everyone with full time jobs as well. And I don't like getting up in the morning any earlier than I have to... so that is out, I am not exercising before class. And then if I have been sitting in class all day that is obviously the prime time I should be working out because I have been sitting on my butt all day but I am tired and I usually have homework or things to read for the next day and so... I feel physical activity in my life

and quite a few other people's lives is the first thing that gets put aside when other stuff comes up and you know the logical part of my mind. I want to be involved in physical activity. I mean when I went swimming last night it felt great. Um and I was proud of myself but it is just again like, to get that motivation, like day after day. I just don't have it, I wish I did... Is there a motivation pill?

Scarlett: I think that the time constraints whether like in my role as a student or when I was working full time and a parent. I felt like I was burning the candle at both ends and as much as it would be really advantageous for me physically and mental health wise it just felt like yet another obligation on my plate that was already way to full.

Olivia: Yeah if somebody else always tells you, you have to care of the caregiver. But somebody needs to get the caretaker dinner and somebody needs to finish the project.

Maya: Absolutely!

Olivia: Somebody needs to drive a ridiculous amount of mileage, you know...

Maya: Or do the laundry, do the vacuuming, and everything.

Moderator: So time constraints and other responsibilities kind of always taking precedent and like you said kicking fitness to the side first?

Olivia: Which is awful because you want to be a role model for your child.

Less active participants also spoke about personally lacking motivation, which was another aspect of the theme of *personal/life commitments, and motivation*. Twelve participants shared this perspective. This is evident through responses to moderator prompts such as, "So even though you did find that time in your schedule the barrier was that it wasn't a convenient time?" To which Hannah responded, "No that was not it. It was laziness on my part." A participant from another focus group strengthened this theme by saying, "of course I go through the phases of doing a few sit ups or a few push-ups you know? I try to do stuff at home. Of course I do it for a little while and then I stop doing it and then I will do it again... It just seems to be the natural cycle." In addition, weather was also mentioned often as a hindrance to sustaining a CFF membership because of its felt impact on motivation:

Rachelle: Well I know in the winter I started walking. It was just so easy you get dressed and go out the door. I'm not going to go wipe off my car, push out my car and drive to the gym. It's just easy to just walk out your front door and go workout.

Moderator: So it's just...

Rachelle: That gives me too much time to talk myself out of it.

Shannon: (Smiles and nods in agreement.)

Shelly: Yeah, you need someone who can start driving you (laughs).

Rachelle: Same (laughs).

Shelly: I used to get in the car and talk myself out of it and just say oh I'll just get some groceries.

(Group laughs.)

Rachelle: Yes, and if I don't go before work, or right after work before I go home, I won't go. I'm not going back out to the gym.

Shelly: (Nods in agreement.)

Moderator: So if it's on your way, but it's not worth the extra trip is that accurate?

Rachelle: Yep, once I go home from work I'm not going back out.

Lastly, participants from another focus group discussed how weather can impact motivation to use and sustain a membership in a CFF. The following sentiment is in regards to not wanting to be indoors during the summer months:

Matilda: Definitely the seasonal thing too right?

(Group nods in agreement)

Participant X: Yes, mmmm.

Matilda: I mean in the summer I don't want to pay for a membership.

Maya: Yes, again it is seasonally though. In the summer you have access to outside, the bikes and hiking and that kind of stuff. I am more likely to just do it in the winter because I get stagnant in the winter. Usually I ride my bike to school but in the winter I can't do that. Well I am not doing that... Some people are, but that is not me.

Intimidating Environment

Within this theme, there were comments about many situations where participants said they felt intimidated, a feeling that made it harder to sustain a membership in a CFF.

Participants in the less active focus groups spoke about the CFF environment as being intimidating, which often resulted in them feeling self-conscious in the CFF setting. The experiences of the participants that led to the creation of this theme included: exercising in an environment with mirrors; exercising with men; exercising in the weight room; exercising with younger members; exercising with more fit members; not being part of the community; and dealing with unfriendly staff. Additionally, the culture of different locations; feeling intimidated during the initial stages of using a membership; and the degree to which less active participants felt intimidated in different areas of the CFF (i.e., group exercise classes or weight room); were

seldom discussed and were not barriers for the less active participants in this study. It was more common for the majority of the less active participants to perceive the entire CFF setting as intimidating and not just certain locations, the initial stages of holding a membership, or specific areas in the CFF setting. The following quote illustrates the perceived difference in feeling intimidated in commercial versus publicly run fitness facilities. Six participants shared the following perspective:

Jada: I first went to a community gym like in the city of Mississauga at community centres. They would have little gyms. I found it was very basic, you know, some treadmills, some machines, a pool. It wasn't a fashion show, it was more just people working out. It seemed different than my first experience at Canadian Commercial Fitness.

Moderator: So was this a community type facility, like publically run?

Jada: Yes. Not intimidating at all. Never felt self-conscious. I just went in and worked out and left. So it was a good experience.

Moderator: So a different vibe than your other experience?

Jada: Yes.

The above quote shows how less active participants perceived the CFF setting to be more intimidating than publicly run fitness facilities. It was also common for the less active participants to talk about feeling less self-conscious and intimidated in the women's only fitness facilities, though not all less active participants mentioned this. The following quote illustrates the perceived barrier of co-ed CFFs, "the last one I went to was an all women's one and mostly because I already know that they are going to judge me and I really don't need to be judged by men because that would make me really self-conscious." Eight participants shared this perspective. The following quote provides evidence for the aspect of this theme that deals with exercising in a mirrored environment:

Hannah: I can't stand people seeing me workout. Like that freaks me out.

Charlotte: I know, I know...

Hannah: It really pisses me off. Like not only am I suffering right now, but people are watching me suffer. And I feel uncomfortable.

Moderator: You don't like that when you feel like people are watching you?

Hannah: No not one bit and that is what it is all about there.

Lily: I guess it is all the mirrors, right, you can see.

Hannah: Yeah like so many mirrors, like, so uncomfortable. It is really hard with mirrors... Charlotte: Yeah.

Hannah: Yeah it is hard with mirrors because you think you are like (makes confident face and the motion of a bicep curl exercise) and then you see yourself and you are actually like (frowns and makes the motion of a bicep curl but flails arms this time).

(Group laughs.)

Hannah: I hate mirrors.

Moderator: So mirrors are a barrier than, is that right?

Hannah: I think the mirrors are a barrier and people watching. I don't feel like it's a safe place to practice exercise when it is all glass and all mirrors.

Charlotte: And it goes for the whole building like, really, when you... If you are new and don't know where things are you get extra self-conscious because you are trying to find the door to the sauna and you open the door to the closet and you are like... do do do, you know?

(Group laughs and nods in agreement.)

The following series of quotations are from conversations surrounding exercising with men, younger members, more fit people, and exercising in the weight room. To reiterate, there was rarely a clear distinction between these different areas among members and the focus was more on the entire facility. Ten participants shared this perspective. The following sentiment highlights this aspect of the theme:

Scarlett: The first one I went to I was really excited that they had a separate women's area. Women's only. I had never been to a formal gym like that before. I liked that there was the women's only area because I felt less intimidated by two things; some of the varsity playing men were really hardcore and were working with free weights and I felt really intimidated in that environment, but also I think I wasn't there to pick up a boyfriend, so I felt less stressed in the women's only area. Or it was intimidating working out with so many fit people that know what they are doing but for me it didn't matter in the women's only because I can workout without that stressor and I could work out comfortably to the next person as opposed to being ogled at or picked up or...

Olivia: Less of a social scene?

Scarlett: Yeah!

A good deal of attention was given to the aspect of not feeling like part of the community or fitting in with the "regulars." This perception led to less active participants feeling intimidated and was a barrier for many across the focus groups. Ten participants shared this

perspective. Less active participants often felt like they were overlooked and the regular members were catered to more than they were. For example one participant commented, “If you’re there and you’re like invisible to everyone and... it’s just not as fun.” The following quotations add to this characteristic of the overall theme:

Rachelle: Now they’ve expanded and they are so big that I used to feel comfortable in the weight area and now I’m not.

Moderator: Right.

Rachelle: Yeah.

Moderator: So you have a membership but don’t go, and have plans to cancel it?

Rachelle: Yeah, its you have to go to the gym to cancel it, so...

Moderator: (Laughs) right.

Rachelle: And I would prefer a smaller one, I’d love to get that feeling that I used to have. Where it is not a complete disjointed social scene of intimidating glares. Not my space, yeah know? (laughs)

Moderator: And the one that you have has expanded?

Rachelle: Well they are all the same now to me, because like I could go downtown because I work downtown, but I don’t want to park underground. It’s underground and dark. And then the other one did expand and it’s just huge. I don’t know. It reminds me something like a fitness commercial you see on TV where everyone’s perfect (laughs). Like they try to send off an image of health and beauty and I am not buying it.

Shannon: (Nods in agreement.)

Shelly: (Nods in agreement.) True.

Participants from another focus group added to this theme with the following dialog that expands more on how the other members of the CFF added to the sentiment that the staff and entire facility is intimidating. The following quote also exemplifies how there is a certain language and image one must have in order to fit into the greater community of the CFF setting:

Hannah: Like there is people at the help desk. And the help desk can be pretty intimidating too. Right? So, because you have you regulars right. So they are all on a first name basis and they are talking about this and that and they start talking like the language right. Like the language of working out, which I don’t know which is all like protein and blah, blah, blah and you feel like really inadequate walking up to ask a question or to ask for help right? Um, ya. You certainly feel like an idiot just asking for help on a machine. And even further when it comes to working with free weights. I remember trying to do free weights because my tae kwon do master who trained me at his gym, just the two of us, so I had some basic knowledge and training and how to do free weights but I was like, not doing that there. Because my form wasn’t good and just no. And it is like first of all,

you have to like own a place there, like you have to be confident, you gotta know what you are doing. You can't just be a fat girl walking up trying to lift weights.

Charlotte: Yeah. The people won't encourage you and they will look at you like, what? You are seriously trying that.

Hannah: You just get a bad eye and not if. I don't even know if I get a look from the regulars they try to just pretend like I am not even there.

Charlotte: Yeah.

Moderator: So it is almost like an intentional ignoring?

Group: Yeah!

Moderator: And so you mentioned the help desk to be intimidating so is that have to do with that there are regulars that are taking up the time talking the talk, you know about protein and that and they are not making it inviting or letting you ask questions?

Group: Yeah!

Moderator: Is there anything else?

Hannah: I just think it is intimidating. An intimidating environment.

Lily: Yeah.

Hannah: You don't wanna look like an idiot in front of the regulars.

Charlotte: That is right, yes!

Lily: Yeah.

The following conversation shows how not all participants felt as strongly about not fitting into the CFF setting though overall still found the environment intimidating:

Rachelle: Also if you actually do go the same time all the time, so you do see the same people, so you kind of talk a little bit. Especially the classes with the same people all the time.

Moderator: So social?

Rachelle: Yeah, you form some kind of bond, if you don't go they notice... Sometimes.

Shelly: Yeah that is true, though in my experience it has been more of a barrier if you don't fit in with the group. But yes, you don't feel as intimidated once you know a few people...

Rachelle: That's true, but it is hard to get to know anyone when you never have time to go.

Shelly: Good point.

All less active focus groups engaged in dialog that highlighted how unfriendly and uncaring staff and members were seen as a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF because of past experiences which made them feel intimidated and left out. Twelve participants shared this perspective:

Charlotte: The only other barrier I can think of is staff. Maybe. Or even watching some of the regulars. I find that very intimidating as well. Watching the regulars. Not only the

friendliness that I don't seem to receive, that they seem to have these connections with the staff. And I'm like no one knows my name. You know when I went to the gym for a full year and they still didn't know my name they had no idea who I was. They saw me all the time. No one talked to me. No one knew my name. No one said hello when I walked in. And I was technically a regular, showed up every day at 5:30.

Moderator: So the barrier was that there's an in-group?

Charlotte: That's right, there's a cliqu-i-ness to it.

Moderator: There's that in-group. If you're not in it then you feel bad.

Charlotte: Absolutely.

Hannah: Yeah. You have to look a certain way.

Moderator: If you look a certain way then you can be in the in group but it seems to be limiting. It's not just about being a regular. There's obviously other criteria.

Charlotte: Absolutely.

Hannah: Yeah I know my mom and her friends go to Zumba and stuff and they have like the girl that teaches their Zumba and she's like on their Facebook and they all Facebook and stuff. I've seen her comment on her statuses and stuff. And I'm like oh... I guess that's what they have. But this is like that clique-i-ness you know.

Moderator: You're in or you're out?

Hannah: Yeah.

Crowded Facilities and/or Lack of Amenities

Less active participants spoke about a CFF as often being crowded which deterred them from sustaining a membership. Also within this theme was a focus on a lack of amenities, which was seen as a barrier by the less active participants. Amenities that the less active participants identified as being potential barriers if they are not present included daycare, parking, equipment, clean changing rooms, as well as professional and knowledgeable staff

As mentioned above a crowded and busy CFF was perceived to be a barrier for less active participants. Eight participants shared this perspective. This is evident through the following quotations from different focus groups. One participant mentioned, "yes, busyness for me is a barrier. Too many people after work makes it hopeless." Rachelle from another focus group said, "plus everyone wants to go at the same time. Most people work the same hours." And the Moderator responded, "so if it's busy that is a barrier to sustaining your membership, is that accurate?" To which Rachelle confirmed, "yes." (Group nods in agreement).

The following series of quotations establishes that less active participants perceived having a lack of amenities to be a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Parking was identified as a barrier in each of the three less active focus groups. Seven participants shared this perspective. However, very little was expanded upon when parking was mentioned, for example, “I’d also say parking is a barrier. So if it’s terrible parking I’ll never want to go.” The quote below shows the importance less active participants placed on having a clean facility, namely the changing rooms. Eleven participants shared this perspective:

Shannon: Cleanliness. If it’s a dirty gym your not going to want to go and touch other people’s sweaty left behinds. It’s gross. Or some of the gyms that haven’t been updated, and I’m not a fussy person. But if the floor is carpet, with 20 year old stains in it, that is pretty gross to me from an allergenic perspective and...

(Group nods in agreement.)

Moderator: So even if it’s clean but has carpet that looks very old, it’s a barrier, is that accurate?

Shannon: Yeah overall cleanliness and steam the carpets once in a while, and um, I will be more motivated to go.

Daycare was something that the less active participants perceived to be a barrier if the service provided was not up to par or if a CFF did not have daycare. Seven participants shared this perspective. The emphasis placed on daycare by the less active participants highlights the importance of this amenity for a CFF to have in order to make using and sustaining a membership possible:

Olivia: So at least if there is a daycare it’s got to be nice. Like, you want to not feel guilty when you are dropping them off as opposed to ones that I have experienced which are just kind of sketch.

Matilda: Mhmm, yes.

Olivia: Like in terms of staff kids and what they have to do, I don’t always trust they are right in there. And like I said, you are only as happy as your kids are, and if they don’t have fun there then there goes your membership. You can have a great workout and your kid is just sitting there giving you the stink eye, you are like okay that was really great (sarcastically). Okay let’s do that again tomorrow.

Jada: It should be a workout area for kids.

Brooklyn: Yeah, you would think that is what it would be for them, yeah know?

Olivia: That would be awesome. If they could be physically active instead of sitting there. You are going to the gym and they are like oh look Tele-Tubbies is on.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Matilda: Yeah they need physical activity just as much as we do.

Moderator: So kind of that...

Matilda: Balance so if you aren't seeing them for an extra hour at least it is beneficial to everyone...

Moderator: So if that child care was getting them active and doing something more than just watching TV...

Group: (Nods in agreement) Yeah.

The following series of quotations demonstrates the importance the participants placed on having access to professional personal trainers and fitness instructors, and how not having access to professionals was seen as a barrier for the less active participants. Twelve participants shared this perspective. As mentioned above, it was common for the less active participants to also cite the cost of hiring a personal trainer as a barrier to using and sustaining a membership in a CFF:

Scarlett: I was just going to add to what Brooklyn said. It made me think about how sometimes when you are at these fitness facilities you have people there of varying educational levels in terms of fitness. And I know that the ones that I always felt more comfortable with are the ones that had more theoretical and practical experience. Sometimes they will hire somebody who maybe doesn't, or who can talk the talk and is good at sales but can't really, or is not mindful of the injury that I had years ago, when they are giving me advise about working on a particular machine or exercise. And that always makes me feel nervous and kind of scared...

Matilda: Oh I know, yeah.

Scarlett: Um yeah, because I don't know and I am relying on them. But whether or not they are hiring physio-therapists or people with a Kin background is you know beyond me. And that is too bad, I don't have time to do my homework to see if these trainers are legit, how do I know?

Moderator: So not knowing if the knowledge of the staff is up to par and they aren't just some smooth talker or full of it is kind of a barrier, if you don't know if they know as much as they should?

Matilda: Yeah for sure!

(Group nods in agreement.)

Scarlett: Yeah like in terms of safety.

Moderator: So safety?

Scarlett: Yeah.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Matilda: Yeah for me right now going to physiotherapy two times a week. I am doing that and making sure I am going, um but to go to a gym, um basically I am on my own they don't know my injury or what I am capable of and I find from my experience that

the fitness instructors don't care because they just are supposed to push everyone and smile (laughs) and they don't know how far I can go or should go or anything like that.

Scarlett: Yeah

Matilda: Where as the personal trainers I have had, you know, I guess they take that into consideration. Um, except one of them did not know too much but she was fun to workout with (laughs). But ya it can be scary and a barrier not knowing if they know...

Scarlett: Yeah for sure.

Brooklyn: Definitely.

The final conversation presented in this theme is from another focus group that adds a slightly different element than the conversation above. The conversation below speaks about personal trainers who have a lack of knowledge and professional credentials as a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF:

Shannon: Or you are instructed wrong by a supposed personal trainer... that happens all the time.

Shelly: Mhmm, all the time.

Rachelle: (Nods in agreement.)

Shelly: Because their personal trainers have no training, whatsoever... usually. Some of them I am sure do, but that is a small percentage and a lot of them don't. Most of them in there have a weekend course and that is it.

Moderator: So there is no consistency in training so there is a higher rate of getting injured or doing something wrong and then getting injured.

Shelly: Yeah.

Shannon: Mhmm.

Rachelle: Yeah.

Shannon: I have treated more back injuries because of improper squats that some of these personal trainers show them.

Rachelle: Really?

Shannon: These personal trainers don't understand everyone's hip anatomy is different and everyone's musculature is different and yeah. If your core is not strong you can't go through throwing that kind of weight on your back and then squat through it.

Shelly: That is true.

Moderator: Yeah so inexperienced trainers and them not being trained.

Lack of Support and Programs for Ability

The fifth and final theme created for the less active participants perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF is *lack of support and programs for ability*. This theme was identified and created because of the significant amount of attention the less active focus groups

gave to not having enough support with their progress and goals in the CFF setting. This theme also encompasses an element of CFFs' lacking programs for the less active participants' current physical fitness, abilities, and skills. This theme was distinct and separate from the theme presented above titled *intimidating environment* because of the amount of attention on CFFs lacking support and programs for less active participants' current ability. Other situations described by the less active participants that led to the creation of this theme were needing consistent and ongoing support with exercise programming and goal setting, and not having a workout partner with whom to exercise. Overall this theme primarily focused on less active participants not knowing what to do in the CFF setting, whether it was from a lack of support or because they perceived that they did not have the abilities and skills to participate in the exercise programs available.

The following two quotations exemplify how having a lack of consistent support was a deterrent to sustaining a membership in a CFF for the less active participants. Ten participants shared this perspective:

Maya: I think for some people that don't have any sort of fitness background going in and seeing all of those machines and not knowing how to set them up properly because some of them you need to make at least three adjustments to the seat and the bar so it is sitting properly and um so, I think that can deter people from using a whole lot of the machines that are beneficial and you can hurt yourself. Because typically I said the pro before about getting that initial orientation but you typically get that one orientation and that is it. You know they show you a bunch of machines but then you are kind of on your own unless you can afford a trainer. But you are on your own so it can be intimidating with all these adjustments and stuff.

Scarlett: And to build on that Maya, ever since I might use a particular piece of equipment but maybe I shouldn't be doing three sets of 15 reps on that particular one on that particular weight. Maybe that is not the best um, for my fitness goals. But I wouldn't have a clue. I am just sort of making a guesstimate. So then there is, like you said the trainer that costs too much.

(Group laughs.)

Scarlett: It would just be nice to have support consistently available.

Participants from another focus group added to this theme with the following conversation about receiving support tailored to their specific personal goals. Commonly, less active participants perceived that they did not receive support tailored specifically to their goals:

Rachelle: I was at Canadian Commercial Fitness, it was so weird back then because when I joined they used to have appointments with you for free, they take your measurements and everything, there was always someone there to ask for help, like always walking around. I don't think it's like that now. They help you change around your weights and stuff.

Shannon: I remember that.

Rachelle: Yeah it was great!

Shannon: We had our own little filing cabinet.

Rachelle: Yeah, your own filing, yep.

Moderator: So there was always someone available to help you, trying to track your progress, what you should be doing and how you should be changing?

Rachelle: Yep, and that was part of your membership. It was free, well it wasn't free. And even if it wasn't that, there was always someone walking around. So if you were having trouble, you could ask how do I use this machine, they were right there. You didn't have to go fight your way to the front desk through all the people or anything to ask, they are just there.

Moderator: They were just there.

Rachelle: Yeah.

Moderator: So how would you say that compares to the way it is now? Like...

Rachelle: I'd probably go if it was like that now.

Moderator: Okay, so big difference then?

Shannon: Oh yeah I would not return to Canadian Commercial Fitness.

Moderator: So would you say that it was overwhelming?

Rachelle: Yeah there was a personal touch where they really cared for you, and now that it's gone...

Shannon: (Nods head in agreement.)

Having no support also encompassed an element of not having a workout partner to meet at the CFF. Less active participants often spoke about wanting support from different sources and not having that support from staff, other CFF members, and friends or family was perceived to be a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Nine participants shared this perspective. As mentioned above in the theme *intimidating environment*, having a lack of support also added to the less active participants feeling intimidated in the CFF environment:

Charlotte: So how do you do that? If you don't have that circle of friends to go? I'm at home doing my PhD right? The first year and a half I don't have any friends. And people I knew from school I interacted with at school, so if I was going to get a membership I would go all by myself.

Moderator: So would you say that's a barrier to, not having people to go with?

Charlotte: It can be. Yeah I don't know, I wouldn't want to be reliant on someone else to go to the gym because I think that is really limiting um... But I don't have children, I'm a student, I have a fairly flexible schedule so when I can go and when other people can go is probably very different, but at the same time how welcoming is it? If you go to Zumba class where 2/3 of class all know each other and get along and all talking inside jokes and your standing there, never been to Zumba and don't know what your doing. You know?

Like what am I getting myself into? (laughs).

Lily: Everybody laughs right.

Charlotte: Yeah but very overwhelming right.

Hannah: Yeah. It's intimidating you know. Really intimidating.

In addition to less active participants perceiving that the CFF lacks support for their progress and goals, there was also the perspective that the programs offered were too advanced for their current fitness level. Ten participants shared this perspective. This was attributed to a number of reasons which included: lack of coordination; a perception of being at a lower fitness level; having personal limitations or injuries; and not being as young as the other members. The following is an example of how the less active participants perceived that not being able to keep up with younger members influenced their decision of whether they would be able to partake in more advanced level group exercise classes:

Scarlett: Well intermediate yoga if you have the instructor come over and move that leg that doesn't have any more flexibility just no more range of motion. You just sort of feel like the spot light is on you. Meanwhile the kid, I am going to say kid, the kid next to me has the, you know, this incredible range of motion she should be in Circ Du Sole. I just find I dislike those advanced level fitness classes.

Brooklyn: Yes I know what you mean you often question whether or not you can still keep up as you age.

Moderator: So something that is for all abilities is what you like? And it demotivates you when you can't keep up with the younger participants?

Scarlett: Yeah I like the classes where there are women of all ages and all shapes and sizes. I love that and that is what I go for. This is a little different experience.

Participants from another focus group added more to this theme with the following dialog. This quote highlights how having a lack of coordination or skills was perceived as a barrier to using and sustaining a membership in CFF:

Hannah: Lack of programs.

Charloette: Yeah, the step people or Zumba people or Pilates... whatever class it happens to be, when they are sliding from position to position and its just so easy and I'm like trying to put my hand, and not doing it. (Makes a confused face.)

Hannah: (Laughs). And you're just getting that one and they are already on the next step, or next ten steps.

Charlotte: Those classes can just as well be as overwhelming as any. I remember going once to spin, on the bike, and I remember looking and watching a step class and I am like, I could not even consider trying the beginner class because I would look like such a moron because it would take me so long to figure it out. And I can't do that.

The next quote demonstrates how less active participants often spoke about having no support as a barrier because of the increased chance of getting injured from exercising outside of the scope of their personal abilities:

Rachelle: On that, and for me too, I find that um, like my one shoulder hurts. I have a bad shoulder and bad hip just from abuse over time. So a lot of these classes that they have are so like, high intensity. The ones that are low intensity are too easy. There's no like...

Shelly: Middle road.

Rachelle: Yeah... like I'm 44 now I'm not going to jump around like when I was 22. And they always say just do it at your own pace, but that's not how it is. You're going to try to keep up with everybody else. And then you are going to hurt yourself.

Shelly: That's so true. Your own pace is not good if the exercise is putting stress on your injury.

Rachelle: Yeah and all the young kids in there with there little bodies make you push (laughs)... so you can get that back. So yeah its either like for people with no injuries, or the complete opposite, so way too easy.

Shannon: Or the kids.

Moderator: So there needs to be classes in the middle of the road for all age groups that isn't going to stress an old injury.

Rachelle: Yep.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Summary

This chapter has provided the results of this focus group study pertaining to active and less active women's perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF. This section will

summarize and compare the results reported on in this chapter starting with the active participants, then followed by the less active participants, and will conclude with a comparison of the two segmented groups in this study.

The active participants of this study engaged in conversation that was examined for collective themes. The themes that emerged pertaining to the perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF were titled: *cost and strong sales tactics*; *personal/life commitments and motivation*; *intimidating environment*; and *crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities*.

The active participants commonly spoke about financial barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF, which created the theme *cost and the strong sales tactics*. Quotations used to create this theme were from discussions on initial cost of attaining a membership; additional services once a membership has been purchased; perceived value of a membership; as well as aggressive sales people, personal trainers, and an environment of fierce market directed competition. Active participants placed most of their attention on the cost of additional services within this theme.

The theme *personal/life commitments and motivation* was created from conversations about personally lacking motivation; personal and life commitments; time constraints and schedule conflicts with group exercise class times; and seasonal components which deter the participants from sustaining a membership year round. Common within this theme is an element of convenience, meaning anything that makes sustaining a membership less convenient was seen as a barrier. Also within this theme was a tendency for the active participants to understand that commitments and life events will always arise and it was important for them to overlook these roadblocks and figure out a way to continue using their membership.

Active participants also discussed topics that created the theme *intimidating environment* and these included being new to a particular CFF; exercising with men; exercising in the weight room; exercising with younger members; dealing with unfriendly staff; and to a lesser degree not having any support. There was a mutual consensus that situations and events that were seen as intimidating had to be overlooked in order to surpass this barrier, which was perceived more as a roadblock by the majority of the active participants. Also, the degree to which a CFF was perceived to be intimidating or make someone feel self-conscious depended on the locations culture and where in the CFF they were spending most of their time, as not all CFFs and areas within a CFF were seen as intimidating or provoked feelings of self-consciousness (i.e., women's only locations and group exercise classes).

The last theme for the barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF was *crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities* and was created from dialog that focused on different times of the day and year that CFF were crowded and busy; a CFF lacking equipment or space in group exercise classes; and a CFF lacking services and amenities such as daycare, change rooms, and professional group fitness instructors. The majority of the participants perceived a crowded and busy CFF to be a fairly devastating barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF because it did not allow them to conveniently use the CFF for what they joined for. The participants also provided insight into how they believed that when a CFF was busy it would also lack equipment and spaces available in group exercise classes, which deterred them from sustaining their membership.

The less active participants of this study engaged in conversation that was examined for common themes. The themes that materialized were titled *cost and strong sales tactics*;

personal/life commitments and motivation; intimidating environment; crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities; and lack of support and programs for ability.

The theme *cost and strong sales tactics* was derived from conversations about the initial and monthly cost of a membership; the cost of additional services; perceived value; lack of payment options; and aggressive sales people, personal trainers, and an environment of fierce market directed competition. The attention in this theme for the less active participants was on both the cost of the initial membership and the cost of additional services once a membership is purchased; less active participants spoke about two barriers in regards to cost. It is possible that this occurred because of the demographic data (presented in Table 1 above), which shows that the less active participants in this study, on average, had a lower annual household income. The amount of attention to both elements of cost also may have been because the less active participants in this study spoke about having a lack of support in regards to their progress and goals and that could be due to the fact that attaining additional support often costs extra (i.e., personal trainer and specialty group exercise classes with an instructor). Despite the demographic data, the number of responses from less active participants was fairly high in regards to initial cost, and cost of additional services as a barrier and was consistent across all focus groups.

Less active participants also discussed topics that led to the creation of the theme *personal/life commitments and motivation* and these included personally lacking motivation; personal and life commitments; time constraints and schedule conflicts with group exercise class times; and seasonal components that deter the participants from sustaining a membership year round. Essentially any situation that may arise in one's personal life or having a lack of motivation makes sustaining a membership less convenient and was seen as a barrier. It was

common for less active participants to speak about this barrier as though it was concrete and impossible to overlook. It was also common for participants to cite family responsibilities and having motivation to attempt to fit PA into their daily lives as a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Furthermore, less active participants used language that suggested that they could not overcome the obstacles of time constraints, life commitments, and schedule conflicts in order to make sustaining a membership worth the investment. The participants spoke about attempting to fit PA into their daily lives and routines though reported being unsuccessful at accomplishing that as well.

The theme *intimidating environment* was created from discussions about exercising with men; exercising in the weight room; exercising with younger members; exercising with more physically fit members; exercising in an environment with mirrors; dealing with unfriendly staff; and feeling like outsiders in the CFF setting. These situations were addressed in great detail and were a fairly devastating barrier for less active participants in this study. Furthermore, the perspective that the less active participants shared about feeling like “outsiders” and not a part of the community within the CFF environment added to them feeling intimidated in it. Though the majority of less active participants felt like “outsiders,” not all participants felt this way and some actually spoke about making friends with staff and other members, which made the environment less intimidating for them.

Crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities was a theme created for the less active participants perceived barriers and was created from conversations about different times of the day and year that CFF were crowded and busy; a CFF lacking equipment or space in group exercise classes; and a CFF lacking services and amenities such as daycare, change rooms, parking, as well as professional personal trainers and group fitness instructors. There was not as

much in-depth discussion about CFFs being crowded and busy in the less active focus groups, though it was mentioned in each focus group as a perceived barrier. When participants perceived a CFF to be crowded it was also accompanied with the notion that there would also be a lack of amenities available to them, meaning participants mentioned that if a CFF was busy, their experiences lead them to believe that there would then be a lack of equipment, free weights, and space in group exercise classes available. Lacking professional staff (personal trainers and group fitness instructors) was perceived to be a fairly pressing barrier for the less active participants because of the number of times it was mentioned across focus groups.

The fifth and final theme created for the perceived barriers to sustaining a membership for the less active participants is titled *lack of support and programs for ability* and was created from discussions about CFFs not providing consistent and ongoing support with exercise programming and goal setting, the lack of programs available for their current physical fitness skills and abilities, and not having a workout partner to exercise with. Within this theme there was a large emphasis on the less active participants not knowing what to do in the CFF setting, which made membership in a CFF not worth sustaining.

With reference to the active and less active focus groups in regards to their perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF, the discussions carried out in each segmented group had a uniqueness to them based on their experiences with CFFs and their current PA level. When active participants were asked to share their perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF, overall the conversations were indicative that some barriers mentioned were personally experienced in the past resulting in some participants canceling their membership; and other barriers were not really perceived as such because they would never completely stop them from sustaining their membership, though they may demotivate them from using it for a period of

time. For example, the themes titled *personal/life commitments and motivation* and *intimidating environment* were seen more as roadblocks or challenges that needed to be worked around rather than barriers to sustaining a membership. The themes *cost and strong sales tactics* and *crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities* were viewed more as actual barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF as some participants mentioned cancelling their membership in a particular CFF, or switching facilities because of negative past experiences.

In regard to the less active participants' perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF the barriers identified were based on experiences that have made all but one of them leave the CFF setting and seek alternative forms of PA and venues for exercise. Furthermore, the less active participants identified more barriers to sustaining a membership than the active participants. The theme created for less active participants titled *lack of support and programs for ability* was the additional theme which the active focus groups did not share as they only mentioned having no support as a barrier in two of three focus groups. This fifth theme for the less active participants is one characteristic that shows the dichotomy between active and less active participants in this study. Moreover the amount of attention placed on the themes *personal/life commitments and motivation*, *intimidating environment*, and *lack of support and programs for ability* showed that these perceived barriers were major deterrents to sustaining a membership in a CFF for less active participants, which the active participants did not share to the same degree.

With regard to the theme *cost and strong sales tactics* both the active and less active participants shared similar perspectives on the expense of a membership and aggressive sales tactics used within the CFF setting as both groups discussed similar topics that created the overall theme *cost and strong sales tactics*. The less active group differed in a couple of ways in

that this group also discussed the lack of different payment options (namely pay-per-use options) as a barrier where the active participants did not. It was also more common for the less active participants to mention that the initial and monthly cost associated with a membership was a barrier than it was for the active participants the majority of whom spoke about the cost of additional services after a membership was already purchased.

The theme *personal/life commitments and motivation* shared identical discussion points with what they perceived to be a personal commitment or motivation barrier. However, the way in which this barrier was perceived as a demotivating factor differed across segmented groups in that the active participants developed an ability to overcome personal and life commitments by keeping their PA routine and CFF membership as a valued top priority in their lives, whereas the less active participants would put their PA routine and CFF membership on hold in order to focus on other life commitments. It was also more common for the less active participants to speak about this barrier as though it were concrete and inflexible making it hard to sustain a membership. Additionally, there was a significant amount of discussion on not seeing value in putting time in, and financial resources towards, a membership in a CFF because of past experiences that resulted in not using the facility and cancellation of membership. A majority of the less active participants in this study agreed that they would rather put their time and financial resources into either: fitting small amounts of PA into their daily routine; unstructured exercise alone or with friends/family; or spending finances on programs or services that cater more to their needs and personal/life commitments.

Participants across both segmented focus groups had conversations about a CFF being perceived as an intimidating environment with notable similarities and differences that created each theme. Active participants differed by speaking in detail about being new to a CFF as an

intimidating experience that was perceived to be a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF, whereas the less active participants seldom discussed this. Less active participants differed by speaking in detail about exercising in an environment with mirrors; exercising around members who were perceived to be more physically fit than they were; and feeling like outcasts and not being part of the community as a barrier. The groups also differed in what they did not speak in detail about in that the less active focus group participants seldom discussed locational differences and the impact location had on the culture and how intimidating that can make a CFF. Less active participants also seldom made a distinction between the weight room and group exercise classes and many participants spoke about feeling intimidated in both areas of a CFF.

Discussions on the amount of support one is perceived to have differed between the active and less active groups which resulted in the creation of a fifth overarching theme for the less active participants titled *lack of support and programs for ability*. Active participants did mention, to some degree, that having no support was a barrier but only in the context of the CFF environment being perceived as intimidating. Active participants shared the perspective that not having support in the CFF setting made it more intimidating and increased feelings of self-consciousness and for this reason this element was a small part of the theme *intimidating environment* for the active focus groups. Less active participants had a significant amount of conversation about feeling as though they had a lack of support in the CFF environment and made it a barrier for them to sustain a membership in a CFF. The attention in this theme for the less active participants also included discussions on how not having a workout partner added to the perspective that there was a lack of support in the CFF setting. Furthermore, less active participants also perceived that the CFF setting did not provide adequate group exercise class

programming that catered to their physical fitness skills and abilities; this led to the creation of an additional theme for the less active participants.

The last theme to compare and contrast is theme titled *crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities*. Both segmented focus groups mentioned that when a CFF was crowded and busy, and had a lack of amenities it was perceived to be a barrier to sustaining a membership. However, the attention given to a CFF being crowded as a barrier was mentioned more often and with more emphasis by the active participants than it was by the less active participants. Additionally, the active participants only spoke about having a lack of professional group fitness instructors as a barrier whereas it was common for the less active participants to speak about a lack of professional group fitness instructors and personal trainers as a barrier. The last difference that was evident when analyzing perceived barriers between the segmented groups was the attention the less active participants placed on a lack of parking as a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF.

Chapter 6: Perceived Health Benefits to Sustaining a Membership in a CFF

This chapter will report on the perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other forms and venues for PA and exercise for the active and less active participants of this study. Active participants ($n = 16$) were defined as those who self-identified as meeting or exceeding Canada's PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week. Less active participants ($n = 12$) were defined as those who have self-identified as not meeting Canada's PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week.

Grouping parallel comments together within each segmented group formed the themes listed below. The themes discussed for the active participants were: *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine; variety; support and safety; maintenance and prevention; and holistic health*. The themes discussed for the less active participants were: *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine; support and safety; maintenance and prevention; and holistic health*. Some of the themes created for this particular research question were not actual health benefits experienced by the participants of the study. This was due to the fact that each group answered the question by collectively defining and discussing how certain aspects of a CFF membership allowed them to attain the health benefits of PA more easily than other forms of PA and venues for exercise. The chapter discusses the active participants perceived health benefits first, and then the less active participants perceived health benefits. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings where similarities and differences across the segmented groups are identified.

Active Participants' Perceived Health Benefits

Active focus group participants commented on their perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other spaces and programs for PA and

exercise. Although the participants' opinions on the perceived health benefits differed, there were some common themes that were apparent. The themes presented in this section include: *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine; variety; support; prevention and maintenance; and holistic health*. Please see Table 6 for a complete list of the keywords, which led to the creation of each theme for the active participants' perceived health benefits.

Table 6

Active Participants' Perceived Health Benefit Themes and Keywords

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Keywords</u>
Accountability and Consistency in a Physical Activity Routine	motivation, accountability, consistency, routine, increased adherence, physical activity, extra push, competition, teammates, seasonal, weather, ever present structure, purpose, staying committed, gracefully aging, convenient, safety, comfortable, better than at home workout.
Variety	variety, choice, group exercise class, equipment, services, programs, locations, hours of operation, amenities, schedule, convenience, diversity, quantity, options for when needs/goals change, instructors to choose from, ability, aging, balance into daily routine, decrease boredom, consistency.
Support and Safety	safety, proper technique, support, injury prevention, health risks, certified, knowledgeable, personal trainer, fitness instructor, guidance, initial orientation, measurements, motivation, goal setting, knowledge on healthy lifestyles, exercise program design, educated staff, check up on members, imitate fit members, personal touch.
Maintenance and Prevention	health, physical health/strength, endurance, physical functioning, maintain/increase health/fitness, energy, prevent disease, cardiovascular health, mobility, independence, balance, muscle tone, limit aches and pains, see results, achieve goals, age gracefully, maintain weight, doctor recommended,

Holistic Health	mental health, mental illness, depression, prevention, confidence, satisfaction, happiness, stress reduction/management, role model for children, social/emotional health, think clearer, psychological well-being, meeting new people, positive environment/people, mindfulness.
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Accountability and Consistency in a Physical Activity Routine

Participants in the active focus groups shared common experiences pertaining to a CFF membership keeping them accountable and consistent with their PA goals. The accountability and consistency in meeting their PA goals available to them was perceived to be a health benefit of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other forms and venues for PA and exercise. Within this theme, there was attention to receiving extra motivation in a CFF from staff and other members; increased accountability to stay consistent in their PA routine; and having structure and a purpose to help with accountability and results. A common characteristic across the different elements of this theme mentioned or touched on were having a safe space to be physically active as they aged; this need seemed to give the participants in this study peace of mind and helped them feel more comfortable and ultimately consistent in their PA routine. It was also common for the participants to mention that a CFF membership helped them stay consistent with their routine better than trying to be physically active or exercise at home or in their daily lives. Furthermore, sustaining a membership was perceived as a motivator for the active participants to push themselves harder in the CFF environment than in other spaces for PA.

Active participants unanimously agreed that sustaining a membership in a CFF helped them stay accountable and consistent to their PA routine. Sixteen participants shared this

perspective. It was common for the participants to compare their membership to being physically active at home. This is evident from statements like, “we all know what we could be doing at home, I am just less likely to do it” (group nods in agreement). Participants in another focus group confirmed this when Rosie said, “I don’t think I would be as motivated at home with my own equipment. I would be like, meh... Netflix!” And Faith replied, “Or you just go grab the bottle of wine.” To which Rosie confirmed by saying, “I know” (laughs). The following dialog shows how having a CFF membership is perceived to be a health benefit for the active participants by aiding them in staying consistent and accountable to their PA routine:

Emma: I guess it is just in general having a membership at a place. You have um, you have a reason to workout, you have, like if you are on your own. And it is just like should I walk my dog or not, I mean there is no... um... I just don’t feel there’s much motivation to do your own thing as there is when you have a membership, you have a place to go, and a structured program whether it is personal training or going to classes or whatever.

Hailey: You develop a routine.

Emma: Yeah.

Hailey: And more easily becomes part of your lifestyle.

Emma: Yeah (Group nods.)

Moderator: Right so it helps by helping you develop a healthy routine and a healthy lifestyle from having accountability?

Hailey: Yes! Accountability is big. Yes. You know you want this and it is not like I am at home and I am going to do laundry or get supper ready. You make an effort to exercise this way.

Emma: Yeah it’s awkward I mean I used to do the workout thing at home and I tried a couple of video’s and I bought the gazel which I used twice and uh, yeah like you don’t really, I did not have any ideas like I did not know what to do.

Another perceived health benefit of sustaining a membership in a CFF was that it helped the active participants by keeping them consistent with their PA routine during times of poor weather. Sixteen participants shared this perspective:

Kristin: You know I have also been thinking that we live in a country and half the year you can’t be outside. I mean look at this winter we just had.

Participant X: Mhmm.

Kristin: And I am an outside person like when the weather is nice. I am in my garden or I bike to work everyday when it is nice. So in the winter, I don’t drive, I walk everywhere

or take the bus, so in the winter it is nice to have place close. I live very close to Canadian Commercial Fitness and it is nice to go spend an afternoon there, indoors being active because some days it is just too cold to be outside, you know? So if the streets aren't plowed, it is nice that it provides a place you can have and do fairly safe activity and see your friends and do all that, in the inclement weather when it is really horrible outside. I think that is important in our country.

Moderator: Absolutely so it provides a space where you can maintain a consistent amount of physical activity throughout the year, or in regards to weather.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Kristin: Yes.

As previously mentioned, a CFF membership was perceived to have value in providing a structured environment that served a purpose and helped the participants stay accountable to remaining physically active. Fourteen participants shared this perspective. It was common that the CFF membership was viewed as a venue to come in and get the job done quickly and with more ease; the quote below shows how the group responded to this idea. The conversation chosen to represent this element of the overall theme also reflects the focus in this theme on aging and the CFF keeping the active participants accountable:

Macey: So it is concentrated, it is defined as to what you are there to do. Go for it!

Betty: Yeah!

Macey: On my own I am not that motivated.

Lola: Like something is missing when you exercise outside of the gym. You can do other things but there is that one piece is missing. Like you feel like you are not getting the same benefit. Like I rollerblade in the summer sometime but for me just to go for a rollerblade it is not enough and so I still have to go to the gym.

Macey: Right like that is working out, that is different. Building blocks, this stuff (sports and rollerblading) is just fun and more social. But that stuff that I do in that facility allows me to have fun outside.

Corey: The gym is for a purpose.

Lola: It forces me to exercise. When I can actually do it elsewhere on my own but it forces me to exercise and as you age, you have to do that. You can't just be the one who doesn't do that (exercise as you get older).

Within this theme there was considerable attention on getting motivation from either the staff, group fitness instructors, or other members. It was common for participants to mention the motivation they received from group fitness instructors during group exercise classes. Thirteen

participants shared this perspective. Participants mentioned that having this extra motivation allowed them to push themselves as hard as they needed in order to get the results they were after. This is demonstrated when one participant said, “I started doing classes five years ago and when I started doing classes I started going, ‘Oh!’ Because I realized I wasn’t really pushing myself like I needed to doing the quick fix.” The following participant comment shows how there was also motivation engendered from being competitive with other members. Thirteen participants shared this perspective. This quote also illustrates how active participants perceived that friendly competition between members was perceived to be a health benefit of sustaining a membership in comparison to other spaces and forms of PA and exercise by giving them extra motivation to exercise at greater levels of intensity:

Emma: And here is another good thing with the classes is it’s sort of two sides to it. It is partly you feel more competitive with the people in the classes and partly you feel like part of a team with a class. So you get that push from your teammates um, to work harder and you definitely, I definitely work harder in classes with other people than I ever do, doing anything on my own.

Variety

Within this theme there was attention on having a lot of variety from which to choose in a CFF. Participants in the less active focus groups spoke about the CFF environment as having many options with regard to equipment, services, and programs that made sustaining a membership in a CFF more favourable and attractive than other forms of PA and exercise. Specific situations where variety was perceived to be a health benefit included having an assortment of equipment and services from which to choose; a diversity of activities and programs to suit goals as one ages; building balance into daily activities; and help with adherence to exercise by changing up routines and decreasing boredom. For this theme, active participants often reiterated points from the theme *variety* presented in chapter 4 when asked

about what facilitates the sustained use of a CFF membership. Furthermore, a common element within this theme was for the factor of convenience, especially as goals and abilities change throughout the stages of life. This theme is also related to the theme *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine* presented previously in that having a variety from which to choose was said to help by allowing participants the opportunity to stay consistent with their PA level by changing up their workout routine and preventing boredom.

Having a variety of equipment from which to choose was perceived by the active participants to allow them to achieve greater health benefits exercising in the CFF setting rather than exercising at home without access to such a variety of equipment. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. The example below shows how it was perceived to be more convenient to purchase and sustain a CFF membership rather than purchase at home exercise equipment:

Julia: Again I would say variety.

Leigh: Mhmm.

Julia: Yeah, because um, sometimes I think that if I had a home gym, but I cannot buy all the equipment that is at the gym in my basement. And I don't even have a basement. And that is why I still have my membership is because we can get unlimited equipment.

Whether it is the pool or bikes you have a variety to choose from.

Moderator: Right.

Participants also spoke in regards to having the ability to try different forms of exercise depending on what their fitness and health goals were at that particular stage of their life. Ten participants shared this perspective. This was also seen as favourable for the participants' health because they could change up their routine when they became bored which ultimately helped them stay consistent with their PA routine:

Isabella: Body pump and body step I just loved. Maybe as I am gracefully aging into the middle age maybe I will want to only do yoga and pilates and you change back into it. And in a large corporation I have the ability to change up. So if I went to a smaller club I wouldn't have that diversity so again diversity being a word where you have the ability to constantly change the routine up when you get board or am not motivated or if things are just plateauing you always have the ability to change it over. And become something else

or do something else. Your body might need, you might not like this body anymore and I want to bulk up then you can go learn more, you know?

Emma: You know that is a good point if you only have at home is a gazelle and you feel like changing it up. You can't change it up because all you have is a gazelle right.

A Participant from another focus group spoke about how sustaining a membership in a CFF awarded her the opportunity to build balance into her PA routine by taking advantage of the variety of equipment available to her in the CFF setting. Other participants mentioned that their CFF membership helped by getting them active after sitting all day long. Twelve participants shared this perspective. The following quote shows how participants believed that a CFF membership allowed them to build balance into their lives and daily activities:

Corey: It also helps build balance in a different way. So I first joined, well maybe my third or fourth one because I was running too much. Right. And there is no balance in running. Running is one activity. And I said ok this is ridiculous. I need to add strength training, I want weights, and even downloaded little things to do it on your own. So another benefit of joining a gym is it gives balance to some of the other activities in your life, which mine happened to be just running. That is not everybody's views, but it gives you something else.

As mentioned above, this theme had a tone of perceived choice as an important component within the variety theme; choice was perceived as beneficial in achieving health benefits by allowing participants to change up what they were doing for PA if they began to get bored. Fourteen participants shared this perspective. The following quote shows how having choice and variety was perceived to be better than purchasing exercise videos to do at home because it is varied and helps with accountability:

Emma: And I still do the video's I do some, like I buy some of those beach body programs and you do the same video once every day and you have to listen to them make the same stupid jokes and it never changes and it is very boring. So even with like a class at Canadian Commercial Fitness like if you do a step class it is different every week and it is different with every instructor. Even though it is the same it is different.

Group: Yeah!

Moderator: So it is dynamic and it is always changing?

(Group nods in agreement.)

Emma: It keeps me going.

Support and Safety

Participants across the active focus groups acknowledged that the potential to attain support and help with the safe execution of exercises was of benefit in sustaining a membership because it allowed them to more easily achieve the health benefits associated with PA. Within the overarching theme of *support and safety* there was a focus on the many different forms of support they received or might potentially receive in the CFF setting. This included support from knowledgeable and certified group fitness instructors and personal trainers; support on the safe execution of exercises; and advice on healthy lifestyles from staff and other facility members. The attention to these different forms of support and the creation of this theme are confirmed through participant dialogue and discussions that took place in each focus group. Across each element of this theme was an emphasis on the CFF setting as being a safe place to be physically active and exercise. The CFF setting was perceived to be safe because of the access to staff that are knowledgeable and certified in the safe execution of different exercises and program design. It was also perceived that having access to knowledgeable staff would decrease the chance of injury, making it easier to attain the health related benefits associated with PA by helping the active participants stay consistent with their PA routine. For this reason there was some crossover between this theme and the theme *support with progress and goals* presented in chapter 4. Moreover, the support available in the CFF setting was perceived to have a personal touch and often was tailored to the participants' specific health and fitness goals.

It was common for active participants to perceive that support was always available when it was needed. Fourteen participants shared this perspective. This support included asking how to use a piece of equipment, how to properly execute an exercise, and receiving help tracking and setting realistic goals. The conversations also revealed the attention to safety within this theme

and how the participants perceived that certified fitness professionals are a reliable source when it comes to executing exercises safely. The following quote shows how having access to support from professionals in the CFF setting was perceived to allow the active participants to attain health benefits more easily than other spaces and forms of PA:

Hailey: I think it is very important to see your progress because for some people it is hard. It comes a point where if you are not losing any pounds but your body is changing and if you are one of those scale people who are like, “Oh my god I didn’t lose a pound this week!” If you can see that you lost some body fat then that is good.

Emma: And another thing about like, with um, having, um, having access to a club versus working out at home or doing your own thing is that there is a lot of support there in making sure that you are doing things effectively and right. Like if you have question about how to use a machine. You are not on your own you can go ask somebody or in the classes they are always helping you do it effectively and your risk of injury is lower. Again and with equipment you know it is going to work. You are not going to get injured because the belt snapped back after whatever.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Moderator: So yeah it is definitely having support, not having faulty equipment and that all lowers your risk of injury as well.

Hailey: Yeah assistance.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Moderator: Right, so assistance being able to ask for help.

Isabella: And your instructors are well trained and professional. Because they have to be certified in order to teach. And in order to teach they have to take quite a few... Do they still have to send in there routine to be analyzed?

Emma: Yeah.

Isabella: And you do have personal trainers that have to be certified and properly trained.

Also within this theme was attention to the ability to receive support from interacting with other members of the CFF. Thirteen participants shared this perspective. Again, the conversation selected shows the focus on safety within the overarching theme of support. Specifically the dialog shows how the CFF setting was perceived to be safer than other spaces and forms of PA, which the active participants believed allowed them to more easily achieve the health benefits associated PA:

Isabella: And it is safe, safer than you doing it on your own, especially as you get older. If you are doing training, not just if you are doing classes even though they help, but if your actually doing the free-weights it is the safest way to go.

Emma: Yeah, to have somebody spotting you and yeah...

Hailey: Watching your form and you can push it to where you need to.

Emma: You can grab anybody at the gym to do that to which is nice where if you are at home you don't necessarily have that. Hailey: That's right and you can hurt yourself and throw your back out Isabella: And they are up to date on that.. Emma: Yeah and if you follow over with a heart attack they have they ADD (Laughter) Moderator: So there are many people there to help you in many ways. Group: Yeah Emma: It is very safe to be there.

The support that was available in the CFF setting was perceived to be a health benefit to the active participants because it was tailored to their personal health and fitness goals. Thirteen participants shared this perspective. The conversation selected below shows how the active participants perceived that help was available from the beginning and throughout the life of their CFF membership, thus making it easier to achieve their desired health and fitness goals:

Leigh: So it is nice to have the variety but I would also say that if they had anymore questions to always go and ask for a tour. Because anywhere they are open to that. I know many years ago one of the trainers had actually written out a whole series of different exercises that I can do because I said that this is my target and this is what I want to do. And they just kind of scheduled it which was so nice, yeah. Which is great. Moderator: So for someone to kind of take you on a tour and explain things at first is nice.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Leigh: And show you everything, yeah.

Moderator: And what you would need to do tailored on your health goals?

Leigh: Yes.

Maintenance and Prevention

When active participants were asked to share their perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF another common theme that emerged was *maintenance and prevention*. Maintenance dealt with the active participants maintaining independence through good health and staying fit as they age. Specifically, participants spoke about their CFF membership allowing them to maintain physical strength, endurance, and better physical functioning as they age. Prevention focused on preventing disease, poor health, low energy, and physical degeneration from occurring or recurring as they age. Active participants across focus groups

unanimously agreed that staying active, independent, and having control over their health was attainable through a CFF membership. Participants believed that sustaining a membership in a CFF allowed them the opportunity to attain the health benefits associated with PA and thus allowed them the opportunity to realize their shared health goals as they age. Though participants believed that it was possible to achieve these health benefits outside of the CFF setting the attention in the focus group discussions was on their personal experience and success through sustaining a membership in a CFF. This theme also encompassed the following attributes: maintaining a healthy weight; staying fit to play sports; and doing tasks that others at their age were perceived to have difficulty doing.

The following series of quotations shows how sustaining a membership in a CFF was perceived to award the health benefits of PA better than other spaces for PA by helping prevent/reduce/manage low energy, disease, and aches and pains. Fifteen participants shared this perspective overtly. The following sentiment shows how sustaining a CFF membership is perceived to help increase energy. Alanna said, “It just gives you so much energy. By working out. Like if I don’t, I feel lazy if I do not workout regularly.” To which Lola responded, “Yes!” The quotations selected below show how the participants perceive that sustaining a membership allows them greater independence by maintaining physical strength, endurance, and physical function:

Macey: Because we are the old ones here (points to Alanna). And we are playing against people half our age. Yeah, so we have to make sure that we do what we need to do.

Betty: That is exactly what I need it for too. To avoid the aches and pains of aging. Because mobility is so important.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Betty: Even like, my knees don’t bother me. Just avoiding and it is giving you added health benefits but just kind of avoiding the shortcomings of aging, back aches, the knees, the whatever. I think we are kind of avoiding it by keeping limber.

Macey: Also the absence of disease and prevention.

Betty: Yes prevention... For independence!

(Group nods in agreement.)

Moderator: So the absence of disease and illness, um... or the kind of mobility and functionality and by maintaining your membership you are able to kind of get all of those things.

(Group nods in agreement.)

The conversation below strengthens this element of the theme by focusing on maintaining good physical fitness, which allows them to continue to be able to participate in activities with their family:

Matilda: And I hate that feeling. Like I hate that. So like I go to maintain and I don't know, I just feel good about myself. My family and I went for a bike ride and we went around and around, this was a couple of years ago. And I was doing really hard cardio then and I was like I am going to do it! I was like over and above you know with my weights and that. And they were like, "slow down, you are going to hurt yourself." And I was just so proud of myself for keeping up because sometimes with like cross country skiing and that I can't keep up. And it is about feeling good about yourself and being healthy and fighting colds...

Group: (Nods in agreement.) Yeah! Totally!

Kristin: And though I cannot do a lot of things I used to and can still go to the gym and can do different classes. And I am now in remission from a lot of the symptoms because of being consistent at the gym.

Moderator: So the independence you get out of the gym membership is what works for you?

Kristin: Yes.

Moderator: So this facility gives you a space that adapts with you as your needs change and body goes through sickness and health?

(Group nods in agreement.)

Participant X: Mhmm.

Within the element of maintaining good physical health and fitness was an element of maintaining a healthy body weight. Eight participants shared this perspective. This element was not as strong within the focus groups though it was mentioned to some degree in each focus group. The quote selected shows the association the participants placed on gaining weight as they age and sustaining their membership to maintain a healthy weight throughout the years:

Lola: And weight fluctuation too. Like I will fluctuate in weight if I am not exercising and not working out but you like to eat the same. As you age it will catch up to you and the less you do it the lazier you feel and it is a domino effect. And so for me it is, that is

how I force myself to exercise. Like I play golf but that is not cardio. So for me it is to get that exercise in that I need to have for myself.

Also within the element of independence for the active participants was being able to do things that other people at their age might not be able to do. Having the ability to maintain physical strength, endurance, and functioning is perceived to have a positive mental benefit (discussed in greater detail under the next thematic heading). The following quotation shows how sustaining a membership in a CFF is thought to carry with it an element of empowerment and control over one's health that is perceived to be a health benefit of the CFF setting:

Corey: Or if you are like me and you are 40 years old and you decided that you want to have a baby and you have never had a baby before than you don't think. My body won't be able to handle it and then, things like that. I have never considered having a family until I was 40 and then all of the sudden. I can. A lot of the people in there forties can't. Lola: And you will have a healthy baby because you take care of yourself.

Corey: Right. And people say, "oh you are still going to the gym?" And I say, 'well I am actually not considering not going.' There is actually no point in time where I can see myself not going until I can't. It is such a part of me. So I think all of those things are health benefits that are intrinsic and they are kind of motivator in the back of my mind and it has allowed me to do what I want to do without ever saying, I am sorry my back hurts.

Lola: Exactly.

Betty: And you know what I absolutely have to add another benefit through the years that I have really enjoyed is that... the independence that you gain and I can lift anything I want.

Corey: Mhmm.

Betty: I can move whatever.

Corey: Mhmm.

Betty: You know that has never been an issue for me and I like that. I have felt the power of that some years ago and I never want to lose that. So that goes with the independence.

Corey: You never realize it at the time it is just a part of who you are and life.

Moderator: So once you go through your workout it helps you feel happy. You talked about it as being a preventative factor to mental illness and poor physical health. And there is a benefit for more than just you but for your family and to fight off disease that might impact your family. Sometimes we really focus on just the physical benefits of it but there is also the mental and emotional benefits and stress management. You also mentioned the day-to-day benefits of being more functional and moving more and being capable on your own.

Macey: Empowerment.

Participants X: Mhmm.

Corey: Or like I couldn't find the elevator when I came into this building so I went up four flights of stairs. Betty: That is it exactly. Moderator: So enjoying life, that by doing this you can take those relaxing day or indulge with the food.

Holistic Health

The fifth and final theme derived from the active participants perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other forms of PA and spaces for PA and exercise is titled *holistic health*. Holistic health is being operationally defined for this paper as any perceived health benefit acquired over and above the maintenance of physical health, and prevention of physical degeneration, mentioned above in the theme *maintenance and prevention*. This theme stemmed from participants mentioning other aspects of health that they perceived were attainable through holding their CFF membership. This is evident from the following sentiment regarding the health benefit of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other settings where physical activity is carried out. Macey stated, "I would say it is all aspects of health. It is social, emotional, physical... whatever." A participant from another focus group mentioned that she enjoyed the health benefit that she defined as, "The emotional well being."

Within this overarching theme there was an emphasis on a CFF membership providing health benefits via: creating a sense of happiness, satisfaction, and confidence, that comes with being physically active in the CFF setting; enhancing and maintaining good mental health, while preventing symptoms associated with poor mental health; being a good role model of healthy behaviour for children; and, improving health by allowing the opportunity to be social and meet new people. These elements of the theme were confirmed through group dialogue and conversations between participants in each focus group presented below.

Participants unanimously spoke in a positive tone about the satisfaction and confidence they receive after they finished a workout at a CFF. Sixteen participants shared this perspective.

It was common for participants to associate extended times when they did not use their membership with feeling down or depressed. This is contrary to the times when they used their membership consistently, and mentioned they felt as though they were better able to relieve stress, have more energy to think through problems, and feel generally happier and have more confidence:

Hailey: Satisfaction.

Isabella: So, it has to be about the holistic approach it has to be more about feeling good. It has to be more about living life and making sure it is about enjoying it and if you are not then... you are teaching your kids to have fun in the sports they play. You have to be having fun, it can't be just a job, it has to be about fun.

The following quote adds to this element of improving overall satisfaction and sense of accomplishment while highlighting some of the mental health benefits the active participants associated with sustaining a membership. Specifically, the quote below shows how participants associated times of using their membership to having more mental energy to work through and solve problems in their life:

Faith: Along those lines I would say my energy levels are higher too. I definitely notice like if I go through, like if it is exam time, or paper writing period, I feel like I just don't have room to fit it in and I notice my energy levels go down when I am not going to the gym everyday. And I think I think better too.

Maya: Yeah.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Faith: I think things are just clearer... yeah know? And I think even when, if you are working on a problem related to something you are studying or working on. I think that in the process of being in motion, even if you are not thinking about it. Even if you don't know you are thinking about it. I think a part of your brain works through it.

Rosie: Yeah!

Julia: Totally!

Faith: And you come to a better conclusion.

Julia: Yes I agree if I have an issue or a problem and if I go to the gym I work it out in my head. Like my daughter had something she was working on and I said go to the gym you will feel better. Because I can work it through when I am running. I can think about it as I am doing it. And I don't know, I think that is a good component, like energy. People at work say how are you doing what you are doing? You are doing so many things and I say, "it is because I workout." And I just, if I don't workout as much, like I haven't this week and I notice that I am more tired than usual.

The conversation below shows how the participants believed confidence could be gained from completing a workout in the CFF environment. Gaining confidence was often mentioned in conjunction with feeling satisfied or feeling accomplished after participating in PA at a CFF:

Monika: Yes more fun. And it also makes you better at the stuff you do outside of the gym. I don't really play on teams or anything. But my daughter plays on all kinds of different teams and she does individual sports. But in the last years she started going to the gym and I think it makes her better at everything else that she does. I think it gives her the added strength and the extra push to do better in sports.

Macey: Confidence to. To complete a workout there.

Alanna: Yeah confidence.

Monika: Yeah.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Many active participants shared the perspective that sustaining a membership in a CFF had a positive benefit on the whole family health. Similar to the theme *health benefits* for the facilitators mentioned in chapter 4, participants believed that sustaining a membership in a CFF benefited their children through not only allowing their parent to be physically active and achieve the health benefits associated with PA, but also by modeling a healthy behaviour for their children, hopefully, to adopt. Thirteen participants shared this perspective:

Monika: One health benefit is that you are modeling good behaviour for your kids.

Participant X: Mhmm.

Monika: And you hope they are following in the same footsteps. Like I have a teenage daughter and then I have younger kids and um, I think that it is really important with teenagers that they are learning good healthy habits. I am fortunate that my teenager is very fit. Um, but you know, it is important that she knows that you have to work at something.

Betty: Yes, mhmm.

Monika: And my little guys then are, you know. My three year old knows what a burpee (exercise) is and he can do it and he can demonstrate it too. And my seven year old knows how to do good push ups and she has the best push-ups in her karate class. So I think those values are important not only for your own health but for the health of your family.

Participant X: Mhmm.

Macey: Indeed.

Within this holistic health theme was a focus on preventing and assisting with poor states of mental health through sustaining a membership in a CFF and participating in regular PA. Sixteen participants shared this perspective. However, participants acknowledged that these benefits were not exclusive to PA and exercise in the CFF environment. The quotations chosen show how the participants perceived that holding a membership in a CFF just seems to work the best in their experience:

Rosie: For me it is mostly mental health.

Moderator: Can you say more about that?

Rosie: Um well, when I was singing a lot. I was a professional opera singer so I was travelling a lot and I was away a lot. And it is a very anxiety, your um, your anxiety or stress levels are very high to have that excellence of performance so I started, I had a lot of anxiety problems start coming up in my everyday life even though I wasn't feeling particularly stressed to my, I mean I would have panic attacks and of course I did not know what they were. And I found out later on that you are not dying, it is actually just a panic attack. Um, and I think, so I have been on medication for like 12 years but I was on just the regular dose of 20mg I guess or whatever and I started going to the gym and I went down to five and so I am just on this, I don't even know if it is anything, my doctor thinks it more placebo than anything but I am going to stay with it because I don't want to go back to where I was. But I find when I workout I just feel great. I don't get anxiety, I don't have that stress. Now mind you that I started teaching and stopped performing as much and I teach way more now. So my circumstances have changed as well but I think the gym, there is just no doubt...

(Group nods in agreement.)

Participant X: Mhmm.

Rosie: Your endorphins are just high and even if you don't realize that your endorphins are high and you are releasing all this stress and everything. At some point in the day if something bugs me I think, 'Yeah, but you did that really tough spin class.' And it is like, I can handle it. So that is just for me, it is totally physical obviously, but mental is big for me.

Lastly within this theme was an emphasis on the health benefits participants perceived to attain through the opportunity to be social and meet people and friends while being physically active. Fourteen participants shared this perspective. Some participants conversations focused more on this aspect of the theme *holistic health* than did others, but all groups shared the sentiment that being social and meeting people and friends was a health benefit of sustaining a

membership in a CFF over other forms of PA and spaces for exercise. The following quote speaks about how both corporate and smaller sized CFFs create a sense of community, which is perceived to be a health benefit in, and of itself:

Emma: It is so good to see your friends and you do something with them, you are basically dancing.

Hailey: You come out so happy.

Isabella: Yeah when you see that instructor that you haven't seen for a while. Like I haven't been to a class for months. And she sees you and it is like, "Hey, How are yeah?" It is friendly.

Hailey: It is family.

Moderator: So it is a stress reliever or a mental pick me up if you are having a bad day. Even if you don't want to go when you do you feel good. And then you get to see friends and instructors.

Hailey: Right they are your friends.

Less Active Participant's Perceived Health Benefits

Less active focus group participants mentioned their perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other venues for PA and forms of exercise. Although the participants' opinions on the perceived health benefits differed, there were some common themes that were apparent. The themes presented in this section are comprised of: *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine; support and safety; prevention and maintenance; and holistic health*. Please see Table 7 for a complete list of the keywords, which led to the creation of each theme for the less active participants' perceived health benefits.

Table 7

Less Active Participants' Perceived Health Benefit Themes and Keywords

Theme

Keywords

Accountability and Consistency
in a Physical Activity Routine

motivation, accountability, consistency, get into a routine, increased adherence, physical activity, extra push, competition, social pressure, vigorous physical activity, locked in for hour, team feeling, seasonal, weather, structured environment, purpose,

	staying committed, gracefully aging, convenient, safety, better than at home workout, variety, decrease boredom.
Support and Safety	safety, proper technique, support, injury prevention, health risks, certified, knowledgeable, personal trainer, fitness instructor, guidance, initial orientation, measurements, motivation, goal setting, knowledge on healthy lifestyles, exercise program design, educated staff, free assessment, check up on members, imitate fit members, personal touch.
Maintenance and Prevention	health, physical health/strength, endurance, physical functioning, maintain/increase health/fitness, energy, prevent disease, cardiovascular health, mobility, independence, balance, muscle tone, limit aches and pains, see results, achieve goals, age gracefully, maintain weight, doctor recommended,
Holistic Health	mental health, mental illness, prevention, confidence, satisfaction, happiness, stress reduction/management, role model for children, social/emotional health, meeting new people, self-care, proud, accomplished, time away from children, positive people, mindfulness, hormonal benefit, improved self-esteem/self-confidence.

Accountability and Consistency in a Physical Activity Routine

Participants in the less active focus groups shared common experiences pertaining to a CFF membership and the link between that membership and their own ability to keep themselves accountable and consistent with their PA goals. The accountability and consistency in their PA routine that a CFF membership was believed to provide the less active participants was perceived to be a health benefit of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other forms and spaces for PA and exercise. Within this theme there was attention to increased accountability and social pressure to remain consistent in their PA routine; receiving extra encouragement in a

CFF from staff and other members; and a CFF as having structure and a purpose to help with accountability and results. Furthermore, sustaining a membership was thought to aid in adherence to more vigorous forms of PA, and was also helpful in keeping them consistent with their PA routine during times of poor weather when being active outdoors was not favourable. There was also some attention to a CFF having a variety of equipment, services, and programs from which to choose that helped some of the less active participants stay consistent with their PA routine. A common theme across the elements of this theme was that a CFF membership helped less active participants stay consistent with their routine better than trying to be physically active or exercise at home or in their daily routine.

Less active participants spoke about the structure and purpose of a CFF as being beneficial for their health as it kept them consistent and accountable to their PA or exercise routine. Having a space that in the participants words was “created for exercise” helped them stay consistent in their PA routine and ultimately better able to achieve the health benefits of associated with regular PA. Participants shared the sentiment that they would be more likely to partake in consistent PA within a CFF than they would at home or in their daily routine. Twelve participants shared this perspective. For example, “If I was doing it at home I could just very easily just like, ‘um no’ (makes a face of disgust) because it hurts. When really, you know I would just really easily talk myself out of it so it does have its pros being in that space, that’s, um, you know, that is created for exercise.”

Less active participants commonly talked about making up excuses or finding reasons not to exercise at home, which made sustaining a membership in a CFF more favourable by helping them stay accountable. The following conversation strengthens this element of the overall theme

by speaking about how having a membership and a designated spot in a group exercise class helps keep the less active participants accountable to their routine:

Jada: I think when you belong to a gym you are making a commitment like to the membership but also to yourself. So you are making yourself accountable and gaining confidence and you are being accountable to your health and achieving better health. When you workout alone at home, you know the tendency is more like I will do it when I feel like it. And I'll do just a few of those and few of those.

Matilda: I think with the membership the intention is to have that. But in reality I don't think I actually have that commitment even though I purchased that one year membership.

Jada: Well that is the idea right you are paying money and you are investing into yourself and your health.

Matilda: I almost think that signing up for a class where you have to go for a specific time is way better instead of, 'Oh, I'll just go, I'll go in the morning,' and then I don't or, 'I'll go after school' and then my son needs help with homework, or 'I'll go after I help,' but I am too tired.

(Group laughs and nods in agreement.)

Within the theme of *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine* there was attention to the social pressure that less active participants have experienced, which helps them more easily achieve the health benefits of PA by keeping them accountable to an exercise program. Nine participants shared the following perspective:

Rachelle: I'd say, there is also um, most people if they go into a class, even if you want to leave, you are not going to leave. Whereas at home it is like, and pause (makes motion of using TV remote control).

(Group laughs.)

Rachelle: So it is the social stigma and wanting to leave a class that forces you to stay in there.

Shelly: So once you get into the doors, I would never go. If I made it in the doors I would do my workout. I wouldn't just like half ass it for ten minutes and boom I am out of here. Unless I was really feeling like crap. Like once I am there I would actually do my workout and maybe a bit more because I am already there and kind of want to get what I pay for.

Shannon: Right.

Moderator: So you are more likely to finish if you go to a commercial fitness facility rather than at home because you can stop anytime.

Rachelle: Oh yeah.

This overall theme had a competitive element that helped the less active participants stay accountable to more vigorous forms of PA and was perceived to be beneficial in them achieving their health and fitness goals. Competition often occurred informally via the less active participants motivating themselves to keep up with other members of group exercise classes or while using cardiovascular equipment such as treadmills and stationary bikes. Eleven participants shared this perspective:

Scarlett: Olivia sparked something as a facilitator in my mind. So, if you are in a class and you have got people beside you who are working out really hard sometimes. I will work that much harder, harder than I would of pushed myself if I was on my own. Just because I don't want to look like the one that can't keep up.

Olivia: And that, you know I would tell people that people are very self absorbed they are not trying to make themselves look better.

Scarlett: Oh I know...

Olivia: But I am competitive, that I don't want to be the worst so you know maybe I will put my step a little lower but I can do it a little bit faster to keep my arms going this time.

Scarlett: Yeah definitely. I really do find even when I am on a treadmill next to somebody. They probably are on an incline and I have no idea but I find myself in my mind wanting to go faster to keep up. It is almost like without them meaning to, it is like they are giving me a competition.

Matilda: They are helping you and motivating you.

Scarlett: Yeah!

The following quote shows how having a structured environment was perceived to help the less active participants stay consistent with their PA routine by eliminating external forces that may be barriers in other venues and forms of PA and exercise. Twelve participants shared this perspective. Specifically the conversation below shows how a membership in a CFF is beneficial during times of poor weather:

Lily: I don't really you know, if your at a non commercial place you may have to rely on numerous factors to get your workout done, at a commercial place that's taken out of there, cause you can work out whether, no matter what the weather is, and...

Moderator: So you wouldn't be limited by external forces if you're at a commercial fitness facility versus...

Hannah: Yeah, and I think exactly that. Its job is the gym. So there aren't external factors and you can go there and that's what you do, I go to school to learn, I go to the gym to work out. Instead of being at home, with me, or it's like I go to the grocery store to get

food. It can be like that, where that's where I can get my exercise if that's what I wanted to do.

Moderator: So from a health standpoint, it compartmentalizes it which is a benefit, is that accurate?

(Group nods in agreement.)

Within each of the less active focus groups there was some discussion about how variety is beneficial because it reduces boredom and allows one to “mix it up.” Seven participants shared this perspective. Though variety was mentioned by the less active participants as a facilitator in chapter 4, and was a perceived health benefit for the active participants, the less active participants seldom discussed it as an element that kept them consistent with their workouts and accountable to a PA routine and for this reason, variety is part of the theme *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine* rather than a separate theme on its own:

Maya: I think one pro is there is a lot of options so you don't have to stick to doing the same thing day after day after day so... When you are motivated to get there, that can keep you motivated.

Olivia: Yeah you can do weight training with the group exercise X class or with the trainer or you can do your cardio with another thing, so it is really easy to mix it up.

Maya: I like the variety of them too instead of just going to lift weights as that can get a bit monotonous where as most gyms offer different variety so you can do a different class everyday if you want.

Support and Safety

Less active participants mentioned that the potential to attain support on the safe execution of exercises was perceived to be a health benefit of the CFF setting by allowing them the opportunity to exercise without injuring themselves or aggravating old injuries. Within the overarching theme of *support and safety*, there was attention to the many different forms of support they received or might potentially receive in the CFF setting, inclusive of: support from knowledgeable and certified group fitness instructors and personal trainers; support on the safe execution of exercises; and advice on healthy lifestyles from staff and other facility members.

Much like the theme with the same name derived from the active participants, the CFF setting was perceived to be safe because of the access to staff who were knowledgeable and certified in the safe execution of different exercises and program design. This safety aspect of the theme was a perceived to be a health benefit because it made it easier to attain the health related benefits associated with PA by helping the less active participants minimize the chance of injury. For this reason there was some crossover between this theme and the theme *support with progress and goals* presented above in the chapter 4.

The conversation below was selected to demonstrate how the less active participants enjoyed the support and instruction they received from knowledgeable staff that was not available to them while being physically active in other venues. Eight participants shared this perspective. Though many of the quotations selected for the theme *support with progress and goals* in chapter 4 are applicable to this theme, the following quote speaks specifically to how support is perceived to be a health benefit of the CFF environment by receiving instruction from a knowledgeable staff member:

Maya: So I like that part and having that instructor there as a motivator too. Because I am fine with working out on my own and know what to do, but the instructor there helps.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Participant X: Yes, for sure.

Olivia: And again it is mindless I don't want to go to the gym and have to think. I really like to go and turn off the brain and let someone else help me.

Group: Yeah, yes.

Olivia: As opposed to sometimes when you are at home. You have to figure out how to make it work.

It was most common for the less active participants to speak about receiving support from knowledgeable or certified professionals as invaluable when it comes to exercising safely and was perceived to be a health benefit of sustaining a membership in the CFF setting. Eleven participants shared this perspective. The following quote reveals the focus the less active

participants placed on preventing injury by having access to knowledgeable staff members as opposed to less knowledgeable staff members. “You could injure yourself too from not having the right people there, like if there is no one there to help you and you don’t really know how to use something and you just think, I am just going to figure it out myself. Like you could hurt yourself.” Furthermore, the conversation below strengthens this element of the overall theme by illustrating the impact having support is perceived to have on achieving one’s health and fitness goals:

Matilda: Having the knowledge of people and staff that are there to help. Whereas if I am working out at home I don’t know if my squat is proper.

Olivia: Exactly, I don’t have mirrors in basement along the wall sadly.

Matilda: Yeah like you can be totally doing it wrong or not getting out of it what you think you are getting out of it. Yeah like, I am like I think I am working out but when you are in a gym and you are watching or asking and you can be informed and know you are doing it right.

Moderator: So the support is definitely there in that environment where as it might not be at home or in the park or elsewhere?

Matilda: Yeah I am just comparing that question to if I was at home working out by myself versus working out in the gym.

Olivia: Yeah you said it perfectly, pushing yourself more and having those other people around you than again being at home.

Maintenance and Prevention

When less active participants were asked to share their perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF, another collective theme that emerged was *maintenance and prevention*. Maintenance dealt with sustaining independence through good health and staying fit as they age. Specifically, participants spoke about their CFF membership as an entity that allowed them to maintain physical strength, endurance, a healthy weight, and physical functioning as they age. Prevention focused on averting disease and physical degeneration from occurring or recurring as they age. Participants believed that sustaining a membership in a CFF

allowed them the opportunity to attain some of the physical health benefits associated with PA such as increased strength, endurance, and good physical functioning.

Less active participants unanimously agreed that sustaining a membership in a CFF allowed them to achieve better physical strength, cardiovascular endurance, and physical functioning. Twelve participants shared this perspective overtly. Participants in the less active group did not often elaborate on their perceived physical health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF. This is evident from the following quote when asked what their perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership were, “Health, a healthy heart.” A participant from another focus group put quite simply, “you gain fitness. Improved fitness, improved cardiovascular health, improved balance, and muscle tone.” It was commonly the case that the less active participants believed that sustaining a CFF membership was the best way to acquire physical health benefits associated with PA:

Hannah: But the physical strength is unique to the gym because I have weights that I don’t use, but at the gym I use weights in a circuit and feel physically stronger after that and that is a benefit.

Moderator: Okay, so physical strength?

Hannah: Gaining physical strength, yeah.

It was common for the less active participants to focus on the cardiovascular health benefits that are attainable through group exercise classes. Participants also focused on being able to do daily activities better and be more motivated to become active in their daily lives during times where they had a membership in a CFF:

Maya: For me it is the cardiovascular endurance. Um, because we again have talked about classes a lot and typically those classes are 45 minutes to an hour and you know you are not going to leave part way through typically unless you are not feeling well. So you know it gives you that push that says, hey I am here and I am committed to the next hour so I am going to do it.

(Group nods in agreement.)

The following conversation adds to this element of the overall theme:

Olivia: So I think again it goes back to more social like I am more apt to (be social) when I was working out. Oh look there is the 5K run for the cure and that stuff that I would join. So you see people doing other things that makes you want to be involved in the community. And I am thinking I am out of shape but I want to do that and get involved.
 Moderator: So it gets you out and doing more because you have the energy to?
 Olivia: Yeah, or like the obstacle course stuff you see now.

Maintaining a healthy weight was mentioned in each of the three less active focus groups. Again, participants seldom elaborated on this aspect of the theme and appeared to perceive that maintaining a healthy weight was a physical health benefit that was inherently a part of sustaining a membership in a CFF. Ten participants shared this perspective. The lack of in depth attention on this facet of the theme is apparent through the following dialog when Maya said, “Maybe also maintaining a healthy weight.” To which Scarlett and Brooklyn replied, “Yes” and the group confirmed by nodding in agreement.

Less active participants believed that sustaining a membership in a CFF had an ability to prevent disease, low energy, physical degeneration, and many symptoms or signs associated with poor health. Ten participants shared this perspective. The following quote shows how exercise in a gym was perceived to help avoid aches and pains associated with a sedentary lifestyle:

Lily: Your back doesn't get so sore. I had a total blow out of my back in November where I was sitting too long and not getting up enough. Stopped coming to work out because I was too busy with papers and my back just seized out on me. So I was totally a Tin Man for a while and I really suffered. Really suffered. So I think exercise in the gym keeps you moving and keeps your body well oiled.
 (Group laughs and nods in agreement.)

The following conversation is from another focus group whose members often spoke about how setting boundaries, making time for yourself, and being motivated to sustain a membership often come from the desire to prevent disease. The quote also exemplifies how despite best intentions the less active participants still had barriers that kept them from sustaining a membership:

Scarlett: That is very true like my mom suffered from breast cancer when I was only 25 and so as my children were growing up. I said to my husband like, my health is a priority and he was good and he took the girls to help me. But again other things get in the way.

Olivia: And that is what I mean something will probably change down the road again.

Fear is a great motivator.

(Group nods in agreement.)

Participant X: Yeah.

Holistic Health

The fourth and final theme derived from the less active participants perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other forms of PA and venues for exercise is titled *holistic health*. For this study, holistic health encompasses any perceived health benefit acquired over and above the maintenance of physical health, and prevention of physical degeneration, mentioned above in the theme *maintenance and prevention*. This theme was created from participants mentioning additional health benefits in which they perceived to attain through holding their CFF membership. These health benefits included: creating a sense of satisfaction and improved confidence that comes from sustaining a membership in a CFF; enhancing and maintaining good mental health, while preventing symptoms associated with poor mental health; and being a good role model of healthy behaviour for children. These elements of this theme were confirmed through group dialogue and conversations between participants in each focus group presented below. Commonly, less active participants spoke about sustaining a membership in a CFF as having the ability to bring about mental health benefits and improve self-confidence that carried over into other areas of their life. This was not true for all individuals however and some participants actually admitted to having lower self-confidence from their experience in the CFF setting.

Participants in the less active focus groups stated that they felt more confident from completing a workout in the CFF setting than they did from other venues for PA and exercise.

Ten participants shared this perspective. This was true despite some less active participants admitting that a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF was that they often felt intimidated and self-conscious in the CFF environment. The following conversation highlights how completing a workout in a CFF was thought to have a positive health benefit for the less active participants by boosting their confidence. Specifically, the quote shows how a focus on strength training done in the CFF setting has a carry over effect and can improve mental health:

Hannah: I think that the confidence of achieving something always is a benefit.

Moderator: Right.

Hannah: If I were to complete a workout in the gym I would feel good about that, so that builds confidence.

Moderator: Right so it's the Self-esteem, healthy...

Hannah: Mind you I feel that when I go for a walk too but I feel that when you're at the gym you put in that focus for the muscle training. I feel more physical strength and so I feel more mentally confident.

The following conversation shows another element of this theme, the potential health benefit attainable from being social while being physically active. Less active participants stated that they acquire a sense of mental satisfaction and happiness from the opportunity to be social and communicate with friends and other members within the CFF setting. Seven participants shared this perspective. Though this sentiment was not shared by all and was stronger for some participants than others, gaining mental satisfaction was mentioned across the three focus groups to some degree:

Matilda: I think you also learn about other things to, you know, not just the physical workout itself but you get talking to people and you are learning what there experiences are and what they are doing and trying something whether it be vitamins to diet and what they are eating to um, how to work it into your regular day.

Moderator: So the other the broader lifestyle stuff that might be outside of the gym.

(Group nods in agreement)

Matilda: Right. But you are communicating with them in the gym so they are like-minded and value health. So kind of like talking to like-minded people, to learn from and be influenced by.

Scarlett: It is interesting, building on what you said I know that when I was committing myself and going, going a lot. I remember feeling like that environment to me was

almost like, a place of really happy people. Or a place with really optimistic people or a place with people who were driven and proactive taking charge of their own health. I loved being part of the community that was like that. That seemed to motivate me to want to do better.

Moderator: So the social aspect that has a health benefit as well?

Scarlett: Mhmm, it makes you want to be there.

Less active participants shared the common sentiment that sustaining a membership in a CFF allowed them to improve mental health and the ability to prevent mental illness. Nine participants shared this perspective. Again, not everyone shared this belief as many of the participants acknowledged that sustaining a membership in a CFF was beneficial for mental health only if an individual was not too self-conscious in the fitness facility environment. The following quote is evident of this characteristic of the overall theme. Rachelle said, “Improved self esteem and everything like that. Or it can be like that if you are not too self-conscious.” The following quote show the perceived health benefit of having a space that was capable of relieving stress accumulated from daily life:

Scarlett: And I know mental health benefits I have benefited from it too.

Olivia: Yeah I agree 100%. The mental health. Just a place, like I said where you can go to a class and have someone yell at me that is probably the only time I can turn my mind off. Because otherwise you know you walk out, and they will even say quit planning your grocery list, quit thinking what you are going to do next. It is like, ‘wow this really works.’ Because when I am at home the phone rings or the kids need something. It is so hard to just shut it off. Or you know, I cut my run short because I probably should get that done. But if I am there and I made the effort I don’t think there was ever a time where it was a bad workout because you were there and you were committed to doing it and you had a group of people to motivate you and I don’t want to be the worst person in the class so I am going to work a little bit harder than that other person.

Matilda: Exactly.

Olivia: So there are all these physical benefits but the mental benefits as well and mentally being able to just know that you are doing something good for yourself.

Scarlett: So Olivia is talking about the like, mindfulness stuff. I am also talking about like the hormones that changes my chemistry and in my brain when I workout.

Moderator: So the physiological and hormonal benefits and then on your end kind of just forgetting the business of your life, giving your brain an hour to be present and mindful?

Olivia: Just complete stress relief.

Moderator: So being mindful.

Olivia: Mhmm.

(Group nods in agreement.)

The last element of the theme *holistic health* focused on the perceived health benefit that comes from participating in PA and spending time to focus on personal health goals while modeling good health behaviour for children in hopes that they might emulate the behaviour being modeled. Also within this element of the overall theme is attention to the mental health benefits of getting away from family and parenting responsibilities and having the time to focus on self-care. Eight participants shared this perspective:

Scarlett: I was very fortunate that I worked a long day and I was the one who dealt with the kids after school and my husband worked quite late and as soon as he walked in the door it was bedtime so he took that responsibility and that is when I went to the gym but by that time you are exhausted. So I really had to force myself to meet my friends but I have to be honest with you, when I was doing that and meeting a friend I was thankful that I had time away. Like I had been away from them all day for work which is not the greatest and then I had a few hours with them and then they are exhausted and they are tired and they are cranky and so Daddy walks through the door and he is the new fresh face and I was appreciative of the time for self-care time.

Moderator: So teamwork with your husband allowed for self-care time?

Scarlett: Yeah, self-care time. It benefits the kids otherwise I am a cranky, you know what. (Group laughs.)

Scarlett: No one is going to appreciate that either.

Olivia: Mommy time.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the results of this study pertaining to active and less active women's perceived health benefits to sustaining a membership in a CFF. This section will summarize and compare the results reported on in this chapter starting with the active participants, followed by the less active participants, and then end with a comparison of the two segmented groups in this study.

The active participants of this study engaged in conversation that was examined for collective themes. The themes that emerged pertaining to the perceived health benefits to

sustaining a membership in a CFF are titled: *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine*; *variety*; *support and safety*; *maintenance and prevention*; and *holistic health*.

The theme *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine* was created to highlight the perceived health benefits available to the active participants by sustaining a membership in a CFF. The theme was created from conversations surrounding experiences that helped the participants stay accountable and consistent with a PA routine through sustaining a membership in a CFF. These experiences included, motivation from staff, motivation and informal competition from other members, situations that increased accountability to stay consistent (especially in times of poor weather), and having access to a structure that has a purpose for PA and exercise. The active participants noted across the different elements of this theme that having the comfort of knowing they are exercising safely helped with consistency and accountability to their PA routine. It was also noted across themes that the CFF setting does a better job at keeping them consistent and accountable to their PA routine than does trying to exercise at home.

The active participants spoke about situations where having a variety of equipment, programs, and services from which to choose was perceived to allow them to better achieve the health benefits associated with PA than other spaces and forms of PA and exercise. The conversations that led to the creation of the theme *variety* were ones that stressed having a lot of options in terms of equipment and services, having a variety of activities to fulfill health goals as one ages, and having a variety of activities that helped build balance into daily activities. A common perspective across the different elements of this theme were that having a variety of equipment and services to choose from helped with consistency with a PA routine by decreasing

boredom and increasing convenience of being able to achieve different health and fitness goals all under one roof.

The theme *support and safety* was generated from conversations about having access to knowledgeable and certified personal trainers and group fitness instructors, receiving support on the safe execution of exercises, and advice on healthy lifestyles from staff and other members of the CFF. It was perceived that having support and a safe environment to be physically active increased the ability to attain health goals as the support and safety that was available to them had a personal touch tailored specifically to their goals and physical limitations.

The active participants of the study spoke about experiences, which led to the creation of the theme *maintenance and prevention*. This theme encompassed the physical health benefits that the participants believed to be associated with being physically active. These experiences included; gaining physical strength, endurance, and better physical functioning; preventing disease, poor health, low energy, and physical degeneration; maintaining a healthy weight; staying physically fit to play sports; and doing tasks others their age cannot.

The last theme derived from the active participants perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF was titled *holistic health*. This theme was comprised of experiences pertaining to participants' ability to gain many other health benefits associated with being physically active such as improving mental and emotional health. Specifically participants spoke about acquiring and increase sense of happiness, satisfaction, and confidence from sustaining a membership in a CFF; enhancing and improving mental health, while preventing or managing mental illness; the health benefits of the family by being a role model for children; and improving mental and emotional health from an opportunity to be social and meet new people.

The dialog between the less active participants pertaining to their perceived health benefits to sustaining a membership in a CFF was examined for shared themes. The themes that emerged were titled: *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine; support and safety; prevention and maintenance; and holistic health.*

The theme *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine* was created from the attention given to situations that helped the participants stay accountable and consistent with PA through sustaining a membership in a CFF. The experiences that lead to the creation of this theme included receiving motivation from staff, motivation and informal competition from other members, a perceived social pressure to stay accountable to completing a workout in the CFF setting, accountability to more vigorous forms of PA and exercise, other situations that increase accountability to stay consistent (especially in times of poor weather), and having access to a structure that has a purpose for PA and exercise. Having a variety of equipment and services from which to choose also helped the less active participants stay consistent with their PA routine. It was common across the different elements of this theme for the participants to speak about the ability of a CFF membership to help them stay consistent with PA better than exercising at home.

Less active participants spoke about experiences that lead to the creation of the theme titled *support and safety*. This theme stemmed from conversations about receiving support from knowledgeable and certified group fitness instructors and personal trainers, support on the safe execution of exercises, and advice on healthy lifestyles from members and staff. The less active participants did not put as much emphasis on receiving support from staff as health benefit as the active participants did. Within this theme for the less active participants there was a lot of attention on the importance of the safety that was perceived to be associated with being

physically active and sustaining a membership in a CFF. Having the comfort of participating in PA and exercise safely was appealing to the participants across the focus groups and made sustaining a membership in a CFF an appealing means to achieve the health benefits associated with PA.

The theme *maintenance and prevention* was generated from dialog between the less active participants pertaining to the perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF. This theme encompassed the physical health benefits that the participants believed to be associated with being physically active in a CFF setting. These experiences included: gaining physical strength, endurance, and better physical functioning; preventing disease and physical degeneration; and maintaining a healthy weight.

The last theme derived from the less active participants perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF was titled *holistic health*. This theme contained quotations from experiences relating to participants' capacity to gain many health benefits associated with being physically active such as improving mental and emotional health. Participants spoke about acquiring an increased sense of satisfaction and confidence from sustaining a membership in a CFF; the ability to enhance and improve mental health, while prevent or manage mental illness; and health benefits for the whole family by being a role model of healthy behaviour for children, and through having time alone for self care. Though all less active participants did not share this sentiment there was a fair amount of attention on acquiring a mental health benefit through stress reduction that was perceived to carry over into other aspects of life and be a health benefit of sustaining a membership in a CFF.

The focus will now be on comparing and contrasting the results that originated from the active and less active focus groups in regards to their perceived health benefits of sustaining a

membership in a CFF in comparison to other venues and forms of PA and exercise. Across the themes created for the active participants perceived health benefits was the perspective that sustaining a membership in a CFF was integral to them in living a healthier, more fulfilling life, and afforded them the opportunity to be their best in many facets of their personal lives. It was unanimous that active participants placed their CFF membership at the core of their health and wellness routine. The data suggest that the active participants in this study believed that nothing else could be as effective or efficient at allowing them to maintain their physical fitness and overall health like a membership to a CFF does.

With regard to the themes created for the less active participants' perceived health benefits there was a shared perspective that sustaining a membership in a CFF does provide health benefits, though the participants often believed that these health benefits were also attainable in other venues for PA and forms of exercise and not always exclusive to a CFF membership. This marks a crucial difference between the active and less active focus groups in regards to their perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF. This sentiment was true for all themes for the less active participants with the exception of the theme *support and safety*, where the less active participants believed the support they could potentially receive was unique to the CFF setting. The data suggests that less active participants believed that there were benefits to sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other forms of PA and venues for exercise. This was true despite the fact that the majority of the less active participants did not hold a membership in a CFF.

For the theme *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine* both segmented groups shared similar perspectives on a CFF memberships ability to add accountability and consistency to their PA routine. The less active participants differed in one

way and that was that they believed that a CFF membership helped them stay accountable to more vigorous forms of PA than they would otherwise do on their own. Furthermore, the less active participants spoke about having a variety from which to choose only as a benefit to staying accountable and consistent with their PA routine and did not perceive having a variety of equipment and services from which to choose to be something in and of itself that allowed the attainment of the health benefits of PA. On the other hand the active participants did perceive having a variety of equipment, services, and programs from which to choose as a health benefit of sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other venues and forms of PA and exercise.

Within the theme titled *support and safety* both the active and less active groups shared similar experiences that aided in the creation of this theme. The segmented groups differed in the belief that the support given to them had a personal touch. Active participants often spoke about the ability to acquire advice that was tailored specifically to their health goals and physical limitations, whereas the less active focus groups seldom mentioned receiving support that had a personal touch and was tailored specifically to them. This is true despite both groups placing an emphasis on the ability to receive support that aided them in exercising safely in the CFF setting.

The participants in this study shared common experiences and the perspective that sustaining a membership in a CFF allowed them to maintain and improve their physical health, while preventing the degeneration of physical health, and for this reason the theme *maintenance and prevention* was reflected in the results for both segmented groups. The language used between the groups is one point of contrast between them in that the active participants often spoke about maintaining physical health whereas the less active participants often spoke about improving physical health. This apparently small distinction highlights one aspect of how the

health benefits of sustaining a membership were perceived differently by the active and less active women of this study. The active participants also differed from the less active participants by focusing more on how achieving the physical health benefits of PA (such as increased strength and endurance) allowed them to stay active in sports and doing tasks others their age cannot.

For the theme *holistic health* the participants across the segmented groups shared similarities with regard to gaining satisfaction and confidence, and maintaining good mental health while preventing mental illness from sustaining a membership in a CFF. Participants across segmented groups also shared similar experiences pertaining to the health benefits available to the whole family, though the less active participants placed more of a focus on the benefit to the family from having a mom who made time for self care through a CFF membership, which, in turn, allowed them a venue for stress management and stress reduction. Segmented groups also differed in that the majority of active participants shared the perspective that having a CFF membership allowed them the opportunity to attain mental and emotional health benefits from being social and meeting new people, whereas this sentiment was not as strong for the less active participants as a health benefit to sustaining a membership in a CFF.

Chapter 7: Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain in depth knowledge on the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF amongst women between the ages 35 – 55 who meet Canada’s physical activity guidelines and those who do not. This age and gender segment was important to study in this context because women between the ages of 35 - 55 have been shown to have more barriers to leisure time PA than men and younger adult women.

This qualitative focus group methodology study segmented focus groups into those who met or exceeded Canada’s PA guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA and those who do not meet the current guidelines. Experienced female moderators, using a semi-structured interview guide, conducted six focus groups comprised of women who all had experience with a membership in a CFF (n = 28). There were three focus groups conducted per PA level category. All focus group meetings were audio- and video-recorded and the discussions were transcribed verbatim. The primary researcher engaged in inductive analysis of the focus group data after deductively creating codes with the help of two independent coders. The deductive codes were created independently and simultaneously by each of the qualitative researchers from data pertaining to the research questions. Findings from the study were represented through the creation of themes derived from the analysis of the data. See Table 8 for an overview of all the themes pertaining to each of the research questions.

Table 8

Themes Derived From the Data

<u>Facilitators</u>	
<u>Active</u>	<u>Less Active</u>
Health Benefits	Health Benefits
Variety	Variety
Support With Progress and Goals	More Support With Progress and Goals
Welcoming and Friendly Staff and Environment	More Welcoming and Friendlier Staff and Environment
<u>Barriers</u>	
<u>Active</u>	<u>Less Active</u>
Cost and Strong Sales Tactics	Cost and Strong Sales Tactics
Personal/Life Commitments and Motivation	Personal/Life Commitments and Motivation
Intimidating Environment	Intimidating Environment
Crowded Facilities and/or Lack of Amenities	Crowded Facilities and/or Lack of Amenities
	Lack of Support and Programs for Ability
<u>Health Benefits</u>	
<u>Active</u>	<u>Less Active</u>
Accountability and Consistency in a Physical Activity Routine	Accountability and Consistently in a Physical Activity Routine
Support and Safety	Support and Safety
Maintenance and Prevention	Maintenance and Prevention
Holistic Health	Holistic Health
Variety	

Perceived Facilitators

Active and less active participants shared similarities in their perceived facilitators to sustaining a membership in a CFF; these were:

- To maintain, attain, and improve their personal health through being physically active on a regular basis;
- To make use of a variety of equipment, services, locations, and programs, while having a variety of group exercise classes and times from which to choose;
- To make use of the potential support systems that are available to them such as knowledgeable personal trainers, group fitness instructors and from encouragement from a workout partner, as well as receiving knowledge on healthy lifestyles and the safe execution of exercises;
- To have an aesthetically appealing environment for PA that has a welcoming and friendly staff and positive culture.

The latter two themes derived from the less active participants had an element of wanting more in order to facilitate sustained membership, meaning less active participants wanted more support with their progress and goals and a more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment. This was opposite of the active participants who perceived the support they could receive and the welcoming environment and staff of the CFF made it feel like a community or a family. Moreover, active participants were able to mention what has personally facilitated their sustained use of a CFF membership whereas the less active participants often spoke about what they would like to see more of in order to successfully facilitate the sustained use of a CFF membership.

Perceived Barriers

The active and less active participants shared similarities in their perceived barriers to sustaining membership in a CFF and they were:

- The cost of the initial membership and cost of additional services once the membership had already been purchased, as well as the strong sales tactics used by staff;
- The personal and life commitments which create time constraints and schedule conflicts along with personally lacking motivation to exercise;
- The different aspects of the CFF environment believed to be intimidating, or bringing about feelings of self-consciousness;
- Having a crowded and busy CFF and/or a lack of amenities such as equipment, daycare, and professional staff.

The less active participants spoke about the lack of support and programs for their current physical fitness abilities, which created a fifth barrier exclusive to the less active participants of this study. Although both groups shared some barriers to sustaining a membership in CFF, the active focus group participants in this study often developed strategies to overcome them and the less active did not. This is especially true for the themes *personal/life commitments and motivation*, and *intimidating environment*. Furthermore, some of the conversations in which the active participants engaged showed that certain barriers were in fact barriers to continuing their membership with a given CFF.

Perceived Health Benefits

Similarities and differences were noted in the active and less active participants perceived health benefits to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Both groups shared similarities in their perspective of a CFF membership being beneficial for their health and they were:

- Creating an increased sense of accountability and helping them stay consistent with their PA routine for longer than they would in other venues and forms of PA or exercise;
- Being active in a venue that is created for PA, there is the potential to attain support with progress and goals while having peace of mind that exercises are being executed safely allowed the participants to achieve the results they were after more readily than exercising elsewhere;
- Achieving the physical benefits associated with PA such as increased strength, endurance, physical functioning, and maintaining a healthy weight, while preventing disease and aches and pains;
- The ability to achieve mental, emotional, and intangible health benefits (happiness, confidence, and satisfaction) from completing a workout in the CFF setting, as well as achieving the mental health benefits and having access to a place to relieve stress.

The active and less active participants differed in their attention on having a variety of equipment, services, and programs to choose from in the CFF environment. The active participants perceived having variety of equipment, services, and programs from which to choose to be a health benefit of the CFF environment as it allowed them to change things up as they aged and as their goals changed. Less active participants mentioned that having a variety of equipment, services, and programs from which to choose helped with boredom and somewhat assisted them in being more consistent with their PA routine, and for this reason the characteristic of variety as a health benefit was included as part of the theme of *accountability and consistency in a physical activity routine*. Moreover, active participants believed that nothing else could be as effective or efficient as a CFF membership in allowing them to maintain their fitness level and that membership was viewed as an important part of them living a healthy

and fulfilling life. In contrast, it was common for the less active participants to engage in dialog that showed that though a CFF membership was thought to be effective in helping them attain the health benefits of PA, these benefits could also be attained through other venues for PA and forms of exercise.

Conclusions

The conclusions presented in this section will specifically address the ability of a CFF membership to alleviate some of the negative health outcomes associated with physical inactivity by enhancing the discussion on the barriers, facilitators, and health benefits of membership in a CFF for women aged 35 – 55. It is worth noting that because this was a qualitative study the conclusions and participant observations presented below are most useful in developing a better understanding of the 35 – 55 year old female demographic. More research is needed in order to confirm or strengthen the recommendations below and to make broad generalizations about the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF or any other fitness facility.

With regard to the perceived facilitators of sustaining a membership, it was found that the health benefits one perceives to attain from a CFF membership was a motivator for both the active and less active participants. Active participants in this study spoke about the health benefits using language that suggested that they sustained a membership in a CFF to maintain their health as they grew older. Less active participants spoke about the health benefits that facilitated sustained membership in a CFF using language that suggested that they wanted to improve their health. Both active and less active participants spoke about preventing disease and poor health as a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Moreover, it was far more common for the participants of this study to speak about the physical and mental health benefits

of sustaining a membership than it was for them to mention sustaining a membership to improve appearance. These findings are congruent with research that suggest that the reasons for participation in PA at a fitness facility change as one grows older where the earlier age focus is normally on appearance and then it evolves to a focus on achieving and maintaining good health (Costello et al., 2011; Mullen & Whaley, 2010). In addition to the findings on health benefits as a facilitators, it was noted by less active participants that they often felt as though they were outsiders and not part of the “community” because they did not have a certain image that fit with the CFF setting. This often resulted in them perceiving that they are overlooked by staff and the “regular” members.

For these reasons, it would be beneficial for CFFs to refrain from advertisements inside and outside of the facility that could be perceived to focus on having or attaining a certain image or focusing on improving appearance if they want to attract and retain more active and less active 35 – 55 year old female members. A focus on promoting the health benefits of sustaining a membership and regularly being physically active at intensities that elicit desirable health benefits might be more effective in getting 35 – 55 year old women physically active via membership in a CFF.

This recommendation warrants careful consideration given that research has shown that CFFs often rely on the appearance factor in their advertising. Appearance-based advertising has been determined to have a negative effect on non-exercisers’ attitudes towards exercise (Berry & Howe, 2004). Results of Berry and Howe’s research also showed that health-based advertising had significant positive effects on social physique anxiety and self-presentation for regular exercisers. The latter results are also applicable to the findings of this study in that participants in the active focus groups reported that one perceived barrier to sustaining a CFF membership is

that the environment is perceived to be intimidating and some participants reported feeling self-conscious exercising in different areas within the CFF. Research by Cunningham and Woods (2011) also found that advertisements that focused on health and well-being rather than appearance had a positive impact on an individual's attitude towards a fitness facility and those individuals were more likely to join that fitness facility if they perceived the culture to focus on health and well-being. However, it is worth noting that the study by Cunningham and Woods did not segment participants into active and less active groups and included a sample of both male and female undergraduate university students.

Participants across both segmented groups spoke about having a variety of equipment, services, and programs as a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Within this theme, there was a focus on wanting variety and choice as it made sustaining a membership in a CFF more convenient and attractive. Specifically, having many group exercise class times from which to choose, flexible hours of operation, and the ability to have access to multiple locations and private women's-only space made sustaining a membership convenient because participants could fit physical activity into their schedule more readily. Therefore, if a CFF wants to attract and retain 35 – 55 year old female members, it would be important for them to have a variety of equipment, services, programs, and locations available to their members. Making PA and venues for exercise more convenient and accessible would help eliminate some of the barriers to regular leisure time PA which research has shown women to have (Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2004; Sternfeld, Ainsworth, & Quesenberry, 1999).

Receiving support with progress and goals was another facilitator identified by the participants in this study. Though both groups perceived the potential support that is available to be a motivator to sustain a membership in a CFF, the less active participants indicated that they

would like to receive more support than what they have experienced in the past. The less active participants also perceived that having a lack of formal ongoing support and programs for their current physical fitness skills and abilities to be a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. The active participants had the perspective that not receiving support in the beginning phases of holding a membership to be a potential barrier and made the CFF setting more intimidating and provoked feelings of self-consciousness. Furthermore, participants in both groups within this study mentioned that it was a motivator to receive support in the form of a free assessment in the beginning of their membership and to have someone follow up with them and help track their progress in achieving their desired personal health and fitness goals. It was also mentioned that staff did not always come through with the follow up appointment and it was generally believed that staff only followed up with them if there was a financial incentive for them to do so, meaning the staff believed there was an opportunity for the member to sign up for an additional package with a personal trainer. The results from the current study highlighting the importance of having both formal support (from staff) and informal support (from friends and family as a workout partner) are congruent with previous research which demonstrated that women over the age of 40 and who had informal social support from friends and family with PA were significantly less likely to be sedentary than those with low support (Eyler, 1999). The researchers findings do not however speak in regards to the impact that having formal support from knowledgeable and certified staff of a fitness facility has on PA levels.

Given the results of this study, it is imperative for a CFF to ensure that formal support is given in the beginning phases of a membership and that support is attainable throughout the life of a membership without the motive of having the member purchase additional services. Participants suggested that it would be a motivator if they received a free assessment that

included a certified/knowledgeable professional to: help them set realistic goals; take initial measurements; calculate body fat percentage; and determine strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular endurance starting points. It was also mentioned by the less active participants of this study that receiving support and knowledge on the proper execution of exercises from a certified professional was a facilitator and would provide them with the confidence needed to stay consistent to their PA routine.

Having access to and receiving support and knowledge on proper exercise technique from a certified professional would also be beneficial in providing support and facilitate sustained membership in a CFF. This is also true in that both active and less active participants identified that having a lack of professional staff (personal trainers and group fitness instructors) is a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Having access to and support from a certified professional also might alleviate the perception amongst the less active participants that they do not have the skills and abilities needed to participate in programs offered in the CFF setting via providing them knowledge and feedback on proper exercise technique. Therefore, it is important that CFFs hire certified professionals such as personal trainers and group fitness instructors who can provide the caliber of support the 35 – 55 female demographic seems to require, according to the findings of this study. Research has confirmed the importance that female clients of personal trainers place on having a certified personal trainer (Melton, Dail, Katula, & Mustian, 2011). Melton et al. found that women believe that having the support of a certified professional facilitated them staying accountable and consistent with their PA routine. Moreover, research conducted in Poland has also demonstrated that group fitness instructors' qualifications have a profound impact on women's choice of a fitness facility and further substantiates the need for certified professionals within a CFF (Szumilewicz, 2011).

Participants in this study identified that having a welcoming and friendly staff and environment facilitated a sustained membership in a CFF. Furthermore, the less active participants highlighted the need to have a more welcoming and friendlier staff and environment than what they previously had experienced. Active participants mentioned that having a venue in which to be physically active while also having the opportunity to be social with friends and like-minded individuals in a positive environment to be a motivator to sustaining a membership in a CFF and concomitantly their PA routine. This desire was also mentioned by a few of the less active participants across two of the three focus groups. For these reasons it is suggested that management of a CFF requires staff to create a sense of community with not only the “regulars” but also give equal recognition to those members who are less active or do not use the facility on a regular basis. Properly trained staff who have clear benchmarks for quality customer service to strive towards will be better able to create a sense of community and a welcoming environment for all members. Participants in this study reported enjoying it when they received a warm and sincere welcome and recognition upon entering and exiting the CFF; it made them feel as though they were a part of something worthwhile and also made them want to come back. This sentiment has been confirmed by research from France that showed that a customer’s relationship with staff of a fitness facility had a positive direct effect on his/her intention to re-purchase their annual membership (Ferrand, Robinson, & Valette-Florence, 2010). It is also suggested that a CFF employ caretaking staff for the sole purpose of maintaining an aesthetically appealing and clean facility as well as fixing broken equipment in a timely manner. Having an aesthetically appealing and clean environment was something that both segmented groups identified as a facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF.

With regard to the perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF that the participants in this study discussed, there was a focus on the cost of the membership and additional services. Active and less active participants mentioned that they would like to see more payment options, though the less active participants discussed this barrier in more detail. This could be due to the higher annual household income of the active participants of this study compared to the less active participants, and might shed light on why pay-per-use options were discussed more commonly in the less active focus groups. It was also mentioned by both segmented groups that having access to daycare and personal training services without a substantial additional cost, would alleviate the burden of the overall cost of sustaining a membership in a CFF. Furthermore, participants across the active and less active groups reported that aggressive sales tactics were also a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. The participants in this study suggested that such aggressive sales tactics were not a motivator to financial investment in a CFF and if they wanted to sign up for a membership or a personal training package, they would do so based on their own motivation and not from being coerced into any contract.

Given these results, one possible intervention incentive that health-focused policy makers might make would be through the use of market enticements that promote healthy behaviour such as the proposed adult fitness tax credit. The adult fitness tax credit, as it was proposed in 2007, would allow Canadians to claim a non-refundable tax credit of up to \$500 for eligible PA programs (Fitness Industry Council of Canada, 2007). Based on a report from the Centre for Spatial Economics the Canadian healthcare system could save \$625 million over five years as a result of the tax credit, making this approach favourable from an economic perspective alone. Health incentives in the form of tax credits for PA and other healthy behaviours have been

supported by a number of organizations such as the World Health Organization, the Canadian Diabetes Association, ParticipAction, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (Fitness Industry Council of Canada, 2007).

The findings from the present study suggest that one perceived barrier to a CFF membership among this segmented group of women is cost. The proposed adult fitness tax credit might make a membership more financially feasible for women aged 35 - 55 and might alleviate some of the perceived barriers to sustaining a CFF membership through increasing access to a structured environment for PA like a CFF. It has been suggested by the supporters of the adult fitness tax credit that the increased participation in structured PA would increase the number of individuals who are physically active and have a population health effect of preventing non-communicable diseases (Fitness Industry Council of Canada, 2007). Furthermore, by alleviating some of the financial barriers to a CFF membership, it might be possible for less active women to purchase additional services such as a personal trainer and/or daycare. Having support in the form of a personal trainer could help combat the barrier of perceiving there to be a lack of support in the CFF setting and make the environment less intimidating, all while helping the individual achieve her health and fitness goals. Having the opportunity to be able to financially afford daycare services could also help diminish the impact of the perceived barrier of having to pay extra for daycare service in addition to the membership. This would help by making a membership more convenient to use in that women with young children would have someone to supervise their child(ren) while they exercise. Though this study's findings support the use of tax (and potentially other financial) incentives by making a CFF membership more feasible, more research is needed on the actual health benefits of holding a CFF membership and whether or not providing market incentives for healthy behaviour would

be effective in helping individuals sustain a membership in a CFF before such an approach is taken.

Both active and less active participants in this study cited personal commitments, family responsibilities, schedule conflicts, and lacking motivation as barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Active participants spoke about their motivation to work around the barrier titled *personal/life commitments and motivation* in order to maintain consistent in their PA routine, whereas the less active participants perceived this barrier to be a major deterrent to a CFF membership and PA routine because they did not have the motivation to work around this barrier. One suggestion from the less active participants was that staff could follow up with them if they noticed that patrons have not checked in to use their membership in a while. Having this support was believed to help keep them more consistent with their PA routine and also showed members that staff cared more than what was perceived; the findings of this study show this boosted support factor would facilitate the sustainment of a membership.

Given that the barrier, *personal/life commitments and motivation* for the less active participants was a major deterrent identified in this study, it would be beneficial for CFF to hire staff with knowledge of exercise psychology and behaviour change to help less active members make exercise a habit. Research by Melton, Dail, Katula, and Mustian (2010) established that managers of personal trainers in both the private and public fitness facility setting are concerned with hiring personal trainers who are educated and knowledgeable in behaviour change and have the social skills needed to make exercise enjoyable for their clients. Through having staff on hand that are sociable and knowledgeable in exercise behaviour, CFFs will be better able to accommodate the needs of less active members and potentially support them in whatever way they need particular to the members' motivation to make change.

Participants across the segmented groups of this study discussed the shared perspective that the CFF setting was intimidating and some participants admitted feeling self-conscious in that environment. This was again a barrier that was evidently more of a deterrent to the less active participants than it was to the active participants because of the way the active participants were able to overlook and overcome this potential barrier and the less active participants were not. Participants identified staff that was unfriendly and/or patronizing created an intimidating environment and led to increased self-consciousness. Participants in the less active focus groups also commented on feeling intimidated or self-conscious because there was a lack of privacy, women's only space within co-ed facilities, and too many mirrors within the CFF setting. It would be beneficial for management of CFFs to ensure that staff is doing everything possible to make the environment less intimidating for women aged 35 – 55 considering that this demographic make up a significant proportion of the population who hold memberships in a CFF (noted previously in this paper).

The recommendations presented above regarding increasing and improving the formal support from staff and making the CFF environment more welcoming and friendlier could help reduce the impact of the environment being perceived as intimidating. Focusing more on the needs of women aged 35 – 55 through these two specific recommendations could make a CFF membership more appealing to less active women and allow them to feel like part of the community. Furthermore, the less active women in this study spoke about feeling intimidated or self-conscious around younger or more fit members. These findings are similar to the results of previous research from Australia that found perceived access to public and CFFs were lowest amongst sedentary adult men and women because of previous negative experiences which led them to believe that fitness facilities were for younger or more fit individuals than themselves

(Corti, Donovan, Castine, Holman, & Shilton, 1995; Corti et al., 1996). Furthermore, getting to know names and giving recognition to less active members and creating a sense of community that extends to all members as also mentioned above would be beneficial in diminishing the impact of the barrier titled *intimidating environment* has on less active women. Also mentioned above was the recommendation to focus advertisements on the health benefits of PA rather than an appearance focus, as this could also help those with body image concerns and those who may feel self-conscious in the CFF setting. Receiving more privacy through having less mirrors and more women's only space is something that the participants in the less active groups suggested would make the environment less intimidating. The findings pertaining to a CFF being perceived as intimidating and provoking feelings of self-consciousness are concerning when considering the research presented below that adds to the understanding of how fitness facilities and fitness professionals can negatively impact body image within this setting.

Research by Phillips and Drummond (2001) has shown that male personal trainers are highly conscious of their own physical appearance, are concerned with the ability to perform physical activity well and desire low body fat levels for themselves, and that these attributes are then transferred to their clients within a fitness facility. Research from England found a strong anti-fat bias amongst fitness professionals and regular exercisers within fitness facilities (Robertson & Vohora, 2008). The anti-fat bias was strongest amongst the fitness professionals and female regular exercisers. The shared perspective among the less active participants that more privacy and fewer mirrors were needed in order for them to feel less self-conscious has been confirmed by prior research. Martin-Ginis, Burke, and Gauvin (2007) found that the women who exercised with others in a mirrored environment had increased feelings of self-consciousness compared to the women in the study who exercised alone with, or without mirrors.

These findings along with the results of this study are of concern when considering that fitness professionals, the beliefs of regular exercisers within a fitness facility, and the way a CFF is structured may compromise the effort to combat physical inactivity in those who are less active, overweight, and/or personally have negative body image perceptions.

With regards to the barrier titled *crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities*, participants across the segmented focus groups discussed how a facility that was perceived to be too busy, dirty, and lacked equipment, daycare service, and professional/certified staff was undesirable. To overcome this barrier, participants suggested that CFFs have: a daycare service that focused on getting children physically active; extra support staff available during busy times of the day (after work hours) and during busy times of the year (January); caretaking staff that could fix equipment and keep the facility clean; and certified group fitness instructors and personal trainers.

Less active participants engaged in dialog that created an additional fifth theme for their perceived barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF. The participants mentioned that having a lack of support with their progress and goals and a lack of programs for their current physical fitness abilities was a barrier to sustaining a membership. Less active participants also discussed not having a workout partner to meet them at the gym as a barrier to sustaining a membership. The recommendations discussed above regarding the facilitator of wanting more support with progress and goals would help alleviate the negative impact the barrier titled *lack of support and programs for ability* has on less active women. Specifically, having a more personalized or hands-on approach within group exercise classes would be a form of support that might help less active women try different exercise programs that they perceive to be outside of their scope of ability and potentially stick with a program that resonates with them and allows them to achieve

their desired health and fitness goals. These findings are similar to that of research already mentioned above that found that less active individuals believed that fitness facilities were for people who were more fit than they were and were deterred from joining a fitness facility because they perceived that they could not keep up in group exercise classes (Corti et al., 1996). Other research found that exercise self-efficacy was influenced by environmental, cognitive, and social variables, such as support available and convenience of using a fitness facility (Hofesetter, Hovell, & Sallis, 1990). The findings from this study and those from previous research suggest that less active women may have lower exercise self-efficacy in the CFF setting. This could explain the perspective of the less active women in the present study that there are a lack of programs for their current physical fitness skills and abilities, and their desire to receive more support than they have previously experienced in order to facilitate.

With regard to the perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF, the active and less active participants in this study believed the increased accountability and consistency in their PA routine they have experienced through holding a membership in a CFF allowed them to more easily attain the health benefits associated with regular PA. The participants also believed that exercising in a venue that is created for exercise motivated them to exercise at higher levels of intensity than they would on their own or in other venues for PA and exercise. Participants also identified that having a structured environment that was accessible year round to be beneficial in a country like Canada as they mentioned that it was hard to stay consistent in their PA routine during the winter months when the weather was not conducive for PA outdoors. For this reason, it is important for the CFF industry to address the barriers identified above by both the active and less active women should they want to be better equipped to lessen physical inactivity in Canada for women ages 35 – 55 and create a space for PA that is

perceived as accessible to all. By decreasing the barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF, it is possible for a greater number of women to realize the health benefits of PA through sustaining a membership in a space that is designed for PA and was perceived by the women in this study to help them stay consistent with exercise and accountable to their PA routine.

Participants in this study mentioned having access to support from certified professionals as a health benefit of sustaining a membership in a CFF. Having access to support was perceived to be a health benefit unique to the fitness facility setting because the women in this study believed that exercise was safer and there was less chance of getting injured while exercising within a CFF when there was access to professionals. Participants across the segmented focus groups also mentioned that it was not known whether a CFF hired staff (group fitness instructors and personal trainers) that were certified by a credible certifying organization or had an exercise science background through a college or university program. Having uncertified staff or not knowing the difference between the quality of the different certifications that staff possess were elements of the barriers mentioned above, *crowded facilities and/or lack of amenities* and *lack of support and programs for ability*.

For this reason, it is important for more regulation of personal training and group fitness instructor certifying bodies to occur in order to create more standardization in education and training of fitness professionals and to promote best practices and professional codes of conduct among fitness professionals. This would be beneficial information that could then be conveyed to the consumer who is interested in attaining such information when deciding what CFF or fitness professional is right for them. The findings from this study suggest that in-house training and education of fitness professionals is not enough to meet the needs of women ages 35 – 55 as the quality of the training is unknown and was perceived to be done by incurring very little

expense in order to keep operating costs low for the CFF. It is inferred from the findings that increased regulation of certifying organizations for fitness professionals would result in providing the caliber of support women in this study desired in order to make them feel comfortable and provide them with the peace of mind that they were exercising safely and limiting their risk of injury.

Lastly, with regard to the themes *maintenance and prevention* and *holistic health*, participants across the segmented groups discussed the unique ability of a CFF membership to allow them to acquire the physical, mental, and emotional health benefits of PA all under one roof. There was specific attention to a CFF membership's potential to assist in maintaining and improving physical strength, endurance, a healthy weight, and physical functioning, while also preventing physical degeneration, and poor mental health by having a place for stress relief. Researchers have discovered similar results in a study that found people were attracted to their fitness facility because of the psychological, health, and physical fitness benefits realized from such a membership (Hanlon, Morris, & Nabbs, 2010). Given these perceived health benefits, it is suggested that health promoters and health professionals, such as family physicians and nurses, increase their awareness of the perceived and actual health benefits, facilitators, and barriers to sustaining a membership in a CFF if they desire to give effective advice on increasing PA with the goal of improving the health of women aged 35 – 55 through the attainment of a CFF membership.

Limitations

Although findings from this study revealed important and useful knowledge that can be utilized to better understand the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a CFF membership amongst women aged 35 – 55, there are limitations that need to be addressed.

First, the use of only one data collection method provides room for bias and inaccuracy to develop within this qualitative study. Strategies were utilized to enhance the trustworthiness of the data such as member checking, peer debriefing, consistent observation, multiple coders, and reflexive journaling; nevertheless, bias was still possible. Participant recruitment was also a challenge due to poor weather on the scheduled dates of two of focus groups; this resulted in having to reschedule one of the groups, and many participants were not able to reschedule. The other focus group was not cancelled but only three participants were able to make it in to their scheduled focus group. For these reasons, two focus groups had to run with only three participants in them. Also one of the female moderators was unable to attend one of the focus groups and for this reason the male primary researcher had to fill in as group leader. Having a male present was not believed to impact the quality of the data collected by either the primary researcher or female moderator in attendance. With regard to the sample selected for this study, participants self-identified as either meeting or exceeding Canada's PA guidelines or not meeting/exceeding them in order to be placed into the appropriate segmented focus group. Thus, there is the possibility of mis-placing a participant into the wrong group, which could impact the findings of this study. The primary researcher took measures to counter this potential limitation by defining Canada's PA guidelines over the phone during first contact. Another limitation of this study was that the findings are specific to the commercial setting and are not applicable to the public fitness facility setting. With regard to the demographic data collected from the participants of this study, there were two small differences, which could account for some of the differences between the active and less active groups. The less active participants had a slightly lower annual household income and a slightly higher BMI (see Table 1). This is worth noting as household income and BMI have been shown to impact the perceived access to a fitness facility,

and a BMI that classifies an individual as overweight has been shown to impact the attitudes towards exercise in a fitness facility (Kruger et al., 2007; Miller & Miller, 2010). However, though the BMI of the less active group was higher than the active focus group, both groups, on average, had a BMI of over 25, which classifies both groups as overweight. Due to the nature of qualitative research and the sampling method utilized, the participants in the current study volunteered to be in the focus group and are therefore not representative of all women in the 35 – 55 year old cohort. Therefore, views presented by focus group participants may not be representative of all of the target population. Therefore, it is essential that further research is conducted that can corroborate and expand upon the knowledge gained in this study.

Regardless of the limitations, the current study provides important detailed information about the facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF amongst this group of active and less active women aged 35 – 55. The information gained from the active focus groups provides insight into: what facilitates the use of this venue that is created for PA and is increasing in popularity as a way to maintain or increase PA as one ages; what barriers are present and how they are overcome in order to stay physically active and sustain a membership in a CFF; and what the perceived health benefits of a CFF are in comparison to other forms of PA and venues for exercise. The information gained from the less active focus groups provides insight into: what facilitates and what would facilitate the sustained use of a membership; what barriers exist to this venue amongst individuals who would benefit from an increase in PA; and what the perceived health benefits of a CFF are in comparison to other forms of PA and venues for exercise. Furthermore, the knowledge gained through this study can be used by health promoters to increase the number of women aged 35 – 55 who meet Canada's PA guidelines. This is the first study known by the researcher to document the perceived facilitators, barriers,

and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a privately owned or commercial fitness facility and the first study to provide knowledge on the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a Canadian context.

Recommendations

Given the results of this study recommendations are given below that can be carried out by the CFF industry, policy makers, health promoters, and health professionals for the purpose of increasing PA amongst the 35 – 55 year old female demographic. Specifically, the results of this study are beneficial for the CFF industry in their efforts to combat physical inactivity through better accommodating the needs of both active and less active 35 – 55 year old women. The following recommendations are specific to the research community that seeks to advance the knowledge gained from the current study. First, further qualitative research into the perspectives of other female age cohorts (younger adults and older adults) would provide in-depth knowledge that would be beneficial in understanding how the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF change throughout different stages of life. This would be beneficial research that would complement this study in that a better understanding would be obtained and used in increasing PA levels amongst inactive or sedentary women throughout the stages of life. In addition to repeating this study for other female age cohorts, it would also be beneficial to repeat this study using male participants in order to obtain a better understanding of men's perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership with the goal of increasing PA in that population via membership in a CFF.

With regard to the current study's focus on strictly the privately owned or CFF, it would be beneficial for future research to compare the similarities and differences between publicly owned facilities and private or CFFs. Given that some of the participants in the less active focus

groups discussed that in their experience, a publicly owned and operated fitness facility was more favourable and preferred over a commercial facility, there could be an increased likelihood of effectively increasing PA through more research on both types of facilities and the promotion of either facility as some individuals might favour one over the other. Further research also might compare different target populations' perspectives of the CFF setting by designing studies using homogeneous samples based on BMI and socio-economic status within both public and private/commercially owned fitness facilities. This is important in light of the literature reviewed which suggested that BMI, highest level of education attained, and annual household income have an impact on the attitudes towards structured exercise programs and/or fitness facilities.

With regard to the high rates of physical inactivity in Canada and the negative impact that these rates are believed to have on population health and the economic burden it has been shown to have on the Canadian healthcare system, more research is needed that compares the perceived health benefits of different forms of PA and venues for exercise used by varying age and gender segments if health promoters are going to be optimally and/or highly successful in creating awareness of the different avenues available to increase PA and obtain the associated health benefits. Furthermore, research is needed to see if there is an actual health benefit to sustaining a membership in a CFF in comparison to other forms of PA and venues for exercise. Considering the participants in this study all perceived there were health benefits to sustaining a membership, having data that confirms that there are actual health benefits of sustaining a membership could assist and direct the actions of policy makers, health professionals, and health promoters in the campaign to increase PA to improve personal and population health.

In regards to the findings concerning a CFF being perceived as intimidating and

provoking feelings of self-consciousness by both the active and less active participants of this study, more research is needed on whether or not the CFF environment does in fact have a negative impact on mental health, body image issues, and social physique anxiety. Moreover, the less active participants perceived that there was a lack of support and programs for their current physical fitness abilities which added to the CFF environment being intimidating and made less active participants in this study feel more self-conscious. For this reason, more research is needed that specifically targets less active women and looks at the negative impact the CFF setting can have on mental health, body image issues, social physique anxiety, and exercise self-efficacy. Through researching these perceived barriers in more detail, steps might be taken to remove or decrease the impact these barriers can have and ultimately make exercise in a CFF more attractive and accessible to active and less active individuals.

Participants across focus groups spoke in depth about the support they received from certified group fitness instructors and personal trainers as an important facilitator to sustaining a membership in a CFF. Having a lack of professional certified staff was also mentioned by both segmented groups in this study as a barrier to sustaining a membership in a CFF. The less active participants stated that they would like more support in the CFF setting from staff, and both groups discussed having more access to a certified personal trainer without having to pay extra for this service. For this reason, further research is recommended into the effect a certified group fitness instructor and certified personal trainer can have on less active women. Future research could focus on the impact a certified fitness professional can have on exercise adherence, exercise self-efficacy, social physique anxiety, perceived facilitators and barriers to working with a personal trainer, and the actual health benefits realized from working with a certified fitness professional.

The purpose of this study was to gain in depth knowledge on the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF amongst women between the ages 35 – 55 who meet Canada’s physical activity guidelines and those who do not. This present study identified important distinctions among factors that were perceived to facilitate, be barriers to, and/or might benefit the health of both active and less active women in the context of PA in the CFF setting. Less active women shared the perspective that a CFF could offer more support with their progress and goals and have a staff and environment that is more welcoming and friendlier as this would better facilitate the sustained use of a CFF membership for them. Both active and less active women believed personal health and having a variety of equipment, services, and programs from which to choose to be a facilitator of sustaining a membership in a CFF. The extent to which the barriers identified in this study actually resulted in the cancellation or discontinued use of a CFF membership were dependent upon the individual; however, most active individuals had the desire and ability to develop strategies to overcome these barriers and the less active did not. Both groups shared similar perceived barriers to sustaining a CFF membership. These included issues with cost and sales staff; other life commitments and personal motivation; feeling intimidated and self-conscious; and a busy facility with a lack of amenities. The less active participants identified more perceived barriers and this was underscored by the establishment of an additional theme focusing on their perceived lack of support and programs for their current physical fitness abilities. Important perceived health benefits of sustaining a membership in a CFF existed for both active and less active participants in this study. Both groups believed that through sustaining a membership in a CFF they were better able to achieve/manage their physical and mental health, and receive support enabling them to exercise safely while staying more consistent with exercise and accountable to their

overall PA routine. Active participants perceived that there were more health benefits associated with sustaining a membership because of the variety of equipment, services, and programs available to them as their health and fitness goals changed as they grew older.

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Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Notice



**Western
Research**

Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Initial Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Donald Morrow
 File Number:104579
 Review Level:Delegated
 Protocol Title:Middle-Aged Women's Perceived Facilitators, Barriers, and Health Benefits of Membership in a Commercial Fitness Facility
 Department & Institution:Health Sciences/Kinesiology,Western University
 Sponsor:
 Ethics Approval Date:December 04, 2013 Expiry Date:April 01, 2014
 Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Letter of Information & Consent	Consent form to be attached to the back of the Letter of Information	
Instruments	Semi-structured interview guide.	
Western University Protocol		
Recruitment Items	Revised recruitment email	
Recruitment Items	Reminder email revised	
Instruments	Script for Commencing Each Focus Group	
Instruments	Screening Form	
Advertisement	Revised Poster for Recruitment	
Revised Letter of Information & Consent		2013/11/15
Instruments	Updated demographic form	

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Health Sciences Research Involving Human Subjects (HSREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the Health Canada/CH Good Clinical Practice Practices: Consolidated Guidelines; and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has reviewed and granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above. The membership of this REB also complies with the membership requirements for REB's as defined in Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations.

The ethics approval for this study shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the HSREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the University of Western Ontario Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the HSREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the HSREB.

The Chair of the HSREB is Dr. Joseph Gilbert. The HSREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000940.

Signature _____

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

_____ Erika Basile (ebasile@uwo.ca)	_____ Grace Kelly (grace.kelly@uwo.ca)	_____ Mina Mekhail (mmekhail@uwo.ca)	_____ Vikki Tran (vikki.tran@uwo.ca)
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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150
 London, ON, Canada N6A 3K7 t. 519.661.3036 f. 519.850.2466 www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics

Appendix 2: Places for Recruitment Poster Placing

Commercial Fitness Facilities and Other Fitness Facilities

- Anytime Fitness
- Definitions Fitness
- Tru Fitness
- Empower Fitness
- Rebirth Wellness
- Karma Yoga Studio

Stores, Markets, and Local Organizations

- Remark Fresh Markets
- The Real Canadian Super Store
- No Frills
- The Western Fair Farmers Market
- Covent Garden Market
- Naturopathy London
- Quarter Masters Health Food Store
- Eat Green Organics
- Organic Works Bakery
- The Meatless Market
- The Running Room
- New Balance
- All London Public Library locations

Health Professionals Offices

- Dr. Hardick Chiropractic Office
- Campbell Chiropractic Centre
- Café of Life Chiropractic Centre
- Forest City Naturopathic Office
- Trust in the Process

Appendix 3: Recruitment Poster

Women's Perceived Facilitators and Barriers of Membership in a Commercial Fitness Facility

Researchers at *Western University* will be conducting research to understand the perceived benefits, facilitators and barriers of membership to a commercial fitness facility amongst middle-aged women. This study will take place at *Western University* and involve being a participant in a focus group discussion. The focus group session will be 90 minutes and facilitated by a moderator to guide the group's discussion relevant to the participant's personal experiences in the commercial fitness facility setting. Compensation will be provided for your time.

If you are interested in participating in this research and can answer YES to the following 4 questions, the research team would like to hear from you.

Are you female age 35 – 55?

Do you speak English fluently?

Do you have transportation to Western University?

Are you presently or have you been a member of a commercial fitness facility in the past?

For more information or to express your interest please contact the researcher below.

Shawn Slade
Health & Rehabilitation Sciences – Health Promotion
Western University
London Ontario
Ph.
Em.

Appendix 4: Email and Newsletter Script for Recruitment

Subject Line: Women's perceived benefits of a fitness facility study! Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study that, Dr. Don Morrow and Shawn Slade, are conducting. Briefly, the study involves gaining a deeper understanding of the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of membership in a commercial fitness facility amongst middle-aged women. Female participants (ages 35-55) will be asked to share their personal experience in the commercial fitness facility setting within a focus group of 6 to 8 of their peers with similar physical activity levels. The focus group discussion will run for 90 minutes and be located at Western University. Compensation will be provided for your time.

If you would like more information on this study or would like to receive a letter of information about this study please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

You can also view the Facebook page created for this study at www.facebook.com/womensperspectives

Thank you,

Shawn Slade

Hons. B. Comm., B.A.

M.Sc. Candidate 2014, Health & Rehabilitation Science – Health Promotion

Western University

E.

P.

Appendix 5: Screening Form Used During First Contact

NAME : _____

PHONE NUMBER : _____

EMAIL : _____

1. Are you between the ages of 35 and 55? _____
2. What is the month and year you were born? _____
3. Are you a current member of a commercial fitness facility¹? _____
 - a. If no, have you previously been a member of a commercial fitness facility?

 - b. If yes to above, how long did you hold your membership in a commercial fitness facility? _____
 - c. How long has it been since you held a membership in a commercial fitness facility? _____
 - d. Do you have perceived easy access to a commercial fitness facility? _____
(This is location and transportation)
4. Do you speak English as a first language? _____
5. Do you have transportation to Western University? _____

¹A commercial fitness facility is operationally defined as either a low or high-end facility with a business structure that is either, a sole-proprietorship, partnership, franchise, and private or publicly owned corporation. A low-end facility is defined as having standard amenities such as, cardiovascular and resistance training equipment, free weights, group exercise classes, personal training and a locker room and shower area. The amount of these standard amenities may vary by gym. A higher-end facility may include a spa and childcare services, full sized gymnasiums and/or pools, retail area and a juice/snack bar. Examples of Canadian CFF are, GoodLife Fitness, The Athletic Club, Curves, and Gold's Gym, to name a few.

6. What is your current level of physical activity? (Indicate which applies best to you.)

____ I exercise 150 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity a week. This should be in bouts equal or greater than 10 minutes and include muscle or bone strengthening activities 2 days a week.²

____ I exercise less than 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a week.

____ I am sedentary most of the week and have periods of prolonged sitting, watching television, playing passive video or computer games, time spent on a computer, or motorized transportation.

7. How long have you been at this level of physical activity? _____

Eligible to participate in the study: YES NO

Dates participant cannot commit to: _____

Date of focus group: _____

² Moderate-intensity physical activity is defined as a rate of personal perceived exertion that is usually a 5 or 6 on a scale of 10. If you are doing moderate-intensity activity you can talk, but not sing your favourite song, during the activity and you are working hard enough to raise your heart rate. Vigorous-intensity physical activity is defined as a rate of personal perceived exertion that is usually a 7 or 8 on a scale of 10. If you are doing vigorous-intensity activity, you will not be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath. Your heart rate has gone up quite a bit.

Appendix 6: Letter of Information

Project Title: Adult Women's Perceived Facilitators, Barriers, and Health Benefits of Membership in a Commercial Fitness Facility

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Don Morrow, Health and Rehabilitation Science, Western University.
Contact Info: Em., Ph.

Letter of Information

1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this research study which involves gaining a deeper understanding of the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of membership in a commercial fitness facility amongst middle-aged women. You are being asked to participate because you are a female between the ages of 35 and 55 and you have personal experience in the commercial fitness facility setting that is of value in answering the research question central to the purpose of this study.

2. Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

3. Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of membership in a commercial fitness facility amongst middle-aged women who meet Canada's physical activity guidelines and those who do not. By specifically focusing on middle-aged women's perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits to membership in a commercial fitness facility, knowledge will be gained on an important group of people that has been shown to have increased barriers to physical activity and has reported more barriers to using fitness facilities than other groups of people.

4. Inclusion Criteria

Individuals who are female, between the ages of 35 and 55, current or past members of a commercial fitness facility, presently have access to a commercial fitness facility, speak English fluently, and have transportation to Western University for a 90 minute focus group session are eligible to participate in this study.

5. Exclusion Criteria

Since the purpose of this proposed research study is to explore middle-aged women and their experiences pertaining to the commercial fitness facility setting, the exclusion criteria for this study include men of all ages, women 34 years of age and under, and women aged 56 and over. Only having past or present membership in a public fitness facility such as, YMCA, community recreation centre, and hospital-based fitness facility, also meets the exclusion criteria for this study. Only having past experience in community or privately run physical activity programs (bootcamps, learn-to-run groups, etc.) or experience working with a personal trainer outside a CFF are grounds for exclusion.

6. Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to self-report your demographic information. Demographic information will include: your body weight and height (in order to determine Body Mass Index, an important variable in this study); annual household income range, and highest level of education completed. This step of the study is likely to be 15 minutes. For the focus group discussion you will be asked to engage in a group discussion with six to eight other women who have a similar level of physical activity. A female researcher will lead the discussion to ensure the group stays focused on answering the questions central to the study. This step of the study will take up to 100 minutes to complete. Up to 90 minutes for the focus group discussion and a 10 minute break in the middle of the focus group. The focus group will conclude with a 5 minute debriefing and presentation of compensation at the end of the discussion.

It is anticipated that the entire task will take up to two hours of each participant's time. The focus groups will be conducted at Western University. There will be a total of up to 48 participants placed into 6 groups with a mix of individuals from the city of London and neighbouring communities of South Western Ontario.

7. Possible Risks and Harms

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

8. Possible Benefits

The possible benefits to participants may be empowerment from the focus group method. This can be achieved through participants developing a particular perspective as a result of talking with other people with similar experiences. The discussion might move an individual from self-blaming and interpersonal explanations for her experience to a more external exploration of social and structural explanations of her experience. Participants can also provide mutual support in expressing feelings that are common to their group but might deviate from other groups.

The information gathered will provide benefits to society as a whole, especially to women of your age grouping; such information might include a better understanding of your group, one that has been shown to have increased barriers to physical activity and more reported barriers to the use of fitness facilities than other demographic cohorts (i.e., men and young women). The perspective of the middle age female demographic is also important to understand because of the ever-increasing amount of women who report using a commercial fitness facility to acquire health-related benefits, especially as one ages. Moreover, physical inactivity is associated with an increase in co-morbidities of disease and obesity. Knowledge gained about barriers and facilitators to physical activity might help lessen the detrimental effects of inactivity on the individual and society (e.g. healthcare spending). Segmenting groups by physical activity level will allow the researchers to be able to identify differences and similarities between groups that could direct subsequent research. The information gathered also has the potential to aid policy makers and organizations in creating physical activity health promotion programs. In addition, the study might inform fitness industry personnel on how they can better serve women, which make up an increasing majority of fitness facility membership.

9. Compensation

You will be compensated with a \$10 Subway Restaurant gift card for your participation in this study and reimbursed \$5 cash for parking costs that you incur at Western University parking lots.

10. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

11. Confidentiality

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. The data (demographic information, audio, video, and transcribed discussion's) will be stored on a laptop computer which only the research team can access with a passcode. Audio and video recordings will be reviewed only by members of the research team and they will be destroyed after 2 years. If the results are published, your name will not be used. During the initial creation of the transcripts your name will be removed and replaced with a pseudonym. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. Representatives of the Western University Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

12. Contacts for Further Information

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Shawn Slade, or Dr. Don Morrow.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics.

13. Publication

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Shawn Slade.

14. Consent

Your signature on the written consent form that follows this letter will indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix 7: Consent Form

Project Title: Women's Perceived Facilitators and Barriers of Membership in a Commercial Fitness Facility

Study Investigator's Name: Dr. Don Morrow, Shawn Slade

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 8: Demographic Form**Note : All information on this form is kept in strict confidence.**

8. What is your body weight in:

a. Lbs. _____

b. kg _____

9. What is your height in:

a. Feet _____ Inches _____

b. m/cm _____

10. What is your annual household income range? \$0 - \$30,000

\$30,001 - \$60,000

\$60,001 - \$90,000

\$90,001 - \$120,000

\$120,001 - \$150,000

\$150,001+

11. What is your highest level of education completed? _____

FOR RESEARCHER USE ONLY:

BMI (calculated by dividing body weight in pounds by height in inches squared and multiplying that number by the conversion factor of 703): _____

Appendix 9: Script for Commencing Each Focus Group

Note: This will be read by the moderator at the beginning of each focus group.

Hello and welcome,

First the research team would like to thank you all for taking the time out of your day to share your experience with us. My name is (*moderators will introduce themselves personally.*) and we will be the focus group moderators today.

The research team values your opinion and it is the purpose of today to share your opinions about and experiences regarding the commercial fitness facility setting with each other. The moderating team will be here to guide and encourage discussion amongst the group, as it is the group discussion and interaction that is important in this study. It is also the role of the moderators to make sure everyone has an equal chance to voice their opinions and stories in a comfortable, nurturing environment. You do not have to answer any question with which you do not feel comfortable. You have been given a copy of the letter of information that highlights all the information pertaining to the study. If you have any questions after today is over please direct them to Dr. Don Morrow or Shawn Slade at the contact information provided on the letter of information.

I will now read a section from the letter of information regarding the purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is to understand the perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits of membership in a commercial fitness facility amongst middle-aged women who meet Canada's physical activity guidelines and those who do not. By specifically focusing on middle-aged women's perceived facilitators, barriers, and health benefits to membership in a commercial fitness facility, knowledge will be gained on an important group of people that has been shown to have increased barriers to physical activity and has reported more barrier's to using fitness facilities than other groups of people.

As a reminder we are speaking about the commercial fitness facility setting which is defined as either a low or high-end facility with a business structure that is either, a sole-proprietorship, partnership, franchise, and private or publicly owned corporation. A low-end facility is defined as having standard amenities such as, cardiovascular and resistance training equipment, free weights, group exercise classes, personal training and a locker room and shower area. The amount of these standard amenities may vary by gym. A higher-end facility may include a spa and childcare services, full sized gymnasiums and/or pools, retail area and a juice/snack bar. Examples of Canadian CFF are, GoodLife Fitness, The Athletic Club, Curves, and Gold's Gym, to name a few.

Should you need to use the washroom it is located (*indicate location*). We have bottles of water and light snacks on the table that you are welcome to at any time. We will not formally break at the halfway mark and should you need to be excused to use the washroom please do so; you do not need to ask. The focus group will consist of nine questions in total. The focus group will conclude with short debriefing at which time compensation for your participation will be provided to you. Are there any questions before we begin?

Appendix 10: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Opening Question (Short answer for everyone to open with)

1. Tell us your name, where you live and something you like to do when you are not being physically active or exercising?

Introductory Question (Short question to get everyone thinking about the phenomenon)

2. Based on your experience how would you describe a commercial fitness facility to a friend who has never been to one?

Transition Question (Helps participants become aware of how other participants view the topic)

3. What was your first experience with a commercial fitness facility like?
4. Tell us about your current involvement with commercial fitness facilities and where it fits in with your physical activity program?

Key Question³ (Question that drives study and analysis, allow time for answers and use probes that uncover why and how participants have attitudes they do)

5. Please share your perceived facilitators (things that make it easier or motivate you) to using a membership in a commercial fitness facility?
6. Please share your perceived barriers (things that make it difficult or de-motivate you) to using a membership in a commercial fitness facility?
7. What do you perceive the health-related benefits of membership in a commercial fitness facility to be in comparison to other venues for PA?
8. What are the health-related pros and cons of carrying out physical activity in a commercial fitness facility in comparison to other settings and forms of physical activity?

Ending Question (Allows reflection on all questions and important to analysis)

9. All things considered, what do you feel are the primary benefits of holding a membership on a CFF.

³ Key questions and ending question are the primary questions used in data analysis. Transition questions can also be used but is not the purpose of these questions.

Curriculum Vitae

Shawn Michael Thomas Slade

Academic Information

Masters of Science

The University of Western Ontario – London, Ontario 2012 – 2014 Candidate

- Health Promotion Field
- Master's Thesis – Adult Women's Perceived Facilitators, Barriers, and Health Benefits of Sustaining a Membership in a Commercial Fitness Facility

Bachelor of Arts – Political Science

The University of Windsor — Windsor, Ontario 2007 – 2008

- Concentrated in Political Economy of Agriculture and Food

Honours Bachelor of Commerce – Odette School of Business

The University of Windsor — Windsor, Ontario 2002 – 2004

- Concentrated in Management and Labour Studies – Minor Economics

Related Teaching and Academic Experience

EIMC Graduate Student President

Exercise is Medicine Canada at Western University – London, Ontario 2014 - Present

- Student Founder of Western Universities Exercise is Medicine Canada (EIMC) student club.
- Responsible for implementing the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology EIMC mission and vision on campus at Western University through the creation of an annual faculty, student, and research conference.

Pro Trainer (Instructor and Evaluator) – Nutrition and Weight Loss Course

Canfitpro – London, Ontario 2013 – Present

- Demonstrated ability to create and maintain a positive and nurturing team-learning environment for students while evaluating their progress with course objectives.
- Transferred knowledge of practical skills and best practices in nutrition and lifestyle coaching to aid students in their personal business goals and development.
- Required to incorporate a variety of teaching strategies to accommodate students learning styles.

Teaching Assistant & Guest Lecturer

University of Western Ontario – London, Ontario Fall 2012 & 2013

- Created and evaluated group work, term papers, and exams for *Health Policy HS3400* for two consecutive years.
- Guest lectured for teaching mentorship credit in *Health Policy HS3400*.
- Guest lectured for Graduate course in *Current Topics in Health Promotion HS9721*.
- Required to proctor exams within the Department of Health Science.

Related Work/Volunteer Experience

Certified Strength and Holistic Lifestyle Coach

The SHAPE Coach, Sole-proprietorship – London, Ontario

2011 - Present

- Mission to educate and coach clients in one-on-one and small group setting with a goal of increasing the individuals control over their health and well-being through creation and supervision of exercise, nutrition, and lifestyle programs.
- Created and performed exercise, nutrition, and lifestyle assessments along with motivational interviewing techniques to set goals, affect behaviour change, and measure progress of clients.
- Successfully managed all administrative, marketing, and operating systems to carry out vision and mission of sole proprietorship.
- Created multiple educational seminars, lectures, and workshops for London area businesses, community events, and fitness facility members as a means of knowledge transfer in the area of fitness and health promotion.
- Demonstrated commitment to community involvement through facilitating delivery of Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) program to clients and facility members, working with *Growing Chef's Ontario*, mentoring part-time summer intern, and *GoodLife Kids Foundation Spin 4Kids Event*.

Assistant Fitness Manager/ Personal Trainer

GoodLife Fitness Clubs — London, Ontario

2009 - 2011

- Effectively managed team of personal trainers at the company's flagship club. Gained management experience from employer that has consecutively been named one of Canada's *50 best-managed companies*.
- Strengthened interpersonal skills through communicating with members, team of personal trainers, sales associates, and customer service representatives while responding to public inquiries with honesty and integrity.
- Developed and trained staff in setting personal business goals to achieve team sales objectives, and maximize monthly revenues.
- Member of Corporate Wellness Team involved in presenting and speaking at local businesses, trade shows, and community events. Actively fundraised for corporate charity, *GoodLife Kids Foundation*. *Quit and Get Fit* program administrator.
- Gained teaching experience as substitute instructor for *GoodLife Personal Training Institute (GLPTI)*.

Public Relations Management Intern

Essex Region Conservation Foundation – Essex, Ontario

January 2008 – June 2008

- Drafted business report through research and needs analysis, highlighting strategic direction to Senior Management and Board of Directors. The report supported the creation of a new administrative position within the organization to handle increases in workload.
- Coordinated fundraising initiatives by filling out grant applications and networking with external stakeholders, elected officials, sponsors, and community organizations.
- Developed media relations materials and assisted with event planning. Duties included drafting and editing media releases for local TV and newspaper aimed at promoting organizational mission, recruiting supporters and increasing community awareness and engagement.

Deputy Returning Officer/ Revising Agent

Elections Canada – Essex, Ontario

2004 & 2008

- Successfully managed and supervised staff at a busy polling station during Federal Election. Sworn in by the Canadian Government to administer Canada Elections Act and maintain the secrecy of constituencies' votes.
- Used unbiased personal discretion to resolve conflicts within electoral riding while maintaining a customer service focus.
- Revised and maintained confidential records of the Canadian electorate using spreadsheets, filing systems and other communication vehicles. Successfully completed training on customer service standards and Elections Canada tracking database.

Campaign Member for Essex Member of Parliament

Essex, Ontario

2006

- Assisted local MP in becoming re-elected through canvassing homes and attending fundraising events for the 2006 Federal election.

Conferences and Speaking Events

Healthy Mind Expo - Alzheimer's Society Windsor Ontario	2013
Health & Rehabilitation Science Graduate Research Symposium	2012
The SHAPE Coach Health and Fitness Promotion Seminar Series	2011-Present
Life By Design Seminar Series.	2011–2012
London Sports and Recreation Show	2011
Corporate Wellness Team - GoodLife Fitness	2009-2011

Publications

American College of Sport Medicine
Indianapolis, Indiana

Fit Pro-Travel – Teaching Vacations
Covinton, Kentucky

Awards and Recognitions

Canfitpro Fitness Professional of the Year – Runner up
Canfitpro – Toronto, Ontario 2013

Canfitpro Magazine Member Spotlight
Canfitpro – Toronto, Ontario January 2013

Consecutive Weeks Being Top Health Podcast on iTunes
The Outlaws of Health Show – London, Ontario 2012-2013

International Personal Trainers to Watch Finalist – Finished Top 3
Life Fitness & FitPro – Chanhassen, Minnesota 2012

GoodLife Fitness Top 500 Associate Recognition Award
GoodLife Fitness – Toronto, Ontario 2010

Technical Skills Summary

Microsoft Office Suite

QSR NVivo Qualitative Software

