

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation            GLOBAL CAPITALISM MEETS LOCAL  
  POSTCOMMUNISM: TENSIONS IN TRANSITION AS  
  MANIFESTED THROUGH PHYSICAL CULTURE AND  
  THE FEMALE BODY IN ROMANIA

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Nearly two decades after communism officially ended in Romania, the nation continues to struggle in its transition from state socialism to liberal democracy. The increased presence and influence of Western images, democratic ideals, and social ideologies produces a complex and unstable tension with persisting legacies of communism and socialist ideologies. This dissertation is a critical analysis of the ways in which various tensions are manifested within the changing physical culture in Romania, particularly through performative bodies and constructed spaces of leisure and physical activity. In addition, participation in sports and other physical activities related to fitness and health are examined to reveal disciplinary techniques that reinforce normalized constructions of gendered and classed bodies. Using a qualitative, multi-method approach, empirical data was primarily collected in gyms and fitness clubs of three major cities in Romania. Through a contextual, interpretive, and theoretically-informed analysis of the empirical findings, this project intends to expand upon and articulate theories of postcommunist transition, gender, and physical culture in the Eastern European context—opening new lines of inquiry that consider both the empowering and problematic implications of creating and negotiating new subject positions within postcommunist environments.

GLOBAL CAPITALISM MEETS LOCAL POSTCOMMUNISM:  
TENSIONS IN TRANSITION AS MANIFESTED THROUGH PHYSICAL CULTURE  
AND THE FEMALE BODY IN ROMANIA

by

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## DEDICATION

To my mom who has taught me so well.

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## Prologue: Why Romania?

### The invitation

I was first introduced to Romania by a good friend who volunteers her skills as a physical therapist to help rehabilitate disabled Romanian orphans. Sadly, these children have been abandoned and abused, and because of their disabilities have been deemed by the State as “irrecoverable”. These young children are a living legacy of the destruction and neglect Romania suffered under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Curious to see my friend in action in this far away place, and having never traveled to Eastern Europe, I gladly accepted the invitation to join her on her next trip. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this trip would trigger a deep sense of intrigue about the lives of Romanians, their struggles in coping with the legacies of communism and the effects of global capitalism and consumerism, their desire to break from memories of a dreary past while simultaneously longing for the security they once knew. As an athlete and kinesiology major, I wondered in particular about the role of the active body in constructing a particular identity in the transforming postcommunist society. This very first trip would ignite a barrage of questions that I felt needed to be explored; however, I would not come to fully realize the significance of these unexplored questions until I made my way back—twice—spending nearly six months living in three different Romanian cities and traveling to many more.

### Initial observations: Country, people, physical activity

Although the World Bank’s published statistics and country information are useful starting points to learn about Romania’s economy, political system, health care,

education, history, and topical geography, it is difficult to find more than cursory descriptions. The facts and figures do little justice to the unique character of this country that gets very little press time in the United States. Romania's landscape is a mixture of luscious green valleys, fertile farmland, and mountains situated around urban centers that contain well-groomed parks and commemorative squares with magnificent stone monuments and statues that pay tribute to only the most celebrated Romanian heroes. The mountains are a popular destination in the summer for hiking and camping and in the winter for skiing, while the Black Sea and other rivers and lakes are well attended by vacationers looking for a relaxing time by the water. The urban centers have shops filled with the latest European fashions. There are large, expensive malls boasting a wide selection of stores that carry a variety of consumer goods such as sportswear, furniture, books, jewelry, clothes, electronics, music, and houseware. In a country where the individual gross average earning in 2003 was 270 USD (exchange rate= 2.5 RON to 1 USD), 57.5% of which was required for food and utilities (INSSE, 2003), I wondered what purpose these Romanian "cathedrals of consumption" (Ritzer, 2001) served for the average citizen. Perhaps globalization has meant that where "the dissolution of social life, social interaction, and community in late capitalism is masked by the false unity of the attention-grabbing spectacle" (Ritzer, 2001, p. 183), so too is social life in postcommunism masked in like manner.

Just outside of the cities' centers are street markets where goods are priced much lower than those found at the mega malls and specialty shops. Vendors are closely lined up side-by-side and row-by-row, selling everything from toilet paper and socks to dress

shirts and chocolate. There are also food markets where local growers come to sell their fresh fruits and vegetables.

In stark contrast to the bright, well-maintained areas within the city centers are surrounding neighborhoods of bleak, cement apartment blocks, dilapidated buildings and buckling sidewalks, many of which have been left in disrepair due to a lack of sufficient government funding. There is an even greater contrast between the cities and the villages. Seemingly worlds apart—especially in the absence of suburban development—city limits and rural villages are oftentimes only separated by a few miles of bumpy roads. Characterized by unpaved dirt roads, old houses, ceramic walls, farmland, roaming cows and chickens, children running about, fruit trees, grape vines, and a general serenity, the villages represent the Old World, a preserve of Romanian tradition. The roads, left to form as nature sees fit, are only one aspect of village life that has escaped the attention of the transforming society. The houses are small and unassuming, and even the modest vegetable gardens have a simple air to them.

Upon closer examination, intricately woven curtains and fresh cut flowers dress the windows and balconies of homes in the city, adding color and life to an otherwise dull and grey reminder of Ceaușescu's systematization campaigns that forced families into the hastily built cement blocks. The apartment buildings embody the spirit of a people still attached to the legacies of communism, yet working to find an identity within the transforming society. Some villages present a fragmented image, a strange mix of old and new: satellite dishes atop deteriorating houses and apartments, farmers in the field talking on their cell phones. Indeed, the negotiation between past and present is visible and a

palpable tension is captured in the buildings that have become symbols of survivorship, family, and privacy.

Looking further into the social and cultural landscape, engaging the communities, the tensions are even more complicated. I met people steeped in tradition, so proud of their Romanian culture and heritage, yet struggling to find their place within a nation *itself* seeking to establish its identity within the global community. Without a sure sense of the identity of the nation, Romanians are working out how to construct community and individual identities. The current era of transition, change, and uncertainty has left open many questions related to survival and subsequently—I argue here—the emergence of a new identity (crisis).

#### National identity crisis: Pride or shame?

Romanians share a common struggle in negotiating national identity and individual identity because of the varied levels of approval and pride in the nation's cultural heritage, economic status, cultural development, and political reputation. On the one hand they may glow with a sense of pride in the rich Romanian culture that has survived through the generations. For example, children and adults enjoy traditional Romanian folk dances, either as participants or spectators, and many families still take the time in the summer to make their own fruit preserves and compotes to last them through the winter. On the other hand, Romanians are fully aware of the unmet needs of their nation's developing social and economic system and the consequent negative outside perceptions of their society. In this sense, there is a tendency to separate themselves from the failings of their government and politics, choosing rather to focus on

improving their individual status, health, and well-being. National identity thus encompasses a major contradiction because there is at once a movement to create identities that are separate from the poor economic status and unfavorable reputation of the country, yet a desire to preserve identification with the nation's history, traditions, and customs.

Negotiating individual and national identity in this instance is thus complicated as tensions continue to mount in terms of how Romanians position themselves in the rapidly transforming postcommunist society. What I argue is that the body in this instance—particularly the active body—plays a central role in the negotiation of these tensions as the critical site in which various forms of power and identity are constituted, articulated, and resisted to construct new postcommunist subjectivities.

## Introduction: New Kid from the Bloc

### Global capitalism meets local postcommunism

The complex relationship of globalization and the development of local physical culture in postcommunist countries, particularly in relation to the spread of capitalism and neoliberal rhetoric, has yet to be addressed within scholarly research. The focus in this regard has been predominantly steered on nations with historically capitalist-based market economies. However, there is a growing need for critical analyses that expose the ideological tensions and contradictions created by the integration of global capitalism with postcommunist landscapes. Romania is of particular interest in this instance because of its current position as a developing, postcommunist nation, attempting to create both a working democracy and a viable market economy to meet the requirements of the European Union (EU).

On January 1, 2007, three years after having been bypassed for EU membership, Romania was officially acceded as an EU member state. Although the average Romanian salary is considerably lower than most EU countries, the number of Romanian households with technologies such as internet, computers, cell phones, and cable is growing. In addition to the increase in technological commodities, which are steadily becoming regular household items, the market for sportswear and sporting goods is also growing. Specialty shops devoted to sports clothing and apparel can be found in every major city, but because most of the items are imported, with such popular brands as Nike and Addidas, prices are expensive even by American standards. Considering the poor economy and the average Romanian income, one has to wonder from where these businesses get their revenue. A pair of Nike running shoes could cost upwards of \$150,

nearly half of an average Romanian monthly salary. Romanian minimum wage in 2007 was 114 Euros (\$180)/month, compared to 675.9 Euros (\$1,071) in the US (Eurostat). In 2005, average annual gross earnings for women in industry and services was 2773.9 Euros (\$4400) compared to the EU average of 26585.4 EUR (\$42,125), and for men 3430.1 EUR (\$5435) compared to 34418.1 EUR (\$54,540) in the EU. These figures show that Romanians are consistently earning approximately ten times less than the EU average.

Joining the EU as one of the poorest and underdeveloped European member nations, Romania continues to face obstacles to achieving social and economic reform goals. Under these circumstances, how are Western notions of capitalism and consumerism affecting the structural and ideological spaces and institutions in the transforming society of Romania? In a country of overwhelming poverty—12.7% of the population live on two dollars a day (World Bank, 2006)—still in the process of national reconstruction, how are patterns of consumption affected, especially in terms of body image, standards of health, and social status?

To a large degree, the situation in Romania is not unlike that found in other postcommunist nations that have been challenged by a weak economy, political corruption, and an unstable economic infrastructure. Historically, countries from the former Soviet bloc have struggled with poverty, among other issues related to national development, that have limited their exposure to markets that thrive in many areas of the developed world. The socialist period in Romania, particularly during the 1980s, was marked by a culture of shortage in which consumer needs and desires could be satisfied only through activity within the black market or second economy (Verdery, 1996, pp. 76-



83). Because of the strict regulations on resource-driven production and rationing within the country, there was neither a variety nor a surplus of consumer goods. In order to compensate for the lack of attention to consumer needs, goods were frequently stolen from state factories or smuggled across national borders (Verdery, 1996). The items most sought after were foreign goods, like brand name jeans or “original coca-cola”, which were highly valued and considered as luxury (Chelcea, 2002).

A major transformation is now taking place as global capitalism and consumer culture make their way into the former Soviet bloc. A growing number of individuals are finding new ways to accumulate not only economic capital, but also social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). More significantly, not only is the accumulation of material goods increasing, so are opportunities to consume in personally empowering ways. The effects of these shifts can be found in analyses of physical culture, including examinations of the active body and the production of spaces used for sports, exercise, and leisure activities. As global capitalism increases its presence in Romania, body consumer culture is following closely behind, but with what consequences?

Increasingly, participation in fitness, exercise and physical activity are becoming markers of social class and economic status as well as social markers of masculinity and femininity. While the shift to a market-economy that serves consumer interests has made consumer goods more readily available, the effects of the capitalist transition have been unevenly experienced across gender and class lines. For those who have not yet found their place within the new economy, the culture of shortage is hardly a phenomenon which has been relegated to the past; rather, it is a continuing, and in many cases a piercing, reality of the present. Availability has certainly not meant affordability. In

general, women have had to struggle more so than men in this regard due to the feminization of poverty and persistent expectations for women to fulfill household and family responsibilities. Under these conditions women have had to accommodate the added restrictions on their (leisure) time even as they are oftentimes precluded from many of the well-paid jobs reserved for their male counterparts. In the transforming postcommunist society, with options to consume fitness, fashion, and physical activity steadily on the rise, how are Romanians differently experiencing the transformation?

### Purpose and Goals

In a postmodern analysis of the relationship between the body, power, and knowledge, I draw upon the theoretical work of French social theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault to examine spatial and temporal practices of Romanian lifestyle consumption. In this study, I critically analyze physical cultural practices related to body image, physical appearance, standards of health, social status, and subjectivity. Because the study of postsocialist bodies in relation to physical activity and exercise is essentially absent from the existing literature, through my research I intend to step into this gap, steering Sport Studies and Eastern European literature in a new direction. In doing so, I aim to identify possible sites of resistance and opposition to dominant, oppressive forms of power that might otherwise control, discipline, and define the body without contest. These sites I believe are located in and through physical culture and the body itself.

The changing role of women in countries of the former Soviet bloc have been dramatic as they learn to cope with massive reductions in state support, erasure of socialist ideological rhetoric promoting (gender and class) equality, and a collective

marginalization within the labor force and political arenas as their nations move toward building capitalism and market-based economies. These conditions paired with the rise in global health, exercise, and fitness trends, open new modes of identity construction that center on the body and the physicality of the body. In the current context, as the condition of women and their social roles continue to shift, to what degree are they empowered or disempowered through the processes of national transition? As I address this question, my goal is to identify, contextualize and critically analyze the tensions and ideological contradictions in the postcommunist moment as they are manifested and expressed through sport and physical culture in Romania.

The primary research question for this project is therefore, **in what ways are the multiple ideological tensions between global consumer capitalism, communist legacies, and postcommunist subjectivity manifested through the active (female) body and the production and consumption of exercise, sports and leisure in the postcommunist moment? To what end are dominant ideologies, related to gender regimes and class formations both contested and reinforced through the aesthetic and physical body in postcommunist Romania?** A subsidiary question I address is, how might the embodiment of new forms of postcommunism, influenced by contradictory ideals of capitalism and communism, be expressed, coded, or interpreted within physical culture? It is with excitement and trepidation that I approach the research questions of this dissertation. Through four related, though distinct chapters, I offer at the very least a start to the journey in finding the answers.

Chapter one provides a historical overview of physical culture in Romania and the participation of women in sports, particularly as it developed in the second half of the

nineteenth century. Understanding the modes of control used to regulate the development of sports and society in the context of socialism and especially under the rule of Ceaușescu, is a critical component to seeing how the body has been historically implicated in the projects of the State. Chapter two is an analysis of the ideological tensions between neoliberalism and the fragmented postcommunist society. I suggest that the active, physical body—including its productivity, appearance, and symbolic and cultural value—in postcommunist Romania, articulated with global consumer culture and the spread of neoliberal ideologies is a critical focal point for examining new modes of power and influence working throughout the transforming landscape; for it is at this juncture that individuals are negotiating identities, social positions, and material realities. I also look at ways in which power relations are exercised in and through the body and how these power relations affect the materiality and performativity of gendered and sexed bodies. In the third chapter, I focus on contemporary understandings of gender roles and expectations in Romania. Insofar as constructing an identity through the consumption of newly available lifestyle options may serve to ideologically separate privileged consumers from the struggling, uncertain status of the nation (Roberts *et al.*, 2005; Svendsen, 1996), these opportunities remain limited by persisting gender norms and the continued cultural reproduction of gender-specific roles. In this chapter I discuss the ways in which gender regimes constructed in the past are part of the enduring legacy of communism that reinforces particular gender norms. I also analyze the significance of the biological viewpoint in constructing ideas about gender and gender roles, and articulate the development of these views in Romania with larger, global social movements. The fourth chapter focuses on the production and consumption of postcommunist spaces and

the built environment of fitness and exercise facilities. Foucault (1984) offers his opinion on the necessity of incorporating spatial analyses to studies of individual practice and social relations:

I think it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through the other. (p. 246)

In an effort to better understand the “effective practices of freedom” and the “practice of social relations” in postcommunist Romania, I include in this chapter an analysis of the symbolic meanings and disciplinary technologies of space in terms of power, gender, and class relations. Taken together, it is my hope that the analyses provided within the following chapters provide a new and insightful reading of the nuanced and complicated tensions in transition as manifested through physical culture in Romania.

## Methodology

### Part I: Intellectual politics, philosophy, and epistemology

#### *Politics, power struggle, and the challenge: Survival of the fittest*

At no other time in history has the “survival of the fittest” mentality been more pervasive and persuasive than the current moment. Just as Darwinian thought has dominated the evolutionary debates in biology, so has it proven to be a driving force in the social, economic, political, and technological spheres as well. An ideology of being the best, to “be all you can be” as the Army invites, or to “just do it” as Nike suggests, constantly bombards the public as if to say those who are the strongest and most assertive will succeed (i.e. “survive”), while everyone else will eventually die off as the lesser breed (i.e. the least “fit”)—*and* it is everyone’s individual responsibility to ensure realization of the former.

The political agenda that concretized this ideological notion into the public mindset arguably saw its beginnings during the dismantling of Keynesian politics. During this era, competition assumed a key position within the economy as the self-regulating mechanism of the free market. As the major industries were deregulated, the ensuing explosion of privatization was indicative of the government’s role in promoting an ideology of individualism that privileged those who could best maximize their resources and social position to succeed and move ahead within this context. This ideology necessarily set apart those who had access to such resources from those who did not, exacerbating the social inequities already present by further marginalizing those who lacked the (social, economic, political, and otherwise) resources to compete in this environment. In a sense, the government abdicated responsibility for the marginalization of such communities,

forcing them to assume all responsibility for the position they held in society. This ‘survival of the fittest’ mentality has led to what Giroux (2004) refers to as a “new social Darwinism” and the “death of the social.” Just as the less developed species fail to survive in the biological world, so will the classes of people who lack the means to advance in society; furthermore, the government and social structures are no more to blame for the demise of the latter than mother nature is to blame for the extinction of the former. Clearly inherent to this new social Darwinism are issues of power and social inequality, bringing into question the role of the government as well as the role of citizens in the ensuing struggle to find meaning and voice within the social order.

Taken to a global level, the survival of the fittest mentality continues to justify power disparities, as less dominant societies and nations struggle to keep pace with the standards of development set forth by the more powerful nations of the world. Ideologies of social responsibility and national progress are tightly interwoven within an international logic of power and success within an increasingly globalized world. In other words, just as socio-economic class divisions plague the social fabric of the United States, so are international divisions reinforced by disparities in socio-economic and political status on the international stage. Because of its direct correlation to capitalism, class is a definitive determinate of social power, even as race, ethnicity, and other social determinates must also be considered. High-technology capitalism in particular (Dyer-Witthford, 1999) allows this relationship between class and power to manifest on a global scale. Dyer-Witthford (1999) explains:

Class—capital’s classification of its human resources—*does* tend to assert itself as definitive of social power. It is “privileged” in all senses of the word—not

because of any essential, ontological priority of economics over gender, ethnic, or ecological relations, but because of society's subordination to a system that compels key issues of sexuality, race, and nature to revolve around a hub of profit. (p. 10)

The degree to which a nation can build, strengthen, and promote its human resources therefore determines international status and global "fitness" level. A striking example can be found in the case of countries trying to keep pace with the standards and regulations of the European Union, particularly in the case of Romania.

*Romania: Survival among the fittest*

In 1989 Romania—and the world—witnessed the assassination of long-time dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena, officially ending a 42 year period of communism in the country. Since that dramatic day, Romania has been struggling to recover from a lasting legacy of brutal oppression and cruelty left by Ceaușescu and his *securitate* secret police force, while also adjusting to the newly created capitalist spaces. Romania is still one of Europe's poorest countries, with a GDP per capita income three times lower than the European Union's overall average level, with approximately 25% of the population below the poverty line (CIA—The World Fact Book, 2006). In addition, the country is known for deplorable orphanage conditions as well as political corruption and questionable standards of human rights. Consequently, Romania is in the midst of drastic social, political, and economic reforms, the success of which will determine their future status within the European Community.



Cases such as Romania need to be analyzed insofar as there is a general need to identify and address the most pressing issues of our time, and it is here, in this moment, that the researcher must find a role. As a researcher, it is my social responsibility to take action by investigating issues, placing those issues in context, uncovering the social relations involved, and engaging in critical dialogue. A project that has these motives at its core is that of cultural studies.

*[Physical] Cultural Studies – a political project*

Cultural studies research operates with a discourse of critique that captures the needs of society. Although cultural studies is informed by multiple theories and methodologies, at the core of this “interpretive field” (Andrews, 2002) are interventionist and political motives which drive the researcher in his or her work. The particularities of these motives differ with each researcher based on his or her own research interests, sensibilities, and politics, but what underpins each of these motives is the aim of thinking critically and engaging social theory to expose and offer a critical analysis of unequal power relations within various spheres of life. These power relations manifest themselves in the form of cultural practices that include the dissemination and structuring of knowledge(s) and truth(s) which work to the advantage of some while at the same time marginalizing others. In other words, culture and cultural practices do not represent a completely shared meaning of reality, but rather are the product of ideological struggles and political battles, thus allowing only a partial representation of those who comprise society (McCarthy, 1996).

Within cultural studies, it is recognized that what we know and how we know, and further how we define and experience reality and “knowledge-of-reality” (McCarthy, 1996) is, at least to some degree, socially constructed. The social construction of knowledge and meaning is inherently political and problematic in that although there are multiple ways of knowing based on different cultures, histories and biographies, culture and cultural practices are not structured in a way that reflects the multiple viewpoints which constitute the social order. In effect, the danger is that there is no escaping the knowledges and ideologies that dominate the social context, thereby revealing the power imbalance inherent to the construction and politics of meaning. Recognizing the oppressive nature of structuring knowledge and culture, Gruneau offers the rhetorical question: “In a society of unequally shared resources and of notable conflicts of interest, is it not plausible that the opening up of options for some people through a particular type of structuring actually implies or symbolizes the limiting of options for others?” (1983/1999, p. 103).

What the postmodernist offers in this context is the argument that just as social reality is not informed by a single knowledge, neither is it informed by a single truth (Harvey, 1989). There does not exist a single truth because truth is that which is believed to be true based on the unique historical and social contexts within which a person lives (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002, p. 18). In light of this formulation of ‘truth,’ and taking into consideration the multiple vantage points from which truth can be derived, it then follows that there are necessarily multiple truths, and “[i]n the context of particular networks of power, it is the task of the researcher to identify, gain access to and share as many of these vantage points as possible” (Sugden and Tomlinson, p. 18). The vantage

points that the cultural studies researcher tries to advance are those which are systematically repressed by, yet still informed and shaped through, the inescapable ideologies, knowledges, truths and meanings of the dominant powers. Further, these ideologies promote, strengthen and continually redefine unequal power relations that oftentimes leave minority and subaltern groups both powerless and voiceless. If in fact, “no human thought...is immune to the ideologizing influences of its social context” (Mannheim, referenced in Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 9), it is essential not only to take a critical look at these ‘ideologizing influences,’ but also to challenge and, if appropriate, actively resist them. The human body is of particular interest when interrogating and problematizing issues of cultural reproduction, especially as the site through which symbolic power is carried out (Bourdieu, 1980; Foucault, 1977), values and class distinctions are embodied and displayed (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1980), and physical practices are managed to serve the needs of capitalism (Marx, 1887).

Physical culture, including sport and other leisure activities, has essentially become normalized in our society. As a site of everyday life, its active involvement in political agendas that promote social injustices, has been masked by a romanticized view of sporting practices, games and institutions. Social Darwinism rears its head once again in a realm where those with the most strength, toughness (emotionally, physically, and psychologically), perseverance, skill, coordination, and intelligence are guaranteed nothing short of success, praise and admiration. From the star of the elementary school kickball team to the Heisman trophy winner in college football to the gold medal Olympic winner, there is no doubt that sports and physical culture play a significant role in social and cultural development. For example, in the midst of March Madness, where

single elimination rounds determine whether a team advances or not, survival of the fittest is etched ever more deeply as the primary element in the social ideology of achievement. The challenge herein is to expose the problematic tendency “to idealize and romanticize the abstract and enabling features of those structures which define play as a form of social actions” (Gruneau, 1983/1999, p. 100). This romanticized view of sport reveals a blind acceptance of a structure that is necessarily bound to the social and economic institutions which have emerged in the context of capitalism, and more recently, of late capitalism. Stated otherwise:

...precisely because it is so deeply ingrained in our type of culture—precisely because, in other words, our understanding of sport is so impregnated with common sense—sport is, in one particular respect, problematic. As a socio-cultural and historical phenomenon, sport remains profoundly opaque: it has proved strongly resistant to critical analysis.... (Hargreaves, 1986, p. 1)

Hargreaves is critical of the fact that the general population takes sport for granted as both participants and consumers with little regard for the problematic implications of their individual sporting experience, never mind those of the institution of sport itself. However, as powerful political and social institutions willfully exert their dominance over those who oppose the ideological values and practices upheld by these (some may argue) hegemonic regimes and/or institutions, and as sporting practices increasingly succumb to capitalist enterprises, there subsequently arises a great need to not only expose, but also to problematize these issues in order to generate a critical response. Forming the foundation of this response is the methodology of Marx and the humanitarian, egalitarian social and political justice found at the heart of Marxism (Jarvie

and Maguire, 1994, p. 87). Moving beyond classical Marxism without losing its basic premise, the critical school has also informed this debate, providing a relevant application and (re-)interpretation of Marx pertinent to the social and economic shifts affecting the sociocultural and political contexts.

A Marxist critique of capitalism can be related to a critique of the political economies of sport, questioning, for example, the production of wealth and profit, wage-labor relations, the exploitation of workers, and the extent to which monopolies and large corporations influence ideologies and (sporting) practices (Jarvie and Maguire, 1994, pp. 90-1). Sport is therefore significant insofar as it can be used as an object of analysis to critically view the world and problematize social and political issues. Recognizing the “centrality of the conceptualization of power for a critical sociology of sport” (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002, p. 19), the cultural studies researcher is called to expose the “active hegemonic practices” (Gruneau, 1983/1999) at work. According to Gruneau (1983/1999), what is needed is an:

attempt to specify those moments in the production and reproduction of meaning in games and sports, where the culturally specific pressures and limits embodied in the dominant representations of institutionally established sporting practices appear to penetrate so deeply into the whole substance of lived identities and relationships that they come to be widely regarded as the pressures and limits of universal experience and common sense. (p. 42)

With an emphasis on the active role of culture—e.g., on meanings, signs, representation, interpretation-- in this sport-society dialectic, agency is no longer subordinated to economic institutions insofar as it can only be explained in terms of the determining

factors of the economic base; rather, it plays a significant role in influencing, even as it is a constituting factor of, the totality of social experience. Drawing from the work of Raymond Williams, Gruneau clarifies the basis of the sport-society dialectic in terms of cultural production and the role of the human agent:

Interpretation and meaning are threaded through all of the means whereby humans “make themselves” by producing and reproducing their own means of life. This production and reproduction of our means of life and the making and the remaking of our social being goes far beyond any narrow sense of production in a purely economic sense and includes all those forms of activity whereby humans interact with one another and with nature. It is in this sense, as forms of cultural production...we can regard play, games, and sports *in themselves* to be concrete, material social practices that are creations of human agency. (1983/1999, pp. 30-1)

According to Gruneau, the sport-society relation is one of a great web of interactions between agents and their spatial and temporal environments that each have some degree of determination in shaping and forming the other.

An analysis of physical culture, especially the practices and institutions involved, would be highly revealing to the nature and conditions of the greater social structure within which it is located. These revelations are only possible because, in the same instant, sport is both bound by and a constituent of this structure. To this end, sports can be characterized as cultural texts, “imaginative works built out of social materials and which offer metasocial commentaries on social conditions and human emotions” (Gruneau, 1983/1999, p. 44).

A study of physical culture, therefore, is necessarily an analysis involving the social and historical context within which its practices, relations, and ideologies are formed. As such, changes and shifts in attitudes, relationships, and politics—pertaining to such phenomena as the entertainment industry, notions of physical fitness, consumer culture, media relations, marketing strategies, and physical fitness—can potentially be understood through the lens of sport. A critical (Marxist) inquiry of the aforementioned subject matters reveals an institution plagued with social division, class struggle, economic inequality, and unequal power relations. This is in no way meant to disregard the positive attributes of physical culture and the freedoms it does provide; however, one cannot ignore the social, economic, political, and ideological constraints and limits produced by, and reproduced within, physical cultural institutions such as sport.

The fact that...sports are conventionally subsumed under the rubric of leisure activity, and that the latter is represented as the sphere, above all, in which individuals enjoy the exercise of free choice and personal expression, we see more as an ideological notion than the insight into the nature of leisure in capitalist society that it purports to be. It is surely not so much a question of the presence or absence of freedom and constraint that defines and characterizes leisure, but the specific nature of the freedoms and constraints that are manifested therein, when compared with other sectors of social life. (Hargreaves, 1986, p. 8)

Removing casual, idealized notions of sport and placing physical culture within the broader context of societal relations is imperative to understanding the implications for society in general, which can be achieved through intervention on the part of cultural studies researchers.

### *Intervention*

If social theory can in fact “expose, render problematic, historicize, and oppose” the rationality of ideology (McCarthy, 1996, p. 46), it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure his or her work moves beyond the walls of academia, lest the work becomes futile in the battle against dominant ideologies which pervade the social order. The work of the cultural studies researcher is consequently interventionist, (co-) producing and mobilizing new knowledges while addressing and attacking the oppressive knowledges already in place (Giroux, 2001). In addition, there has been a call for a move toward a more performative, action-oriented, pedagogical practice which strategically moves beyond the artificial boundaries traditionally separating the “intellectual workers” from “cultural workers” (Giroux, 2001). Giroux expresses the need for change within cultural studies, the need to become “oppositional public intellectuals”:

My call to make the pedagogical a defining feature of cultural studies is meant to accentuate the performative as a transitive act, a work in progress informed by a cultural politics that translates knowledge back into practice, places theory in the political space of the performative, and invigorates the pedagogical as a practice through which collective struggles can be waged to revive and maintain the fabric of democratic institutions. Such a call to reform also suggests redefining the role of academics as oppositional public intellectuals to reaffirm the necessity for them to focus on the pedagogical and political dimensions of culture and interrogate cultural texts as public discourses. (p. 14)



Giroux (2001) also cautions against focusing on the influence and nature of power itself to the exclusion of considering “how these cultural texts work within the material and institutionalized contexts that structure everyday life” (p. 14).

A key to observing and understanding culture is realizing that what we are looking for is not exclusive to the exotic or the extraordinary, that which, in the past, has been ascribed to the practices and rituals of the ‘Other.’ Rather, culture and cultural practices can be observed at the level of the banal and ordinary, that which we see and experience everyday. In essence, “culture has entered the realm of the quotidian” (McCarthy, 1996, p. 25). Frow and Morris (2003) explain:

Cultural studies often tends to operate in what looks like an eccentric way, starting with the particular, the detail, the scrap of ordinary or banal existence, and then working to unpack the density of relations and of intersecting social domains that inform it. (p. 508)

In his post-9/11 reactionary piece, Denzin (2002) appears to be in full agreement with Frow and Morris’s insistence on starting with the “scrap of ordinary” existence. He highlights four directions in which the dialogue should move, starting with the personal and biographical. He stresses the need to first expose human tragedy through stories and narratives. Second, a critical discourse must be created and brought to the attention of people and institutions that are in positions of power. The media, for example, needs to be included in this process. Social reality and perceptions alike are subject to manipulation by those in control of the media, through which dominant ideologies, discourses, and practices are propagated: should the media be dominated by ideologies

that favor the status of those in power, then processes of subaltern identity formation are heavily compromised. This statement holds true insofar as:

The media have not only filtered into our experience of external realities, they have also entered into our very experience of our own selves. They have provided us with new identities and new aspirations of what we should like to be, and what we should like to appear to be. (Mills, 1956/2000, p. 314)

The images and messages of the media pervade individual and collective identities in ways that not only affect social practice, but also the cognitive structures that inform aspirations, beliefs, and desires.

The third direction is toward the enactment of a critical national convention which includes a coalition of voices to dialogue about peace and justice. Last, Denzin argues, there needs to be a move toward critical interpretive methodologies. According to Denzin, movement of dialogue in these four directions will facilitate the development of an informative discourse in favor of the utopian society he envisions. Where, though, are these particular sites of investigation found? What are the sites of everyday life to which particular political discourses have been attached? In other words, what are the institutions and practices being used to promote political agendas that threaten basic human rights?

There has been a call to mobilize a “politics of hope” (Giroux, 2001) and the pursuit of a utopian society (Denzin, 2002; 2004) within cultural studies. Denzin (2004) goes so far as to say that it is the obligation of those who are socially responsible within cultural studies to take on the task of “policing the crises” (Hall, 1978), of creating a critical dialogue to combat the moral and ethical decline within the current historical and

political moment of America's cultural landscape. Though some may dismiss the notion of utopianism as romantic idealism, it is important to consider "the power of 'utopian' thought, which (like ideology) produces a distorted image of social reality, but which (unlike ideology) has the dynamism to transform that reality into its image of it" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 10). Giroux (2001) emphasizes the power in developing, maintaining, and acting upon a utopian vision, stating, "as a form of educated hope, [utopianism] provides the grounds for thinking critically and acting responsibly—pushing against the grain to undermine and transform structures of power and oppression" (p. 8). Standing up and fighting for that which is moral, just and right in this world may seem a noble and noteworthy cause, but what we must now consider is how we expect to achieve this utopianism. How are we, as cultural studies scholars, going to make an impact and contribute to the struggle over the construction of meaning, knowledge and truth? In short, how and to what extent are we going to use our work to make a difference?

### *Ethnography*

Given the philosophical, political, and epistemological underpinnings of my research, located within the general project of cultural studies, the methodological tools that I use include ethnographic interviewing and participant observation, as well as content media analysis. The many layers and nuances of lived experience cannot be captured with a single method, but instead requires an integrated approach that utilizes various strategies of inquiry when conducting research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 31).

According to C. Wright Mills, understanding of the totality the internal and external processes within the life of an individual first requires a recognition of the

intersection between personal biography and history, the development of a “sociological imagination” (1959). Social reality is informed by the intersection of biography-- including values, behaviors, perspectives, responses--and historical context, what is experienced in terms of time and place (Kaufman, 1997). Mills (1959) explains, “The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise” (p. 6). Interpreting Millsian thought, Kaufman (1997) asserts:

[I]ndividuals need to understand that their values and behaviors do not occur in a vacuum; rather, these values and behaviors are situated and consequently influenced by their particular time and place. (p. 1)

As we develop and engage our sociological imagination, therefore, we are better equipped to think and theorize about the sport-society relation, insofar as we are more able to form a historically grounded understanding of the intersections between sport and social context.

The conjunctural theory-method further stresses the importance of analyzing the intersections (the conjunctures) of historical context and social practices. This method “engages society as a concrete, historically produced, fractured totality made up of different types of social relations, practices, and experiences” (Andrews, 2002, p. 114). Society is a web of social relations, practices and experiences whose meanings and effects are interrelated and affected, determined, and identified in terms of their relationship to each other within particular moments in time. Meanings and relationships are thus constantly shifting and modified, but can be understood when articulated within

social and historical contexts. The research methods used must be consistent with these epistemological underpinnings, recognizing that:

Knowledge of the social world is gained through a fluid and flexible design that often emerges as the project unfolds. Further, there is a commitment to understanding human actions within natural environments (rather than in controlled or sanitized laboratory conditions), environments that the researcher may well be a part of or influence due to the subjective nature of inquiry. (Silk, 2005, p. 74)

Articulating political, historical and social contexts with physical culture and space, and understanding both the human and structural relationships therein, requires a certain degree of flexibility and personal involvement. Perhaps the most effective research tool in this instance then is ethnography.

Ethnography has been defined as “writing culture” (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). It is both a process and a product (Tedlock, 2000) of going into the field to make observations, interacting with and engaging that which is observed, and (re-) presenting the context in new and meaningful ways. “Primarily a process of attempting to describe, analyze, and interpret social expression between people and groups, ethnography requires the researcher to enter the natural settings for purposes of understanding the hows, whys, and whats of human behavior” (Shaffir, 1999, p. 676). What sociologists term “field research” and anthropologists label “participant observation”, ethnographic research includes a number of genres that Tedlock (2000) classifies as: 1) Biography, the telling of a “life history” where the life of one person stands for the entire culture; 2) memoir, 3) narrative ethnography, a hybrid of the life history and the memoir, a “border-zone cultural production,” 4) ethnographic novels, 5) travelogues, chronicles, diaries, which

include the researchers inner thoughts, emotions, and prejudices, and 6) ethnographic/field diaries (pp. 459-464). In essence, what each of these genres share is a central component to ethnographic research in general--an attempt to “learn about the world through careful and detailed observation” (Fine, 1999, p. 538). In discussing each of these genres, Tedlock points to the question of creating a “new critical self-awareness” highlighting the need to address ethical and authorial issues. In other words, it is important to recognize that ethnography within cultural studies has evolved from the traditional anthropological method of doing fieldwork in “natural settings” using “naturalistic observations” (Angrosino and Pérez, 2000), where the goal of the researcher was to be a detached observer as he or she collected, analyzed, and represented the information. This method necessarily sets up a power relation that privileges the knowledge, status and position of the researcher, essentially rendering the subject voiceless.

From a postmodernist perspective, the detached, objective observer is neither feasible nor desirable. Angrosino and Pérez (2000) explain, “In effect, objective truth about a society or a culture cannot be established, because there are inevitably going to be conflicting versions of what happened” (p. 675). Instead of attempting to represent an objective truth, the goal of the researcher should instead be one of representing an ‘ethnographic truth,’ which can be achieved through a recognition of the researcher’s role in the context he or she is observing.

In this new era, the qualitative researcher does more than observe history; he or she plays a part in it. New tales from the field will now be written, and they will

reflect the researcher's direct and personal engagement with this historical period.

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19)

Observation can no longer be thought of as solely a research method, but rather must be reconceptualized as the context itself, the context of interaction which constitutes the “dialogic relationship” between researcher and subject (Angrosino and Pérez, 2000, p. 678). The researcher thus becomes a part of the multiple contexts—the social worlds being studied-- that he or she enters into. Consequently, ethnography involves a collaborative effort on the part of the ethnographer and the subject as they work together in the production of meaning and new knowledge.

Ethnographic participant observation provides the best vantage point for the researcher to understand the values, viewpoints, and perceptions of the participants (Shaffir, 1999), and further, “to the degree that a sharper understanding of a slice of human lived reality is our primary objective, ethnographic-based research approaches yield highly credible analyses” (Shaffir, 1999, p. 684). Norman Denzin (1999) demonstrates the degree to which ethnographic research methods remain true to the cultural studies project in his article “Interpretive Ethnography for the Next Century”. In this article, Denzin outlines what he envisions ethnographic research should include as it continues to develop in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ethnography, he argues, is always political (p. 513), seeking to unveil and understand the ways in which “power is exercised in human relationships” (p. 510). He argues that interpretive ethnography should be minimal, existential, autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical:

This [interpretive] ethnography inscribes the human crises of specific culture. It endeavors to connect those crises to the public sphere, to the apparatuses of the

culture that commodify the personal, turning it into a political, public spectacle. In doing so, this ethnography attempts to better understand the conditions of oppression and commodification that operate in the culture, seeking to make these ways of the world more visible to others. The moral ethnographer searches for those moments when humans resist these structures of oppression and representation, and attempt, in the process, to take control over their lives and the stories about them. ... An existential ethnography offers a blueprint for cultural criticism, a criticism grounded in the specific worlds made visible in the ethnography. It understands that there can be no value-free, objective, dispassionate, value-neutral account of a culture and its ways. ... This is writing that angers the reader, writing that challenges the reader to take action in the world, to reconsider the conditions under which the moral terms of the self are constituted. This critical vulnerability dares to use the particular and the personal as vehicles for criticizing the status quo. (pp. 512-513)

It is here that I locate my own research, including my philosophical viewpoints, political tendencies and personal sensibilities: namely, recognizing that there are multiple constructed realities, knowledges, and truths (relativist ontological positions), and that the ethnographer and the subjects are co-participants in the research process as they interact and shape one another (interpretivist epistemological stance) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). As the researcher, even as I am working to create a critical analysis of the social worlds of others (though placed in a greater global context in the end) as interpreted from my own observations and interpretations of their perceptions, words, actions, experiences, practices, and relationships, I have a social responsibility and moral



obligation to identify and acknowledge my position within the context of the research. In addition, I acknowledge that I am bringing personal political sensibilities and philosophical beliefs as well as my own cultural, gender, racial, ethnic, class, and religious biases to each step of the research process (axiological position). In short, as I embark on this ambitious, politically charged, ethnographic project, I openly recognize and acknowledge that “[a]s is true for all systematic studies, we are limited by the tools that we use to gather data, in this case ourselves” (Fine, 1999, p. 535).

## Part II: Process

With the goal of producing an interpretive ethnography that meets the criteria of a politically-driven, critical, and performative cultural studies research project (see Denzin, 1999), I have had to carefully consider how the data collection methods I choose would work toward achieving this goal. Ethnography has taken on many forms within different disciplines, each developing in a way that supports the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the discipline (i.e. anthropology, sports studies, or feminist studies). In 1999, Gary Fine made a call for a reinvigoration of realist or naturalist ethnography in the twenty-first century. What we need, he argues, is a “self-confident ethnography that is not afraid to capture the vivid and richly filled sprawl of the contemporary human landscape” (pp. 535-36); for “ultimately, the goal of social science depends on a shared confidence in our ability to learn about the world through careful and detailed observation” (p. 538). Reacting to postmodern critiques of any researcher making claims to know or uncover what is “real”, Fine challenges the basis upon which this critique is founded, pointing to the intersubjective, epistemological, and pragmatic elements which render realist

ethnography an exceptionally relevant and productive research perspective and method. Just barely having entered the twenty-first century, it seems that Fine's call has already been met by a number of social science researchers, particularly within physical cultural studies. Not only have ethnographers reinvigorated realist accounts, but they have also begun to collate specific considerations to address when entering the field for observation and data collection (see, for example, Silk, 2005 and King, 2005).

As contemporary ethnographers accept their involvement and participation in the research setting, they assume various "membership roles" which can be discussed in terms of the research typology of Adler and Adler (1987, cited in Angrosino and Pérez, 2000). A modification of Gold's (1958, cited in Angrosino and Pérez, 2000) naturalistic research typology which includes: the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant, and the complete observer, Adler and Adler suggest a typology which includes peripheral membership researchers, active-member researchers, and complete-member researchers. There has been a shift from participant observation to the "observation of participation" (Tedlock, 1991, cited in Tedlock, 2000), where "ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others' coparticipation within the ethnographic scene of the encounter" (p. 464). This shift is significant insofar as within this framework the ethnographer can "present both self and other together within a single narrative frame that focuses on the process and character of the ethnographic dialogue" (p. 464-465). According to Tedlock (1991), five principles of social interaction need to be addressed in ethnographic research: 1) The conscious adoption of a situational identity; 2) The perception of power ('real' vs. 'ideal' culture); 3) Negotiating a situational identity (no fixed roles, constantly redefining positions); and 4) Criteria for

validation (internal vs. external criteria). In order to maintain academic rigor, the ethnographer must devote serious consideration to these principles. In addition, it is critical to identify foreshadowed problems, which will inform the eventual outline of a conceptual framework, and to tackle issues of access prior to entering the field (Silk, 2005).

### *Foreshadowed problems and conceptual framework*

Very generally, through my research I hope to gain an understanding of the tensions and contradictions produced by the introduction of global capitalism into the postcommunist landscape of Romania by observing the ways in which these tensions are manifested in physical culture within this country. Of immediate concern was the language barrier, since I do not have advanced Romanian language skills, and English is neither the primary nor secondary language for the majority of Romanians. From simple verbal communication to accessing and reading the available literature, the language barrier was a major hurdle, especially in terms of data collection and analysis. In order to tackle this obstacle, however, I completed an intensive language course in Romania that included both group and one-on-one sessions. Upon completion of the course, I was able to reach a basic level of fluency which became a key step in making entry into the field more feasible. Fortunately, I have also made connections with Romanians who speak fluent English, though I recognize the limitations of becoming too dependent on these particular Romanians.

Language barriers aside, capturing and identifying the multiple vantage points of the participants called for a mixed method approach, using both ethnographic participant

observation and interviews. This strategy follows the advice of Denzin and Lincoln (2003) who suggest: “The many layers and nuances of lived experience cannot be captured with a single method, but instead requires an integrated approach that utilizes various strategies of inquiry when conducting research” (p. 31).

### *Gatekeepers and access*

The preliminary steps of data collection involved gaining access to private homes, gyms, and other sports facilities. Through connections I had made through personal contacts, I identified the key personnel—the gatekeepers—with whom I would eventually develop a relationship in order to gain access to the research sites. It was important to form a rapport with these gatekeepers such as facilities managers because not only did they grant me access to their facilities, but they also played a critical role in introducing me to others who I could include in the research study. To counter the potential biases that may have led the gatekeepers to point me in particular directions and to specific people in favor of a position he or she might have wanted to promote, I attempted to maintain as much control as I could over who I talked to, and when and where the meetings took place, as is recommended by Silk (2005, p. 77).

### *Ethnographic Design, situational identity and tools*

As opposed to using a fixed set of methodological procedures and tools, ethnographic design is emergent, fluid, and flexible (Silk, 2005, p. 77), taking shape as the research process materializes and adjustments need to be made to account for unanticipated events, discoveries, or roadblocks that may arise. Along the same vein, as

the ethnographic research tool, it is important that I also remain flexible in terms of communication strategies, observation, recording and analysis techniques, and negotiating my situational identity. For example, the main data collection methods I used were participant-observation (PO) and interviews. At times, what I chose to disclose about myself and my research project to the interviewee, or those I observed, had less to do with my politics and ethical concerns of disclosure than it did the language and cultural barrier which might limit my ability to effectively communicate who I am and what my intentions are. Also, self-reflexivity remained a crucial tenet to the entire research process, particularly as I negotiated my situational identity and positioned myself in the research setting. I found that I had to make adjustments in body language, recording or observation techniques, or even theoretical approaches in order to better understand the behaviors, attitudes, viewpoints, and contextual details I observed. The ways I represented myself in the research setting had to remain flexible as well. Shaffir (1999) explains:

By its very nature, ethnographic research requires some measure of role-playing and acting. An essential component of the research process involves learning to present particular images of oneself. Such self-presentation cannot be calculated completely in advance and, as many research accounts aptly illustrate, evolves during the research process (p. 681).

Self-representation must be adaptable to the circumstances, but not to the extreme of creating a dishonest representation of who I am, but rather negotiating small details to better fit in or gain acceptance into the research setting.

PO involves immersing myself within the research setting, participating in the daily life activities of those I am observing, keeping a field diary to record observations and “ethnographic” conversations, analyzing the data, and continuously reworking the research design to better meet both the needs of the community and my own research agenda. To eliminate as many boundaries as possible that separated me from the research setting, I familiarized myself with Romanian culture and language, and continued to form relationships and build rapport with key personnel. Despite these efforts, however, I knew I would never attain a complete “insider” status; the best I could perhaps ever hope to achieve was a “privileged outsider status” (Shaffir, 1999, p. 683). In this case, achieving a “privileged outsider status” is not to be taken for granted, for it indicates a certain level of mutual trust and intimacy to be protected and valued, not only for moral and ethical reasons, but because it will, admittedly, lead to more and richer data (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). In this instance, then, ethical and moral concerns, particularly in relation to disclosure and reciprocity must be fully considered.

#### *Ethical and moral decisions; reciprocity*

The fact that there are no hard-lined definitions of what is ethical and moral makes it all the more critical to carefully consider my role as the researcher, the limits and boundaries I need to set as far as representing myself and making my purpose known, protecting the privacy and rights of those involved, and making sure that I am not the only one benefiting from the experience. Even though I genuinely have at the heart of my project the goal of better understanding the physical culture in Romania so as to identify and tackle any injustices that may be revealed, it may turn out that the only material

product to emerge is a research paper that I will benefit from, but what about all those who helped me? In other words, even as I recognize and emphasize that my efforts to “connect ethnographic interpretations to wider social processes is linked to the political commitment of cultural studies research, particularly the struggle to overcome social oppressions of class, race, and gender” (King, 2005, p. 11), I am still obligated to seriously consider the (in)equitable nature of the research “bargain” in place (Vanderstaay, 2005, pp. 381-82). As Steven Vanderstaay (2005) so succinctly put it: “If successful, this research would complete my Ph.D. and help me attain a university position. What did I offer in return?” (p. 382).

The nature of my project is not dangerous and did not involve any illegal activity, so in that respect I did not have to worry about compromising my moral or ethical judgment for the sake of personal safety. However, I did inquire about issues that were sensitive and that may have conjured up personal, political, private, and emotional responses. For example, as I gathered data on the communist legacy and the effects of global capitalism within the post-communist landscape of Romania, respondents may have had to think back to the Ceaușescu regime and recall disturbing details about their life at that time, or in describing the changes that have taken place since the fall of the Communist regime and what they see as their own or their nation’s future prospects, this may have created a longing for the past or feelings of anticipation or trepidation looking toward the future. All the information they provided was useful to the overall dissertation as I articulated my findings with details of the present socio-political-historical conjuncture. As I analyzed and interpreted the research data, including the information collected during interviews, I was conscientious of my responsibility to avoid exploiting

not only the respondents' openness and willingness to help me but also my privileged position as the researcher (the privileged outsider status I had been granted). In regards to issues of reciprocity, once I became better acquainted with people, I was better able to identify what I could best offer in return for their assistance. While considering my options, I kept in mind the meaning and significance of reciprocity to fulfilling my moral and ethical research obligations:

Reciprocity involves give and take. We find that as we think and write about the interrelatedness of reciprocity and trustworthiness, we are concerned with issues that are sometimes difficult to articulate but include rapport, safety, honoring, and obligation. We want to be clear to ourselves and with our participants about our obligations, what it is we hope we have given or still hope to give our participants, and what it is we are taking, that is, how we benefit. We see tensions and dangers; to openly state whose side we are on (if and when we've figured out what the sides are) can close the door on rapport, put ourselves or our participants in danger. In an effort to honor our participants, we may find ourselves refusing to deal with the hard stuff—sentimentalizing and romanticizing some participants and demonizing others. We make a number of research moves, in the name of reciprocity, to get better data with which to construct more trustworthy accounts. We also make these research moves because of our political commitments to engage in critical dialogue with our participants about descriptions and meanings. There are multiple readings possible for every one of our research interactions, some of which are much less flattering, less comfortable, than others. (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001, p. 325)



Reciprocity, along with all other moral and ethical concerns, must be considered at every stage of the research process, so that we continue to “honor” and show our gratitude to the research participants. However, as Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton (2001), purposefully mention, actions of reciprocity should not impede efforts to (co-)construct politically salient, constructive dialogue.

After fieldwork is complete, the ethical and moral concerns involved in the writing process must then be addressed. How should the ethnographer present his/her work? What should be included in the analysis? To what degree should the author’s presence be known in the text? What are the responsibilities of the ethnographer when interpreting, analyzing and expressing this work? These are the questions addressed in the next section.

### Part III: Data Analysis and Write-up

Once the interviews and observations have come to an end, the researcher is left with how to manage, organize, and analyze the data collected, now in the form of transcripts, field notes, and journals, to produce the final research product. Whereas traditionally this step would almost exclusively entail “writing up” the data in the form of a standardized written text, post-structuralist considerations have rendered research data analysis and write up subject to serious considerations of power relations, political intent, and representation (Richardson, 2000; Markula and Denison, 2005; Sparkes, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). These considerations have led to a diversification in the way data has been managed, interpreted, represented, and ultimately, presented to an audience. In this manner, the role of the researcher/author is questioned, as well as the

text itself, in terms of the triple crisis of legitimation, representation, and praxis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Essentially, what the triple crisis refers to are issues of authority, voice, and political action that need to be reconsidered in light of emerging arguments that question issues of power identified in conventional standards of qualitative writing. For example, “realist tales” claim validity through experiential authority, interpretive omnipotence, and interpretive credibility, which is problematic for both the author and those the author is writing about (Sparkes, 1995).

Andrew Sparkes (1995) argues that in realist tales, the author is absent from the text which is written in a passive voice, thereby exerting the author’s power over the voice of those he or she is claiming to represent (experiential authority). If voice is given, it is actually only the appearance of giving voice, because the voice is only used in accordance with the author’s opinion (interpretive omnipotence). Further, claims to authority are embellished by the ‘native’ tones (interpretive credibility) (pp. 162-164).

The production of realist tales are problematic within the postmodernist context insofar as the implications of the researcher’s subjective viewpoint and expression within the text are not fully realized. In this section I discuss in more detail the general theoretical debate as influenced by poststructuralism concerning how best to represent research data. Using my own research as an example, I address the questions which are becoming increasingly pertinent in discussions of qualitative data analysis. Heavy emphasis is given to using a poststructuralist epistemology to explore the question, how can we as researchers express, and in what form should we present, the information we have gathered in a way that balances our presence with that of those we are representing in and through our work?

With field notes, interview recordings, journals, and transcripts in hand, the issues surrounding data analysis were multifold and multiform. The main issue however centered on the following question: how do I interpret and orchestrate the re-presentation of others' voices, words, actions and meanings, while negotiating the complexity and sophistication of the interplay between written text, writer (me), subjects, and audience? The narrative turn (Bochner, 2001), and the subsequent performance turn, have opened up a number of options in this regard, combining aspects of literary writing with academic writing and also including theater and film production among the acceptable forms of "writing up" data. Performed ethnography, also referred to as ethnographic performance text or ethnodrama, allows the possibility of physical, embodied expression as well as verbal expression, thus responding to the critique of written texts containing "bodiless voices" and "voiceless bodies" (Sykes, Chapman, & Swedburg, 2005). Performance based ethnographies, however, require collaboration with experts who are trained in the performance arts, thus limiting the ability of many scholars to experiment with this type of expression (Sykes, Chapman, & Swedburg, 2005). At the moment, even though I could perhaps find somebody with such expertise to help with a staged production of my data, because of the strictures of academia to which I am currently bound, the final product will remain a dissertation in the form of a written text. Nonetheless, postmodern texts are no less interesting, important, complex, or epistemologically challenging than their staged and filmed counterparts, as is evidenced in the increasing variety of texts qualitative researchers are currently producing. To name a few, scholars have presented their work as memoirs, fictional stories, autoethnography, and personal narratives, each

with their own unique literary and methodological qualities (Markula and Denison, 2005).

Just as going into the field to make observations is a dynamic process where the researcher and the researched interact to give meaning to the social context, so is the process of writing itself an active and creative process (Richardson, 2000) which involves much of the same interaction. Consequently, acknowledging the role of the researcher within the writing process is equally as important as acknowledging his or her role during the entire research process. This epistemological perspective is informed by a poststructuralist understanding of knowledge. Richardson (2000) explains:

Poststructuralism thus points to the *continual cocreation of Self and social science*: Each is known through the other. Knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges.

Poststructuralism, then, permits—nay, invites—no, incites—us to reflect upon our method and explore new ways of knowing. (p. 929)

Richardson is critical of conventional qualitative methods which limit the possibilities of recreating the “written world” from the “studied world” and also advocates an open, reflexive account on the part of the writer, who takes care to include him or herself in the written text. Because the telling and retelling of the events and dialogues are so far removed (in the sense of time and space) from the actual places and people by the time they are put down on paper, the researcher is necessarily left to wrestle with the “ghosts, shadow, and fictions” of the people and events (Sykes, Chapman, & Swedburg, 2005) involved in the research itself. In my own research, especially, where the people and places involved are halfway across the world, I have to wonder as I read through my

transcripts and field journals, “Is this what they mean when they say this?”, “What did their tone of voice express here?”, “Could a part of their social context that I don’t know about have affected how they answered this question?”. The “ghostly voices” (Sykes, Chapman, & Swedburg, 2005) constantly challenge me to find alternate meanings, to better reflect polyvocality, to question in what ways the audience will perceive that which is presented through *my* writing. In addition, the issue is further complicated for my project because I am working in a language that I have only recently learned, and so when I ask myself, “Did they mean to say this?”, it could literally be because I do not know what the words themselves mean; I am therefore challenged not only by cultural differences in body language, tones, and innuendos, but also the language itself. As with translation in general, recognizing the “reductive and generative nature of methodological translation” (Sykes, Chapman, & Swedburg, 2005) helps the qualitative researcher in coming to terms with the many shortcomings of representing others’ stories. Though self-critique and a recognition of shortcomings should be acknowledged, this process should not hinder the overall project, with its personal and political intents of representing others and adding to a body of knowledge. In other words, as Markula and Denison (2005) explain:

...qualitative research is fundamentally subjective in nature and takes into account many non-quantifiable elements of experience such as emotions, feelings, desires, and dreams. It’s important, then that qualitative researchers celebrate the unique access they have to people’s lived experiences and try to evoke those experiences with as much drama and detail as possible. (p. 1)

Embracing the subjective nature of qualitative inquiry in general, and ethnographic methods in particular, allows the researcher to advance his or her findings as a unique perspective from which to analyze a particular subject. In doing so, the researcher has the opportunity to create a “vital text” (Richardson, 1994), one that is appealing on a number of levels including epistemologically, theoretically, and even aesthetically; a text that does not aim to uncover the truth with a capital “T”, but rather multiple and diverse “truth effects” (Denzin, 2003, p. 624).

With the assumption that knowledge is fractured and impartial, an overall interpretation which takes into account the values, beliefs, and subjectivities of the participants in conjunction with those of the researcher is the “most honest representation of a given milieu’s shared truth about itself at a given point in history” (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002). Crystallization (Richardson, 1994) is thus my theoretical grounding of choice, with an understanding that partial knowledge provided by every unique angle is valuable because it provides a unique contribution to the whole body of knowledge previously established. In addition, consideration of multiple voices, including that of the writer, helps to produce a text that speaks *with* the subjects rather than *for or about* them (Sykes, Chapman, & Swedburg, 2005), thus taking a necessary step toward addressing the “vital need for productive dialogue” (Denzin, 2003, p. 601). Because ethnographers are the “conduits through which culture is coded, decoded and recoded” (Silk, 2005, p. 22), they must act responsibly in terms of presentation and representation of their subjects and data, producing an analysis that carefully considers the use of multiple meanings, the sound of multiple voices, and subsequently the reception of multiple audiences who will bring forth an even greater number and range of interpretations.

The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the “right” or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But it does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. Rather, it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are then, subject to critique.” (Richardson, 2000, p. 928)

It would thus be useful to employ an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating multiple methods of inquiry, theoretical understandings and perspectives, promoting the development of research *bricoleurs* who, “recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience,” and in doing so “understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the process” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681).

In light of this argument, there has been a call for researchers to increase their engagement with experimental writing forms, performance ethnography (Denzin, 2000), and Creative Analytical Practices (CAP) Ethnography (Richardson, 2000). In turn, new standards of rigor must be established to accommodate the introduction of these new forms of presentation and expression. The researcher must still consider how she or he will “meet the criteria of validity, credibility, and believability,” what Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton (2001) term “trustworthiness” (p. 321). The production of a

trustworthy text involves an intimate engagement with reflexivity, truth texts, and the rigors of reciprocity, the “give and take” of the research process (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). There is no “forced scientific separation between the research experience and the resulting interpretation, or between ourselves and our research subjects” (Markula and Denison, 2005, p. 4). In addition, Richardson (2000) proposes a set of standards for judging what she classifies Creative Analytical Practices (CAP) Ethnography. She provides the following five criteria:

1. **Substantive contribution**—Does it demonstrate a social scientific perspective?
2. **Aesthetic merit**—Is the text artistic and creative? Does it open up the text, inviting interpretive responses?
3. **Reflexivity**—Is the work mindful of epistemology? of postmodernism? Is there self-awareness and exposure? Is there accountability?
4. **Impact**—Does it have the ability to move people? Does it grab them emotionally? Does it stimulate intellectual sensibilities? Does it generate new questions and move others to write or try new research projects?
5. **Expression of reality**—Does it seem “true” or “real”? Does the text have an embodied sense of lived experience? In other words, is it credible? (p. 937)

No matter what style of representation is chosen, following these standards of rigor is a critical step in constructing a qualitative “vital text;” vital in the sense that it is an essential piece of work in terms of sharing new information from a unique and fresh perspective, and also in the sense of *vitality*, engaging audiences through a particular writing style and manner of presenting the information. Although my dissertation does not include many of the literary techniques used by fiction writers, such as time shifts,



changing contexts, visual, olfactory, audio and kinaesthetic imagery (Markula and Denison, 2005), it is only because I am unfamiliar with these techniques and have not learned how exactly to “do” them. However, even though these techniques are powerful writing tools, they do not suit the needs or purposes of each individual’s research goals, which should ultimately be the guiding force in deciding which style of representation to use (Markula and Denison, 2005).

My research goals include uncovering the sociocultural tensions that accompany the infusion of capitalism into the postcommunist landscape of Romania. Through an investigation of fitness and leisure consumption, I explore issues of class and gender as they are manifested through physical culture. The data I have collected through ethnographic interviews and participant observation have first taken form as this dissertation; but just as the data and context of the research remains unstable, uncertain, and incomplete, so the expression of the data remains vulnerable to change and re-representations in other forms. No matter what form the data takes, however, I will continue to strive to meet the standards of trustworthiness, reflexivity, and reciprocity, recognizing my roles and responsibilities, which include above much else empowering those who made the study possible in the first place. As Silk (2005) reminds us, “The author of the academic text may well have the final word, but it is crucial that subjects are granted voices, have an ability to talk back, have their own opinions and constitute their own representation” (p. 22). This is the challenge for all ethnographers, no matter how they choose to express it.

## Review of the Literature

While sport sociology has gained significant ground in garnering acceptance as not only a legitimate field but also a needed area of cultural study in the United States and Western Europe, it continues to exist only within the margins of mainstream East European academe (Krawczyk, 1992). The slow growth of sport studies in Eastern Europe is a result of many contributing factors, including a lack of financial and material resources at the university level, an enduring bias against sociology as a ‘bourgeois pseudo-science’, and a common view that sport sociology does not share the same political and social goals as the field of sociology in general (Foldesi, 2000). Recent work (post-1989) by sport sociologists in Eastern Europe has generally involved investigations of the structural changes in sport, examining for example changes in sport economic models, sport ideology, organizational systems, and admission criteria for elite athletes (Krawczyk, 1992; also see Collins, 2004). Perhaps due in part to a ‘crisis of theoretical reflection in the sociology of Eastern European sport’ (Krawczyk, 1992), sociological studies of East European physical culture, especially in relation to the active body, have received minimal scholarly attention at best. Receiving even less attention is the (active) *female* body and the shifting roles and meanings of postcommunist female identities.

Comprehensive studies on women’s positions in East European society articulated with the dramatic changes in physical culture are needed insofar as these changes can be seen as manifestations of the tensions and contradictions within the social, political, and economic postcommunist environment more generally. This dissertation seeks to make such an analysis, articulating the complicated relations between a shifting body culture, female identity, lifestyle consumption, media representations, national rhetoric, and sport

opportunities in the postcommunist moment. This dissertation thus seeks to bridge, even as it is critically informed by, four main bodies of literature that include: 1) Transition studies, also referred to as transformation studies, which focus on processes of change after communism; 2) consumer culture and globalization studies; 3) sociological, cultural studies and feminist studies on gender, power, and the body; and 4) interdisciplinary physical activity and sociology of the body studies.

### Revolution of body culture

An attempt at reconciling the ‘crisis of theoretical reflection in the sociology of Eastern European sport’ (Krawczyk, 1992) can be found in Henning Eichberg’s (1995) article, “Problems and future research in sports sociology: A revolution of body culture?”. In this article, published in the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport Journal*, Eichberg makes a strong argument for the need to reconceptualize the transformation processes of Eastern Europe as stemming from a revolution in body culture. In making this suggestion, Eichberg problematizes the ‘different and contradicting’ theses of both systems change and modernization; while the *change of systems* interpretation operates under the understanding that with the defeat of communism, a commercial sport system is being constructed within a Western capitalist mold, the *delayed modernization* thesis is an evolutionist interpretation that assumes the need for underdeveloped countries to catch up on the road to modernization and industrialization (Eichberg, 1995, pp. 1-6). These linear and progression-based approaches preclude any possibility of placing the social body and the formation of new cultural patterns of movement and sports at the center of an analysis of change (Eichberg,

1995, p. 4). Eichberg thus posits the need to consider a thesis of *post-modernity*, challenging sport sociologists to interpret the current social, economic, and political changes through what he identifies as a possible revolution of body culture and ‘transfigurational dynamics’ (pp. 4-8). An investigation of the postmodern body would acknowledge the complicit role of sports and the body in ‘boundary projects’ while simultaneously pushing beyond “the modern project of the rationalization of the body” (Pronger, 1998); indeed, the postmodernizing body “opposes the body’s differentiated, autonomous legislation from socio-cultural discourse” (Pronger, 1998, p. 292). Eichberg (1995) explains his revolution of body culture proposition and the implications for East-West dialogues in this way:

While the model of the ‘change of systems’ and of ‘modernization’ establish the Western achievement sport as the landmark of future development and thus suggest a one-way communication, the interpretation of post-modern transfiguration inverts the attention. The West would have to learn something from the change of the East.... (Eichberg, 1995, pp. 8-9)

Eichberg (1995) makes a call to sport sociologists to employ “new approaches and a new courage in methodology” in East European sport studies, elements he believes are critical for the purpose of more effectively capturing the complexity of change and post-modern social configurations in this region (p. 8). The appearance of new and diverse lifestyle choices, movement cultures, and an expanding “commercial market of body culture” (p. 5) attest to the need for heeding Eichberg’s call to interpret the post-revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe as a “revolution of body culture” (p. 6).

## Body studies

To study and identify elements of a revolution of body culture requires an understanding of the body, including its multiple meanings, its role in identity formation, and the processes which lead to its definition and construction. Bruno Latour (2004) suggests that discussions of the body requires the use of articulations and postulations rather than finite and resolute conclusions and definitions. Moving away from finite definitions opens the possibility of acknowledging infinite layers of difference—whether in body structure, identity, perceptions, experiences, knowledge, or any combination thereof—which each form a small though significant part of a flexible, complicated whole (Latour, 2004). This approach contrasts with one defined solely on the basis of biological and physical properties.

Donna Haraway (1989), a well-respected Western feminist scholar, questions how academic researchers ought to address and study the complex, fragmented, multifaceted body. Whereas the physical sciences are privileged in terms of their ability to define the body, Haraway, as well as many of her Western feminist contemporaries, argues that those findings which are seen as definitive and authoritative by the scientific community serve mainly to define and reinforce social and cultural norms. In this manner, Haraway (1989) argues, bodies are socialized and scientized; they are “made”, not “born”. In other words, the social context into which a body is born defines who and what that body is to become through political inscriptions already in place in terms of gender, sex, race, ethnicity and other socially constructed categories of demarcation. Similarly, Anne Balsamo (1996) argues that individuals have become technological embodiments. However, Balsamo (1996) stresses that even in considering the discursive nature of the

body, one must not discount the material relations of the body to the social world of which it is part and parcel. Balsamo postulates in Foucauldian fashion that though bodies are discursively constructed, they are technologically and culturally disciplined. She presents a matrix of possible forms of technological embodiment which include: 1) the marked body, 2) the labouring body, 3) the repressed body, and 4) the disappearing body. A brief discussion of Balsamo's technological embodiment matrix is provided below.

According to Balsamo, the marked body is one that has been transformed into a cultural signifier. If meanings of masculinity have been constructed through the reinforcement of dominant gender ideology, defining this trait as strong, aggressive, and brave, and for the most part attributable to men, the many ways in which a culture or society have been taught to view men and women are subsequently placed on the body. The implications of a marked body are no less significant for a man than they are for a woman, especially when notions of race, class, sexuality, and nationality are considered.

The laboring body is a functional body that deems woman's body as a maternal and reproductive body. Though the laboring body can be empowering, for it *is* the woman's body that is able (in most cases) to give birth, this body has been used as a controlling mechanism whereby the female body is constructed within the dominant discourse as physically limited. Framing the female body as possessing physical limitations fuels the rationale that constructs a limited social role for the female body in general.

The repressed body is one of pain management. Technological development has enabled the use of devices such as virtual reality to transcend the discrimination or oppression individuals may suffer or endure as a result of skin color or gender for

example. Perhaps the repressed body is used as a counter strategy to the pressures, expectations and stereotypes that the marked body cannot escape.

The disappearing body is the biotechnical body, one that is objectified and “scientized” such that subjective meaning and personal identity is giving way to the rational, decoding of human existence (think of the human genome project, for example). The different forms of technological embodiment as discussed by Balsamo are in no way concretized categories, but just as bodies themselves and the meanings and identities attached to them are fluid and flexible, so are these forms of embodiment.

In a Foucauldian sense, political, cultural and social inscriptions serve to discipline the body to conform to social norms. In light of these interpretations, in the Western context, there has been a movement to critically problematize the (bio-) politics of the body to identify and resist dominant ideologies that reinforce divisive lines of power. Once the ubiquitous nature of power is acknowledged, the next critical step for academics is to work toward understanding how power is used through sport and physical activity (Markula, 2003), from which the disciplining and symbolic meanings of the body cannot be separated.

#### Gender studies in transition literature

As the research on sport, physical activity, leisure and the body grows in depth and nature on a global level, research of this type in East European studies heretofore has shown minimal growth—even since Eichberg’s 1995 article discussed earlier. Romania takes no exception to this trend. However, since 1989 *non-sport* related sociological and cultural analyses that place notions of power, consumption, and production of the body at

the center of investigation have been mounting, as have studies related to gender and gender relations in countries of the former Soviet bloc. This work highlights the unique and multiple positions of women within the rapidly transforming societies of postcommunist nations, revealing the complex manifestation of social issues specific to women in this context.

A significant portion of transition literature analyzes institutional, structural and social changes from political science and economic angles, looking for example at issues of democracy and democratization on market systems (Dobry, 2000a), implications for retail sectors and changing consumption practices (Batra, 1999), and questions of nationalism, nation-building, and politics (Tismaneanu, 1998; Lane, 2002; Duncan & Light, 2001). While the scholarly contributions of these works cannot be ignored, one is left wondering what the implications for women are within this period of great change. As the Romania experiences major shifts in its economic and political structures, how are women adjusting to these shifts? What are the roles of women and how are they affected in terms of political prospects, employment opportunities, social identity, and family obligations?

Prior to the 1989 revolutions, a handful of studies that analyze the relationships between women, family, the State and State policies, and the Communist Party were collected and published as anthologies (see for example Wolchik & Meyer, 1985). Studies addressing these same issues, though many times framing the center of analysis on 'gender politics' and identity, have multiplied considerably after the official fall of communism. This is evident in such titles as *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* (Funk & Mueller, 1993), *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* (Gal & Kligman, 2000),



*Living Gender after Communism* (Johnson & Robinson, 2007), and *Gender Regimes in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe* (Pascall & Kwak, 2005) (see also Corrin, 1991; Roman, 2003; Aslanbeigui, Pressman & Summerfield, 1994; Moghadam, 1993; and Pilkington, 1996). In addition, a growing body of work centered on postsocialist consumption practices, market outcomes, and social change and stratification, include experiences of women (see Mandel & Humphrey, 2002; Burawoy & Verdery, 1999).

#### Political and social participation of women: Living legacies of communism

Issues of gender and women's rights as they are conceptualized and theorized in the West are not easily transferable to the condition of Romanian women. This is primarily due to the unique histories shared by women living under socialist governments which are considerably different than those from which feminist movements in the West have emerged. The contrast lies primarily in the significance of three factors: *conceptualization of private and public spaces, the active involvement of women in the social and political spheres during communism, and a lasting legacy of pervasive socialist ideology*. Together these features of postsocialist societies have greatly affected the development and acceptance of women's social and political roles, while contributing to a female subjectivity particular to the postsocialist context. Before discussing these elements in more detail, it must be said that although generalizations (such as those identified above) can be made about socialist society, the position and power of women varied across national boundaries. These differences stemmed not only from the ways in which socialism was balanced with elements of democracy, but also pre-communist differences between Eastern and Central European states including family organization,

fertility and birth rates, literacy and educational levels, access to secondary and higher education for women, political organization, political culture, and opportunities for women to participate in public life (Wolchik, 1985).

Women's social identity during communism was intricately linked to their location within a public/private dichotomy that ordered relations between men and women (Gal & Kligman, 2000, pp. 37-62; Havelková, 1993; Duffy, 2000; Wolchik, 1985). As living conditions deteriorated and public life became more oppressive—due to food and electricity shortages as well as tight surveillance and control over public life, for instance—citizens began to place greater attention and value on the private sphere of the home. Crowley & Reid (2002) argue that although the identification of the home with the private sphere is a relatively recent Western construction, this connection is critical to uncovering details of socialist life; further, “historically and geographically specific, it cannot be taken for granted in the context of socialism” (p. 13).

On the one hand, where government informants were placed throughout each community, silencing political dissent, policing the citizens' every movement and word, public space became a stifling and restrictive environment. On the other hand, and in response to the transformation of the public realm, the private sphere became a sacred space of protection. The home had become a place where cultural and moral values, no longer available in public space, could be preserved (Duffy, 2000; Havelková, 1993). In reference to Czechoslovakia, Havelková (1993) explains:

Orientation toward the private sphere was an essential, psychologically formative consequence of the suppression of public subjectivity. The family assumed a special function as the refuge of moral values. (p. 68)

The role of women during this period, particularly in the capacity of family caretaker and mother, was thus elevated, especially as their identity became intricately linked to the survival of the family (and subsequently of the nation) and to the preservation of cultural values. (Duffy, 2000, p. 221). Where the Communist public world came to represent a distortion in cultural and social mores, the home was used as a space to protect the family against cultural decline (Duffy, 2000). Thus “[a]s the private sphere became more important,” Havelková (1993) concludes, “so did the role of women” (p. 69).

In addition to their significant role in the private realm of the family and home, women proved themselves to be “competent in public matters as well” (Havelková, 1993, p. 69). Women actively participated in the workforce and held political positions in government agencies. However, although these positions provided a means through which women could become involved in public life, the significance of their participation was undermined by the purpose for which they were recruited. For example, many of the political positions held by women were merely ‘filler roles’, unspecialized, and oftentimes unneeded, roles (Nelson, 1985) created to provide the illusion of social equality upheld by socialist doctrine. Even as this practice of ‘structural tokenism’ increased the political presence of women, it did little to engage the ‘real voice’ of women or to provide ‘true representation’ (Duffy, 2000, p. 217). A similar process was evident in the public workforce whereby women were clearly involved, but the impetus behind their inclusion was not based on policies that recognized women’s skills and individual contributions. Rather, women were placed in the workforce out of economic and ideological necessity; their presence was vital to meeting the production demands of the Communist government, and also served to superficially demonstrate movement

toward the socialist ideal of a classless society (Duffy, 2000). Women were not seen as equal to men, however, which was further demonstrated in their overrepresentation in light industry, culture and education roles (Nelson, 1985; Fischer & Harsányi, 1994; Verdery, 1996).

Communist legacies have had multiple and contradictory effects for the current status of women in Romania. Postsocialist countries in general lack a strong tradition of political activism, especially in Romania where all forms of opposition to official ideology were vigilantly suppressed by Ceaușescu and his secret police. The systematic silencing of political opposition left virtually no space for learning to be proactive (Duffy, 2000), eventually resulting in a weak tradition of mobilizing political dissidence. Furthermore, as was the case in most Eastern European countries during communism, issues particular to women were given low priority (Wolchik, 1985). This legacy continues as women's issues of equality are subsumed by "larger strategies of economic, political, and social development" and are affected particularly by development strategies and economic crises in the region (Wolchik, 1985, pp. 35-41). As a result, grassroots movements and human rights campaigns have a long way to go in terms of advancing from their nascent stages and building a strong and effective civil society, let alone gaining local and foreign support, social credence and an active, political voice.

#### Feminist movements: Addressing the gendered (post-)socialist body

Increasingly, scholars are addressing the subjection of women, and the social consequences of gendered discourses, mobilized during communism (Gal and Kligman,

2000; Roman, 2003; Pascall and Kwak, 2005). Major findings of these studies show that women were targeted for both their productive and reproductive capacities, in the public and private realm respectively. In this context, their bodies were in one sense stripped of gender, seen in terms of their use-value in labor production, yet also targeted for their sex-specific biological ability to reproduce. Balsamo's (1996) matrix of technological embodiment (discussed earlier) is useful in conceptualizing the implications for women and their bodies in this case. Women's presence in the communist workforce served as a cultural signifier whereby femininity—or the visible differences which would otherwise mark female bodies as different than masculine bodies—was subsumed under a blanket of ideological equality. In effect, policies directed toward women were justified by the State's claim that women were equal to men; the marked body (Balsamo, 1996) was one of gender neutrality. In contrast, women were targeted for their ability to bear children, required by law under Ceaușescu to produce the future workforce—the future of the nation. Indeed, mothering was exalted as the “special task and privilege of women” (Verdery, 1996, p. 67). Negotiating the essential female ‘laboring body’ (Balsamo, 1996) produced much tension when juxtaposed with the ‘marked (sexless) body’ of the public worker.

If during communism women were faced with the daily challenge of negotiating their identity within the contradictory boundaries of official ideology and lived reality, in the postcommunist moment they are no less burdened by incongruous political and economic policies and social life. The current condition of women is indicative of lasting communist legacies. For example, because women were overrepresented in light industry and in non-managerial positions in socialist factories, women are now disproportionately

victims of rising unemployment and poverty as these positions are eliminated in the transforming economy. Also, because women were generally denied high-level, decision-making posts in the government, there continues to be low levels of female representation in the political sphere.

Further examination reveals that many of the conditions for women found in Romania parallel those in developed nations such as the United States: women are more concentrated in jobs with less authority and prestige and receive fewer promotions; political life is dominated by men, especially in highest positions; females make up majority of bottom of socio-economic populations as pensioners and single mothers (Meyer, 1985, p. 24). However, much *unlike* their counterparts in the West, despite the poor condition of women in transforming postcommunist societies, there have been few large-scale movements to improve their situation (Duffy, 2000).

The differences between feminist movements in Eastern Europe as compared to those in highly developed Western countries can be attributed to the structural and organizational differences in the political systems of the former “that make it difficult if not impossible for all citizens to form independent organizations in these countries” (Wolchik & Meyer, 1985, p. 9). Also, where women in the Western context have themselves fought to make changes in their social roles, in Eastern Europe these changes were forced upon them to accommodate a socialist agenda (Wolchik & Meyer, 1985). Therefore, in the period of postsocialism, there is a tendency to reject the idea of working outside the home as empowering, as it is commonly viewed from the Western perspective. Further, because women had already been included in the workforce, it could be interpreted that they had already demonstrated a certain degree of independence from

men (Meyer, 1985); thus Romanian women had in a sense already achieved what women were striving for at the outset of feminist movements in the West. The burden for women in Romania was not having to stay at home and care for the family, but rather having to stay at home and care for the family without “time-and labor-saving appliances” or adequate food sources (Meyer, 1985, p. 24), *and* having to work at state-run factories.

Feminist movements have largely been rejected in Romania because of their association with goals particular to the situation of inequality for women in the West. In addition, western modes of feminism have long been denounced by public officials who accuse this movement of promoting a radical, bourgeois agenda that opposes principles of equality. Emerging from this socio-historical context, postsocialist societies have not yet developed a sufficient language with which to describe and analyze gender issues specific to the condition of men and women in the current environment. Insofar as “gender” is a concept familiar neither in the Romanian vernacular (Roman, 2001; Pascall & Kwak, 2005) nor sociological imagination, it is challenging as a Western researcher to engage such topics as gender ideologies and inequalities that have received limited attention in the Romanian social agenda. That is not to say that power discrepancies between men and women are not—and have not—been recognized (Duffy, 2000) and addressed, but feminist movements in Romania have not had the same political or cultural resonance as those in democratic nations of Western Europe and the United States. Hobson and Lindholm (1997) make clear the challenge of mobilizing a collective, feminist movement in Eastern Europe:

[L]ittle discursive space exists for a new feminism to emerge in current civil society if one observes the cultural framing of gender that circumscribes political

discourse in many Eastern European countries. It is a cultural narrative that reasserts an essentialized sexualized woman, who seeks to reclaim her natural domesticity denied to her under the former regime. To compose a women's constituency, a new feminism would have to emerge...[that is not] derived from Western feminist movements that has constructed women's oppression around male dominance over women as wives and partners (private patriarchy). (p. 501)

Hobson and Lindholm make a call to social theorists to thoughtfully consider the possibilities of a new feminism that is informed by the cultural framing of gender particular to the East European context. In similar fashion, Denise Roman (2001) has made her own call to (feminist) academics to construct an empowering “‘gender-relevant language’... to carve discursive gender spaces and a gender politics beyond traditional patriarchal and heterosexual orders” (p. 62). Whatever the future direction of a new feminism in Romania, it is apparent that gender analyses must be incorporated into current political, economic, and social research agendas to gain a clear understanding of women's role and identity in the transforming society.

#### Global consumer culture: Shifting practices of body and lifestyle consumption

Within contemporary Romanian society, women cannot escape the effects of global capitalism and consumerism. The downfall of Ceaușescu's socialist program in 1989, followed by nearly two decades of dramatic policy changes in preparation for the 2007 accession to the European Union, has resulted in major shifts in the postcommunist political, economic, and social landscape. Expanding private markets coupled with shrinking public assistance are but a few changes that have impacted the position and role



of women in present-day Romania. To the detriment of women, the continued feminization of the nation's struggles (recall overrepresentation of women in areas of poverty and unemployment) and national space (Verdery, 1996), undermines efforts to identify and address the growing needs and challenges of women in the postcommunist era.

Gendering the national body politic often renders invisible the material realities of individual women's lives as "woman" becomes the mute symbolic ground upon which transactions of nationalist history are enacted. Efforts to contest and refigure such reductive symbolizations frequently focus on incorporating those voices and experiences that have been distorted, actively silenced, or simply unrepresented. (Berry, 1995, pp. 6-7)

Women's identity during communism was conflated with that of the nation, as the primary responsibility of women to preserve family/national strength and moral values became the symbolic struggle of the national body politic. In this instance, as Berry (1995) suggests above, the material realities of individual women's lives become invisible, thus posing a direct challenge for women to establish themselves as a (silenced) social group with a separate set of needs and struggles than men. In many ways, the nation and the national body politic continues to be gendered, thus sustaining 'woman' as "the mute symbolic ground upon which transactions of nationalist history are enacted" (Berry, 1995, pp. 6-7).

In the period of democratic transitions, however, changes in the political system combined with a growing market-based economy are shifting the prospects for women. Moving further away each year from the ideological constraints of the Ceaușescu regime

and toward new possibilities within an increasingly globalized world, women are finding ways to construct new identities, transcending boundaries previously constraining their voice and public presence. Key to this process are the effects of a global consumer culture that brings attention in particular to the language of lifestyle and the multiple ways of constructing, managing and disciplining the body.

Language of lifestyle, consumer culture and the body: What does it mean for women in Romania?

The era of postsocialism in Romania has been marked by an awareness of, and movement toward, new expressions of individuality. No longer bound by policies directed toward creating a homogenous, socialist society of equality and classlessness, nor limited by a dearth of consumer products, new opportunities for lifestyle change are rapidly expanding. As the nation continues to struggle economically, and in light of women's socio-economic position and status in Romanian society, access to a new language of lifestyle and body consumerism opens avenues for individual subject formation. Implications of this new language of lifestyle articulated with the national move toward a rhetoric of neoliberal individualism can be partially understood through an examination of these trends in societies already vested in their promotion.

In the United States, the language of lifestyle became a significant conduit through which Reaganism was promoted not only as an economic ideology, but also as an affective moral philosophy in the 1980s (Howell & Ingham, 2001). By mobilizing a discourse within the health policy debate that reinvented and lauded the self-reliant individual as following the true American way, the State justified and convincingly

argued for cutbacks in social welfare programs; in the meantime private industries capitalized on the booming rhetoric of health, fitness, and physical activity (Howell & Ingham, 2001). Moving toward market-based strategies, the mass discontinuation of state funds to public institutions in Romania creates a need to reinvent the Romanian citizen and celebrate individualism—just as it took place in the United States—to ease the social tensions created by these policy changes. A critical examination of the ensuing cultural shift reveals how both women and men are conceding to the rhetoric of individualism, and the lifestyle changes promoted therein, as they negotiate and position themselves in the postcommunist society.

A growing number of Romanians have become postmodern consumers who define themselves in relation to society through participation in exercise- and leisure-based activities which are consciously consumed as a lifestyle choice. Consumption practices have become central to the process of identity negotiation, especially as women are ‘hailed’ by, and simultaneously invest themselves in, subject-positions (Hall, 2000) created by the increasing number of fitness and health industries. Identification with the discursively constructed meanings associated with purchasing gym memberships, applying beauty products, changing lifestyle practices, and consuming spaces of fitness and physical activity, can provide a new sense of self for women. Due primarily to the slow pace of social restructuring and economic recovery, Romania “in no way gives the impression of a country on its way to entering the twenty-first century” (Hausleitner, 1993, p. 56). However, even as a “strange combination of the premodern and the modern (Hausleitner, 1993, p. 56), Romanian society is faced with a postmodern identity crisis.

The individual in postmodern society is threatened by a number of ‘dilemmas of the self’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 201): fragmentation, powerlessness, uncertainty, and a struggle against commodification. These dilemmas are driven by the ‘looming threat of personal meaninglessness’ as the individual endeavours to construct and maintain an identity that will remain stable through a rapidly changing environment. (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998, p. 131)

The postmodern consumer confronts many of these ‘dilemmas of the self’ in and through media and advertising, while attempting to construct an identity through physical practices of the body. Body maintenance not only creates a certain aesthetic which conveys the values and meanings associated with these practices, but also involves the negotiation of identity within specific spaces (which themselves have values and meanings attached to them). In other words, “[health] is most often a matter of the self working on the body. In the process, our bodies often become our selves” (Aldridge, 1996). The body has thus become significant insofar as:

The body ‘reappropriated’ in this way is reappropriated first to meet ‘capitalist’ objectives: in other words, where it is invested, it is invested in order to produce a yield. The body is not reappropriated for the autonomous ends of the subject, but in terms of a *normative* principle of enjoyment and hedonistic profitability, in terms of an enforced instrumentality that is indexed to the code and the norms of a society of production and managed consumption. In other words, one manages one’s body; one handles it as one might handle an inheritance; one manipulates it as one of the many *signifiers of social status*. (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 131)

As a signifier of social status, the body thus has a sign value and its development is critical to the formation and expression of identity. It is at the level of appearance and image that the social world in the postmodern condition interacts; for it is at this level that symbolic exchange occurs, that cultural meanings are encoded and decoded. In what ways will imported images of the physical body be appropriated in Romania and to what end? How will power struggles manifest in the materiality and performativity of the body as global capitalism meets local postcommunism? Further, through what mechanisms will the body be controlled and disciplined in the postcommunist era?

Now that women are freed from the ‘sexless’ environment of Ceaușescu’s Romania, a new female subjectivity will emerge that remains limited not only by a lack of material resources and universal access, but also by emerging forms of power that continue to construct and reinforce social gender norms. Michel Foucault (1975) argues that self-surveillance and self-discipline have become the regulatory mechanisms by which modern forms of power are sustained. The discursive relations of power he describes include the ways in which dominant ideologies dictate the norms and values of a society in service of those in positions of power. Proper behavior, attitudes, comportment, and styles are thus subsumed under an established code of conduct, which is reinforced in social circles, through the media, and through publications of “scientific” health and fitness guidelines, for example. Ultimately, deviance from the social code of conduct is recognized and self-corrected. In this manner, the body acts as a vehicle of control that is trained and regulated to reinforce ideologies that privilege the status of those (men) in power while marginalizing (female) others. Foucault (1975) argues that the fragmented and inconsistent nature of the body leaves it vulnerable to a variety of

disciplining technologies. The process of identity formation for women in Romania is complicated by these self-regulatory mechanisms, or “technologies of the self”; for while seeking to construct a particular identity, the aesthetic and body modification practices through which women work to achieve this goal have already been instilled with socially and culturally constructed meanings. The politics of the body in Romania will be of notable concern with the growing democratic marketplace that promotes the power of certain marked bodies over others; but perhaps in deciphering the methods of biopower and technological production of bodies, opportunities to achieve social equality will be revealed, creating an empowering space for physical cultural resistance.

In a study on political transformation and changing forms of leisure consumption in postcommunist Eastern Europe, Roberts *et al* (2005), state: “Markets allow individuals to decouple (subjectively at any rate) their own life chances from their countries’ prospects” (p. 132). In other words, markets provide individuals with what they see as viable options to raise their social status, through the attainment of cultural capital for instance, despite Romania’s struggle to gain status within the international community. In this manner sport and physical activity can be appropriated by individuals as a mark of rebellion against a Communist past, showing signs of progress, strength, and distinction. Participating in aerobics could in some instances be used by women to achieve these goals (Svendsen, 1996).

The response to changing consumption practices vary among men and women between and within social classes. David Kideckel (2008) found that miners from the Jiu Valley tended to demonstrate a conservative attitude toward shifting standards of feminine beauty and aesthetics, rejecting cosmetic advertisements and the push for

women to enhance their beauty through make-up. In contrast to the (male) miners, however, the miners' wives were attracted to the advertisements, demonstrating a belief that dress and cosmetics are important in enhancing one's beauty and chances of success in the postsocialist environment (Kideckel, 2008, pp. 160-161).

The responses of the miners' wives in Kideckel's (2008) study are demonstrative of a larger trend among Romanian women that also parallels attitudes among women in Western societies. Images of beauty and a belief in the role of appearances in improving one's chances for success are shared conceptions that reveal common perceptions of female aesthetics and their status-invoking qualities. The many similarities to western ideals and trends in Romania can be explained by the high degree to which Western fashions and images are held as ideals (Roman, 2003).

As access to multiple images of beauty, fashion, and lifestyle increase in Romania, shifting patterns of body and lifestyle consumption are redefining gender and gender relations. The politics of the body are thus implicated as a new postcommunist norm develops in relation to expectations of what it means to be male and female in the transforming society. Haraway (1989) argues that despite the complicated meanings of 'being' male or female, neither the male or female body can escape assessment and judgment at the 'dominant juncture' of normativity. Normative definitions themselves are unstable, though, which opens spaces for movements of resistance to challenge and resist subjection to disempowering norms. An examination of physical culture—of the ways in which the (active) body in its multiple forms is articulated with larger social, economic, and political processes—reveals the unstable nature of gender norms and the shifting balance of power within the production of meaning. While such a study has yet to be

conducted for the Romanian context, excepting this dissertation, comprehensive examinations of sport, the nation, and the (gendered) body have been done in other non-Western contexts. These works and their implications for similar analyses in Romania are discussed below.

### Physical cultural studies: Sport and the (non-Western) body

Within the past fifteen years there have been two seminal books in the area of physical culture that have demonstrated the effective use of an interdisciplinary approach to critically examine physical activity and the role of the body in non-Western contexts. In *Training the Body for China*, anthropologist Susan Brownell (1995) draws her analyses from social theories of the body and body culture (i.e., Mauss, 1939; Bourdieu, 1977, 1988, 1990; Foucault 1978, 1979; Turner 1969, 1986, 1988), strengthening her arguments with historical, cultural and linguistic examinations of Chinese (sporting) bodies. Brownell makes a strong case for placing the body at the center of her study on nationalism, sports, and training in Beijing, emphasizing her belief that the body is located at the “center of human experience” (Brownell, 1995, p. 15). As a competitive heptathlete, Brownell competed for Beijing University at the 1986 National College Games of the People’s Republic of China, which still holds the position as the “most important occasion for dramatizing the politicized body” (Brownell, 1995, p. 59). With the subtitle “Sports in the Moral Order of the People’s Republic”, Brownell’s book takes the reader from sports in ancient times (beginning in the first century) through present day China, demonstrating the persistent link between moral principles and body techniques, even amongst shifting definitions and conceptions of the body and its



meanings through time. The connection between morality and the body, both of which have been ideologically linked to the nation itself, has been heavily impressed upon the people by the government and its leaders.

Although very influential in enforcing rules against immorality and teaching morally acceptable body practices, in recent years the Chinese government has had to come to terms with increasing globalization processes, growing exposure to Western influence, and an expanding consumer culture. Brownell (1995) discusses how bodybuilding, for example, developed as a viable competitive sport despite its initial ban in 1953 and continued misgivings about the contestants' bikinis when the sport was revived in the 1980s (pp. 267-268). The skin baring bikinis went against the modesty so valued in Chinese culture, and it was widely believed that "bikinis would have a 'bad social influence,' especially on young people" (p. 270). However, because the 'bikini debate' was framed to encompass 'orthodox Party discourse of the time', rather than motives associated with a politically charged, social movement of (feminist) resistance, bodybuilding was not as heavily contested as it might have been otherwise (p. 272). Brownell (1995) explains the implications of the bodybuilding movement in China this way:

In fact, the State Sports Commission made every effort to identify the main issue as that of following international rules rather than of transforming cultural beliefs; this was obviously part of its strategy for calming the furor. The emphasis on following the international rules [of bodybuilding] deflected attention from the more important fact that the body culture promoted by the Party since its inception was being attacked and dismantled. (pp. 272-273)

Brownell continues by suggesting that changes in body culture, prompted by newly available images of bodybuilders and the exposed body in general, was closely followed by consumerism.

That the idea of gender and gender distinctions as we have come to know them in the Western context are not directly transferrable to the non-Western contexts should not be surprising. However, dominant studies of gender have unevenly favored Western-based research based on assumptions of a strict male/female dichotomy. Brownell (1995) argues that in the West, the socially constructed distinctions between male (masculine traits) and female (feminine traits), situated in a politically charged discourse of sexuality, sets conceptual boundaries that are difficult to cross without having one's sexuality questioned (p. 230). In China, Brownell explains, the 'primary axis for moral evaluation is based on class rather than 'sexuality'' (p. 230), meaning notions of gender are neither questioned nor considered in terms of sports participation; rather, one's participation in a class-appropriate (or –inappropriate as it were) sport invites judgment from onlookers.

The easy acceptance of women in sports in China was also partly due to the socialist ideological norm of promoting equality (Brownell, 1995, p. 226). Brownell, however, cautions that this explanation in itself is inadequate, especially since outside of sport, power equity between genders was not always evident (p. 226). A strong sense of nationalism—of being a Chinese athlete competing 'against the world'—eclipsed any desire to separate male and female athletes or their achievements (p. 227). In addition, women's entrance into sport was made available because, unlike in the Western context where sport is constructed as a male preserve, in China sport was viewed as an activity of the lower-class (227). Chinese sportswomen, in fact, have outperformed their male

counterparts in the international arena, and their athletic success has raised questions of neither sexuality nor gender equality in the public sphere. In China, unlike in the West, it is not a stretch of the sociological imagination to associate strength and power with women, primarily because of the consistent physical contributions women make on the farms as well as in the factories.

Because communist ideology glorifies labor and the lot of the oppressed, women's suffering has been well-represented in Chinese propaganda, and the notion of women's strength has probably penetrated all social strata to a greater degree than was true before Liberation. Chinese sportspeople believe that women in general are more able to eat 'bitterness and endure hard labor' (*chiku nailao*) than men, and peasant women more so than urban women. (Brownell, 1995, p. 228).

Brownell argues the male/female dichotomy that underlies much Western thinking about sport participation and athletic ability does not present itself in the Chinese discourse on sport and physical activity (p. 229). That women are innately biologically weaker than men is a notion that has not found a place in Chinese mentality, even as it remains the driving force behind maintaining the polarized boundaries of female and male (athletes) in the West.

In her book, *Working out in Japan*, Laura Spielvogel (2003) examines the construction of "workplaces, bodies and lifestyles" (p. 9), with a particular focus on active female bodies and popular fitness clubs in post-industrial Japan. As an experienced aerobics instructor, Spielvogel finds entry into the lives of Japanese fitness professionals and aerobics participants. She immerses herself within the changing Japanese culture of

fitness, health, and leisure by living in Japan and working for two popular health club chains in and around Toyko. As with Brownell, Spielvogel examines the cultural construction and understanding of the sporting body, locating contemporary images and perceptions within the historical context of China and Japan, respectively. Spielvogel (2003) examines the spaces of Japanese fitness clubs, producing a critical examination of “the expanding [Japanese] service industry, ideological contradictions and interplay between Japan and the United States, the symbolic construction and discipline of the female body, and the changing complexions of work and leisure in late-capitalist Japan” (p. 9). Her study sheds light on the ways gender and femininity is performed in the fitness club by the aerobics participants as well as the workers whose roles are determined by a male-female hierarchy. In addition, Spielvogel (2003) deconstructs the thin and toned feminized body ideal, providing insight into the meanings the ideal holds located at the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism (p. 172). “Thinness and dieting,” Spielvogel (2003) explains, “become emblematic of the tension and ambivalence over gender roles and notions of the self in Japan” (p. 195).

Using the works of Brownell (1995) and Spielvogel (2003) as models, this dissertation provides an ethnographic and historical account of physical culture in Romania. As an American researcher doing research within a non-Western context, I am faced with many of the same challenges Brownell and Spielvogel experienced in their studies of Asian societies. An ongoing struggle involves the negotiation of social theories of the body based primarily on Western experiences and notions of gender and sexual difference. A re-working of the theory to some degree is required to accommodate the cultural, political, and historical meanings of the active, physical, body in Romania.

In sum, at the intersection of cultural understandings of sport, physical activity, and the body, lies a complicated tension between gender roles, biological conceptions, and transitioning global social movements. These tensions are manifested in the shifting meanings and practices of the body and have had major implications in the construction of new postcommunist subjectivities, especially female subjectivities, in the transforming social context of Romania. In addition, changes in (body) consumer culture as well as gender relations, in terms of previously and presently existing gender regimes in Romania, are affecting women's participation in physical activity. One of the primary aims of this dissertation is to interrogate the relation between elements of what I identify as an emerging postsocialist or postcommunist consumer body culture, with larger socio-political issues related to gender and class in postcommunist Romania. What is the role of consumer body culture in the construction of new postcommunist subjectivities? How are these new postcommunist subjectivities constructed among women and with what consequences? In particular, how is the changing physical culture, including body management practices—"technologies of the body" related to health, fitness, and exercise—shaping and defining emergent female subject-positions? These questions are important because they help to unfold the complex manner in which power relations are transforming in Romania, revealing both the empowering and disempowering potential of shaping the body within new spaces of exercise, sport, and leisure.

## Chapter One

### History of physical culture and women in sports

#### Geopolitical instability and the rise of socialism

Since gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877 and officially becoming the Kingdom of Romania in 1881, Romania<sup>1</sup> has struggled in its development as an independent nation. Romania's identity and international reputation has been regularly compromised by territorial and political instability not only within its own borders, but also in the surrounding regions of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Especially evident during World Wars One and Two, Romania's position near the Soviet Union made it a nation of great political interest, particularly for those nations who feared the rise of Soviet power.

As a young, underdeveloped nation, Romania heavily relied on political and economic support from the more powerful countries. Rather than fully supporting the development of Romania's independence, however, those who took control of the political reigns in Romania continued to create further instability and insecurity in Romanian society. When Austro-Hungarian and German occupation ceased with the end of World War One, local radical nationalist movements grew and a fascist dictatorship rose to power. At the end of World War Two, the fascist government was overthrown and the Soviet Union moved in to occupy the country. It was not until Nicolae Ceaușescu took over as General Secretary, and later as President, that Romanian ties with the Soviet Union were severed in an attempt to finally assert Romania as a truly independent nation.

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<sup>1</sup> In some texts you will see Rumania instead of Romania. In the English language it was officially spelled "Rumania" from 1866-1966.

The timing of Ceaușescu's induction was fortuitous to his career because by this time the people were ready for a confident new leader who offered a change to the oppressive regimes and policies of the previous ruling parties. With each regime change prior to Ceaușescu's accession, disillusionment with governing bodies and dominant political ideologies grew, so that by the time Ceaușescu took over as the country's leader, the people were drawn to the promising socialist rhetoric of Ceaușescu and the Romanian Communist Party. Both fascism and capitalism were rejected as faulty systems unable to meet the needs of the people, thus setting the stage for the initial attraction to and embrace of communism in this region.

Across nearly all of Eastern Europe after the First World War there was widespread disillusionment with Eastern European 'travesties of democracy', whereby corrupt, self-serving political leaders moved ahead with failing economic and political reforms that were 'democratic' only in name (Bideleux and Jeffries, 1998, p. 458). This is one of the major reasons attributed to the quick rise in power by ultra-national fascist groups in the interwar period and then by authoritative, communist leaders after World War Two. Whether at the hands of foreign occupiers or their own extremist political leaders, Romanians have had to endure the effects of pervasive corruption, poorly developed national policies, and strictly enforced ideological teachings. Other factors retarding Romania's growth included the lack of economic and political support by the stronger democratic nations—of Great Britain and France, for example—in making war reparations, establishing functional democracies, and stabilizing weak economies among the East European nations in general (Bideleux and Jeffries, 1998).

By the time help had arrived to reverse the fascist takeover in Europe, considerable damage had already been done. Again, political instability combined with economic hardship, and an overall dissatisfaction and disenchantment with alternate forms of government, including democracy, opened a door of opportunity for political leaders looking to increase their power. In Romania the end of fascism marked the beginning of a new era in which communism and socialism would thrive with promises of strong government, social security, and a classless society, all of which neither fascism nor capitalism proved to be capable of achieving.

Ceaușescu's policy of 'building socialism' was not unique to Romania; rather, this all-encompassing socio-political project dominated the cultural and social sphere of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Citizens of these countries were expected to decisively commit themselves to the cause of strengthening the socialist system, which promised to protect and care for their individual rights and freedoms. Physical activity and sports played an important role in this context, especially because health and productivity were so closely linked to national strength, international reputation, and subsequently the superiority of the socialist system over other forms of government (Riordan, 1976; 1993). The government thus began to give more attention to sports programs and physical education, initiating directives that emphasized physical activity and sports competition in elementary schools, high schools, universities, work factories and in public state-run facilities and events.

In principle the 'masses' were encouraged to participate in large sports festivals, devote leisure time to physical activity, and incorporate mandatory exercise in their work schedule to improve their physical health and vitality so critical to the socialist building



project. As the State increased its emphasis on ‘physical culture’, it continued to indoctrinate the citizens with self-promoting Party lines and socialist ideology, while physical practices of the body became a central focus of State control. Thus the body itself was ultimately used as a political tool for strengthening national identity, Party support, and overall solidarity, but to what extent and with what success? In this chapter I analyze the social and cultural significance of the Romanian Communist Party’s (RCP) programs for improving physical culture. With what consequences and to what extent was the Party successful in achieving its goals of (1) improving the health of the nation through the popularization of mass sports events and (2) strengthening national solidarity by promoting identification of Romanian sporting successes to personal and State achievements.

A second line of inquiry examines the contradictions of Romanian socialist doctrines used to promote sports and physical activities. Official rhetoric lauded the creation of an inclusive sporting space in which men, women, children, seniors, villagers, and urban dwellers alike could participate and reap the benefits of these State-supported activities. The promotion of equal opportunities in the sporting world was also seen in the political arena where women were officially, though not always in practice, viewed as equals to their male counterparts. In a society that publicly upheld socialism’s ideology of full equality, how was gender addressed within physical culture initiatives and incorporated into the Party’s political and social agenda? The treatment of women in politics was not unrelated to their treatment in sports or in the workplace or home. This chapter addresses the shifting roles of Romanian women in relation to the changing role of the State before and during socialism, analyzing the tensions between socialist rhetoric

and policies and culturally prescribed gender roles and expectations. Tensions between women's bodies and their roles in society were manifested in both mass and elite sports participation.

In the final section of the chapter, I examine the life of gymnast Nadia Comaneci as a representative case of how women were burdened with reconciling the opportunities offered by socialist policies with the oppression caused by the same system. I argue that Comaneci, though having enjoyed the status of a high performance athlete, symbolized the extent to which female subjectivity in general was tied to the productive and performative female body, which represented the successes and achievements of the Romanian Communist Party and the socialist system.

#### Sports development and politics: 1800s to 1944

Throughout Romanian history sports have been enjoyed as a political and social outlet. Dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, the Jockey Club was a place not only to discuss political matters and socialize, but also to enjoy the physical game (Georgescu, 1991). Although public sporting events, such as fencing matches and target shooting, began mainly as an activity reserved for the upper classes, the popularization of less aristocratic forms of sport began to grow toward the end of the 1800s, especially after the first publication of *Sportul* (Sports) in 1880 (Georgescu, 1991, p. 176). Over the next thirty years, Romanians began to hold competitions in gymnastics (1872), track and field (1882), and soccer (1909), eventually forming the Federation of Sports Societies in 1910. This federation later transformed into the Union of Roumanian Sports Clubs, and included federal, regional and local organizations, consisting of 400

private local clubs and approximately 40,000 members (Georgescu, 1991). The government thus assumed a prominent role in the growth and development of sports in Romania in the last part of the nineteenth century, and thenceforth continued to assert itself as the central driving force behind all national sporting initiatives.

As sports gained in popularity, the government began to incorporate policies for improving national physical education standards. In 1923, a physical education law was passed making it obligatory for Romanian youth to attend either public or private school for physical training. This law was amended in 1929, officially naming the National Institute of Physical Education, which was “responsible for the co-ordination of tuition in all schools in matters pertaining to physical education, and the promotion of private athletic societies,” training sports and gymnastics specialists, editing and publishing periodicals, sports reviews, books, and brochures for “popularizing physical training,” and organizing pre-military training for youth as well as national and international sports competitions (Georgescu, 1991, pp. 278-279). Centralized control over sports was exercised early on as the national governing body of physical education was put in charge of coordinating, organizing, and promoting sports events, training, and education at all levels.

Although significant steps were taken toward improving physical education and sports training in the first half of the twentieth century, Romania’s involvement with sports, particularly on the international stage, was limited due in large part to a weak economy and political instability. Many of the unstable conditions stemmed from the difficulties Romania faced in re-acquiring and subsequently re-assimilating three major territories that had each been under the control of three culturally distinctive empires.

After World War One, Romania's Old Kingdom was reunited with the territories of Transylvania, Bukovina, and Bessarabia, previously occupied by Hungary, Austria, and Russia, respectively. With this "Great Union of 1918" came the challenge of creating national unity among what had become ethnically and linguistically diverse regions. Therefore, in a strong push toward rebuilding the nation and achieving "full national consciousness" (Livezeanu, 1995) after World War One, much of what was left of the State's limited economic resources were earmarked for the education system. Massive funding was directed toward general education reform, including the construction of new schools across the country and training new teachers. With this strategy, the government hoped to create a consistent curriculum among the nation's schools, assimilating those who had developed their own agenda prior to the Great Union. A primary aim of the State was to preclude any discrepancies that may have otherwise presented themselves had each region been left to make its own educational decisions based on regional, rather than national, goals. During this period, sport development and physical education took a backseat to programs targeting school systems, through which the official version of Romanian history, language, and culture was effectively controlled by the State.

Further, in the period leading up to World War II, sport development was temporarily suspended as militant fascist groups such as the National Guard took control of the political reigns. Wide-scale oppression and ultra-nationalist ideology dominated the social and political landscape, and in the process anti-Semitic feelings patterned after Hitler's creed of ethnic and racial cleansing were cultivated. Just as these ultra-nationalist feelings were advanced in the daily lives of Romania's citizens, they were no less apparent in the overt disapproval of minorities who participated in Romanian sports. In a

note titled “Athletes’ and National Sports”, Vasile Marin, a leading ideologist in the fascist movement in Romania, complained, “The Jews have perverted our national feeling to such extent that even in sports, which are a strong factor of national affirmation, we can no longer be Romanians!” (cited in Petreu, 2005, p. 72). The nationalist rhetoric that had been so strongly used to justify political decisions (i.e. in education reform described above) prior to this point was now being exploited in its connection to sports. Promoting the ideologies and actions of the fascist National Guard, who openly perpetuated anti-Semitic feelings, was facilitated in this instance by pointing to sports as a veritable factor in affirming national identity. However, the people could hardly focus on sports while the Iron Guard—an ideologically-driven group of radical, nationalist extremists—terrorized the nation through criminal acts of violence and destruction (Livezeanu, 1995). The Iron Guard wielded its influence over the people not only through physical violence, but also psychological and emotional tactics, insisting their actions were justified by always working “in the name of the nation” (Livezeanu, 1995, p. 287).

The nationalist rhetoric was somewhat palatable to those Romanians searching for ways to uphold and strengthen their national identity amidst the usual instability of the nation. Later, the new government would promote these same nationalist feelings through sports and physical education. Until then, the fascist’s ultra-nationalist agenda set the stage for sports, as a more moderate venue, to be accepted and used with nationalist rhetoric to promote the new government.

### Shift in State policy toward sport and physical education: 1944 to 1960

The lack of attention to sports development while under fascist rule was clearly evidenced in Romania's low participation in and success at the Olympics in the interwar period and through the Second World War. In these years Romania earned a total of one bronze (1924, Paris) and one silver (1936, Berlin) medal. It was not until after the Second World War ended that a renewed interest in sports and physical activity was realized. In 1944 the fascist regime in Romania was defeated and the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) regained full legal status. As the project of 'socialist construction' began, sports, including leisure time physical activities, competitive sports, and physical education, as with all other aspects of social and cultural life, was taken under the centralized control of the State. It was the clear directive of the RCP that all social and cultural movement make significant contributions to the overall goals of developing the socialist society. To this end the State assumed responsibility for coordinating efforts to improve the physical health of the nation. Improved physical strength, the government reasoned, would directly impact work capacity and industrial production levels. The State also took over the training of athletic champions, who "by their results, honour the successes scored by the Romanian people in the construction of the new, socialist society", according to the National Council for Physical Education and Sports (1973, p. 12).

The all-important goal of demonstrating the superiority of socialism over capitalism in meeting the people's needs was strongly linked to the spread of 'physical culture' and the popularization of sports and physical activity in general. Bringing sports, education, and politics together to promote large-scale physical culture movements across Eastern Europe reflected the socialist goal of providing a holistic education, which itself

was part of a larger social movement to mobilize the masses and encourage nation building (Girginov, 2004, p. 696). Evidence of these goals—to promote national solidarity while exalting the efforts of the Party, popularizing notions of physical culture, and encouraging the individual’s role in molding the ‘new socialist man’—was in no short supply within print media and Party propaganda. In its publication *Sports in Romania* (1980), the Romanian Olympic Committee clearly blames the fascist government for neglecting the development of sport in Romania. The Committee used sports as a vehicle through which to raise national consciousness, implicating its importance to Romanian life and culture. A dramatic shift in sports policies would reaffirm the new communist government’s commitment to working for the best interest of its people in the wake of August 23, 1944, “National Day”, the definitive date marking “the victory of the revolution of social and national, antifascist and anti-imperialist liberation” (*Sports in Romania*, 1980, p. 8). The Committee offers the following account which highlights the promising turning point of Romanian culture and society embodied by National Day:

In spite of unfavourable social and economic conditions and the lack of interest on the part of the authorities (vehemently criticized in the press of the time), who did not allow the organization of sporting activities, Romania was present on Olympic stadiums as early as six decades ago. The true assertion came later, following the revolutionary act of 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1944. Phenomena at the periphery of social concern under the former regime, physical education and sports have become activities of national interest in the years of socialist construction, with

deep implications in moulding a new man, constructor of the new society. (Sports in Romania, 1980, p. 4)

Pointing to the former regime's lack of interest and support in developing physical education and sports, the Committee emphasizes the new Party's enthusiasm for actively promoting and developing physical activity as an element critical to the health and well-being of the people, and consequently the new socialist society. Further supporting this commitment to improving physical activity, Law no. 29 on the development of physical education and sports, clearly stated:

In the Socialist Republic of Romania physical education and sports are activities of a national interest. Physical education and sports contribute to preserving and improving health, to increasing physical and intellectual capacities, to an efficient use of the leisure time, to a harmonious physical and moral development of the population. With a view to attaining these targets, the State supports the development of physical education and sports. (translated and cited in National Council for Physical Education and Sports, 1973, p. 5)

The contribution of sports to physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual health was raised as an issue of national importance. Now designated as activities of "national interest", physical education and sports warranted immediate, compulsory, and radical measures by the State to increase participation. The measures taken by the State, however, under the guise of improving the physical status of the masses, primarily served to assert another level of control over the lives of its citizens. Since political power and economic resources were concentrated at the head of the centralized government, the people became dependent on the State to construct facilities, organize competitions, and



regulate physical education and sports. In theory, the efforts made toward increasing mass participation of sports and physical activity demonstrated the RCP's and the people's ability to reach socialist ideals of equality. In practice, mass sporting events became ideological battle fields where the people were obligated to devote their time and energy to participate in the national agenda of the State. Though in a different context, this harkens back to the program of the ultra-nationalists of the 1930s who claimed to take action "in the name of the nation". Here too drastic measures were taken in the name of the nation as the State worked to convince the people en masse to involve themselves in their own indoctrination—though this time through sports and the requisite devotion to their body. Indeed, school classrooms and Party propaganda taught that social and moral development was directly influenced by proper physical training and regular participation in physical activity. Moreover mass participation in sports and physical activity was heavily emphasized as an important component to successfully building the socialist society.

In sum, prior to Nicolae Ceaușescu assuming power as the new General Secretary in 1965, the RCP had already begun to lay the foundations of 'socialist physical culture' as part of its larger agenda to strengthen the new social-political system (Földesi, 1991, p. 243). In the "spirit of social justice" (Földesi, 1991, p. 243), the RCP denounced the oppressive measures of the defeated fascist regime, and began at once to capitalize on the spiritual elation of the wounded Romanian community. With promises of new freedoms and social improvements, the RCP justified the heavy push for implementing mass sports movements and physical activity requirements among every group of the citizenry.

### Ideological pressure and technologies of time and space under Ceaușescu: 1960 to 1989

Even as Romania started to pull away from the USSR in the 1960s, the Soviet influence of organizing mass sports events and incorporating physical activity into the work (for adults) and school (for children and youth) day cannot be overstated. In regards to mass sports festivals, the *Spartakiad of the Peoples of the USSR* was fashioned after the Olympic Games in its ritualistic and grandiose production and also in its use of sport as a culturally unifying experience (Riordan, 1976; 1977). Beginning with the First Summer *Spartakiad* in 1956, the number of participants reportedly grew from 23 million to 80 million by the Sixth one held in 1976 (*Cnopm 6 CCCP*, 1971, No 1, 3, cited in Riordan, 1977, p. 163). In much the same way as the Soviet citizen was encouraged to identify team-loyalty with state-loyalty during these festive mass sporting events (Riordan, 1976), so was the Romanian citizen to more closely identify with the goals and ideologies of the RCP and socialist state as they participated in the *Spartakiads* and later in their own national Romanian sports competition, *Daciada*.

By 1964, participation in physical activity and sport had grown significantly, due in large part to the commitment of the Party to use certain “means and methods” to encourage and oblige the population to do regular exercise (Földesi, 1991). It was during this time that reported participation in State-run (and –mandated) physical activity reached phenomenal heights: the Union for Physical Culture and Sports boasted more than 3,400,000 members, amounting to one of every six Romanians being claimed by a sports club; Romanian participation in the *Spartakiads* had grown to 3,000,000; and

events such as the Agricultural Cup Contest, also referred to as the “small Olympics” of Romanian villagers, and the “Sundays for Culture and Sports” in the villages became widespread (n.a., 1964, pp. 58-62). Also by this time, “occupational gymnastics”—exercise breaks led by trained specialists in person or by “radio relay system” at factories and other places of employment—were widely practiced (n.a., 1964). Once Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power in 1965, the environment had been suitably prepared for further progress in the physical culture movement.

The National Council for Physical Education and Sport was the central body in charge of “implementing the policy of the Party and State in this field” (National Council for Physical Education and Sports, 1973) and worked closely with other national governing bodies such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Armed Forces, Union of the Communist Youth, sports federations and local town councils. In 1972 the Ministry of Education published a report containing details on age-specific physical training. This report defines the objectives and characteristics of physical training specific to each level of participation, and it is here that distinctions are made between physical education (*educația fizică*) and sports, where sports is further divided into mass sports (*sport de masa*) and performance sports (*sport de performanță*). The separation and formal division of the different levels gave the State license to subsequently separate the goals—and thus the requirements for inclusion—in each division. This was beneficial to the State because, for example, even if elite athletes were specially recruited and given exclusive access to the best training facilities, the State could still boast success in offering sports opportunities to the population en masse, as it organized and ran nationwide sporting festivals and competitions.

In its publication *Physical Training and Sport in Romania*, the Romanian Olympic Committee (1973) explains that by the date of publication there had already been set in place “preoccupations for the development of physical training and sport from early childhood, when exercise in the open air, the practice of different games, the participation in the sportive demonstrations have a great importance for the realization of the ideal of physical and moral beauty” (p. 14). The Committee continues by providing some of the statistics they view as highly significant to this effect: participation of over 400,000 children during the prior year in “organized excursions”, 750,000 at athletic triathlons and tetrathons in 1971, 250,000 at football and gymnastics competitions, over 200,000 annually at ski, skating and sledge competitions, and the conferring of over 100,000 graduation certificates from “The Dolphin”-[swim] school (Romanian Olympic Committee, 1973, pp. 14-16). The Romanian Olympic Committee also highlights the achievements within the university system where annual student participation in the university athletic championships surpassed 50,000 girls and boys. Building a “strong mass basis” was something to be proud of as organizers, schools, and students provided a direct contribution to the realization of the national agenda (Romanian Olympic Committee, 1973, p. 17).

To understand the significance of promoting physical culture in Ceaușescu’s socialist building program, it is important to recognize the political context within which sport and physical activity were being pushed to the foreground of the Party’s priorities. During his first six years as the new General Secretary, Ceaușescu succeeded in increasing Romania’s international presence and reputation as he began to pull Romania away from Soviet influence, increasingly asserting Romania’s independence from its

former wartime ally. This separation from the Soviet Union, in addition to making other similar political moves in the name of international peace, caught the positive attention of some of the most powerful Western nations, including the United States. Thus Ceaușescu's initial years in power, guided by a Marxist-Leninist version of socialism, were marked by savvy political decisions in foreign policy and improving standards of living and 'freedom' of the Romanian people. In his *Report on the Draft Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania*, on August 20, 1965, Ceaușescu boldly declared:

...the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania shows what can be achieved by a people who has shaken off the yoke of national and social oppression, and advances along the road of socialism... What more can one desire than participate in the struggle and work for shaping this future, for the progress and prosperity of the Homeland! We express our conviction that under the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party, the working people will spare no effort for developing the socialist economy and culture, for the victorious advance towards the society in which all abilities and talents of the people will blossom unstemmed and all those who work will live a life of plenty and happiness—communist society. (Ceaușescu, 1969a)

With frequent references to Romania as the Homeland, Ceaușescu indicated his strong desire for the people to identify with the nation—the land to which they were inherently bound and committed to progressing. At the Party's Ninth Congress in July 1965, Ceaușescu officially changed Romania's name from the People's Republic of Romania to the Socialist Republic of Romania, signifying Romania's progress toward the goal of

building a socialist society and affirming his own commitment to the advancement of this project. In his report at the Ninth Congress, Ceaușescu offered this explanation:

The proposal that our Homeland should bear the name Socialist Republic of Romania fully corresponds to the present stage of development of our system...Our system is based on the socialist ownership of the means of production, which ensures the all-round development of the Homeland, the welfare of the entire people...Romania's modern history is indissolubly linked up with the struggle of the working class for winning political power and building the new society. (Ceaușescu, 1969b, p. 57)

Determined to lead the country through a period of rapid industrialization and systematization to achieve production goals, Ceaușescu further raised industrial output requirements, mandated changes in education to better align curricula with Marxist-Leninist ideology, and increased production of socialist propaganda to be promoted through cultural activities and newly commissioned works of art and literature. As Ceaușescu acknowledged the importance of social and cultural activities to “raising the living standards of the working people” he did not fail to mention the need to pay more attention to “expanding sports and physical culture, to developing their material basis” (Ceaușescu, 1969b, p. 48). Building socialism thus included building facilities and opportunities for sportsmen and sportswomen, and indeed the entire Romanian population, to be physically active. The significance of sports to the project of building socialism is evidenced perhaps by the extent to which the building of sports grounds and facilities grew not only in schools but also in public areas open to the entire population. The National Council for Physical Education and Sport (1973), the main governing body

in charge of all matters concerning the practice of sport in Romania—including regulation of clubs, federations, schools, associations, and publications—reported that forty-four gymnasiums were built between 1965 and 1971 (p. 22), contributing to the enormous growth of sports facilities that included the completion of twenty-one stadia with high capacity stands (10,000 to 80,000), indoor and open-air swimming pools in twenty-three cities, indoor sports arenas in twelve cities, seven skating rinks, and more than 2,000 sports grounds belonging to factories, institutions, schools, (university) faculties and villages (pp. 21-22).

Even as the nation seemed to make significant progress toward realizing Ceaușescu's national goals presented at the Party's Ninth Congress, the tide would turn shortly after Ceaușescu returned from his trip to Asia in 1971 with a newly revised plan for national development. The intense material and ideological measures enacted at this time would eventually have a dramatic effect on the life of every Romanian citizen. Following his visit with China's Mao Tse Tung and North Korea's Kim Il Sung, Ceaușescu prepared and delivered his "July Theses", a series of speeches given on July 6 and July 9, 1971, to the Executive Committee of the Romanian Socialist Party. Whether influenced by the impressive displays of mass adulation or the overt power of ideological thinking in the communist regimes of Mao and Kim (Verdery, 1996), Ceaușescu would thereafter take extreme measures in creating his own 'cult of personality', mandating overt expressions of public approval and acceptance of his leadership and the Party's policies. He tightened the reins on opposition through increased censorship and a combination of fear and demoralization (Boldour-Lătescu, 2005, p. 81), political persuasion, and administrative measures (Maier, 1972). In addition, Ceaușescu went to

great lengths to mobilize intense social and cultural movements in the name of strengthening the nation, building socialism, and molding the ‘new man’, marking the beginning of what some refer to as the ‘mini-cultural revolution’ (Verdery, 1991, p. 107).

In the summer of 1971 Nicolae Ceaușescu, president of the socialist republic of Romania and secretary general of the Romanian communist party, delivered his July Theses. Ceaușescu’s July Theses emphasized the formation of a “new man,” a man driven not by material incentives or Western influences and practices, but rather by his own consciousness and “Romanian essence”. The use of the term man in this instance did not exclude women, but in fact included women and served to fuel the social egalitarian logic of creating a homogenous society without differentiation between the sexes—especially when it came to providing contributions to the building of the socialist state. The “new man” was expected to devote himself (or herself) to advancing the socialist system, both materially—through physical labor, and ideologically—through cultural activities that advocated nation building under the banner of social solidarity.

Gender equality was practiced insofar as both men and women were subjected not only to the nationalist rhetoric promoted through songs, poems, and artwork, but also to the harsh realities of living under a system that emphasized intense industrialization at the expense of meeting basic human needs (Staar, 1988). Both men and women were required to hold industrial jobs and women were further subjected to pro-natalist policies that were strictly enforced through regular mandatory medical check-ups for example. However, while Ceaușescu’s intensification of industrial output and social egalitarianism would serve to erase gender differences, placing every body under the ordinances of his call to mold the new man, the reality was that rather than receiving support as equals to



men, the policies meant only that women's needs and responsibilities were no longer officially recognized, thus actually reducing their support.

Just as state-mandated work requirements and child birth were justified through nationalist rhetoric that focused on the productivity of the nation, so too was the movement to improve physical culture subsumed under the same ideologies. Physical culture was emphasized in terms of training and disciplining the body for the state, and its development was implicated in the overall project of building national solidarity and gaining support for the Romanian Communist Party (PCR). Therefore, in the same manner that the writing and teaching of national history was built upon themes of uncovering and preserving Romanian (ethnic) origins, unifying the nation, and protecting the independence of the nation (Petrescu, 2004), so too was the development of national sports movements and competitions also motivated by these nationalist principles. Perhaps this is best evidenced by the introduction of the Daciada competitions which were massive sports festivals fashioned after the Soviet Spartakiads.

Although a physical education law had already been passed in 1923 that mandated Romanian youth to attend public and private school for physical training (Georgescu, 1991), Ceaușescu strongly pushed for further developments in physical education in schools, universities, and the workplace. By the 1970s sport was “encouraged as a healthy political activity for the young” that diverted students from “political deviation” (Hale, 1971, p. 139). Indeed, at all levels of competition—from mass sports to elite-level competition—the sportsmen and women were constantly reminded of the Party's goals in providing sports opportunities. In the “Message to the Participants in the Country's Conference of Sport Movement” (1975), Nicolae Ceaușescu explained:

Our sport movement and its supporters must do their best to contribute through their successes in international contests to maintaining and increasing the high prestige Socialist Romania enjoys in the world as a result of her achievements in intensive development, of the steady policy of peace and cooperation she promotes. (cited in *Sports in Romania*, 1976)

Sports participation and achievements were thus incorporated into the State's program of nation-wide ideological indoctrination, attributing athletic success to favorable conditions made possible through the successful implementation of socialist building plans.

That accessibility to sports and the number of participants in physical activity and sports increased dramatically as a result of the push for the development of physical culture is hard to argue. However, to what extent were the official reports of success, impressive statistics, and charted progress within the schools' physical education programs indicative of the achievements of the Party's goals? How were the ideological ideals of socialism as they were linked to sports in the official rhetoric accepted by the participants? Even as *Daciada*, "the greatest mass and top performance event in Romanian sport" in the words of Ceaușescu, reportedly grew to a record 8 million participants of a population of 22 million (*Sports in Romania*, 1984), questions remain about the extent to which these numbers can be used as a reliable indicator of the State's success in promoting its egalitarian ideology through sports and physical education programs.

Gyöngi Földesi (1991) argues that the late development of the "bourgeois" competitive sports model as well as the "casual character" of mass sports events such as the *Spartakiads* and *Daciada*, merely resulted in a massive state production. The

enormity of these mass sporting events produced a rather fantastic “show”, Földesi (1991) explains, but was not in and of themselves indicative of a positive trend toward increased physical activity among the general population (pp. 244-245). The lack of trainers and coaches, adequate training facilities and equipment, and leisure time were obstacles that the average citizen did not have the resources to overcome, and under these circumstances any sort of formal or regular training prior to the large events was most likely nonexistent (Földesi, 1991, p. 245). In addition, some scholars (Földesi, 1991; Boldour-Lătescu, 2005, pp. 78-80) argue that fitness and health levels of non-elite athletes actually *declined* through the second half of the twentieth century as interest in amateur sports fell, adequate nourishment became less accessible, physical capabilities declined, and free time was usurped by the failing communist system’s rationing policies.

As living standards continued to deteriorate and the struggle for survival persisted because of ineffective central state planning and Ceaușescu’s failing industrialization projects, the widening gap between quality of life and sports facilities for elite athletes and those of ordinary citizens was becoming more evident. Sport historian James Riordan (2007) explains, “To some the worst aspect of the old system was misplaced priorities, the gap between living standards and ordinary sports and recreation facilities, on the one hand, and the money spent on elite sports and stars, on the other” (p. 279). Symbolic nationalist rhetoric surrounding elite athletes and their achievements impacted ordinary citizens who were faced with reconciling the celebration of these athletes and the glory they brought to the nation with the harsh reality of their own living conditions and struggle for survival. This negotiation highlights the contradictions within the socialist system with which many had to come to terms; and in this context, women had the added

challenge of locating their selves within the nationalist discourse of forming the “new man,” and of negotiating both physical and ideological control over their bodies.

### Nadia, the nation, and neglect

The athlete most prized for her ability to garner the international recognition and legitimacy so desired by Ceaușescu at the time was Nadia Comaneci. Comaneci’s gymnastics career finds its beginning in her hometown of Onesti, where at the age of six she was selected and invited by Bela and Marta Karolyi to train with them in their state-supported experimental gymnastics school (Comaneci, 2004, p. 24). As Ceaușescu delivered his July Theses, marking a shift that would change forever the course of Romanian history, ten year old Nadia Comaneci was similarly preparing to make her mark within that same course of history. Even before her career began, however, Comaneci’s life had already been intricately spun into the web of Ceaușescu’s overzealous personal political agenda, his destructive cult of personality, and the resultant demise of social and economic conditions in the country; and unbeknownst to her, even as she continued in the sport she loved, at once supported and oppressed by the state system, Comaneci would eventually come to embody the struggles of women and the performative ideological battles of the female body under Ceaușescu.

As a young girl, Comaneci was easily taken in by the promises of the State and the possibilities of developing as a world-class gymnast under the direction of the Karolyis. Referring to her childhood memories, Comaneci recounts in her autobiography, *Letters to a Young Gymnast* (2004), “There was so much freedom in the feeling of my body,” “The freedom of movement was intoxicating....” (p. 7). Ironically, this freedom

would soon lead her to the sport which in the end restricted, controlled, and dictated her every move.

While at the sports school, Comaneci trained with great fervor, and with faith in the Karolyis' ability to bring her to the top, she posed no questions to the training demands and the strict schedule she and her teammates followed. A typical week included four hours in classes at school and four hours in the gym, six days a week. The team had a prescribed diet and was required to sleep for eight to ten hours a night (Comaneci, 2004, p. 24). In a sense, her body was no longer her own, but that of the State and Party, no different in that respect than the women who were not involved with state-supported sports.

Initially unifying the people under a banner of national solidarity and the common goal of working toward a culturally-rich and productive, socialist society, Ceaușescu was soon delivering empty rhetoric to a people starving for creativity, security, and basic nourishment. By the 1980s, Romania had already begun a period of economic decline and in response to a severe food shortage, Ceaușescu began food rationing in 1981. Household electricity was also restricted, as was television programming and the availability of consumer goods such as clothes and food, which eventually resulted in a veritable “shortage economy” (see Kornai, 1992). Media content in general was also highly regulated and monitored by the government which maintained tight control over all media outlets. In a Stalinist manner, space and time were usurped from the private realm and placed under the control of the state, thus placing individual bodies under the constant gaze and control of peers, family members, and state security forces alike.

Although she did not realize it at the time, Comaneci would soon too feel the pressures of the state's constant gaze and control over her body.

Comaneci reached the peak of her career at the age of fourteen when at the Montreal Olympics Games she captured the world's attention with her performance that earned her a perfect ten—the first ever to be awarded in the Olympic Games—not once, but seven times, compiling a total of five medals (three gold, one silver and one bronze). For her achievements, she was awarded two of Romania's highest honors, the title of "Hero of Socialist Labor" and the golden "Hammer and Sickle" medal. A “great festive meeting” was held at the Palace of Sports and Culture in Bucharest to honor the Olympic achievements of Comaneci and the other medal winners whose victories combined to represent the “most fruitful participation in all editions” of the Olympic Games for Romania, as was reported in *Sports in Romania* (1976, pp. 1-3).

The achievements of the Romanian gymnasts at the 1976 Olympics were particularly significant to the Ceaușescu regime because they were seen as a direct result of the successful molding of the “new man” fully supported by the socialist system. In summing up the words of the accomplished sportsmen and women (and girls) at the Montreal Olympic Games, *Sports in Romania* (1976, p. 1) reported, “They expressed their gratitude for the fine conditions of training they had had and they pledged to represent Romania's colours with honour and self-denial at other international competitions, too” (p. 1). Ceaușescu took this opportunity to increase his notoriety while strengthening the State's position on upholding the value of hard work, as related to sports development and other social fields, so critical to the process of molding the new socialist man:

It is a fact that in our view of forming the new man, we consider work the determinant factor of all social activities. That is why, paying attention to the development of sports, to cultural and educational activities, we must start from everyone's active participation in productive work in his own field from harmoniously blending work and sports and education, so that everybody would be an active participant in the construction of the multilaterally developed socialist society, in the growing of welfare and happiness of our whole social nation. (Speech given by N. Ceaușescu, President of the Socialist Republic of Romania, at the festivity honoring the success achieved by Romanian sportsmen and women at the Montreal Olympic Games, cited in *Sports in Romania*, 1976, p. 2)

The attention given to sports and the achievements of sportsmen and women did not go unnoticed on either side of the competitive divide.

While ideological and nationalist teachings were spread to the general population and elite athletes alike, material benefits were disproportionately enjoyed by the highest level of sports competitors. Even though this practice seems contradictory to the socialist ideal of creating a classless society, it was justified in terms of its necessity toward building higher standards, toward which each “man” in an effort to reach greater heights in social development would aim, such that in the end everyone (theoretically) would reap the benefits. Comaneci herself recognized not only the extra material advantages afforded those in competitive sports, but the reasons for it. “The Romanian government,” she explains, “used to pour money into its Olympic programs because our leaders believed that athletes represented the power of the government and validated our way of

life (Comaneci, 2004, p. 35). The main problem herein is that “our way of life”—the Romanian way of life—was not the homogenous experience as she presents it, but was only officially, and apparently very effectively, promoted as such.

Thanks to her selection to train at the experimental gymnastics school at such an early age, neither Comaneci or her family were fully exposed to the declining living conditions under Ceaușescu. Furthermore, her success as a female athlete served as a symbol of the State’s success in achieving an ideologically homogenous and egalitarian society, thus embodying the superiority of socialism to bourgeois, capitalist systems. However far removed she was from the harsh living conditions imposed on the general population, though, there was no escaping the ideological rhetoric that raised the cause of socialism, and thus of the people, above individual achievement. The emphasis on learning, sharing, and praising the Romanians’ original (Dacian) roots and heritage was widely promoted in schools, political propaganda, the arts, and cultural and sports festivals. Comaneci (2004) expresses her feelings of national solidarity that have continued to the present day, “If you want to know me, know Romanians because my spirit was created by their experiences, passed down and given as an offering to our collective future” (p. 8).

#### Discipline, control, and surveillance of the female body

Even though Comaneci’s status as an elite gymnast allowed her to enjoy more freedom than her female Romanian counterparts, the limitations to her freedom were set by the same socialist causes and nationalist-ideological rhetoric that controlled and regulated female bodies among the masses. In this instance, it is critical to consider the role of the female body and the physical practices and experiences of women. Locating



the female body at the intersection of socialist ideologies, nationalist rhetoric, and the rise of physical culture allows us to see how communist female subjectivities were constructed and to what end. If the bodies of ordinary citizens were tightly regulated and observed, those of elite athletes were even more so, despite the material and nutritional benefits afforded to the latter.

The physical body in general was viewed from a rational, scientific standpoint that reinforced traditional female roles related to maternity, childcare, and the home. The physical capabilities of women were therefore not judged as inferior *per se*, but rather as needing more protection whether through less strenuous (from a labor intensive point of view) work or otherwise (Duffy, 2000). However, under communism, the female body was subjected to the dictates of a patriarchal order that officially incorporated the maternal role of women, in terms of literally producing the next generation of workers, while mandating participation in the industrial workforce. The socialization of the private sphere was never fully realized, however, leaving the burden on women to continue in their household duties and childcare responsibilities while also working for the state-run factories.

The female body was further controlled by the state as the policies justified through egalitarian rhetoric actually placed further restrictions on women and their bodies, whether through the enforcement of pro-natalist policies or creating extra burdens on household care through food rationing policies. As an example, women twenty-five years of age or older who did not have children had to pay an additional “tax” to the government. Once Comaneci turned twenty-five, she too was subjected to this tax (Comaneci, 2004).

What did the molding of Ceaușescu's new man mean for women? Just as Comaneci was subjected to the constant surveillance of her body, so too was the ordinary female citizen. Comaneci's daily training routine, eating schedule, and travel itinerary were strictly controlled and watched. Particularly after the defection of her coach Bela Karolyi in 1981, her movements were closely followed and regulated. The daily routine of the average woman was no less controlled as their bodies were placed under the watchful eye of the *Securitate*, Ceaușescu's secret police, forced to have regular medical exams, work long hours at the factories, and spend inordinate amounts of time standing in lines for basic food staples in the shortage economy—all in the name of building the socialist state.

Praised for her athletic success on the world stage, particularly her achievements in the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, Comaneci symbolized the disciplined, trained, and regulated body that labored for the socialist system. Achieving excellence in competition symbolically strengthened and celebrated the same (socialist) boundaries that suppressed (her) individual expression and freedom. It was only after her career as a competitive gymnast came to an end that she realized the ideological contradictions of this system that she herself came to embody.

In 1989 communism officially ended with the overthrow and execution of the Ceaușescus, but by that time Comaneci had already committed the ultimate act of defiance against the regime that came to control her by defecting just a few months prior to the Ceaușescus' capture. Perhaps the ideological battles of the female body can be summed up in Comaneci's own words when she explains, "I executed each skill with the extension and movements expected of me, and I dismounted" (Comaneci, 2004, p. 43).

Women living in Ceaușescu's Romania were continuously challenged in their daily struggle to survive, but they too in the process prepared for their own much anticipated dismantlement as socialism officially came to an end in 1989.

## Chapter Two

Negotiating gender within the post-communist terrain:

Intersections of fitness, fashion and the female body

In post-communist societies, legacies of communism—including strong affirmation of a collective mindset, weak civil society, corrupt political systems, poorly developed infrastructure, distrust in government officials, and elevated worry and angst related to individual and national prospects—push hard against the forces of global capitalism and consumerism, which have recently flooded into these regions. Romania is one such nation where major steps toward the establishment of a working democracy and market economy have been taken without due thought to the implications of insufficient preparation within the cultural, social, and economic spheres. The subsequent tensions in Romanian society have become evident, especially as manifested within Romanian physical culture. One has only to walk the streets of any urban center in this country to witness the emerging post-communist body culture, partially resulting from the adoption of body shaping and modification techniques somewhat in alignment with those found in the West, but that have been locally adapted to fit the post-communist context. As interest for various sports, exercise and leisure practices begin to shift, negotiating identity within the rapidly changing post-communist landscape is creating evermore social and economic tension. At the center of this tension is the body. This paper intends to analyze the role of the body in the construction of new post-communist subjectivities, particularly for women, in the face of neoliberal rhetoric which continues to spread seemingly uninhibited across the globe. I thus offer a critical analysis of neoliberalism's spread to

the post-communist landscape of Romania, suggesting that perhaps a form of “protoneoliberalism” is emerging in this context where the basic tenets of neoliberalism are manipulated in order to ease the tensions created by its Western roots in Eastern Europe.

### Political transitions: Addressing the “chaos and confusion”

The “revolutions” of 1989 marked the beginning of a long road of transition for the former communist nations in Eastern and Central Europe. Though predominantly hailed as a victory for the United States in terms of defending the “universal” principles of democratic rights and individual freedom, the fall of the iron curtain has not consistently been held in the same regard among those for whom the change has left a life of inequality, uncertainty, and poverty. The new socio-political environments of the former communist nations articulated with the market principles of global capitalism, the spread of democracy, and neoliberal techniques of government (Ong, 2002) reveal a struggle for survival in which women in particular commonly find themselves on the losing end. David Harvey (2005) suggests that among a maelstrom of problems associated with the current transition, “the loss of women’s rights through neoliberalization has been nothing short of catastrophic” (p. 170).

Nearly two decades after revolutions ending communism swept across the Soviet bloc, the uneven processes (in both direction and scope) of democratization and marketization, and their multiple implications for the lives of those living in post-communist societies, have yet to attract large-scale attention of sports studies and physical culture scholars. In light of current discussions centered on the perpetual state of

war and democratic principles in the “Age of Empire” (Hardt and Negri, 2004) and the neoliberal affront across the global stage (Harvey, 2005), as the ex-communist countries themselves continue to align their political and economic practices with those championed by the developed, Western nations, critical analyses of the subject-formative experiences and cultural and political implications of the “transformation” processes in Eastern Europe cannot be ignored. In a period where “freedom”, “justice”, and “individual rights” are being mobilized in imperialist fashion (Hardt and Negri, 2004) as powerful cultural signifiers to justify (coerced) political change, how are these concepts being interpreted, manipulated, and negotiated within the post-communist context which already has at its inception the roots of discontent with a government that denied the realization of these rights? Stated otherwise, if a search for freedom, justice and individual rights played a critical role in mobilizing civil action against the oppression of communist regimes, how are individuals now rationalizing the manipulation and consequent withholding of these principles by the very same (neoliberal, democratic) institutions that have promised their realization?

Most analyses of neoliberalism’s reach across the globe are centered on the political and economic orders of the day. This comes as no surprise since neoliberalism is “in the first instance a theory of political economic practices” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2); however, in the postmodern context, where increased recognition of cultural values and social norms have already disrupted traditional interpretations of Marx’s economic base-superstructure model, there is a need for additional analyses that focus on the socio-cultural effects of the neoliberal turn, especially within Eastern Europe. A select number of sport studies scholars have conducted analyses related to neoliberalism, sport and

physical culture, but the focus has remained almost exclusively within the context of advanced capitalist nations (see for example, Andrews & Silk, 2006; Cole, 2000; Fusco, 2005). This paper aims to push the boundaries of sports studies research to include investigations of neoliberalism within the realm of everyday physical practices in post-socialist societies.

In this paper I focus on Romania, a unique case among the countries in transition from communism, to broaden the scope of social and cultural analyses addressing the complexity of neoliberalism's uneven development around the world, a development which entails "multiple determinations and not a little chaos and confusion" (Harvey, 2005, p. 9).

#### Whither East or West?: Theoretical and methodological considerations

Within Romania there has been a centuries-old identity debate about whether to align Romanian identity with Eastern orthodoxy, promoting Dacian-Roman "essence" and traditionalism, or Western notions of modernization and democratization, severing associations with the "backwardness" of the East (Verdery, 1991). However, it seems now more than ever there is a general desire to move ahead with all processes of modernization, and subsequently Westernization, most evidenced in Romania's push for and success in joining the European Union on January 1, 2007. The stark reality is that even after going through eighteen years of "transition" from a command economy and state-run social system to a market economy and democratic political structure, Romania is still challenged in its attempts to improve human rights efforts, address a weak economy, and reduce political corruption. Further, the Romanian population is still

adjusting to the social implications of significantly reduced state subsidies in health care and other areas, including sport and leisure (Girginov, 2004; Krawczyk, Zbigniew, 1992; Riordan, 2007). The underlying tensions have begun to surface as daily lived realities, such that even as communist ideology is challenged and “replaced” by democratic policies and neoliberal rhetoric, power and control over time and space—previously held solely by the state governments—have been transferred not necessarily to the individual, but to yet another power regime—global capitalism.

Ideological struggles come to the fore even as we make our methodological decisions. For example, the application of cultural studies methodologies and theoretical interpretations itself has caused some concern among Romanian scholars (see in particular Anghelescu, 2001, pp. 169-178). Notwithstanding its connection to Marxist ideologies, cultural studies is seen as “largely a product of the English-speaking world” which in the minds of Romanians links it to the same operating modes and structures of power underlying imperialism and global capitalism; this connection creates a fear that, “under the guise of a coherent, independent, post-colonial type of discourse, we [Romanians] might perpetrate the same imperialist movement we are allegedly fighting against...” (Anghelescu, 2001, p. 176). In her critique of “Romanian cultural studies,” Ilinca Anghelescu (2001) further explains:

Romanian people at large, including academics, find it very strange and almost funny that Western intellectuals are actually drawn to Marxist ideologies, of however far descent. As Tony Judt stated, the strangest thing (and most amusing to Romanians) is that the countries whose intelligentsia is most fervently caught with Marxism are the English-speaking ones (and in general Western ones),



where Marxism has never had political velleities (in Babeti and Ungureanu, p. 27). ...an association, however distant, with an ideology that caused atrocities seems a downright disgrace to many intellectuals. (p. 172)

Angelescu (2001) continues to note that Romanian society is “fast reaching the symptomatology of capitalist diseases, without yet forming the essential capitalist structures” (p. 175). Thus the imperialist-like nature of the spread of cultural studies, like global capitalism, Angelescu argues, is perceived as assaulting those countries that without a developed capitalist infrastructure must struggle daily to meet basic needs, feeding and caring for the family, constantly working to simply survive.

Within transition theory there are six main approaches that include political culture and modernization, elites and institutions, class and productive forces (Lane, 2002, p. 5). When using any one of these approaches, theorists generally incorporate in various combinations concepts of values and norms, structures, societal preconditions, interests and class relations (Lane, 2002). The two primary methodological approaches used within the transition literature are the path-dependency model, also referred to as social and institutional embeddedness, and the system transfer method approach (Lane, 2002, pp. 8-9). Although some scholars have offered critiques to the path-dependency approach (see, for example, Bohle, 2000, pp. 244-246, who makes a call to also consider “internationalization”, and Blokker, 2005, who argues that both modernist and historicist path-dependent frameworks have been “unable to fully incorporate diversity”), according to David Lane (2002) this method better takes into consideration postmodern emphases on complex cultural and social dynamics within political and historical contexts than do system transfer methods.

Similar in many respects to social and institutional embeddedness, a cultural studies approach also involves recognition of the changing and complex interactions between social structures, ideological and historical contexts, and individual actors (Denzin, 2000). In addition, not unlike that of (Western) social and cultural activists who regularly challenge the status quo, many cultural studies scholars take a political stance to disrupt movements of disempowerment and fight against injustices embedded within the social sphere (Denzin 1999; 2002; Giroux 2001). The cultural studies project has moved in the direction of using its work as a weapon in the battle for moral justice and freedom, engaging a “politics of hope” (Giroux, 2001), thus producing a body of work that is at once political, contextual, and critical (Grossberg, 1997; 2006). The current research project aligns itself with the political motivations driving many cultural studies academics. Through the analysis, I aim to expose power relationships that plague social practices and lived realities through an articulation of individuals, institutions, and communities to the current context. . Taking a cultural studies approach will thus lead to a critical reading of the context and empirical data, leading the researcher to uncover or establish knowledges or truths which are otherwise suppressed or marginalized due to unequal power relations.

Clearly, there is much work to be done in the area of reconciliation before unabashed acceptance of cultural studies can be expected in Romania. However, this is not to say that cultural studies has been fully relegated to the philosophical or methodological margins, nor I would argue, should it. Though the root of the tensions so succinctly provided by Anghelescu’s analysis are reasonably logical, if not fully understandable, there is still some measure of utility to be found in an area of study that

seeks to unveil unequal power relations and provide critical socio-cultural analyses with the goal of improving the living conditions of those at whose expense others prosper through exploits of power (Grossberg, 1992). That being said, this paper continues in the spirit of cultural studies in an effort to unveil the power at play in postcommunist Romania, with the goal of opening further critical dialogue that addresses the direction in which transformation processes are currently heading. What are the effects of the rapid spreading of neoliberal ideologies, global consumer capitalism, and democratic rhetoric of freedom and justice within the postcommunist context? Of particular interest to this study are the ways in which women are responding to these changes, how new postcommunist female subjectivities are emerging and what new consumption patterns are developing as women continue to negotiate their identity in this context. The critique of cultural studies in Romania is instructive in that it demonstrates the challenging nature of attempting to analyze the social conditions of a country whose conceptual vocabulary, ideologies, and civil movements have developed on a different parallel than that in the West (the U.S. in particular). Thus, as I hope to show in this article, studying such topics as “gender relations” can be at once complicated—in that terminology developed in “women’s studies” and “feminist studies” do not have a direct translation nor oftentimes any direct relevance in the Romanian context—and instructive, in that a cross-cultural comparison placed in historical and social context can help to explain why women’s movements or other civil-based projects have taken a much different direction than what one might expect after such a long period of what the West has interpreted as a history of communist repression (and oppression), particularly for women (Berry, 1995).

### In search of “freedom”: Women’s role in the culture of shortage

A search for freedom assumes *a priori* that there is something from which freedom must be attained. In the U.S., we are constantly showered with a rhetoric of freedom, whether of its guarantee and protection under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights or cautionary warnings of serious threats against it, such as might be unleashed by Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, terrorist organizations in general, or nuclear warfare. Since the events of 9/11 there has even been a political pairing of these images of freedom—defending each individual’s right to “life, liberty, and justice”, with major sporting events such as the Super Bowl and the Olympics (Silk and Falcoux, 2005). In a nation that has had tunes of freedom ringing since its inception, it is no wonder neoliberalism’s unabated stronghold in the United States has continued to spread across the continent and indeed across the Atlantic. We cannot assume, however, that notions of “freedom”, and related symbols of “liberty” and “liberation”, are directly transferable from countries in which neoliberal ideologies find their roots to those that do not. In other words, although strong pushes toward privatization, recognition of individual rights, and the creation of an unregulated open market economy are oftentimes closely followed by the familiar battle cry of civil rights and political activists in the U.S., these same reactions are hardly existent in the historically and culturally different context of post-communist Romania.

Under the reign of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romania’s leader from 1965 until his execution in 1989, both women and men were subjected to strictly enforced laws that dictated the use of their time and energy, justified in the name of strengthening the nation through improved national output and production (Verdery, 1996). The private sphere was commandeered in the sense that daily life was highly regulated in terms of how one

could spend leisure time, which goods and services were available for consumption, and the ways in which one could modify outward appearances (Verdery, 1996). Women were especially affected by these restrictions which dictated how, where, and when they spent their time on a daily basis as they worked to negotiate the state-imposed limitations with the necessities of survival (Gal and Kligman, 2000). In addition, television programming was limited in content and actual viewing time. Food and basic goods were rationed, though never guaranteed, regardless of the time spent queuing up . Also, clothing and consumer goods were only available in limited varieties and quantities as access to Western, “bourgeois” tastes and fashions were denied. Far from reaching a socialist utopia, however, by the 1980s Ceaușescu had succeeded only in causing a food shortage for the Romanian people who by that time were struggling to survive in a “culture of shortage” (Verdery, 1996).

In an effort to keep the nation well populated, thus strengthening the workforce through an increase in sheer numbers, emigration was tightly restricted, and birth control and abortion were outlawed (Kligman, 1998), thus placing further restrictions on women’s bodies. Furthermore, every citizen was subject to the close eye of the *Securitate*, Ceaușescu’s secret police force, for whom even close friends and family may have been recruited, thus creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust (Boldour-Lătescu, 2005). The political and ideological control Ceaușescu exerted over the basic needs of the people involved the development of normalizing technologies of the body (Foucault, 1977) that promoted “needs” as defined by the State over personally empowering needs. These practices were consistent with Marxist-Leninist interpretations of socialist doctrine

of which Ceaușescu claimed to be a staunch follower. Breda Luthar (2006) explains the nature of socialism and its powerful mechanism of ideological control in this way:

Socialism represents a political and social project and a form of economic organization characterized not only by cultural, legal, and economic constraints and control of demand, but also direct political forms of disciplining and limiting demand (i.e. the political and ideological ‘dictatorship over needs’...However, political control over needs under socialism is not just the consequence of the power interests of a ‘unified apparatus of power’, but is based on the ideology of socialist egalitarianism and through it on the essentialist view of human needs and the division of needs into ‘real’ ones and ‘false’ ones). (p. 233)

Acts of resistance did exist in the form of “black markets”, border crossing, and industrial stealing and bartering, which led to the formation of the “second economy” (Verdery, 1996). But for the most part, living in a culture of shortage and a society of limited consumption opportunities, food and otherwise, heavily contributed to the depravity of the nation. The promotion of socialism’s egalitarian ideologies, though in reality not fully supported through government policies or practices, did in some ways contribute to the growing role of women in society and the economy. For example, the establishment of subsidized child care, summer programs, and cultural and athletic programs for children, allowed women to take part in the workforce, while still maintaining familial responsibilities, “thus becoming an integral part of Soviet economy” (Shelley, 2002, p. 201). Women also played a significant role in the underground “second economy”, many times becoming the primary source of purchasing or trading over their male counterparts (Chelcea, 2002). In this environment, although women were particularly oppressed in

terms of having to bear the triple burden of raising children, managing the household, and holding an industrial job, as well as enduring the control asserted over their bodies as the government strictly enforced its pro-natal policies, many women actively negotiated their position and identity within the socialized system of which they became an integral part. Whether through compliance or silent resistance, women were able to construct their identities through various practices of the body. What was to come in 1989 however was an unfamiliar system to which they would have to make serious adjustments.

Even as many believe the changes beginning with the official fall of communism in Romania will eventually bring about improved living conditions, enforcement of human rights standards, economic development and viability, political credibility, and international status, the road toward this capitalist, democratic utopia has taken an extremely complicated turn. As markets continue to open, access to international media continues to grow, investment is rising, and changes in lifestyle consumption and body practices in terms of sports, exercise, and leisure are following suit. In this new era of “freedom” the position of women is changing in the official and popular discourse, but in what ways are women responding to the changing context as they seek to re-establish themselves as integral contributors to society? As the ideological emphasis shifts from socialist equality to democratic freedoms, I argue here that the subsequent tensions can be examined through women’s participation in the changing physical culture, looking particularly at how the construction of identity through lifestyle and leisure activities are influenced by similar socio-cultural movements found in their Western counterparts. Through an analysis of the empirical data gathered through ethnographic interviews and

participant observation, this study reveals the tensions women have come to embody within the changing post-communist landscape of Romania.

Post-1989: New government, new materials, new context...same struggle?

As tough as conditions may have been for women under socialism, it seems logical to assert that this time of transformation post-1989 would prove to be fertile ground for neoliberalism to plant new seeds of “freedom and individual rights” (Harvey, 2005) in Eastern Europe; and indeed the seeds have been sown, but the ground, as many are now discovering, was not properly prepared for the harvest. Under conditions of “maximum uncertainty” and severe economic and social hardship, a “survival and self-preservation” mentality developed and came to dominate people’s lives during socialism; and “[u]nfortunately in post-revolutionary Romania, life continues to be seen primarily in terms of ‘survival,’ in terms of social fragmentation, and stress-based existences” (Michelson, 2001, p. 57). With the influx of media images and messages that flaunt lifestyles of the (oftentimes American) rich and famous, Hollywood superstars, international supermodels, as well as popular diet, health and exercise regimes, gender norms and expectations are experiencing a veritable shift. If prior to 1989 women were valued for their (re-)productive capacities, admired and praised for their strength and resilience in the face of severe adversity (Gal and Kligman, 2000), they no longer hold the same credence in comparison to their male counterparts as industrial jobs for women have diminished and the legacy of male management prevails in the transitional economy (Shelley, 2002). Furthermore, the neoliberal tenets of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values have been recognized and touted as the most



important values of the new era to be sought after in lieu of social solidarity (Harvey, 2005, p. 23). As the government withdraws state subsidies for services related to health and education, the individual is left feeling responsible for figuring out ways to finance these needs. The individual is now held accountable for his or her own life situation—from health care, to leisure experiences, and ultimately to the shaping of his or her own destiny. Indeed, as David Harvey (2005) explains:

The social consequences of neoliberalization are in fact extreme. Accumulation by dispossession typically undermines whatever power women may have had within household production/marketing systems and within traditional social structures and relocates everything in male-dominated commodity and credit markets. (p. 170)

Neoliberal rhetoric merely masks the inability of the state to sustain the legacies of full employment and investment in women's education (Shelley, 2002). In the meantime, the reality of limited reform possibilities and outcomes inevitably shine through this mask as institutional deficits continue to impede successful reform (Cook, 2002). However, even as the state continues to defer social responsibilities in the name of promoting individualism—thus further increasing the challenges of adapting to the post-socialist context—on the flip side, this ideology also leads to new opportunities for change and creating difference that were previously unavailable in the Ceaușescu era. Therefore, although women have become the primary victims after the official fall of communism in 1989—a consequence of the feminization of poverty (Shelley, 2002; Roman, 2001), privatization of firms resulting in the loss of full-time jobs, and disappearance of the highly valued second economy—with the promotion of the individual has come new

opportunities of expression and identity construction through leisure consumption, physical activity, and aesthetic modifications.

### Body aesthetics and leisure consumption

Economic and social prospects are looming on the horizon for many Romanians, and women are searching for alternatives to the uncertain outlook through lifestyle changes that involve newly available options for physical activity and body modification practices. From selling their bodies in prostitution (Shelley, 2002) to getting involved in physical activities such as aerobics (Svendsen, 1996), in the post-communist era, women are finding ways within a changing body culture to construct new identities in an attempt to change their economic and social status. No longer subject to the restrictive and sexually homogenizing policies previously placed over their bodies under communism, women are actively taking part in defining an emergent post-communist female subjectivity that has at its core a new body aesthetic and mentality (Roman, 2003). Concurrently, media outlets are capitalizing on and perpetuating the spread of global (body) consumerism through their own dissemination of gendered images and expectations, promoting especially Western constructions of the ideal female body. As health, beauty and fitness discourse continues to fill the pages and air time of Romanian media—including both foreign and domestic television programs, magazine publications, and newspapers—Romanian women are now more than ever exposed to Western images of the “ideal woman” who is commonly portrayed as thin, sexy, and “toned”. On the streets, there is no shortage of hair dye or body piercings, evidence of the changing consumer body culture, especially among youth. In addition, the number of health and

fitness facilities is growing as private entrepreneurs look to take advantage of and invest in the growing health and fitness industry. Although Bucharest, the capital of Romania, has no equal in the country in terms of the quantity and vastness of its sports facilities, gyms, and spas, other cities are quickly catching on, adding their own array of fitness opportunities to the developing urban landscape.

In this context, opportunities for women to construct their identity through physical activity and lifestyle changes, and consequently through body modification and consumerism, are being shaped by, in, and through the newly constructed spaces and gendered discourses. In the next section, I conclude the study by presenting a brief analysis of the changing spaces and discourse of fitness, health and exercise in post-communist Romania. I suggest that women are being challenged to negotiate elements of “protoneoliberalism”, a nascent form of neoliberalism unique to the post-socialist Romanian context.

#### Promoting lifestyle changes: Articulating discourses of health, fitness, and gender

Among the advertisements at the airport in Timișoara, a major urban center in Romania, there is a new business card advertising “Alana’s perfect body”, a company that specializes in “Ladies Fitness and Personal Training”. The by-line: “Alana, a beautiful woman, a perfect body, a healthy lifestyle”. Only one of the approximately 160 beauty centers in Timisoara, Alana’s conveniently complements the rising number of “sporting clubs” in this city ([www.Timisoreni.ro](http://www.Timisoreni.ro)) demonstrating the growing emphasis on conflating notions of women’s beauty, health, and lifestyle change. To be healthy is to be beautiful and to meet the standards of both, a lifestyle change is required. Despite its

inability to completely shake a questionable reputation as an underdeveloped, struggling nation, Romania has increased its publications and advertisements targeting personal health in an effort to promote individually motivated lifestyle changes. As examples: in 2007 *Adevărul* (The Truth), a widely circulated Romanian newspaper, reported the results of a study that showed Romanians were spending more money on cigarettes and alcohol than on food (April 30, pp. 25 & 27); television stations have started running a commercial that has only a single frame of plain, white, block-lettered text set against a solid black background that reads (in Romanian), “Excessive eating, drinking, and smoking is bad for your health”; and many magazines and newspapers now have special sections devoted to health and nutrition, including diet tips and exercise recommendations for women. The ‘knowledges’ and ‘effects’ produced by media, scientific reports, surveys, and commercials are those from which the body is currently finding meaning within the contemporary historical context (Howell and Ingham, 2001). This is very similar to the rise of the fitness culture in the U.S. context during the 1980s in that a shift from socialized health care to assuming personal responsibility for health needs has been met with the timely emergence of a changing lifestyle rhetoric. Howell and Ingham (2001) in their study of U.S. fitness culture argue that:

despite the fact that there can never be any guarantee as to how these ‘knowledges’ and ‘effects’ will be articulated together, as we moved into the 1980s the venerable theme of improving your life via the fitness marketplace, the belief that the individual was solely responsible for acquiring the skills needed for personal well-being, became increasingly discursively evident. (p. 335)

In the context of post-communist Romania, mobilization of an individual-focused discourse that reinforces notions of survivorship in an uncertain economy of bodies, health, and capital, articulates these ‘knowledges’ and ‘effects’ with perhaps even more consequence than that discussed by Howell and Ingham in the U.S. context of the 1980s and 90s. In other words, locating the female body within a traditional discourse of motherhood and childcare alongside that of improving and meeting health and beauty standards, we see how constructed “knowledges” and subsequent expectations and established norms continue to discipline and regulate the female body through neoliberal self-betterment technologies.

At a time when the Romanian government is fighting for legitimacy in the European Union, radically changing social and economic policies despite the lack of infrastructural readiness, the familiar language of self-sacrifice is being transferred to that of self-governance such that women (are made to) feel collectively implicated in the success or failure of their own survivorship in the transforming society. Again, similar aspects of the fitness culture movements in the U.S. can be seen in the transforming culture of post-communist Romania, especially in terms of turning responsibility inwards and incorporating self-improvement strategies of both mind and body into the dominant discourse. Howell and Ingham (2001) state:

While self-improvement and personal responsibility continue to be major affective themes, that investment is increasingly turning inwards. Lifestyle consumer oriented strategies focusing on ‘consciousness’ in the form ‘finding one’s authentic self’ are rapidly appearing. The ‘new’ healthy you has to be a ‘true’ you. It is an ‘all that {it} can be self’. Therefore, to the body fit movements

of the last decade, we must add the mind fit industries that focus primarily on adaptation, compensation and catharsis as the key structures of personality (see Kohut, 1971). The internal search for self is becoming a driving force for physical activity. (p. 343)

In Romania, the “internal search for self” is complicated by the country’s ongoing search for national identity; even as women choose to engage in newly available body modification and lifestyle practices, they must still negotiate traditional expectations with “modern” ones, compelled to use their body in service to the nation all the while seeking independence. In the meantime, women must also negotiate consumptive limits imposed by social and material realities with imported images of fashion, beauty, and femininity.

Just as the unmet promise to meet basic needs through a distinctive socialist consumer culture contributed to a growing enchantment with the West behind the iron curtain (Stitzel, 2005), legacies of communism continue still to encourage an enchantment with Western fashion, beauty and the body. Indeed, even though bourgeois prosperity, symbols of modernity, and Western ideals of beauty were scorned and ridiculed by socialist governments, they “remained virtually identical on both sides of the iron curtain” (Stitzel, 2005, p. 167). Now free to consume these images, encouraged through popular media and empowered by neoliberal discourse to do so, women are challenged to come to terms with notions of “modernity”, “femininity” and “individual responsibility”. In this manner, while presenting contradictory tensions in the construction of post-communist female subjectivity, neoliberal rhetoric is nonetheless being co-opted into physical practices of Romanian women. As these women increasingly engage socio-cultural and political tensions through physical activity and

exercise in the post-communist, protoneoliberal context, it will become all the more critical to expose the obstacles that prevent women from constructing and using their bodies in socially empowering ways.

## Chapter Three

### Sports, sex, and social norms: Understanding gender roles in the next generation

#### Images of the female body

Nearly two decades have passed since the transition from state socialism to liberal democracy in Romania began. Not wholly unfamiliar with the effects of democracy and capitalist enterprises, yet still unprepared to fully support a market-driven economy, Romanians are having to find ways to adjust to the changing political, social, and cultural landscape. The challenge for women is especially daunting as traditional norms and communist legacies retain their social significance even as new opportunities arise for women to construct and appropriate alternate understandings of gender and the (female) body. In socialist society under Ceausescu women's sexuality was repressed, female subjectivity was defined primarily by motherhood, and male and female bodies were subsumed under the production goals of the State's industrialization projects. No longer bound to the socialist laws that strictly dictated how men and women were permitted to use and display their bodies, Romania is now experiencing a veritable shift in the "body politic" (Berry, 1995). Among other changes, a significant increase in sexualized images of women and the conflation of beauty, health, and fitness in popular discourse have further complicated the negotiation of female identity with dominant gender ideologies.

In many ways postcommunist body culture is shifting and changing as manifestations of larger movements related to neoliberal "technologies of governing" (Ong, 2006). In other words, even as Romanians are encouraged to exercise their individual rights within the emerging democratic society, they are no less disciplined by



social norms and values within the ever-persisting patriarchal society. In the current context, though, to what standards are women and the female body held—with what consequences and under what constraints? How are women repositioning themselves in the new economy and socio-cultural postcommunist spaces?

In this chapter I examine gender relations and body culture in Romania, looking particularly at how women embody the cultural tensions between the spread of global consumer capitalism and persisting legacies of communism. I begin with a general overview of various constructions of health and female beauty in the media, showing the extent to which sexualization of the female body is normalized and virtually uncontested as problematic. Next, I articulate popular images of the sexed body with those of the physically active sporting body, revealing an ideological tension between sporting and non-sporting-type bodies. In addition, I argue that the changing role of women in sports challenges dominant social and cultural gender norms through a discourse that is rooted ironically in socialist constructions of women. I thus problematize current understandings of gender roles in contemporary Romania, particularly in relation to aesthetic and performative expectations, family responsibilities, and sports opportunities.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), David Harvey states, “Beneath the veneer of common-sense and seemingly ‘natural’ ideas about space and time, there lie hidden terrains of ambiguity, contradiction, and struggle” (p. 205). The problematic gendered terrain traditionally subsumed under the political banner of social equality has shaped postcommunist spaces and common-sense understandings of time distribution in ways that have silenced the internal struggles of women. Insofar as women have accepted and adjusted to the conditions of transition to various degrees, and with different

consequences, it is critical to problematize the “natural ideas about space and time” with which women have had to struggle.

A growing fitness movement is adding to the complexity of the postcommunist landscape. Beauty is being redefined through a body aesthetic that includes physical practices related to fitness, health, and self-care. In the cities opportunities to join aerobics classes and weight lifting gyms are rapidly growing. Classes for kickboxing, yoga, and martial arts are also becoming more popular. In response to growing fitness trends, women’s magazines presently include fitness and exercise tips as well as images of the “new woman”. The new woman is expected to now show she can take care of herself as well as she does others. To be sure, images of the physically active, exercising, fit woman continue to reinforce the “natural” physical limits of the female body. Muscle development, heavy lifting, and serious weight training and bodybuilding remain the preserve of the male body which is (better) made to endure physical strain and build strength. As meanings of beauty and the beautiful body are conflated with the fit, healthy (and feminine) body, consumption of health, beauty, and fitness products in Romania has a growing appeal for women.

#### Locating the young, urban generation

The spread of global consumer capitalism to postcommunist Romania has been unevenly experienced across rural and urban lines as well as generational lines. This trend is due in large part to the rising popularity of Western images and ideals that have become more readily accessible to the young, urban generation through new media outlets and advanced technologies. More connected than ever before to international

sports media, global fitness trends, and fashion and style networks, as well as political movements and worldwide advocacy groups, Romanian youth have an exponentially-growing selection of products, images and lifestyles to consume. In addition to changing socio-economic prospects and increased exposure and access to alternative lifestyle choices, this generation is faced with the task of negotiating shifting gender roles within the ambiguous spaces of postcommunism.

In this chapter I include an analysis of how members of the young generation are currently negotiating legacies of gender norms and practices with the shifting development and adoption of emerging forms of body governance. I look particularly at the role of physical culture, including practices and symbolic meanings attached to the active body within the context of sports, leisure and exercise. I argue that while disciplinary regimes—including the construction of gendered discourses related to the body and physical abilities—strongly influence how the body is imagined, used, and constructed, they strengthen the division of male and female roles. Further, socially defined roles are serviced by a neoliberal rhetoric supporting individualism and market-driven capitalist enterprises, showing a shift from the nationalist, communist rhetoric heavily promoted prior to 1989.

My analysis is based on observations and data collected from local and national newspapers and magazines as well as interviews with students at a major university in Timisoara, Romania. Empirical data was collected through a series of twenty-one interviews with fourteen male and seven female students in their fourth and final year in a Sport and Physical Education Faculty. At the time of the interviews, conducted in 2007, the students were in their early twenties and had been involved with sports either

recreationally or competitively. With the help of Romanian colleagues, I translated an interview guide that was used during the one-on-one interviews which were digitally recorded. A native Romanian transcribed the interviews, after which, with the help of Romanian friends, I completed the translations into English.

The interviews focused on three main topics: 1) the identification of perceived social roles for men and women, 2) the difference between the availability of sports and physical activity opportunities for men and women, including the role of parents and peers in providing these opportunities; and 3) gendered expectations of body image and aesthetics.

There are three major findings in this chapter. First, at the intersection of cultural understandings of gender, sports and the body, lies a complicated tension between traditional gender roles, biological conceptions, and transitioning global social movements, with which many women must struggle in their decision to participate in sports and physical activity. Second, neoliberal ideals (of individualism and freedom, e.g.), which are especially appealing to the young generation, rather than fully opening avenues for girls and women to participate in sports, are instead being reappropriated in the gendered discourse as justification for the continued lack of support for female participation in the male-dominated arena of sport and physical activity. Third, a post-communist female subjectivity is emerging as women negotiate their identity through the increasing number of physical and aesthetic modification practices available to them. This emergent subjectivity incorporates elements of global body consumer culture as well as culture-specific, highly gendered spaces of physical activity in Romania.

### Enduring legacy: Gender norms reinforced

Although in many respects “traditional” expressions of femininity were disrupted under communism, as the consumption of fashion and beauty were officially sidelined for example, gendered discourse disappeared no less than the actual practices of gender specific social roles. In other words, even though official ideological rhetoric promoted social equality, women were targeted in ways that reinforced the notion that they were naturally unequal to men. One legacy of socialism that persists post-1989 is the mentality that women’s issues are no different than men’s. The added burdens carried by women and their unequal status to men have not been officially recognized. Rather, their status as “engineer, pretty wife, mother, fashion plate, and political activist” (Gal & Kligman, 2000, p. 53) has been normalized in the social imaginary and indeed in the daily lived realities of girls and women in contemporary Romania. The findings of this study show that there is a general belief that boys and men are “made” not only to enjoy sports and other physical activities, but to excel in these areas. Conversely, women and girls are not made this way. The natural, biological differences are emphasized especially in terms of physical abilities. Darius<sup>2</sup>, a male athlete, expressed his understanding of gender differences in this way:

Of course men are more equipped to have good physical form. Men like to move, to go out to play soccer at the school playground, starting at three years old, while the women less so.

According to Darius, men and boys actually have a natural affinity to physical activity complemented by their biological make-up which has properly ‘equipped’ them for sports.

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<sup>2</sup> All interviewee names have been replaced by pseudonyms that correspond to his or her respective gender

The normalization of socially prescribed gender roles also contributes to the marginalization of women in sports and physical activity. Traditional family roles in particular define and reinforce social expectations of men and women as well as meanings of femininity and masculinity. One student detailed his opinion on the division of responsibility between the sexes:

I believe that men have their roles in life and the same goes for women. For example, in life the man is the one who has to bring in the money, home, family, everything...protect the woman. And the woman's role is to protect the man.

Therefore I believe it is very important to help reciprocally, but there are different roles, meaning that the man has to do the hard work. The man has to help more with things that involve strength between the two because the woman knows that they don't have enough strength—like the man does. I believe that women have the role of helping the man through affection, though—things like that in life.

According to this student there is common-sense knowledge that men have more strength than women; not only do men know this, but women are also fully aware of their limited muscular strength. What is interesting is the idea that the man needs support as much as the woman, and it is in fact the woman's job to provide the man with what he lacks—affection. This student's understanding of masculinity and femininity are consistent with dominant images of strong males and affectionate females.

What sporting opportunities then are actually available for women in this context?

As state support for sports and recreation diminishes, so are the institutions that promote equal participation. Thus, when children are young, it would seem that the decisions made by parents are key factors in determining how their children respond to sports

opportunities, or a lack thereof. However, as Dana pointed out to me, there is too little support in the way of promoting physical activity for girls. She explained, “In general, parents guide [their children] to do a sport and too few support the girls”. This is indeed “a delicate question” as another student remarked, and the issue becomes more complicated when one considers the spread of neoliberal ideologies articulated with the rise in health, fitness, and beauty industries that work together to promote individuality and particular modes of femininity.

### Constructions of the female body: Popular media representations

If prior to 1989 expressions of female body aesthetics were limited to prescribed gender norms that promoted a homogenous, desexualized image of the “socialist man”, the current period of transition has not only opened opportunities for sexualized images of women to proliferate, but has put the female body on the fast track toward this end. Whether picking up the latest edition of the TV guide, local newspaper, or popular magazine, it is not uncommon to find women pictured in suggestive poses and revealing clothes on the one hand. On the other hand, in magazines specifically targeting the female population, discourse on the benefits of fitness and exercise for women is growing. Among the pages of these magazines are images of the female sporting body as it is re-imagined and reinforced in the public imaginary. Figure 1 is representative of the growing number of articles that promote exercise for women. The series of pictures featured in *Sana* (2006), a well-circulated Romanian women’s magazine, show a young woman with her hair in pig-tails, wearing three-quarter length spandex pants and a butterfly top. She does not appear to be very muscular nor does she appear to be exerting

very much energy or force while doing the exercises. Furthermore, the handheld weights she uses to demonstrate the seated shoulder press are small and colored. The appearance of the model, the types of exercises she demonstrates, and the intensity at which she is shown working, makes visible the constructed and disciplined female sporting body in Romania. Boundaries between men's and women's bodies are clearly demarcated through media representations, and specific definitions of femininity are further emphasized in advertisements and stories that focus on beauty and health improvement strategies for women.



Figure 1: Demonstrating recommended exercises for women in *Sana*

An article from *Information Arad* (2006, September 13, p. 13), a city newspaper circulated locally through the city of the same name, exemplifies the emerging trend of



defining femininity in terms of body maintenance, gendered aesthetics, and social expectations. The article includes one photograph of a woman with long hair pulled to one side and draped over her shoulder. She is resting on the ground, leaning back onto her elbows with one leg straight extended along the ground and the other bent to reveal her thigh and calf. She is wearing a sports top that exposes her shoulders, arms, and belly, and a pair of short spandex shorts. Titled “Beautiful breasts” (*Sâni frumoși*), the article discusses how to maintain beautiful, healthy breasts through medical check-ups, wearing proper supportive garments, and other “little tricks and exercises”, which include following up regular showers with a separate cold water (“but not too cold”) shower targeting the breasts to improve circulation, and also massaging the breasts with a hydrating cream. One of the “little exercises” the article recommends directs women to “stand with shoulders relaxed and arms resting at the side of the body. Place hands directly on the breasts and press them toward each other for a few seconds with the palms of the hands. Repeat fifteen times.”

Though the article mentions physical activity as one of the strategies for inducing “real changes” and maintaining beautiful breasts, even highlighting the importance of first selecting a sports bra that “supports vibration and jumping, and that protects the breasts from any sudden movements,” the physical level of the recommended ‘exercises’ is questionable at best, if not all together useless from a physiological and medical standpoint. The exercises require minimal physical exertion, but if they are done with regularity, the article promises noticeable results. In many ways, the light nature of the exercises and recommendations to enhance the health and appearance of the breasts, and

thus the body as a whole, signify the restrained, controlled, and passive movements expected of the female body in Romanian society.

The article begins:

Breasts have always represented the symbol of our femininity. We've always wanted to be admired and we've always tried to maintain the health of our breasts or to improve their image. In giving them the proper attention, checking their health periodically, we can have healthy and beautiful breasts. ... Regular medical attention and physical exercise are the main tricks that help to maintain the breasts' health and firmness. (p. 13)

Maintaining that women's breasts are the "symbol of our [Romanian] femininity", women in this instance are not only defined by their biological body, but their identity is tied to a perceived image of the ideal female body (with beautiful breasts) and even threatened by their ability to care for themselves (e.g., can they meet the challenge of keeping their breasts firm and beautiful through regular exercise and routine medical examinations?).

Images of Romanian women and constructions of beauty and femininity cannot escape the influence of Western ideals and ideologies. As Western media increases in accessibility, visibility, and desirability, the promotion of iconic female pop stars and actors increasingly act upon the fluid boundaries defining femininity in Romania,. Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Lopez (Figure 2) are but a few examples of the imported images of "Hollywood" beauty that have made their way into Romania's mainstream media.



Figure 2:  
 Angelina Jolie (left) on cover of *Jurnal TV* and Jennifer Lopez (right) on cover of *Elle*

If during communism the image of women was modeled after their role in the workplace and at home—the functional, utilitarian body—the model after which bodies are now constructed is the complex, fragmented image of women in the postcommunist moment. In its transition toward liberal democracy, Romania is uniquely challenged with the “schizophrenic” condition of postmodernity (Harvey, 1989), negotiating fragmented identities (Roman, 2003) within a “geography of differentiated tastes and cultures” (Harvey, 1989, p. 87). Addressing the changing relationship of the “image” to the body, Geneviève Rail (1998) explains, “In modern times, the image was modeled after the human body. In postmodernity, the reverse is true; the human body is modeled after the image” (pp. 148-9). Because the images themselves are fragmented and unstable, so too

are constructions of the human (female) body, rendering possible multiple reconfigurations of alternate identities in postmodernism.

Presenting a counter-image to the widely promoted sexed female aesthetic, are groups of women who have created a space to collectively voice their opinions and take action to improve their social position. These women recognize their inferior social status and advocate challenging social inequalities that consistently privilege men over women. Next to the “beautiful breast” article mentioned above, for example, is an article about a women’s club whose members are determined to fight for the respect of men and to prove that they are worth more than they are commonly given credit for. In order to achieve their goals, they have prepared themselves to “Fight like a man, win like a woman.” An obstacle for these women and those who hold a similar viewpoint is that sexual identity in Romania has historically been socially inscribed as a fixed, biological given. Further, social issues particular to women have not traditionally been separated from those of men, and thus have not been publicly identified or recognized; this has led to the virtual absence of a women’s movement and the public voicing of discontent and disapproval with women’s social status (Duffy, 2000; Roman, 2001; Berry, 1995; Gal & Kligman, 2000; Pascall & Kwak, 2005; see also Havelková, 1993, p. 65).

#### “Governing technologies” of neoliberalism

Neoliberal rhetoric, which highlights the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of individuals to make their own lifestyle choices, when articulated with the rise in global consumer body culture, seems to promote a context in which women are more free to express and construct their identity. However, women’s participation in sports and

physical activities continues to reinforce established gender roles, norms and expectations. The construction of women's bodies therefore continues to be regulated and disciplined, no longer by oppressive and fearful laws and regulations, but by mediated discourses of femininity. After having been subjected to restrictive laws and oppressive conditions under Ceaușescu, women are now moving toward creating a new sense of identity and femininity through previously denied physical and aesthetic practices, such as aerobics (Svendsen, 1996). Furthermore, they are confronted with the challenge of negotiating legacies of the past with new prospects for change, modernization, and associations with the West. No longer subjected to the homogenizing dictates of the communist era, nor the extreme limits on consumption imposed by Ceaușescu's socialist regime, a new female subjectivity is emerging that is closely linked to the body. However, the marginalization of women in physical culture is a manifestation of larger social phenomena that highlights a neoliberal-inspired rhetoric of individual choice and desire, which then precludes the language of inclusivity and exclusivity. *Opportunities thus become more a function of choice rather than structural constraints.* In other words, neoliberalism's emphasis on the will of the individual and personal responsibility has entered the Romanian mentality in terms of justifying the unequal number of sports opportunities available to girls and boys. The following excerpts are taken from interviews with male university students. They demonstrate how limited the social constructs of femininity have become, which consequently restrict sporting opportunities for girls (emphases are my own).

No, I don't think [that it's harder for girls than boys to play sports], *but they don't want to*...I told you that I did high performance sports. There was a group of about 50 kids and mainly girls, and after four years only two girls were still there. The majority had left.

*Women are more concerned with how they look*, how they are dressed, the make-up they use, the hairstyles that are in fashion, especially clothes and aesthetics. But men are more attracted to sports. I can't say that girls aren't since we have many [female] champions—but for the most part, men are *more attracted* [to sports]. I'm not saying that if a man can run 100 meters that a female can't. It depends on *will and desire* to do sports. There has to be an *attraction* to sports. There is [an attraction to sports from women], but not for all of them. In my opinion, *men are much more attracted to doing physical conditioning*.

They [opportunities] are not different. It just depends on their mentality. There's absolutely nothing holding them back. Anyone can do sports wherever and whenever if they want.

These students exemplify the strong, divisive mentality that currently inhibits girls and women from fully participating in sports and physical activity in postcommunist Romania. Women are viewed as making the choice themselves of whether or not to participate in sports, a choice that is guided by their “natural” feminine qualities, their “mentality” and their tendencies to not be attracted to physical activity. The challenge

herein lies in overcoming the socio-cultural barriers that continue to appropriate acceptable physical practices and aesthetics to the female body.

### Physical practices: Negotiating legacies in the current moment

Even though persistent legacies of gender inequality combined with an emerging neoliberal discourse continue to limit the discursive spaces in which females construct their identity, there is still evidence of an active negotiation process between the past and present. Physical activity has become a venue for this negotiation and for many is challenging dominant gender discourses, creating new spaces for women to promote new definitions of femininity. For example, although soccer is viewed as a “male sport”, the attitudes about girls playing soccer are slowly changing. Here Maria reflects on her experience with two of her colleagues who are competitive female soccer players:

I don't know. We have two colleagues who are sisters and play soccer. At the beginning of our first year, I thought it was a little strange for us (*fața de noi*), because everyone else did other sports. And now I even like to ask them what they did, did they win, it just doesn't seem like something abnormal anymore, but it probably seems that way to a lot of people. I think there is still that *mentality*. Maybe those who've been outside, to another country, maybe they think differently, *but for those who are still here, it's a sport for boys, not for girls.*

Although Maria's conception about female soccer players changed as she became better acquainted with her colleagues, she still recognizes the pervasive social stigma toward women who choose to play male-dominated sports. Further, Maria is aware that more accepting attitudes can be found outside of Romania, but within her country the mentality

remains that it is “abnormal” for women to play soccer. In addition to its struggle to build a market-based economy and working democracy, it seems Romania is also lagging in its movement toward recognizing and legitimizing the physical abilities of women.

As new fitness and health clubs continue to open and the media increases the promotion of health and beauty products, opportunities for women to participate in this growing market are also rising. However, even through these new spaces of physical culture, the role of the man as protector is maintained. “The man protects the woman,” a male student explained, “If you make a team with a mix of men and women, then he will have the tendency to protect her.” Sports are an area where traditional gender roles not only persist but are also reinforced. As gender roles have been normalized to the degree that they can go virtually unchallenged in the daily lives of Romanians, discrepancies in the availability of sports opportunities between men and women are likewise generally unrecognized. With few exceptions, in the student interviews there were both men and women who strongly believed that their society offered equal opportunities for sports participation. Many of the students shared the opinion of Darius when asked about the different social expectations held for men and women in sports. He stated, “In sports, I see that women can do any sport just like men. They [women] can do everything; therefore, there’s not really a difference—they don’t have to have different roles.” Darius’ comment exemplifies the common attitude that society provides equal opportunities and does not favor men over women; therefore, women do not *have to* play different roles on the sports field. The assumption is that if women and girls *do* find themselves in fewer numbers doing physical activity and sports, it is a function of their natural physicality as well as their own attraction and desire to participate.



In the postcommunist moment, women are caught in a critical bind: how are they to negotiate biological distinctions that position them as the physically weaker sex with shifting socio-cultural understandings of equal opportunity and individual responsibility that re-position them as simply lacking the desire or ability to move ahead? This complicated negotiation is starting to take place among members of the young generation. With her comment, Silvana first reveals her beliefs about the natural, physical difference between women and men, but then proceeds to present a contradictory belief that echoes neoliberal rhetoric of being able to individually achieve whatever one sets his or her mind to.

Women are more sensitive to colds and the flu compared to a man who can get through it more easily... [But in sports], men can do what women do. I don't believe that there has to be a line and that men have more opportunities than women.

In referencing not only a man's ability to recover more easily from sickness, but also a woman's elevated susceptibility to get sick in the first place, Silvana readily acknowledges her belief in the biological superiority of the male body. Interestingly, her biological bias toward men does not prevent her from readily advancing the rhetoric of gender equality once so heavily emphasized during socialism, and now also promoted in the context of liberal democracy. Through the contradictory nature of her statement, Silvana actually demonstrates the complexity with which normalized beliefs about biological and social distinctions between men and women discursively restrict the power of women in (sporting) society.

Women are also faced with reconciling messages and images disseminated through media outlets, such as the internet and television, with what is taught by their parents and grandparents. Diana shares her opinion here:

In our country, yes [there are different roles for women and men]. I don't say this, *but I heard from parents* that the woman's role is to stay at home with the children, to cook, to take care of the children, the housework. And the men have to work and bring home the money. I think that a woman can make as much money as a man. And I think that home obligations should be divided in two (shared)...In some sports, yes [I think there are different roles]. I'm not ok with playing tough sports (*sporturile dure*) like boxing, hockey, sports with that kind of roughness (*din acestea dure*); I'm not ok (*nu sunt de acord*) with girls who do that. Why? I don't know. *To begin with, they give an aspect to the physique that I don't like—I don't like too many muscles on a woman.* It doesn't look good...Yes, if a woman plays a rough sport, she's not feminine anymore; she no longer looks like a woman. She looks more like a man. Me, if I was a man, I wouldn't like to have a girlfriend that did boxing or rough sports.

Clearly, to this student the physical nature of a sport is linked to the level of femininity a woman can or cannot display—what is desirable and what is not. Even though she disagrees with traditional division of household roles, she has strong feelings about women who play 'rough sports'. Not only do these physical sports threaten a woman's femininity, but in developing a muscular body, she may also jeopardize her chances of finding a boyfriend or husband.

While women may have new opportunities to exercise and join gyms, try new hairstyles and buy beauty products like make-up and other accessories, post-communist female subjectivity is restricted by the social constructs and normalized understandings of women and women's bodies. The disciplined body is closely regulated in order to preserve distinctions between masculinity and femininity. As one of the female students explained, "Here [in Romania] women have to be skinny and frail to be beautiful. Here, women don't eat very much to keep their silhouette and men have to be muscular."

Why do discrepancies in sporting opportunities for men and women persist? It seems the young generation has not quite figured it out yet. There is certainly awareness of the cultural pressures that dictate what is socially acceptable and understood as the norm, but the tensions are evident along the boundaries of social transformation, even within areas that seemed before to be completely fixed.

#### Women in sports: Does sex still matter?

Despite the absence of a large political movement advocating for women's rights and inclusion in social spheres dominated by men (i.e. politics, sports), women have had a significant presence in Romanian sports and physical activities. Women have consistently performed well in the sports arena, and in the media, women are praised for their athletic success at local and national levels of competition. Traditionally, Romanian women have been competitive in such sports as handball, basketball, rowing, and gymnastics. Other popular sports among women include volleyball and tennis. Women, however, have less of a presence in soccer and combat sports, as these sports are generally viewed as being too physically aggressive for women, and are popularly

classified and recognized as “sports for men”. A consequence of the gendered classification of sports has been the subsequent discrepancies between the treatment of women’s and men’s sport, and consequently between the production of female and male bodies and mediated discourses of femininity and masculinity. Across the board, however, sports are popularly viewed as a realm where equal opportunity abounds not only for participation, but also for success, regardless of gender. Women’s movements are thus at once complicated and somewhat stifled because their fights are viewed in light of society’s larger issues of overcoming the economic and political postsocialist challenges. As Hana Havelková (1993) explains in her essay on “prefeminist thoughts”, the fight for social justice in the areas of Eastern and Central Europe is not understood as a (political) battle *between* men and women, but one *with* men and women.

Even though women have systematically been excluded from managerial positions both during and after communism, their ability to manage the triple burden (Meyer, 1985) of childcare, housework, and participation in the workforce has been acknowledged, though at times to their detriment. For example, during communism, women were portrayed as “superwomen” in the media for their sacrificial nature and ability to manage their private and public responsibilities; however, there was a significant gap between the superwoman image and the realities of the daily struggle to survive in a system that never fully came to realize the ideological social equality it widely promoted (Gal & Kligman, 2000, p. 52). Coping in the gendered arrangement of the socialist system led to contradictory feelings of empowerment and disempowerment for women. Gal & Kligman (2000) explain:

On the one hand, women gained a sense of gratification, moral superiority, and power in the household from their centrality and apparent indispensability. They also gained a somewhat different, more autonomous sense of self-worth and self-esteem from participation in the labor force. ... On the other hand, the conditions of work, the low wages, and the magnitude of demands on them produced a sense of victimization and perennial guilt at their never being able to do enough of anything, especially mothering. (p. 52)

In the postcommunist context, images of women in the home and at work are no less significant in defining the role of males and females. Women maintain a central role in childrearing and household care—as social subsidies and aid have significantly decreased—and the workforce—due to economic shortages that necessitate dual-income households.

In sports, the media continues to recognize the achievements of women, even as dominant definitions of femininity and gender roles remain largely uncontested. The visibility of women in sports, though in some ways promoting the construction of alternative female subjectivities through a presentation of different body shapes and physical abilities, creates a disillusioned sense of equality that preempts any challenges to the gendered social order.

When Carmen Tocală, President of the Romanian Basketball Federation (FRB), was asked if the club accepted the idea of having a woman as president, she admitted that “it was a change” that some have accepted while others have not. She continued in her response, “But does sex still matter (*Mai contează însă sexul*)? At home who manages the family, isn’t it a woman?” (Tocală, “Contează sexul?” (“Does sex matter?”), 2006).

Running the basketball federation is a difficult job, according to Tocală, because of its complex structure and limited budget. She explains that the FRB runs twelve national basketball teams and is given a budget of 12.5 billion ROL (Romanian Old Lei), which at the time of the interview was equivalent to approximately 500,000 USD, the smallest budget of all the Romanian sports federations, according to Tocală. Indeed for Tocală, the most challenging aspect of running the FRB is not related to gender discrimination and overcoming gender biases in her position, but rather applying the management skills—for which women have been known to effectively execute in the running of their homes—to achieving the federation’s goals.

The success of Carmen Tocală may indicate a certain level of acceptance among society in terms of challenging previously marked social territories, but conflicting opinions of women’s place and role in sport spaces and society in general remain. In sports journalism, for example, women are breaking through the gender barrier and beginning to cover the highly masculinized space of men’s football (soccer). How has women’s presence in this domain affected the spaces traditionally held as a male preserve? In an interview with *Today’s Woman (Femeia de azi)*, Vlad Enăchescu, a well-known sports journalist in Romania, spoke candidly about female sports journalists, their acceptance into the field, and his personal opinion about women’s sports. According to Enăchescu, there is no reason why a woman should be excluded from reporting on football games, especially if she understands the sport. When asked about the initial appearance of the idea “women in sports”, Enăchescu replied that this idea arrived after 1990. “But I don’t understand why women in sports have to be contested,” he added. “There are sports disciplines for women, so why shouldn’t there be women sports

journalists?” For Enăchescu, women are just as capable of sports journalism as their male counterparts. In Enăchescu’s opinion, their physical attributes would only make them more agreeable on the football pitch and as long as they have a good knowledge of the game, the fact that they are women does not reflect negatively on their ability to be successful sports journalists.

Enăchescu’s attitude is consistent with the general belief in Romania that differences between men and women are considered on the level of natural physicality, biological attributes that differentiate the sexes in terms of *natural* strength and power. Enăchescu affirms this conception when asked about whether he would do commentary for a game of women’s football and whether he thinks there is a difference between a women’s football match and a men’s. In response to this inquiry, he responded:

The differences are significant. All you have to do is think about the physical aspect. There are certain sports that women shouldn’t do. Boxing, weightlifting, ice hockey, for example. Football enters another category and I’ve seen women play with great success. All that being said, I don’t think that I’d like to do [sports] commentary for a women’s football match. But I would do commentary for ice figure skating with great pleasure. (Stănescu, 2006)

That Enăchescu is willing to speak up for women entering the profession of sports journalism, while still holding firm to the belief that there are specific sporting disciplines where women (and more specifically, women’s bodies) do not belong, is indicative of the shifting tensions in gender relations.

Bodies are categorized along biological lines defining women as less physical and needing more protection than men. This view has not changed even as women have

begun to more assertively negotiate their place within spaces typically viewed as masculine terrain. In this manner, the female body is continuously reinscribed through cultural markers of gender defined through processes of socialization and scientification (Haraway, 1991).

If the body is made through political inscriptions already in place in terms of gender, sex and other visible signs of demarcation (Haraway, 1991), what strategies are available for contesting and resisting normative practices and images? Under the current circumstances how might women enact “technologies of the performing body” and of the “transforming self” (Markula, 2006) in order to construct new definitions of femininity and female subjectivity. These questions are critical to understanding the position of women in the transforming society, since it is clear that in answer to Carmen Tocală’s question mentioned earlier, sex *does* still matter.

### The “big deal”

*Society and the conceptions that we’ve had until now. I don’t know. That woman can’t play soccer, that it’s just a sport for men. Because that’s how their bodies are made ...maybe that’s it. But I don’t think it would be a big deal for them to play.*

--Cristi, male soccer player

Gender regimes of the past have carried with them a legacy of assigning women a role of family support, self-sacrifice, and affection. In the current moment however, with a building rhetoric of creating individual responsibility and improving one’s own personal life conditions in the absence of state support, women are faced with a



challenging, complex, “schizophrenic” context within which to construct their identity. However, the current times of transformation have merely changed the nature of the power under which their bodies are disciplined and shaped through governing technologies. Where once they were limited in the consumption of leisure and lifestyle practices by a nationalist plan of industrial growth and social equality, women are now encouraged and indeed enticed by the growing consumer marketplace to indulge in consumption practices that reinforce socially constructed notions of femininity and “womaness”.

It is within this postcommunist context that women actively negotiate and renegotiate their identity among a mix of tensions that include the pull between traditional gender norms and images of modern, “Western” ideals, and the contradictions between neoliberal offerings of choice and individualism with the lived realities of limitations and social division and dependence. Participation in physical activities is an area where these observations are particularly evident, as girls and women struggle to construct a specific body through spaces traditionally reserved for men. And even though there are some who now feel that “it wouldn’t be a big deal for them to play”, the opinion given by Cristi in the quote above, it would in fact be a really big deal for those seeking to actively renegotiate the gender boundaries with which they struggle daily.

## Chapter Four

### Producing classed and gendered spaces of fitness and health

#### Studies of space: (post-)socialist spaces of sport, fitness, and health

Among sports scholars, the limited number of analyses on space—including its use, production, and articulation with the active body—is gradually increasing. A thorough examination of spaces of sports and physical activity is important insofar as the images and discourses related to the primary uses of these sporting spaces are embedded within larger cultural and social movements (i.e. related to health and fitness, body image, or national identity), which, when identified, reveal complex social processes that contribute to a “gendering” and “classing” of these spaces (see for example; Cahn, 1994; Craig & Liberti, 2007; Dworkin, 2003; Theberge, 2002).

In the context of East and Central Europe, the need to conduct critical analyses of spaces of sports and physical activity has not yet been addressed. However, different dimensions of socialist space have been explored demonstrating the complex processes of spatial production and use that have played a significant role in understanding larger political, cultural and social currents in the everyday lives of citizens. During socialism, when political ideology and rhetoric regularly invaded public and private spaces, asserting an overarching influence that permeated everyday life in socialist societies, space remained a contested realm (Crowley & Reid, 2002; Gal & Kligman, 2000). However, as Crowley and Reid (2002) demonstrate through their anthology of socialist spaces, “the spatial practices of citizens...were still made in relation to its [the party-state machine’s] priorities and tactics” (p. 4). The power of citizens to produce their own

meanings and uses of space was thus limited in its relation to the pervasive physical and ideological constraints of the socialist state. Even after the downfall of communist regimes in East and Central Europe, the production of space remains highly contested by the spatial practices of its citizens--though still not outside of relations to the “priorities and tactics” of the producers of these post-socialist spaces.

Insofar as the political nature of socialist spaces has been exposed (Crowley & Reid, 2002) and the politics involved in the gendering of sport spaces in the Western context has been critiqued and theorized (Cahn, 1994), what I offer in this chapter is a synthesis of theoretical work on “(Western) sport spaces” and that on “socialist spaces” to provide a critical analysis of the construction, representations, and uses of spaces of exercise and physical activity in Romania. The chapter focuses on the production of “spaces of exclusivity” and the ways in which post-socialist spaces are monitored, constructed and used, to reveal a class-based process that cannot be separated from a gendered organization and production of these spaces. Through this analysis I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the sites of physical activity and exercise in post-communist-type societies especially as they are articulated with the active body.

The particular space I focus on is that of the “fitness club” or “gym” in Romania. I put these terms in parentheses because there is not an exact translation for the English words “gym” or “fitness club” which are Western constructions whose meanings and connotations do not carry the same level of common understanding in Romania as they do in the United States, for example. The most common word used for the English equivalent of “gym” is *sală*, which can mean a (sport) hall or room depending on the context. Other related terms include *sală de forță* (strength/power gym), *sală de fitness*

(fitness gym), *sală de sport* (gymnasium), and *complex sportiv* (sports grounds). In addition, the word *sport* in Romanian is used to refer not only to sport itself, but also physical activity and exercise more generally.

For the purposes of this chapter (in order to make a distinction between the different venues) I will use the phrase “fitness club”, or simply “club”, to denote a space that has enclosed sports terrains, such as tennis courts or turf fields, in addition to areas for strength training, cardiovascular training, aerobics, and possibly a massage studio, sauna, or bar area. When using the term “gym”, the space I am referring to is mainly reserved for strength training, but may also include areas for aerobics classes or cardiovascular work. A fitness club thus offers spaces designated for exercise, sports and leisure; whereas a gym is used for resistance training (lifting weights) and in some instances cardiovascular exercise as well (using stationary bikes or treadmills, for example).

For this study, I observed gyms and fitness clubs in three major cities in the west of Romania. The cities are modern, university centers where attention to sports and exercise is increasing at a rapid rate, as evidenced by the rising number of gyms and improvements to public areas of leisure and physical activity. The gyms vary in many respects, but can be distinguished mainly by differences in location, size, clientele and membership prices.

The amount of time I spent at each location was dependent for the most part on the opportunities I had to build a relationship with the managers. Because of a particularly strong rapport with a manager at one of the more upscale clubs, I was able to spend a significant amount of time with her and the club’s instructors to get a fairly

strong sense of the processes involved in the production of this particular space of sport, exercise and leisure. The last part of this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the data collected through interviews and observations at this exclusive club. For the other venues, data was collected through participant observation and informal interviews with staff and gym members during tours and my own time spent working out in these gyms.

### Initial observations

What was most striking to me when I first started going around to make observations was the wide range of physical conditions—the material settings, including the lighting, decor, building composition, quality of equipment, and spatial arrangement—not only from city to city, but also from one block to the next. Sometimes the gyms are hard to find because they are located in the basement or another part of what otherwise looks like an ordinary office building. Making your way through empty halls and stairwells is not uncommon when searching for these gyms. In contradistinction to the bodybuilding or strength gyms are the exclusive “fitness clubs”. These clubs are in essence large, highly conspicuous sport complexes that completely alter the physical landscape they occupy. They may offer amenities such as tennis courts and enclosed turf fields, and are a testament to the rise of both the nouveau riche and the enterprising businessmen looking to take advantage of growing consumerism and interest in physical activity in Romania.

Both the gyms and fitness clubs have elements to attract (or distract) a particular type of consumer, whether of a certain gender or economic status, which I would later discover is associated with personal exercise preferences (a desire to lift weights,

participate in aerobics classes, or do cardiovascular work, for example). These spaces of sport and physical activity both strengthen and complicate the fluid demarcations between socio-economic classes and gender within the post-communist society of Romania in general.

Each of the sites offer the possibility to consume a new post-socialist lifestyle that, rather than promoting ideals of social equality (the primary goal of socialism), highlights and further creates ideological differences. For some, purchasing a membership and locating themselves within the space of a fitness club or gym may serve as an escape from the realities of living in a country with a weak economy, still struggling to prove itself to the European Community in terms of its government, human rights efforts, and market system (see for example, Svendsen, 1996). However, what I am arguing is that these new postsocialist spaces of leisure and physical activity are produced as highly gendered and classed spaces that actually make it difficult to resist dominant, constructed ideologies. Foucault (1984) states:

A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external spaces (cf. the geometry of fortresses), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. (p. 190)

What I examine here is the “problematic” of architecture used in post-communist spaces of sport and exercise: the operations of these spaces, and the effects of power used within

them to promote a gendered and classed discourse that becomes embodied in the consumers (who are also ultimately co-producers) of these spaces.

In a Lefebvrian sense, my goal is to identify the “spatial codes” that characterize spatial and social practice and their relations with “the extreme formal abstraction of logico-mathematical space” and “the practico-sensory realm of social space” (1991, pp. 15-17). In other words, I will examine the physical, constructed material aspects of these spaces in relation to the experiential, personal realities of interacting with(in) them. For this purpose “Codes will be seen as part of a practical relationship, as part of an interaction between ‘subjects’ and their space surroundings...” as I “highlight *contents* – i.e. the social (spatial) practices inherent to the forms under consideration” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 18). The analysis incorporates Lefebvre’s “conceptual triad” of spatial practice [perceived space], representations of space [conceived], and representational space [lived space] (1991, pp. 33-34), in addition to Foucault’s (1977) understanding of special technologies, which I believe is a useful theoretical approach to capturing the complex dialectic between these postsocialist spaces and the subjects acting upon, within, and through them.

#### Spatial practice [perceived space]

Lefebvre (1991) argues that “(social) space is a (social) product” (p. 30), meaning that lived and perceived experiences and relations are what produce space. Thus social space is spatial practice, it is an active process of production and reproduction of that space, its meanings, and the practices that provide the elements which make the space

cohesive and knowable (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33)—this includes the tangible, visible, and audible characteristics that make the structure of space comprehensible.

At local gyms and fitness clubs in Romania, spatial practice can be analyzed through the locality and structural characteristics of the exercise facilities. Spatial practice in this case can be categorized into one of two designations: strength (*forța*) or fitness (*fitness*). Strength training is associated with lifting heavy weights and building muscle mass and power whereas fitness training is associated more so with less strenuous movements. Bodybuilding (*culturism*) is also a popular activity which is generally linked to power and strength because of the heavy lifting and focus on building mass involved in this type of training. Not surprisingly perhaps, spaces of strength and power target men while fitness venues, including aerobic studios, are spaces commonly constructed for women. Under this logic, aerobics and “doing fitness” are seen as activities for women, whereas “doing power” is for men. In fact, there was one instance where I was holding a conversation with someone at a gym and I told her that I do powerlifting (*forța*) and immediately she offered the correction, “You mean fitness.”

#### *“Strength gyms”*

Besides supporting a strong link to men, masculinity, and male bodies, power and bodybuilding gyms are also associated with a lower-middle class social and economic status. It is not uncommon for the gym to be in an inconspicuous location—in the basement of office buildings or tucked away on the periphery of the city center. Once inside, these spaces have little order to them, with worn benches and outdated cardiovascular and strength training machines crammed into the space enclosed by the



surrounding walls. Most everything is in a usable condition, and certainly there is enough equipment to ensure a complete and proper workout, but there are certain characteristics that set these gyms apart from the fitness clubs, whether a broken cable replaced by a rope on the pulley system, dumbbells and free weights strewn about the floor, or bodybuilder pin-ups or posters hanging on the wall. Spatial practice, perceptual experiences within these spaces, is addressed below as I describe material reality as I perceived it during my time spent inside.

The very first Romanian gym I observed was inset among a row of shops along a side street near the center of the city. As I approached the entrance, I noticed a woman smoking in the courtyard just outside the door. She was young, looking to be in her twenties and wore a shirt that exposed her belly and her bellyring. After I passed through the doorway, she followed me inside and I learned right away that she did not speak English. She allowed me to look around and pointed to the ledge behind me where there were small blue pieces of paper with the membership prices printed on them. I grabbed a couple and continued to explore the gym space.

The first room I came to was the aerobics studio, which was directly connected to the front desk area. On the floor of the studio were small hand weights and a portable radio. Nothing really struck me as extraordinary—in my opinion it just looked like an aerobics studio you could find in the United States that needed to be updated or remodeled. It was a fairly plain, carpeted area surrounded by mirrors. In the back corner, I did notice an interesting machine, and upon closer examination I realized it was a “vibration machine”. In the U.S., I had seen these machines on TV shopping channels such as QVC, but never anywhere else. The machine itself is a platform with a band

attached. After stepping onto the platform the user places the band around the target area (i.e. leg, buttocks, or arm) and turns the machine on. Once on, the machine vibrates rapidly, supposedly to get rid of fat and cellulite from the area around which the band was placed. I have always found these types of machines “gimmicky”, but they can actually be found in a number of gyms and even in the more upscale fitness clubs in Romania (I even saw one for sale in the mall).

The weights and strength machines were located in the basement which could only be accessed by walking through the aerobics room. The stairwell itself was very narrow and steep with low ceilings. As I stepped into the room, the space seemed small and cramped especially because there was no natural light coming in and there was a hodgepodge of equipment in no particular arrangement that I could tell (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Inside the weight room of a “strength” gym

[photo taken by author, 2006]

In one corner was a dressing room with a drawn curtain as the only barrier separating the person inside and those in the training area. Hanging on one wall was a pin-up of a female bodybuilder in a thong, sitting with her legs spread wide open. It did not seem like an appealing space for the general public to train in, especially with the lack of air circulation, and the low ceilings paired with the unarranged equipment and crude decor.

A different power gym was located inside of a building that is shared by a gymnasium where basketball and handball games are held. The gym itself is located on the second floor of the building and has its own space that is visible from the other floors because it is in an open foyer with open staircases. This gym is a single room equipped with dated machines and free weights. The walls and pillars are covered with dark paint and graffiti, and the space is uninviting in general; especially because instead of a wall and a door to enclose the space, separating the inside of the gym from the rest of the building space is a wall-to-wall wire fence with three lines of barbed wire running the length of the fence. Additionally, hanging on a wall near the entrance was the only picture in the room which was a pin-up of a naked woman.

The decor of a third gym consisted of posters of women in string bikinis, professional bodybuilders, and advertisements for nutritional supplements. It consisted of one large room in the basement of a multi-use building. Toward the front of the gym were dated stationary bikes and other cardio equipment crammed together making it look like a cardio equipment yard sale. The weight machines, benches and free weights were all located in the back.



Figure 4: Poster of a male bodybuilder marking the entrance of a strength training gym

[photo taken by author, 2006]

Outside of some gyms (or the multi-use buildings in which a gym may be found) are clear markers of what type of body one might aspire to once inside; these could be either drawings, sketches, or pictures of muscular bodies. In the case of a fourth gym, the gym itself was located a few blocks outside of the city's center. I got general directions from somebody before setting off to find it, but even with the directions, I probably would not have been able to find it as easily had it not been for the larger-than-life picture

of a fully flexed bodybuilder, with fantastically developed muscles bulging from every part of his body, on the side of the building adjacent to the gym (Figure 4).

The value of a well-developed muscular body is visible in the signs and bodies working within the spaces of strength and power gyms. Women are also shown with hard, developed muscles, but rather than glorifying their bodies, they are sexualized and demeaned by the posters hanging on the walls, which display them in suggestive poses. The women are generally confined to the cardiovascular areas and so are actually kept away from the strength building equipment. Should they enter these marked areas, not only are they confronted with the live male bodies that are permitted to move about with ease, but also with the posters of well-built muscular women and men that serve as reminders of the what types of bodies the space is reserved for.

### *Technologies of space*

Spatial dimensions of these sporting spaces provide another key to understanding spatial practice. Gyms are spaces of discipline whereby individuals reproduce gendered and classed norms as they consume the images and structural elements through spatial practice. Within these confined spaces individuals are set apart from the outside world, already separated by their decision to change their bodies through exercise. Foucault (1977) explains that “discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space” (p. 141), and in these gyms the primary disciplinary techniques involve the enclosure and subsequent division of space. Enclosure, Foucault (1977) explains, is “the specification of a place heterogenous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected place of disciplinary monotony” (p. 141). Daily life for most Romanians does not involve

thoughts devoted to fitness or health motives. In a nation still struggling in its transition to a fully functioning, capitalist-based market economy, families continue to focus on daily survival, working to keep up with the rise in costs of living and consumer products. Although sport continues to play a significant role in Romanian society in terms of national identity and social activities, “working out” at a gym—strength training, bodybuilding, or “doing fitness”—has not enjoyed the same history, having been introduced as a western import. Exercise and physical activity for the sake of improving health, therefore, has not been fully accepted or understood as a way of Romanian life. Further, in many instances those who choose to consume sporting spaces are enclosed in disciplinary isolation.

Although there are not necessarily physical, material barriers that compartmentalize gym spaces, divisions are nonetheless visible by a clear separation between different types of equipment. If there are cardiovascular machines, such as elliptical trainers, stair climbers, treadmills, or stationary bicycles, they are usually placed away from the weight training equipment, located in a non-threatening area, such as the front of the gym. The weight lifting areas are commonly in the back of the gym or in the basement if there is one. The disciplinary space is thus divided, but each “partition” is visible to the other, and individuals within each division can be observed by those in another. “Presences and absences” are clearly established in this manner so that it is easy to “know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits” (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). There is

thus a space for every body and the more the spaces are consumed, the more spatial practice is reproduced and social divisions are reinforced, strengthened, and defined.

*“Fitness clubs”*

Spatial practices of fitness clubs are distinctly different than those of strength and fitness gyms, starting with their highly conspicuous construction in brightly colored facilities that stand in stark contrast to the surrounding neighborhoods and government-owned buildings, the latter of which are more telling of the country’s economic condition. The fitness clubs double as sports complexes that offer a wide range of membership options. These options include various combinations of facility usage, so that individuals can customize their membership to their sports participation preferences—including, for example, using the weights, taking aerobics classes, or renting out the turf field or tennis courts.

Club facilities are kept very clean and are well-maintained. At one club, they had a cleaning lady who was on duty the whole day, who was continuously mopping the floors to keep them shiny and dirt-free. The clubs also have top of the line equipment placed in carefully organized and constructed spaces. Locker areas and exercise rooms are accessed only by electronic key card, which must be obtained with each visit at the front desk. Whereas local gyms keep track of members by issuing paper membership cards and keeping those cards at the front desk while the member works out, fitness clubs are equipped with computer software that allows them to check members in electronically.

In addition, there are spaces not only for sports and exercise, but also for relaxation and socializing, such as bar areas that serve food and drinks (including alcohol), spacious lounges, and patios with tables and chairs. These spaces present opportunities to visibly consume a lifestyle that the average Romanians cannot afford. But, interestingly, disciplinary space in these facilities is more cellular, enclosed, and monitored than in the local strength gyms. The next section will discuss the representations of space, the abstract and symbolic meanings associated with the spatial practices described above.

### Representations of space

Lefebvre (1991) explains that representations of space are “tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to ‘frontal’ relations” (p. 33). This section contextualizes the codes which are culturally produced and reproduced in sporting spaces. The construction of the spaces, including what is inside and how it is arranged can be seen as manifestations of the larger post-socialist context and the arrangement and disciplining of bodies in the social space outside of the gyms and fitness clubs. In many instances, the gendered and classed nature of the spaces is clearly marked and defined. In one gym, for example, there were areas clearly labeled with signs reading “women’s fitness”. More commonly, however, I found that workers readily gave cues about the gender or class norms in their particular gym by matter-of-factly stating who consumes (and thus belongs in) which spaces.

There was one gym that I would perhaps classify as a ‘hybrid’ gym given my prior definitions of gyms and clubs; it had the order and cleanliness of a fitness club



facility, but some of the outdated equipment and limited variety of sports offerings typical of strength and fitness gyms. With the main floors above ground and big windows on two sides of the building, there was a lot of light pouring in to keep it bright. The person working at the front desk was a man who looked to be in his twenties and he had some interesting piercings through his lips and various parts of his ears.

There were four floors, including the basement, the ground floor which was the main floor, a third floor which overlooked the ground floor, and the top floor that opened up to a balcony and also led to a small loft which was not in use at the time. The basement was the “free weight” area where an assortment of dumbbells, barbells, and benches were located. The weights were neatly arranged on racks and weight trees and the area was clean and well-maintained. There were two main sections separated by a brick archway and there were mirrors along some of the walls.

As I looked around this area, the front desk worker explained that this was the “boy section”, thus making the connection between strength training, lifting weights, and constructing a male, masculine body. The main floor had the front desk, changing rooms, a small “pro shop” with supplements for sale, and strength training machines (not free weights). The next floor up had about five pieces of equipment including a shoulder press and other machines that target the midsection. As we made our way to the top floor, the worker freely explained, “This is where the girls like to go” (speaking in English). Not surprisingly, this is the space reserved for cardiovascular machines, including two stationary bicycles and one elliptical trainer, and machines targeting the legs, including machines for performing leg extensions, leg curls, leg presses, hip abductor and adductor (outer and inner thighs) and a set of five, ten, and twelve pound dumbbells which were

neatly lined up on the floor. I had to ask myself first, why this is the space “for girls” while the other is “where the boys like to go”, and second, what prompted him to actually point this out to me?

Answers to these questions can be found in the dominant cultural understandings of gender and the changing role of the female body in post-communist Romania. What is the relationship between post-socialist sport spaces, health, fitness, and the female body? To what end are representations of sporting space tied “to the relations of production”, “to knowledge, to signs and to codes” (Lefebvre, p. 1991, p. 33)?

*Health and fitness (trends): Cultural norms and technologies of the body*

The role of the female body is taking on new meanings in the post-communist era. Social and cultural norms are shifting as body consumerism and Western ideologies of beauty and fitness continue to penetrate the media and everyday lives of citizens. Whereas socialist ideology mandated a homogeneous workforce and social body centrally controlled by the Romanian Communist Party, officially promoting physical activity and sports development across social divisions, the Romanian capitalist system portends no such practices of equality. In addition, achieving a healthy body does not hold as much social currency as attaining an aesthetically pleasing one. As an example, many interviewees when asked what they felt was an ideal body responded, “90-60-90”, measurements they had learned are the ideal proportions—chest, waist, hips—for a woman’s body. Unable perhaps to change the first “90” without drastic surgery, the only other options to reach this standard is to work on reducing the waist and focusing on the development of the hips. With a focus on these proportions, it is no wonder that the areas

the “girls like to go” are those they feel will slim and tighten their legs and reduce their waistline.

Class- and gender-based ideologies continue to produce spatial representations that symbolically distinguish “fitness” needs and body norms of women from those of men. Ironically, in a move to distinguish themselves through the active, physical body, women are increasingly becoming normalized subjects moving back toward homogeneity. Through homogenization, however, individualization continues to work as a disciplinary technique that measures and highlights the differences between individual subjects and the collective norm. Foucault (1984) explains the paradox of normalization:

In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties, and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (p. 197)

In a sense, having come from a “system of formal equality”, it seems logical to assume that women have been conditioned to measuring themselves against a norm. However, the homogeneity imposed by socialist ideology, while formally promoting equality between sexes and classes, still privileged the male body and stature. In other words, women were measured against a male norm in their ability to contribute to the socialist system through their contributions to the labor force and expectations to mold themselves into the “new socialist man”. The division of social roles was rooted in

cultural beliefs in biological differences between the sexes which materialized in patterns of gender segregation particularly evident in the workforce and in the home. Where women were overrepresented in caretaking, service, and light industry jobs, placed in clerical and sales positions, men were responsible for heavy industrial work and skills-based jobs. In addition, men were almost exclusively charged with operating mechanical equipment and given positions of leadership and management within each sector (Gal and Kligman, 2000, p. 57).

Sporting spaces have continued this pattern of gender segregation, normalizing the act of heavy lifting, operating machinery, and leading the way in developing a strong body, as masculine. The spaces reserved for these activities are thus marked and reproduced as male-spaces through spatial practice. Likewise, small-scale, nonmechanized work is viewed as the norm for women. Whereas men operate the weight-loaded machines and manage the freeweight dumbbells and barbells, women are socially sanctioned to the programmable and automated machines, such as the treadmill or stairclimber (or even the “fat vibration” machine). In the aerobics room, for example, machines are not used and only small hand weights are incorporated into the routines if at all. In this manner, post-socialist spaces of physical activity and exercise are experienced by and through individual subjects whose bodies become integral to the practical production and representations of the space itself. Bourdieu (1980/1990) offers an explanation as to how these practices become normalized into common sense practice:

Practical sense, social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and body automatisms, is what causes practices, in and through what makes them obscure to the eyes of their producers, to be *sensible*, that is, informed by a

common sense. It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know. (p. 69)

Representations of sporting space in post-socialist Romania are embedded with common sense practices of gendered and classed bodies and complex systems of coded meanings. Subsequently, *representational space* is produced wherein socially and culturally constructed systems of meaning are lived through the normative spatial practices.

#### Representational space [lived space]

Sporting spaces of gyms and fitness clubs embody the complex structural and ideological tensions of the shifting gender and class dynamics in post-socialist Romania. In the face of global capitalism and global health, fitness, and body movements, these *representational spaces*, “linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) reveal social codes and value systems unique to the post-1989 Romanian context. The spaces become a collection of images, structures, materials, and bodies which are organized and inscribed with social meaning through disciplinary techniques and spatial practice. As alternative images and representations of lifestyle become increasingly available—through the internet, television, newspapers, or magazines, for example--the choices made in lifestyle consumption and the construction of identity through these means becomes ever more complex.

Barry Glassner (1990) characterizes the fitness movement in the West as a ‘pastiche,’ a complex collection of diverse, and oftentimes contradictory, images/imagery which comprises the whole of what is represented—in this case the self/body. Though perhaps sharing little else in common, the “fitness movement” in the cultural context of

Romania can also be seen as a postmodern phenomenon which itself is viewed as a complex “collection of attempts to reconstruct the self (and in particular the self-body relationship)” (Glassner, 1990, p. 217). In regard to notions of self, Glassner suggests that the construction of self is intimately tied to the experiential relation of the body to an ‘other’; this relation to an other may include physical interaction with or dialogue about other bodies, the interpretation of other bodies as portrayed by the media, or how one responds to the description (and in many instances, prescription) of a body as being healthy or unhealthy, fit or unfit (Glassner, 1990, p. 221). Given this conception of the postmodern self, to what degree do sporting spaces enable individuals in Romania to reconstruct the “self-body” relationship, to construct a new identity, and to contest the symbolic power inscribed within social space? In the next section I examine the spatial practice, representation of space and characteristics of representational space of an exclusive fitness club that can be used as an example of the ways in which new spaces of sports and leisure are constructed and consumed (experienced) as individuals seek to practice expressions of freedom (Foucault, 1984, p. 245) while developing the self-body(-space) relationship.

Figure 5: “*Club Dinamo*<sup>3</sup>”: Physical spaces of luxury and exclusivity

[all photos taken by author, 2006]



Figure 5.1: Outdoor patio (above)



Figure 5.2: Clay-surface tennis courts

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<sup>3</sup> Club Dinamo is used in place of the actual name of the health club



Figure 5.3: Outdoor showers



Figure 5.4: "Children's World"



Figure 5.5: Classed and gendered space of the weight room at Club Dinamo





Figure 5.6: View of Club Dinamo from the back of its property

#### Club Dinamo: Physical spaces of luxury and exclusivity

Club Dinamo (Figure 5) is an exclusive fitness club, with a sauna, indoor pool, outdoor tennis courts (Figure 5.2), a mini artificial soccer turf, outdoor showers (Figure 5.3), aerobics studio and fitness room (Figure 5.5). Apart from the nearby Physical Education and Sport University, it is the largest sport and fitness club in the city. Within the facility, each room is separated by either a clear or opaque glass door on which is a sketch indicating the function designated for that particular space. As an example, there are martini glasses sketched onto the door to the bar area and little waves on the door to the pool. On the door to the aerobics studio is a sketch of a woman, indicated by the long flowing hair, and on the door to the area with the weights is the torso of a muscular man, indicated by the exposed chest. Just as natural as waves can be linked to the swimming pool, so is a woman associated with aerobics and a man with strength training. As individuals go in and out of these clearly marked areas, they are confronted with images that immediately gender the space; even if they pay no heed to the picture (I was told that

there are an equal number of women and men who use the weight room), the picture serves as a marker of space that is consumed on a regular basis.

The fitness area consists of state-of-the art cardiovascular equipment such as treadmills, elliptical trainers and stationary bicycles, as well as strength training equipment that parallels, and in some instances even surpasses, the quality of machines found at many gyms in the United States. The free weight area takes up only a small corner in the back and the aerobics studio is in a separate room altogether. In the free weight area (Figure 5.5), there are a few, small, neon-colored, rubber-covered dumbbells located in the corner of a rack of otherwise large, iron weights. When the trainer was showing me around, he pointed to the colorful, miniature dumbbells and explained that those are for “women and children”.

In addition, at this exclusive club, every member is issued an electronic key card that is required to enter every room, including the fitness room, aerobics room, swimming pool, sauna, and locker rooms. There are also surveillance video cameras in many areas of the club that feed into the computers at the reception area. Activity within the club is thus constantly monitored and access to the different areas of the club is restricted even once inside the front doors. This club stands out from the rest of the gyms in the city for the above reasons, but also because it offers a whole lifestyle change package, with its “gold membership” which includes use of its swimming pool, bar, lounge, outdoor terrace, patio with lounge chairs and outdoor showers, childcare facilities, and sauna. There are also eight tennis courts and an enclosed mini soccer field. This membership, however, costs approximately 130 USD, about a third of the average worker’s monthly

salary. Clearly, consuming the spaces of this club requires having obtained a certain socioeconomic status that sets its members apart from the average citizen.

Class distinctions are also practiced and reinforced through individual lifestyle choices made at the club. In an interview with the assistant club manager, I was informed that some people join the club not for health benefits, but rather just to be able to show others that they can afford to be a member. Class divisions are thus clearly marked through class *habitus* and the consumption of the constructed spaces of sport and exercise facilities. Bourdieu (1979/1984) identifies the *habitus* as the display of particular learned actions and behaviors that act as social markers. Individuals therefore, through their physical practices, sporting choices, exercise habits, eating and dressing choices, and speech patterns, for example, all embody a class distinction that is learned through daily interaction with institutions which reinforce class-based values, styles, and ideals.

At the fitness club, a strong emphasis is placed on family where the role of mother and child is strongly reinforced. Not only are there children's aerobics classes, but there are also swim classes and private instruction for children. The spaces and structures constructed for women are those that are reserved for children as well, reinforcing the importance of preserving mother-child connections and the family unit in general. That there are specific classes (kids' aerobics, private swimming instruction), spaces (aerobics room and swimming pool), and even equipment (small weights) reserved for children is an indication that this exclusive club values the inclusion and protection of children and their needs. In addition, the club also provides childcare facilities including an outdoor "Children's World" (Figure 5.4), so that mothers (or fathers) can have their children looked after while they use the club.

In the post-socialist state, one of the pressing challenges for families, especially for women, has been finding time and money for adequate childcare. The necessity for dual-income households, where oftentimes at least one parent holds multiple part-time jobs in order to make economic ends meet, combined with the effects of losing government subsidies for childcare, has put an extra strain on families in terms of surviving in the country's costly transition to capitalism. The ability to take advantage of childcare services and activities is thus a privilege at the club that allows women to preserve a socialized system of family values that others cannot afford. This reinforces their status both as strong mothers and as successful survivors in the changing economy.

Another distinguishing feature of this exclusive fitness club is the high degree of attention to cleanliness and order. Cleaning and cleanliness form a significant part of Romanian culture that demonstrates pride in traditional home keeping and manifests as a sense of general progress (Drazin, 2002). Traditional practices to maintain cleanliness inside the home—for example, changing from outdoor shoes to indoor house slippers (*schlops*) at the home's entrance—have retained their significance at gyms and fitness clubs alike where a requirement to bring a change of shoes is not uncommon. To the degree that definitions of clean are socially and culturally constructed, these regulations may or may not result in a “cleaner” facility. In one gym, many of the members would come in and work out in their *schlops*, which are basically low-grade rubber flip-flops or slippers, or their bare feet. Some would even run on the treadmill with their bare feet. Unaware of the custom of changing to indoor footwear, I once tried to enter a gym after having come in from the rain. The front desk worker confronted me and almost made me leave when he found out I did not have another pair of shoes with me. I convinced him to

let me stay after promising to thoroughly wipe my shoes off on the door mat, but saw that as soon as I started walking away, he took out a mop and cleaned the floor where I had stepped.

At Club Dinamo cleanliness and order are highly valued. These characteristics are seen as being strongly correlated to progress in terms of culture and social class. The visible signs of their dedication to keeping an immaculate facility include outdoor showers, a cleaning lady always on duty, and trainers cleaning the equipment on their down time. The employees of the club, including the trainers, instructors, and manager, indicated that one of the main draws of their club was the cleanliness and the character of the members. One of the trainers explained, for example, that the club did not attract bodybuilders and individuals focused solely on building mass and strength, those individuals who he identified as being more likely to be involved in steroid use and other deviant-type behaviors. The strength gyms, he said, were more suited for them. Indeed, there was a certain process of “othering” within the space of the club. Also, in Club Dinamo there were no pictures or posters of supplement ads or male or female bodybuilder; and it was thus cleaner than the neighboring gyms by virtue of it not being a space that promotes performance-enhancing substances (further marking a distinction between a pure, clean body and a deviant, dirty one). In addition, the building complex is completely above ground and the rooms and equipment are generously spaced, producing an open and bright facility that also highlights its cleanliness, embodying the significant preservation and protection of traditional Romanian values. The fitness club is thus exclusive in its very selection and organization of material structures (different rooms, weight training equipment) and bodies (gendered and classed articulated with the value of

preserving traditional practices and thus spaces of the family and home). By re-creating sporting spaces in this manner, social and familial roles are reinforced and the body-self is further disciplined to perform and thus reproduce these practices as common, practical sense.

Every social order systematically takes advantage of the disposition of the body and language to function as depositories of deferred thoughts that can be triggered off at a distance in space and time by the simple effect of re-placing the body in an overall posture which *recalls* the associated thoughts and feelings, in one of the inductive states of the body which, as actors know, give rise to states of mind.

(Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 69)

The spaces of gyms and fitness clubs contribute to a larger system of social and cultural relations that strategically positions individual and collective bodies. This is evident when identifying the some of the differences between the spaces of strength and bodybuilding gyms and those of exclusive fitness clubs as summarized below (there is, of course, some degree of cross-over between these generalizations).

#### Strength and bodybuilding gyms

- Affordable
- Congested and cramped space
- Dependence on artificial lighting
- Dated equipment
- Sexually suggestive posters of women
- Little attention to appearance of space
- Conspicuous locations
- Space for lower class, masculine bodies
- “Ladies’ Gym” (explicitly or implicitly identified)
- Aerobics studio (if available) separated, but visible from weight training areas
- Associated with steroid and other drug use (deviant behavior)

### (Exclusive) health and fitness clubs

- Cleaning staff (women) always on duty
- Traditional gender roles in division of labor maintained (female receptionists and aerobics instructors, male personal trainers)
- Fewer ‘bodybuilders’
- Family-oriented
- Children’s aerobics and childcare available
- Opportunities for other leisure, social activities (bar, terrace, lawn chairs, smoking section)
- New models of equipment
- Electronic key cards and other technological devices used to control movement of clients
- Fully enclosed aerobics room
- Organization and order in free weight area maintained by workers

### Restrictive vs. resistant spatial practices

The findings of this chapter indicate that constructed spaces of exclusive fitness clubs reinforce class-based ideologies that view the upper classes as appreciating more clean, structured, and ordered environments. Within this space, corporeal practices are also highly regulated, especially in terms of the areas specifically designated for women and men which promote social reproduction of dominant gender norms. Through the use of expensive, state-of-the-art equipment, comfortable lounges, and convenient child care facilities, the highly regulated, carefully planned technologies of space limit the ability of its members to actively construct a subjectivity that counters dominant notions of gender and class.

Spaces of leisure, sports, and physical activity contain the “representations of the relations of production” in the form of buildings (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) that organize, produce, and discipline bodies. Production of these spaces thus contributes to the proliferating class struggles in the postcommunist moment, and as such should not be

overlooked in terms of embedded power relations within both the physical and social infrastructures. In the assessment of David Harvey (1989):

The production, restructuring, and growth of spatial organization is a highly problematic and very expensive affair, held back by vast investments in physical infrastructures that cannot be moved, and social infrastructures that are always slow to change....Superior command over space has always been a vital aspect of class (and inter-class) struggle.” (p. 232)

In light of these analyses, the challenge remains to identify effective strategies to change socially restrictive infrastructures through resistant spatial practices.



## Chapter Five

### Reflections

#### Looking back: Village surprise

On my first trip to Romania I was taken to a village to visit with a family whose destitution had threatened to separate the siblings from each other and their parents. Unable to financially support the family, the parents had painfully considered giving their children up for adoption, as many in the country are forced to do in similar circumstances of impoverishment. Thankfully, the family received help from a non-profit organization that gave them the resources they needed to stay together. Entering their village and their home, I got my first glimpse of the modest living conditions many Romanians have come to know as their daily reality. The significance of family traditions and values are strong and the home is the protected center of social life. Inside, the cement floors were swept and freshly mopped, the beds were meticulously made, and the rugs covering the floors and the walls were worn, but colorful and clean. Outside, the garden plot was a fresh reminder of the level of subsistence living that continues to sustain a large portion of the Romanian population.

As interesting and eye-opening as these sights and revelations were, what was to come next in the tour of the property was nothing short of shocking. Behind the house we followed a short path that led us past the garden to a small concrete building. When the host first opened the door to the one-room building I could not quite make out what was inside, but as I stepped across the threshold I saw what looked like dumbbells and other weightlifting equipment. As it turns out that was exactly what it was! I quickly took out

my camera to take pictures of this wonderful surprise. My curiosity about the reconstructed look of the equipment was settled when I was told that the family's only son (who was not home at the time) had made everything for himself by hand. I asked his sister if she ever used any of it. She responded with a bemused laugh and said no.

I will never forget the indelible images of that visit: the modest, well-kept, single story home, the smiling family, the vegetable garden and grape vines, the small concrete building in the back, the handmade weightlifting equipment inside, and the woman who found great pleasure in showing us the products of her brother's handiwork, amused at the thought of using it herself. What were the brother's motivations in putting the time and effort into not only constructing the weight training equipment but also using it? What type of body or body image was he trying to build? What did his sisters think about his training and what would others think if they discovered his private training area in the back of his village home? What prompted the sister to chuckle at the thought of her training on the equipment too? Thinking back, this small home embodied the changes and tensions of a country whose population must wrestle with economic hardship, social developments, and shifting ideological and cultural mores, all the while maintaining persistent traditional values centered on the private sphere of the home and family and negotiating postcommunist identities increasingly influenced by an emerging physical culture. What have these changes and tensions meant for Romanians in the postcommunist moment? How have the definitions and meanings of physical culture and the body—and in turn social roles and gender distinctions—as understood in the socialist context shifted in post-socialist Romania?

### Looking on: Tensions in transition

Approaching the last decade in the twentieth century, Eastern and Central Europe underwent a great deal of change as a wave of revolutions officially ending communism swept across the former Soviet bloc. The social, political and economic transformations in these regions have had a number of implications for power relations between government parties and the public, exposure to global processes, and adjusting to ideological shifts toward democratic and capitalist projects. Both between and within the former communist countries, the effects of the transformation have proven to be of uneven and unequal proportions (Gal and Kligman, 2000). Romania in particular stands out among its former communist neighbors for the degree to which its political history and communist legacies have complicated its advance toward a working democracy and successful market-driven economy.

Through tight ideological control over education, work, production, consumption, and physical activity, the Ceaușescu government initiated and enforced policies that eventually left the nation bereft of food and individual freedom. It was during this time that disillusionment with government and ideas of democracy and equality became pervasive, ultimately leading to the most violent communist overthrow in the otherwise ‘velvet revolutions’ of Eastern and Central Europe (Roman, 2003). Romania continues to face a unique set of challenges in the twenty first century as it negotiates the political and historical legacies of communism in general, and those left by the Ceaușescu government more specifically, with the effects of global capitalism.

In the current context of political and social change, Romanians must negotiate their identity within a nation of uncertain status. The official collapse of communism has

meant movement toward an open market system and democratic government, which in turn is opening a space for enterprising, capitalist-minded individuals to build and promote new business ventures. The shift away from a centrally-planned economy has also meant greater possibilities for consumers in terms of product selection and consumption practices. As a result, there has been a general shift in the consumption of new images, products, and rhetoric, related particularly to global and local constructions of health, the body, physical activity, and lifestyle.

A shift toward global consumer culture, democratic rhetoric, and capitalist enterprises, has led to significant transformations in the 'subject-formative' (Roman, 2003) practices in postcommunist Romania. Where once an ideology of gender equality dictated the unadorned, homogenous clothing, hairstyles, and fashion in Romania's urban centers, neoliberal ideals of individual freedom and expression now allow for the production and consumption of a virtually unlimited array of fashion trends. The new display of bodies, fashion, and style in the postcommunist moment are a visual testament to the changing society and culture. Body piercings, hair gel and hair dye, exposed midriffs, and tattoos are but a few examples of the ways Romanians are constructing their identity through outward expressions of the body. If the body has not taken center stage in postcommunist Romania, it has at least usurped a platform of its own in terms of constructing new identities through an emerging body consumer culture.

Methods and means of training the body are increasingly available and apparent at sports clubs, fitness and weight lifting gyms, aerobics studios, swimming pools, athletics centers, and even public running and walking paths, all of which are growing in number throughout the country. That exercise and physical activity are important components to

personal development is not a new concept in Romania; however, as the significance of nation-building and social solidarity gives way to a mentality focused on individuality and personal prosperity, the goals and meanings of physical culture are changing considerably. Communist policies and rhetoric encouraged the general population to become physically active, developing individual physical capabilities with the ultimate goal of improving the health and strength of the nation. In contrast, physical fitness in the postcommunist moment is no longer an all-inclusive national goal related exclusively to strength and health; rather, physical activity is now promoted as a means to aesthetically alter the body and to demonstrate individuality through physical practices, even as it remains the responsibility of the individual to do so. Indeed physical culture in Romania, which was once a formal, government-mandated, -regulated, and -controlled social movement (Girginov, 2004), no longer holds the same cultural significance it once held as a structured, system of learning. It is interesting to note, however, the continuities between the socialist project of physical culture and its post-1989 manifestations, especially in terms of training and disciplining the body. If prior to the 1989 revolution power over the body was exerted through national programs and laws that explicitly placed bodies under the surveillance and judgment of the law, the removal of these national directives has merely shifted the subjection, discipline and surveillance of the body to the normalizing gaze of the self and others (Foucault, 1977).

The contradictions and tensions examined in this dissertation are thus complex and multidimensional. While a focus on the body and its symbolic meaning in terms of constructing new female subjectivities, analyzing gender relations, and bringing light to otherwise unchallenged power structures, has found a central place in critical feminist,

cultural studies, sociological, and sports studies research in the United States and Western Europe, a similar movement is only beginning to take shape in East European transition literature. The body, especially the active body, in the postcommunist context is difficult to analyze using the language, discourse, and concepts developed within Western-based literature. Historical and political differences between nations with longstanding democratic conventions and those with strong socialist legacies are hard to bridge. This is especially true in examinations of gender and gender relations where an investigation of power structures based on concepts and ideas developed in one context may lead to results that are superficially comparable in another. What I attempted in this project, therefore, was to look at Romania in its own context: in the context of a nation that has been struggling to find its identity since its inception; that has undergone several border changes which have affected its ethnic composition as much as its geopolitical power; that continues to struggle for international legitimacy; and that in the current moment must negotiate not only communist legacies, but also *pre-communist* traditions, in the midst of postcommunist developments.

The goal of chapter one was to historically locate the role of sports and the development of physical culture in Romanian society. Traditionally physical education and physical activity more broadly were linked to national development, and it was not so much the sports themselves that embodied the traits and values of the nation (as baseball has done for the United States, for example), but the active participation by the general population that served to demonstrate a holistic and inclusive approach to human development. After a period of national distress under fascist rule, Romania welcomed its new leader Nicolae Ceaușescu. Much of Ceaușescu's success stemmed from his ability to

capture the public with ideological socialist rhetoric that promoted continued national development (Verdery, 1996). Therefore, when the negative effects of his national policies became apparent—in the form of a severe food shortage, oppressive conditions of spying and surveillance, restrictions on consumption, and deteriorating social and economic conditions (Verdery, 1996)—women were not singled out as a marginalized or overburdened group. Women were considered just as much a part of the national body as men, neither of which could claim exemption to the harsh conditions set forth in the last decade of Ceaușescu's rule. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000), in their study on the politics of gender capture well the contradictions women faced at this juncture. They argue:

Women generally saw themselves as courageously and unselfishly coping with very difficult demands, which brought not only exhaustion but two other and contradictory results. On the one hand, women gained a sense of gratification, moral superiority, and power in the household from their centrality and apparent indispensability. They also gained a somewhat different, more autonomous sense of self-worth and self-esteem from participation in the labor force. Despite discriminatory wages that were considerably below those of men and despite excess hours of labor, many came to take seriously a communist ideal of equality between men and women. On the other hand, the conditions of work, the low wages, and the magnitude of demands on them produced a sense of victimization and perennial guilt at their never being able to do enough of anything, especially mothering. (p. 53)

Gal and Kligman make the argument that a public/private dichotomy during communism, where women were most valued in the private sphere and made invisible (through the rhetoric of equality) in the public arena, has affected women's position in Romania after socialism.

If during communism women found their role in the home and in the workplace imperative to their identity and sense of value (Gal & Kligman, 2000), even as they were forced into these roles, in the postcommunist moment the challenge has been to relocate themselves in the new political and social economy. During communism, elite and mass sports performances were showcased and used as evidence of social equality. However, as a national institution, sport was yet another system through which the State controlled and disciplined women's bodies. Lack of resources, funding and tangible forms of support to achieve the State's explicit production and performance goals—both within and outside of the sports arena—rendered official state rhetoric little more than an ineffective device of ideological control. I argue that the empty consumption of sports and physical activity during this period fully embodied the empty rhetoric of the Party and its promotion of socialist freedom and equality.

In the current context of neoliberal democratic global movements (Harvey, 2005), Romania's social and political landscape is ever more complicated. Chapters two and three focus on the tensions and contradictions that characterize the unstable Romanian context as the country opens itself to the global market economy and growing consumer culture. As women seek to establish themselves in the post-communist terrain, they are caught at the intersection of traditional beliefs that reaffirm biological distinctions between men and women, an exponential increase in the exposure to new images and



ideologies of femininity, beauty, and the body, and a need to redefine their position and identity in the new system. I argue that women are increasingly using the body as a social commodity to reassert themselves in the new microeconomy of gendered bodies. In other words, for those women with adequate resources, they are constructing new images of the female body through physical activity and other body modification practices. Negotiating gender within the post-communist terrain also involves reconciling communist legacies of collectivity, pre-communist traditions of caring for the family, and meeting new social expectations of beauty and femininity. Through a developing physical culture that involves increased health and fitness rhetoric in conjunction with the spread of neoliberal ideals of individualism, a new female subjectivity is emerging that can be characterized by the delicate balancing act women perform between maternal roles, political involvement, and the shifting social and aesthetic standards of femininity.

Based on my analysis, I found that new spaces of physical activity, though seemingly offering a place to freely construct new identities, continue to reinforce traditional gender divisions. In my observation, the construction of gyms, fitness centers and sports complexes is such that women are confined and limited to designated areas. Chapter four provides an analysis of these constructed spaces and the suggested place of women within them. It is ironic that while the new spaces may symbolically represent change and opportunity for women, the consumption of these spaces is a manifestation of a new technique of disciplining women's bodies. Where once an ideology of socialist homogeneity and equality masked the burdens of women, an ideology of individual freedom and democracy now works in conjunction with those legacies to create a social landscape of confounding consequences for women in Romania.

Further, as the nation continues to adjust to the demands of a market economy, while still recovering from the destructive legacies of the Ceaușescu era, the position of women in this context is ever more compromised. Still understood in terms of longstanding traditional and cultural values, the role of women continues to be highly contingent on the demands and expectations of a patriarchal order that defines the socially and culturally acceptable gender norms. Women, however, exert some measure of agency in constructing their identity as they search for alternative social positions through practices of the body.

Regulations and restrictions of the body from socialism to postsocialism have shifted rather than disappeared. Katherine Verdery (1996, pp. 54-55) explains that in the past, “resistant self-conceptions” were constructed as a reaction to “assaults on self-conceptions”. Under these conditions, women had to manage the triple burden of housework, raising children, and participating in the workforce, responsibilities that actually worked to reaffirm their femininity. Consequently, in an era where femininity was systematically repressed, in some respects this ‘burden’ was actually welcomed. In the present context, it would seem that a new burden has been placed on women to maintain a certain body image amidst working and caring for the family—a burden that is consistent in its reinscription of socially understood meanings of femininity through its practice. What this scenario demonstrates is that regulations and restrictions of the body which were previously dictated by the State are now subject to the effects of global corporeal capitalism and the emerging health and fitness marketplace. In addition, the increased participation of women in exercise classes and physical activity can be viewed as performative expressions of dominant socio-cultural currents and contradictions that

arise as these women negotiate dominant, residual and emergent identities related to the female body. It could be argued then that even within a period of change and rapid social transformation, Romania has not moved much at all, “as women continue to construct, struggle with, and transcend their subjectivities from one patriarchy, communism, to another patriarchy, postcommunism” (Roman, 2003, p. 118).

#### Looking forward: Examining physical culture and the (female) body

In contrast to the villages I saw while in Romania, the cities offered different spaces of physical culture, development, and attention to the body. Where evidence of constructing a particular body image is not readily observable in the village, the visibility of aesthetic body forms and practices is quickly becoming part of the contemporary urban landscape. Venues for bodybuilding, weight training, and leisure sports, for example, are gaining in popularity and numbers. However, the place for women within these spaces is unclear, and the meanings for women’s identity even more so. The aim of this dissertation was to examine the complex ways in which gender regimes (Pascall & Kwak, 2005) and ideologies of the past and present condition are disciplining female bodies while also providing new spaces for resistance and constructing new self identities in the current period of transition and transformation.

Although little recognition has been given to political and social movements led by women in Romania, local forms of activism have existed even during the era of communism (Einhorn & Sever 2003). Research on the changing conditions of women in postcommunist Romania has focused primarily on the social and political consequences of the transition process, underscoring particularly the (lack of) opportunities and limited

participation in the restructured workforce and political milieu. Surprisingly there is only one published study to date that has analyzed the 'post-communist body' through an examination of women's participation in physical activity (see Svendsen's study on women's experiences in aerobics, 1996). Perhaps the research process had to start with locating the female subject within the political and social processes of change. While political involvement and social activism is critical to improving women's condition in postcommunist Romania, of equal significance is understanding how women assert their power and presence through the active body. Further research will reveal the extent to which the tensions and contradictions of the current postcommunist moment in Romania are manifested in female bodies. This line of research will hopefully lead to the creation of empowering spaces and physical practices in which the emerging postcommunist female subjectivity can be fully realized.

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