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# Workin' It Out at Curves – Religion, Gender, and the Body in Contemporary America

Jamie K. Singelais  
Colby College

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Workin' It Out at Curves – Religion, Gender, and the Body in  
Contemporary America

By Jamie K. Singelais

Senior Scholars Project  
Department of Sociology

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To my mom Karen.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

I performed qualitative research in the form of participant observation, surveys, and in-depth interviews to examine Curves, a fitness franchise for women found throughout the United States and, increasingly, the rest of the world. I conducted this exploratory study specifically at the Curves in Waterville, Maine, and made several trips to other franchises in the area for comparative purposes. One of my key findings is the importance of understanding Curves' organization as a business, specifically, its status as a franchise and the effect that this has on its popularity and growth. Additionally, my research revealed the role, surprising to me, that religion plays both at the corporate and franchise levels. The founder, Gary Heavin, is an evangelical Christian, who carries his beliefs into his business. In the text I argue that Curves can be compared other organizations founded on religious principles, and examined as a place where ritualized practice of deeply held beliefs takes place. Gender also proved to be salient in my analysis: Curves is a distinctly gendered space and I explore the consequences of this fact. I also examine women's evaluations of the Curves program and their reasons for adding it to their lives. Personal reflections on body image were solicited as well. I integrate these results through a larger theme I found to be significant during the project: the tension between autonomy and constraint. Personal reflections on the research experience and specific questions for future research are also offered.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Methodology**

Curves is the largest fitness franchise and the tenth largest franchise company of any kind in the world: Curves is visible even in rural American towns, there is one Curves for every two McDonald's in the U.S., and founder Gary Heavin hopes Curves will become the "McDonald's of fitness" (Bartirromo, 2007). While these facts are noteworthy as an indication of the growth and influence of Curves, they are also fascinating because, although offering different products, Curves and McDonald's share similar characteristics, such as a focus on fast service and affordability. Although perhaps not as well known as McDonald's, Curves is becoming a worldwide sensation in fitness. Exclusively for women, the club offers a thirty-minute circuit training workout for women who do not have the time or desire to participate in other exercise programs. The standard workout is thirty minutes three times a week and includes cardiovascular and strength training followed by stretching, all for about thirty-five dollars a month. I was introduced to this fitness phenomenon through my stepmother, Mary, who was a member and who took me with her for a qualitative research methods class assignment two years ago. This experience revealed that Curves was much more complex than I could have imagined and what began as a one-time visit led to countless research questions and turned into a Senior Scholars project.

During my initial observation I discovered that Curves is decidedly different from any other fitness club to which I had previously been exposed. It is unique because it focuses exclusively on women and women's health, and the fast rate of growth indicates that it is reaching a previously untapped demographic. My aim in this exploratory study was to uncover the importance of Curves in the lives of its members, in particular investigating why these women choose Curves as an alternative to other exercise programs, what they like about Curves



that makes them continue to participate and what role Curves plays in shaping their social lives.

In order to serve these purposes I devised a three phased study using qualitative research methods to investigate the relationship between Curves and the women who make it so popular. The goal of qualitative research, specifically, is to understand the ideas, perspectives and beliefs of a group of people and to learn how this shapes their actions in everyday life. According to sociologist Robert Emerson, “the fieldworker’s first commitment is to enter the ongoing worlds of other people to encounter their activities and concerns firsthand and close up” (Emerson, 1995:1). Qualitative research is an interactive process whereby the researcher learns from the subjects and it requires that the researcher become part of the world he or she is attempting to study, either by observing it, participating in it, or asking the participants about it (Ely, 1991:4).

For the first phase of my research, I used participant observation, in which the researcher becomes part of the group that he or she is studying in order to discover how people act in specific situations and to understand these actions (Delamont, 2004:218). In this case I became a member of Curves for a period of approximately four months during which I attended Curves at my primary investigation site, Waterville, Maine, while also visiting other locations in Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. The objective of this phase was to gain a specific understanding of the workings of the Curves in Waterville, which was my primary source of data, and develop a rapport with the staff and members to facilitate the second and third phases of my research. I also wanted to visit other area locations in order to situate the Waterville club within the larger set of Curves franchises. I primarily visited other nearby clubs in Maine, one in South China, two in Augusta, and one in Gardiner, but also visited the Curves in Meredith, New Hampshire, that had been my original observation site two years ago, and went to one franchise in Groton, Massachusetts, at the suggestion of my stepmother.

Participant observation enriched my research experience immensely in a variety of ways, which will be evidenced in my report, but for the purposes of my study I needed to learn directly from the women about their involvement in Curves. In order to obtain more detailed demographic information about the women who frequent Curves, I employed another important method of data collection, the survey. Surveys allow the researcher to gather information about a large group of people with relative ease and in this case they were used to compile a profile of the women who attend Curves. I developed this survey based on early observations and background reading and made it available solely at the Curves in Waterville, with the exception of providing one for my stepmother to complete (see Curves Survey in Appendix A). By limiting the survey to one location, I was able to focus my research specifically on the issues and needs relating to the women in Waterville and this exploratory work can thus serve as a starting point for a larger comparative study of different Curves locations in Maine, New England, the United States, and other countries.

I introduced the survey by employing the aid of the co-owners of the club, who allowed me to place the surveys, consent forms, envelopes to ensure confidentiality, and a collection box on a table at Curves. I also provided a sign written in brightly colored markers explaining that I was a member of Curves doing a school project, assuring confidentiality, and entreating the women to take time to fill out the survey (see Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix B). At the end of the four month period I collected fifty-six surveys, providing me with information on demographics, length of participation in the program, previous exercise experience, frequency and schedule of attending Curves, and a personal assessment of the program. These surveys were vital in offering a preliminary picture of women's experiences with Curves and led directly to the third phase of my study; the interviews.

The interview allows the researcher to understand the perspectives of a group of people by talking to them. Interviews vary in style; structured or not, casual or in-depth; but they are unique in their ability to let the researcher learn directly from the participants in their own words. In this case my interview subjects were self-selected and drawn directly from phase two of the project. At the bottom of the surveys I explained my plans to meet and speak further with women about their participation in Curves and asked willing volunteers to provide me with contact information or contact me directly via phone or email. I was able to interview seven women who left contact information and shared my interest in discussing Curves. In addition, I interviewed both co-owners of Waterville Curves early in the fieldwork and I interviewed my stepmother, Mary, as she was my informant in the initial project.

There are many interview techniques, but for the purposes of this study I used semi-structured or open-ended interviews, meaning that questions were developed ahead of time in various topic areas I wished to cover. Some questions were standardized across all interviews while others came directly from the women's survey responses. However, during the interview I allowed the women to speak about other issues that arose and I responded with additional questions as they emerged. The use of interviews allowed for the development of my areas of interest while also exposing other topics that the women deemed important, and it served my research purpose of exploring how women experience Curves.

Regardless of the type of interview employed, there are multiple methods of recording the exchange in the interview process. In this case I chose to use a cassette recorder to document the exact conversation that took place. It was my intention to ensure that I could go back later and have a written record of everything that had been said and thus focus completely on what the respondent was saying during the interview. Unfortunately, the end result did not always meet

these expectations. Technical difficulties that I discovered later, a low hum in the interview room picked up by the recorder and variations in voice volume and accent, prevented the accurate transcription of the entire conversation. Although I made a diligent attempt to understand and document every word, some interviews could not meet this standard. In completing the transcripts I attempted to fill in these sections with memory or simply marked them as indistinct. In reviewing the transcripts I believe that, although these problems made transcription frustrating, the lost conversation does not negate the significance of the project. However, an important lesson is to be learned for future research: if possible, test record in the interview space to ascertain important background noises and take some notes during the interview in the event of technical failure.

The decision to use participant observation, surveys, and interviews was vital to the purposes of the study. Participant observation served the dual purpose of allowing me both to understand the day-to-day workings of Curves and to develop a rapport that could be used to further the participation in the surveys and interviews. Although the surveys were simply left out to be completed by those women who had the time and were willing, I relied on the owners to point members to the surveys when I was not there and to answer any questions that might come up about the research. Becoming a member of Curves and attending on a regular basis demonstrated my sincerity and dedication to studying and understanding the Curves program and allowed me to be more visible to my potential participants. In addition, it provided me with a basic knowledge of the issues and activities going on at the Waterville Curves that could be used in the development of the survey instrument, as a basis for comparison when visiting other Curves locations, and to establish a rapport or relate to the women in the interviews. In turn, the surveys became important because they allowed me to have a basic understanding of the

interview participants before meeting with them, thus enriching the topics addressed during interviews. Also, the use of multiple methods, known as triangulation, is important in verifying data and producing sound qualitative analysis (Ely, 1991:96-7).

The method of qualitative analysis itself raises important practical considerations for those conducting sociological research because in qualitative research the self is the research instrument. Regardless of the method of data collection employed, the researcher must realize that his or her presence changes the world of study and the idea that the researcher is the primary research instrument complicates the process of data collection and analysis. Although it is acknowledged that complete objectivity is not possible, the goal is “to become less blinded by our own subjectivities, more self-aware” and to “present the points of view of our participants” (Ely, 1995:220). If the characteristics of the researcher differ from that of the participants, they may not fully trust the researcher. There is ongoing debate regarding the effect of researcher attributes in data collection. A distinction is made between those researchers who share certain characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, or social class with the group being studied, so-called “insiders,” and those who do not, the “outsiders.” According to sociologist Robert Merton, “The Insider doctrine...holds that one has monopolistic or privileged access to knowledge, or is wholly excluded from it, by virtue of one’s group membership or social position” (Merton, 1972:15) while in contrast the “Outsider has a structurally imposed incapacity to comprehend alien groups, statuses, cultures, and societies (Merton, 1972:15).

This insider/outsider dichotomy is crucial to my study of Curves participants because, if relevant, it could have an effect on my interview data. As a woman I was able to join Curves, something I would not have been able to do as a man, but as a college student I was significantly younger than most other members (the average age of survey respondents was fifty and two

thirds years). In my case, then, I was simultaneously an insider and an outsider, an experience which fits more closely with a third possible understanding of researcher-respondent relations identified by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins in her discussion of the status of African-American women working in white households: “Afro-American women have long been privy to some of the most intimate secrets of white society...these same Black women knew they could never belong to their white ‘families.’...This ‘outsider within’ status has provided a special standpoint on self, family, and society for Afro-American women” (Collins, 1986:S14). Like these women, I was able to use my membership at Curves and my gender to establish a rapport and gain information that may have been inaccessible to others. However, it is possible that my status as a student and healthy and physically fit young woman prevented me from gaining other valuable insights that the respondents would have shared with women their own age.

In addition to gender and age, social class and political and religious beliefs became salient characteristics during my interviews with women from Curves. I found that during different interviews I could relate to the women on some level through shared backgrounds or beliefs, but also realized that there was usually another characteristic which set us apart. Sociologist Jennifer Pierce acknowledged a similar experience during her field research and asserted that “fieldworkers undertaking participant observation are neither insiders nor outsiders, but rather, in the course of their research, assuming a role that is flexible, changing, and quite complex” (Pierce, 1995:194). This changing rapport has implications for building the level of trust that is necessary for accurate qualitative research. Throughout this shifting relationship with my respondents, as a researcher it was important to me to keep my own opinions and definitions from interfering in the project and certain qualitative research methodologies were employed in order to minimize the effect of the characteristics of the researcher on the data.

I analyzed the data using the grounded theory approach, which maintains that the researcher begin to analyze the data already collected while continuing the process of data collection. According to social lecturer Ian Dey, “Grounded theory was conceived as a way of generating theory *through* research data rather than testing ideas formulated *in advance of* data collection and analysis” (Dey, 2004:80). Choosing to use this methodology has immediate implications for all aspects of the research from inception to completion. Dey explains that in grounded theory sampling is used to “test or refine new ideas as these emerge from the data” not to gain a representative sample to use for generalizations to larger populations. Additionally, data analysis consists of coding into analytic categories that offer “meaningful interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation” and due to “‘constant comparison’ their relations and properties can be identified and defined” (Dey, 2004:80). Lastly, grounded theory maintains that continuing to gather data becomes unnecessary when “further data no longer prompts new distinctions or refinements to the emerging theory” and this state marks the end of fieldwork (Dey, 2004:80). By using this method the results of the study are formed by the data, not assumptions made before the research begins. This is consistent with the goal of qualitative research; to discover the meanings of the group being studied and not to allow preconceptions to affect the data.

Using grounded theory as an underlying methodological concept led to the use of certain methods of data collection and analysis. My initial observation at Curves two years ago served to focus my research questions toward general subject areas including the role of gender in the success of Curves. The samples used for my surveys and interviews were not necessarily representative of all Curves members, or even all members of the specific Curves in Waterville, because the surveys were completed voluntarily by members. In this manner the research serves

solely as an exploratory study into Curves and further investigation is warranted. However, data collected does offer significant insights into how some members of the Curves in Waterville see issues related to their physical bodies and their opinions regarding the role Curves plays in their lives. As such, it is relevant to the understanding of larger issues in contemporary American society including gender interaction, the place of religion, and understandings of the body and exercise.

Thick description and reflexivity are two other perspectives related to the grounded theory approach that are employed to ensure that researcher bias does not significantly affect the data. Thick description is a method advocated by Clifford Geertz that allows the researcher to decipher multiple meanings when observing actions. Geertz acknowledges that different observers will not agree on a single meaning for what they observe. He advocates describing everything in great detail so that although the researcher is still only guessing at the meaning of the action, he or she is able to decipher the possibilities without letting his or her first opinion define the action (Geertz, 2001:57-8). Reflexivity is also important in the discussion of researcher bias. Sociologist Virginia Olesen asserts the view held by some feminist researchers that bias can become a positive force when paired with reflexivity. She explains that it is necessary to have: "...sufficient reflexivity to uncover what may be deep-seated but poorly recognized views on issues central to the research and a full account of the researcher's views, thinking, and conduct" (Olesen, 1994:165). Reflexivity is thus closely related to the idea of reflectivity in which "the researcher is committed to pondering the impressions, deliberating recollections and records-but not necessarily following the conceptualizations of theorists, actors, or audiences" (Olesen, 1994:242). Reflexivity and reflectivity allow the researcher to ensure that preconceived notions are not influencing the practice of data collection or interpretation.



In this study, thick description was used in fieldnotes during observational sessions at various Curves locations. In addition, reflexivity became a vital aspect of the study, especially during the interviews in phase three. Following each interview I recorded my personal reaction to the respondent in an attempt to locate any prejudice or bias in my interpretation of the conversation. Upon returning to the tapes to transcribe interviews these reflections were important in establishing my mood and understanding at the time and although I take those reactions seriously they also point to possible bias in my research. The use of multiple methods of data collection and grounded theory as my underlying theoretical assumption shaped the research, allowed me to recognize how personal assumptions could have affected the analysis, and supported a degree of reflexivity necessary in sound qualitative research.

In accordance with the grounded theory method of qualitative research my analysis consisted of coding interview transcripts and fieldnotes to develop an understanding of Curves as a social phenomenon. Coding is a complex and multi-stage process in which the researcher formulates important categories and develops them into a coherent understanding of the phenomenon under surveillance. According to sociologist Ian Dey, debate regarding to what extent theoretical preconceptions should be brought to the coding process led to the creation of multiple coding practices. In this research I applied the concept of open coding which, Dey asserts, emphasizes “stimulating ideas rather than documenting evidence” (Dey, 2004:85). During open coding I carefully read through the interview transcripts and fieldnotes and organized the data into general categories such as gender issues or corporate regulations. This practice provided me with a visual map of areas that were important to the subjects’ understanding of Curves and allowed me to compare categories across interviews. The next phase of coding was decidedly more systematic.

Following open coding, I employed selective and focused coding to obtain a more cohesive picture of Curves. According to Dey, the use of selective coding allows the researcher to “deepen and enrich the analysis, while also forming a framework around which to weave a ‘story-line’ that conveyed its central import” (Dey, 2004:85). During the process of selective coding I re-read the interview transcripts and fieldnotes, creating a more detailed map of major categories and subcategories and their relationship to each other. Although some of the codes remained the same, specific subcategories were identified and broadened to include concrete examples. For instance, gender remained a major category, but women’s health issues was added as a subcategory and fleshed out to include specific examples such as the respondent-identified importance of exercising in addition to dieting. This process led to a more complete understanding of the data by illuminating the relationships between categories and providing specific examples to be used in the final analysis. It also helped me to develop a core concept around which the data could be integrated: the tension between autonomy and constraint. In addition to interview transcripts and fieldnotes, this study drew on other materials collected at observation sites, including flyers, some of which were exclusively produced by Curves.

Curves locations typically provide both pamphlets explaining their products and flyers advertising local events, businesses, and charities. Curves-specific pamphlets and local flyers were collected sporadically throughout the study and analyzed to ascertain how Curves presents itself to members and prospective members and what issues are important to owners and members at local franchises. In addition to pamphlets, Curves produces a quarterly publication for members, Diane magazine, which is not available by subscription, but is distributed to members at local clubs. In order to analyze this source the content analysis method was employed. According to sociologists Peter K. Manning and Betsy Cullum-Swan, content analysis

is typically understood as a quantitative method of data analysis that has been applied to magazines and other documents and has become increasingly popular through the development of computer software for these purposes (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994:464). Four magazines were collected during the research, and although I utilized content analysis, I did not employ a computer program to count or categorize the data. Instead, I counted the number of pages dedicated to each advertiser and grouped these into more general categories, such as those involving food and drink or Curves products. This practice allowed me to see the prevalence of certain companies and categories compared to others and enriched my understanding of Curves as a business. The rest of the magazine was analyzed less systematically for themes and, like the Curves pamphlets, provided a more general picture of how Curves International presents itself. Collecting and analyzing supplemental materials provided at local Curves locations greatly enhanced my study of Curves.

Qualitative research is vital to understanding certain social phenomenon, but like any other social research it raises important ethical questions. According to sociologist Anne Ryen, the ethical dilemmas raised during qualitative research relate to issues of consent, trust, and confidentiality. Consent refers to “informed consent” meaning that “the research subjects have the right to know that they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time” (Ryen, 2004:231). This is simple to obtain when doing surveys and interviews, but becomes vague when conducting covert participant observation. Although I did not attempt to hide my status as researcher from the women at Curves, I did not want my presence to change their normal, everyday actions. As a result, I did not volunteer my purposes. However, the presence of the surveys indicated that a Curves member who was also a Colby student was doing research there and it is possible that some

women identified me as the researcher. Although there is ongoing debate about the extent of information that must be provided to participants, oversight committees have been developed to protect possible subjects. In this case before beginning the research I submitted a proposal to the Colby College Institutional Review Board (IRB) outlining my research intentions and containing a copy of the intended survey and consent forms. In addition, I gained access to the site by explaining my research goals to the owner of Curves in Waterville.

Despite these precautions, at times I wondered if I were deceiving the women I was studying. When visiting other Curves locations none of the women knew of my research and therefore could not give consent. This made me feel awkward and calls attention to the delicate balance between trust and deception that is necessary in field research; the researcher does not want to fully inform the participants because it might change their actions and taint the data, but the researcher also wants to protect the participants from psychological harm. In contrast, formal interviews and surveys allow the researcher to obtain explicit consent, as I did in this study. The surveys were voluntary and the sign indicated that participation was anonymous and confidential and referred women to the consent form for more information. All the women who completed interviews had already completed optional consent forms for the surveys and before each discussion I asked the respondent if she wanted to look over the consent form again. All research was conducted after receiving proper consent from Colby IRB and in the case of surveys and interviews, with the explicit consent of the research participants. Even after obtaining consent the researcher may come to care about the group he or she is studying and thus feel that writing about them is a betrayal of trust; I did feel somewhat guilty at points for criticizing several aspects of Curves.

This study of Curves illuminates why women enjoy this particular exercise program and

raises issues of gender relations, religion, and body image that are relevant to understanding contemporary American society as a whole. Additionally, this study reveals important information about owning a Curves franchise. What follows in this report is a development of major issues that were salient for the women I interviewed in the study. I begin by concluding this introduction with a brief description of Curves to offer the reader an understanding of the general atmosphere and the components of the workout. Chapter two addresses the organization of Curves as a business, specifically its status as a franchise and the effect that this has on its popularity and growth. Chapter three features the surprising role that religion plays both at the corporate and franchise levels. The founder Gary Heavin's position as an evangelical Christian is explored as well as the local owner and member response to his religious beliefs. In addition, comparisons are made to other organizations founded on religious principles and Curves is examined as a place where the ritualized practice of deeply held beliefs takes place. Chapter four identifies the importance that gender plays in Curves and the effect this has on franchise success. Curves is examined as a gendered space and the consequences of this fact are revealed through interview respondents and promotional information. Chapter five addresses issues relating to body image and looks at Curves as an exercise program. Women's evaluations of the Curves program and their reasons for adding it to their lives are explored. Chapter six offers a conclusion and considers issues addressed in previous chapters through a larger dichotomy that emerged from the data; the conflict between autonomy and constraint. The final chapter is a postscript with brief reflections on my research experience. It points to the need for more elaborate and comparative studies to enhance comprehension of Curves and offers specific questions for future research.

### *Description of Waterville Curves*

The entrance to the Curves in Waterville is non-descript; a small white sign with the word 'Curves' in purple script hangs above a brick archway. Under the arch is a tattered folding whiteboard sign printed with the current Curves promotion, such as the waived sign-up fee in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I walk under the brick archway and open a door that leads into a foyer. In the foyer a bulletin board on the left displays community events and the door that leads into Curves is on the right. I turn and open the door into Curves.

When I open the door and walk in, the front desk is straight ahead. On the wall above and behind the desk is the word 'Curves' painted in dark purple script. On the left is a wooden board with hooks on which to hang car keys, the circuit of exercise machines, the stretching area, the measurement station, and a small hallway that leads to the bathroom and the back room where the weight management class holds weekly meetings. On the right are the bookshelf for the book exchange and a small round table for meeting with new clients, which now holds the collection box for my surveys (see Figure 1 in Appendix B). There is an arched brick wall on the right that separates the entrance and exercise area from the changing rooms; in between the brick arches yellow curtains hang with the Curves logo printed in black script. Below the curtains is a ledge with paperwork for new members and more flyers for local businesses and events. The walls are painted pastel green and yellow and are adorned with inspirational posters and seasonal decorations. There are ceiling fans and portable floor fans to keep the room at a comfortable temperature.

I walk towards the desk and pull out the Curves tag on my key ring, walk up to the scanner sitting on the desk and scan my card (see Figure 3 in Appendix B). The machine beeps and my name pops up on the computer screen in front of me. It tells me the number of times I

have come to Curves and reminds me to get weighed and measured today. Sometimes an employee is sitting behind the desk, but, today, Patty is talking to someone in the circuit and she says hello to me as I am looking at the computer screen. I return the greeting and turn to the right, walking under a brick archway into another room that has a changing area. I am now facing the front windows and I can see cars driving down Main Street. Unlike most Curves locations, the facility in Waterville does not have coverings on the windows. It does, however, have elaborate seasonal decorations in the three arched windows and on the window ledges: scarecrows, apple cider, pumpkins, and Thanksgiving books in the fall and a Christmas tree with presents, a small menorah, and skis in the winter. They also have seasonal flags with leaves or snowflakes hanging in the windows, which partially block the street from view. I hang up my coat on a hanger on the left end of the room.

I turn around and enter one of the three dressing areas at the opposite side of the room. The dressing areas are not permanent; they consist only of yellow cloth hung over PVC pipes, but they do offer sufficient privacy. I pull the curtain closed behind me and put my bag up on the wooden ledge, which also holds a small lamp and a basket with baby powder, tissues, lotion, and body spray. I change my clothes and sit down on the black folding chair to change into my sneakers. I leave the dressing room and put my bag in a locker on the left and my shoes under my hanging coat. I walk back into the main room and ask Patty if she will measure me, she says of course and we walk toward the back corner of the large room. Patty takes down one of the measuring tapes hanging on the wall and asks me how to spell my name so that she can find my paperwork in the file bin. After opening my file she has me step on the scale and then records my weight and uses a hand-held machine to measure my percent body fat. Then I stand facing her and raise my arms so that she can take my measurements. She measures my bust, waist,

abdomen, hips, thighs, and arms and records the numbers in my chart, all the time telling me how skinny I am getting and that I don't need to lose any weight. I thank her for the compliments and explain that I am trying to maintain my weight, not lose any. She congratulates me on the results and asks if I want a printout tracking my progress. I say, "Yes, please," and she heads back to the front desk with my file so that she can enter the information into the computer.

After the measurements, I go to the nearest rest station and begin working out. I typically choose a station close to other women, but with a few spots in between in case they want to spend extra time on a machine. While on the rest station I jog in place, reading the posters on the wall or listening to the conversations around me. Sometimes I also sing along and lip sync to the upbeat music. After thirty seconds a woman's voice rises above the music and directs the workout. She says, "Change stations now" and all the women, myself included, move counterclockwise to the next machine or rest station. The circuit is arranged in a circle around two square columns with a whiteboard and decorations propped against them. The board has a trivia game written on it and I think about the questions as I continue around the circuit for two full circles. After completing the circuit, I walk up to the front desk and fill out a slip of paper with the answer to the trivia questions and put the paper into the collection box. Then I turn and walk to the back of the room to stretch.

The stretching area is in the back corner of the room opposite the measurement station. I turn with my back to the measurement area and face the wall with the stretching poster on it. I check the clock next to the poster and then do the stretches, making sure to hold each one for the allotted amount of time (fourteen seconds). There is a wooden bar along the wall in front of me for balance. To my left is a large metal safe door left over from whatever business occupied this space before Curves and there is also the stereo and CDs that play the music and the separate CD



player for the woman's voice. After completing the stretches I get a drink of water from the water fountain along the back wall and head back through the circuit to the changing area. I change my clothes, put on my coat, and say goodbye to Patty as I head out the door just forty minutes after arriving. Like me, some four million other women enter and engage in a nearly identical activity weekly at their local Curves.

## Chapter Two – Curves as a Business Franchise

While conducting this research I learned a substantial amount of information about Curves as a business that is vital to understanding it as a fitness phenomenon and to recognizing its place in contemporary American life. Most importantly, Curves is a franchise, which means that individuals have the right to sell a company's goods or services in a particular territory (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). As such, the corporation may make certain requirements of owners and in turn owners can turn to the company for help and support. Curves' status as a franchise is necessary to understanding why people are motivated to buy Curves, why it has grown so exponentially, and what relationship exists between the founder's ideology and that of the individual owners.

Curves' status as a franchise is a vital component of its success and is relevant to how the owners of the Waterville Curves see their business. Bill Free, owner of six Curves locations in Florida, explains, in the journal Franchising World, the importance of the franchise system: "I've seen people in business for five or six months. They open, then they close. Number one, they don't have the support" (Scott, 2005:15-16). Free speaks specifically about the support provided by Curves, International: "Curves gives us fantastic Web-based support, with all of the answers and tools we need to run the business--a system for advertising, marketing, administering, and training the business at the staff level" (Scott:16). This perspective was confirmed by my interview with a former staff member who explained that everything she needed to advertise for Curves could be printed right off of the website and, also, by my visit to a nearby club where I saw an instruction sheet intended for staff members with information about how to instruct new members in using the machines. The issue of corporate support is also salient for the owners of the Waterville Curves. Before examining this connection I first provide a brief background of the

ownership situation in Waterville.

During the research I interviewed the owners of the Waterville Curves, Barbara<sup>1</sup> and her niece Kaitlin, who work there during the day. Through them I learned that the third owner is Barbara's brother, who, according to Barbara, performs mainly maintenance tasks. Thus, this is a family enterprise and Kaitlin implies that they almost fell into owning the franchise. She explained, "...one day when I was working out, there was a sign up that said it was for sale and my aunt Barbara also got laid off around the same time so we just kinda said wanna buy it—so here we are" (S2:1)<sup>2</sup>.

During the period of my research, the owners celebrated their one year anniversary of ownership, so they are fairly new to Curves franchising. Their decision to buy Curves was made jointly, happened by chance, and was based on a few key aspects of the business, including participation as members. Kaitlin's explanation of the family's previous business experience lends an understanding to Florida Curves owner Bill Free's earlier comments: "We really knew nothing about owning a business at all, we had no idea how this place worked, we only knew it from being a customer not behind the scenes" (S2:1). Barbara had managerial experience from previous employment at Hannaford's supermarket, but she and her family had not owned a business before. Despite this lack of experience, Kaitlin spoke highly of the required Curves training in Texas: "They made us feel really comfortable and they just made you feel like I can do this" (S2:1). In this case, Curves corporate provided the training and support necessary for three people without extensive experience owning a business to run a franchise successfully for more than a year.

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<sup>1</sup> Names of interviewees have been changed. For online success stories, names appear as on the Curves website.

<sup>2</sup> A note on citations: To cite interviewees I use a shorthand format that I developed during the project. The letters S (for Staff) and NS (for non-staff) are followed by a number which was assigned to the interviews in chronological order. The number after the colon indicates the page number where the quotation may be found in the transcript.

The fact that individuals with no business training or experience can buy and run a Curves franchise, or maybe even more than one franchise, has increased its popularity. According to Curves owner Barbara, as more women became aware of the clubs, through friends or family members, people started franchises in new areas, which is relatively easy to do because of corporate support. Although the owners of Waterville Curves took over an existing club rather than opening one in a new area, as they explained, the success of the Curves in Waterville (it had eight hundred members when it started) led to the opening of other franchises in nearby towns, such as Oakland and Fairfield (S1:5). The success of the Waterville club showed that Curves was a good investment.

Now that Curves has expanded across America, the fact that it is a franchise offers benefits local gyms cannot. Curves caters to older women, many of whom are semi- or completely retired. These women, especially those in certain geographic regions, move around in the winter time to seek warmer climates; the nationwide prevalence of Curves makes it easy for them to continue their fitness regimes. One interviewee focused on this fact as one of the reasons she continued to attend Curves even though she perceived Curves to have limitations, such as a lack of showers. The ability to transfer membership to accommodate a mobile lifestyle is an important benefit that other clubs cannot provide. Curves' status as a franchise partially explains why people are motivated to buy clubs; there is extensive corporate training and support and the success of other franchises shows that it can be a good investment. Now that the company is widespread, its organization as a franchise provides a unique service for women who lead mobile lives.

Although the franchise system provides support to individual owners, it also means that franchisees must comply with certain company regulations and requirements. An examination of

these necessities offers an important glimpse into the balance between autonomy and constraint in franchise-franchisee operations, more generally, as well as the balance specifically at Curves. Curves has certain requirements for its franchisees: attending training in Texas, getting all staff CPR certified, and having owners take courses on how the muscles work within two years of owning a franchise. These firm requirements are complemented by other, more flexible controls. For example, while Curves International dictates how owners can use the Curves name and logo, requiring them to order merchandise from a specific vendor, the company allows them to use the name for “stationary-type items” produced locally (S1:14). In addition, relatively little corporate oversight of day to day operations exists; there is a regional manager but she is responsible for three states and has not visited the Waterville Curves in person in the past year (S1:3). This lack of supervision allows the owners to participate in activities that would not be approved by the corporate office, but which serve their own interests. It also leads to concerns when a franchise owner acts in a manner that is completely against general business practices.

In the case of the Waterville Curves, the owners negotiate their own ideas about which corporate policies need to be followed and which can be disregarded. For example, while interviewing Kaitlin, I commented on some vitamins sitting on a table in the back room that were not sold by Curves. She explained that her mother both teaches the weight loss class at Curves and also sells vitamins out of her home and that she “can’t help herself but bringing out that stuff” and Kaitlin acknowledged that this was not approved by Curves International: “Technically we’re, we’re not supposed to, we’re supposed to sell the Curves products which they make” (S2:8). She continued, rationalizing the practice by claiming that Curves did not have these particular products and insisting that they do not push the Curves supplements because they have insufficient information to date. However, I read extensively about the benefits of the

vitamins in Gary Heavin's book and when I pressed Kaitlin she replied, "I mean, that's stuff we could learn if we wanted to, but I'm not sure that they [Curves corporate] offer it, I don't think they themselves push it that hard" (S2:8). Thus, although willing to follow some corporate policies, Kaitlin is prepared to disregard others.

The tension between corporate rules and policies and individual wants and needs was also raised in my conversation with Barbara. She explained that other Curves locations had yoga classes or tanning beds, for example, in addition to offering the standard Curves services, but clarified that those offerings were against official Curves policy. However, her opposition to the practice was not absolute; she posed possible explanations for these owners' actions, such as needing another source of funds to keep the club running, and left open her future plans: "Right now we're buying into that [the Curves policy of strongly discouraging additional services]" (NS1:15-16). This statement implies that although there is respect for Curves policies, the owners of the Waterville Curves do not consider them to be immutable over time.

Although corporate policies throughout Curves are not completely rigid, oversight becomes important when franchisees cease to follow even general business practices. During my observation period a Curves franchise in a nearby town had this problem. According to one interviewee named Jessica, who used to be employed at that location, the business changed hands and the new owner had no interest in the club. She stopped paying her employees and one day she closed the franchise without giving the members any notice. My informant recognized the role that the company organizational system played in this development: "Curves--it's a franchise and it depends, you know, --the success and the experience of the members--depends largely on the owners and the managers of the franchise" (NS3:4-5). Although Jessica understood that the problem lay with the local management, she expressed disappointment that

the corporate office did not step in more quickly and forcefully to remedy the situation and was worried that it could have ruined the Curves reputation, especially for new members who were discouraged by the low quality of service and had no point of comparison (NS3:6). Barbara also spoke about this situation and said she wanted more guidance and information from the corporate office. However, she was quick to point to the positive side of corporate inaction: “They didn’t offer a lot of direction for us, but you know, so that was a downside, but an upside is that we don’t have a lot of direction” (S1:26). These comments illuminate the complex relationship of corporate constraint and oversight and individual autonomy in franchise businesses.

The relationship between Curves International and individual franchises became even more salient through subjects’ discussions of religion. During her interview, Kaitlin explained that the religion of the founder, Gary Heavin, was one of the reasons she chose to buy a Curves franchise. In the Curves Member Guide, Heavin speaks of religion as a main guiding principle in his business practices: “God’s will is sought in our business decisions, and then we do our best to carry it out” and he explains that, “The astounding growth of this company is His signature” (Heavin, 2005:6). This is directly related to the relationship of religion and capitalist activity outlined by Max Weber in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Weber argues that Protestantism ideals are congruent with capitalist enterprise: “Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God, according to the definite manifestations of His will” (Weber, 1958:157). Protestantism calls for its followers to be active to please God and teaches that success is a result of God’s will. Heavin actively tries to seek God’s will through his business decisions and attributes his accomplishments to this same divine being. His beliefs also attract some women to his franchises.

As a Christian, Kaitlin could identify with Heavin and believed that his religious beliefs

had implications for how he ran his business. She said, “It was really nice to see that it was based on Biblical principles, that it wasn’t open on a Sunday, um and that--I don’t know—just, just the core of the company was very honest and had good ethics” (S2:9). Another respondent, Jessica, explained how Heavin’s ethics were important in the franchise system: “...again its a franchise so you can have an atheist or someone who’s like totally against religion of any sort owning a Curves, but they’re still gonna have to you know go through the women are valued and loved, they have to accept the manual in some respects” (NS3:31). For these women the religion of the founder mattered because it influenced how he ran his business and what values were passed down to the franchise owners. Although franchise owners have some autonomy in that they don’t have to share the founder’s religious beliefs, they are subject to control through the values they must promote in their clubs. The importance of religion, specifically at the Waterville Curves, will be further developed later in this report.

During this study I learned about the business aspects of Curves International more generally and specifically those of the Waterville club. An understanding of these characteristics, including the fact that Curves is a franchise, is vital to comprehending the extreme popularity and growth of the company. In this specific case the owners almost fell into owning a Curves franchise, but the support and training necessary to make it work were available through the corporation. Curves’ status as a franchise also allowed for it to spread quickly; if women heard about it, but there was not one in the area, it was possible to open a new one. With the necessary financial resources a franchise could be opened by someone without previous experience owning or running a business. The growth of Curves and its expansion into even rural America then became a selling point for those women who travel frequently and, with a membership, could go to any club in the country and now in other parts of the world. The position of Curves as a



franchise with relatively little oversight is also pertinent to an examination of the connection between the ideology of Curves founder Gary Heavin and that of each individual Curves location, a situation which points to the need for a more extensive comparative study of clubs across the United States and the world.

### Chapter Three - Curves and Religion

As discussed in the previous chapter, the founder of Curves, Gary Heavin, is an avowed evangelical Christian individual, and his status as such becomes important because his beliefs inform both the values he endorses in his business and the causes he supports with his profits. Furthermore, religion emerged as a significant topic in my study of Curves during interviews and also through browsing online dialogue between members. With respect to Curves, religion is vital in a number of ways. First of all, it is important in understanding the Waterville club, specifically, because my research revealed that it is a motivation for owners and members to become involved. As a result, religious undertones exist in the fitness classes and the charity activities which are run through the club. Secondly, it is significant on a national scale because Gary Heavin's decision to donate to pro-life groups sparked online discussions between Curves members nationwide, led to the creation of a new member organization, and even provoked a reaction in Waterville. Thirdly, religion is noteworthy, more generally, because Curves can be compared with other religiously influenced exercise or community service organizations throughout American history, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Salvation Army, and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Lastly, independent from its relationship with evangelical Christianity, Curves can be compared to religious institutions because it involves the ritualized practice of deeply held beliefs about the salvation properties of exercise; its ritual practices aim to heal the participant not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

Gary Heavin has very strong religious beliefs that affect his business practices. An article in Today's Christian reveals Heavin's religious past, his current religious beliefs, and the impact these values have on how he lives his life. Heavin became a Christian as a teenager, but later re-

committed his life to Christ after going bankrupt and being sent to jail for failure to pay child support. Heavin explains this conversion experience: “I told God, ‘I’ve lived life my way and it’s a mess. Now I’m giving it to you’” (Kennedy, 2004). He claims that he remains humble despite his current success and says, “To whom much is given much is expected” (Kennedy, 2004). Heavin’s religious convictions have important implications for how he runs his business, and they also attract those who share his beliefs to Curves.

For co-owner Kaitlin and Jessica, another interviewee, religion was important because their shared belief system provided a connection to the founder, specifically, and the company, in general. Kaitlin was drawn to buy a Curves franchise partially because of Gary Heavin’s religious persuasions and the implications she felt this had for how the business would be run. Local member Jessica also had a positive reaction when she discovered Heavin’s religious background and described it as something that attracted her to Curves: “It’s [Gary Heavin’s belief system] something that I’d heard of before and I was impressed with...and I strongly wanna support things that are—that I believe in—that are, you know, of important value...I was really excited to-to learn more about it and to be a part of that” (NS3:30). Although Jessica’s occupation as a missionary could partially explain her view that the Curves values stem directly from religious beliefs, she asserted that this understanding came directly from Heavin’s writing: “Yeah, well it’s [Heavin’s religious beliefs and inspirations] all through the manual” (NS3:31). These statements demonstrate that for at least one owner and member, shared religion was an important motivation for becoming involved in Curves and this fact affects the way the franchise is operated.

Gary Heavin’s religious beliefs and his willingness to publicize them have implications for individual franchises. In this case, the owners of the Waterville Curves were inspired by

Heavin's frankness and, as a result, they became more open about their own religious beliefs. According to Kaitlin, at the initial training in Texas Heavin talked about his religious beliefs and offered the trainees advice; Kaitlin said, "We asked and-and Gary Heavin, the founder, said, 'Well, I am a Christian, people know that, and I'm not ashamed to put that in my stuff so-so feel free to, you know, let people know'" (S2:10). The owners reacted to this honesty and Kaitlin explained their philosophy: "I don't want it to be like overbearing on the people who come in...but we do not want to hide the fact that we're Christians and so we're not ashamed about putting a Bible verse in the bathroom" (S2:9). Biblical quotes were indeed displayed in Waterville; there were passages from the Book of Psalms hanging in the bathroom and a poster in the workout area proclaiming an inspirational Bible verse as well. In addition, Heavin's religious values contribute to Curves' commitment to community activism more generally, and the local owners' religious beliefs influenced the choice of activities available to the members in Waterville.

Gary Heavin sees his success as a mandate to serve others. Heavin is quoted in an Inc. Magazine article as saying, "We've been given this gift and if we don't use it, it will be taken away" (Wellner, 2006:121). This belief led Heavin to franchise the company in order to reach more women in need and also to strongly support community involvement. According to a Curves International press release, following Hurricane Katrina the company matched donations up to a thousand dollars per club and donated a total of three million dollars to relief agencies (Curves International, Inc., Nov. 17, 2005:1). Owner Barbara confirmed the emphasis on charitable activities: "They recommend that we get involved in the community as well" (S1:4).

In the case of the Waterville Curves, the religious beliefs of the owners and members influenced what community activities were sponsored by the club. During the 2006 Christmas

holiday season, the Waterville Curves participated in a program called Operation Christmas Child, sponsored by a religious organization, which I observed first-hand during my time in the field. Curves members who chose to participate gift-wrapped a shoebox and filled it with toys that would be sent to children in Africa. Pamphlets were available detailing the project, which, according to Kaitlin, explained that a religious tract in the child's native language would be added to the gift boxes teaching "the Christmas story and about, you know, the birth of Christ and stuff, the salvation message" (S2:10). However, Kaitlin emphasized that non-religious (or non-Christian) members could still send the packages or simply not participate if they found it offensive. She added that no one "seemed" to be offended yet (S2:10).

In addition to the decor and optional charity programs, which contribute to the general club environment, the weight management class makes more explicit use of religion as a motivational tool. At the national level, Curves International produces a Member Guide that can be obtained through the club. I purchased one at the Waterville Curves after learning from interviews that it is the main text used in the weight loss class and that it contains biblical quotations. The book explains the Curves weight management plan and has daily charts with meal suggestions and empty spaces to write in substitutions. Each page also includes a box called "Soul Food" that offers an inspirational quotation from such famous individuals as Helen Keller and Sophia Loren. However, this section also includes words of wisdom taken from the Bible, such as the following from Matthew 6:6: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Heavin, 2005:216). The periodic phrases from the Bible serve as a constant reminder of Gary Heavin's Christian belief and vision. At the Waterville Curves I conducted my interviews in a back room that was also used for the weight loss class and biblical quotations

were often written on a white board, presumably left from the last meeting.

Thus, religion plays a strong role not only in Gary Heavin's personal life, but also in his business enterprise. His willingness to be frank about his religious beliefs has had a direct impact on the franchise in Waterville: his views attracted the owners and encouraged them to be open about their own faith. Religious faith shapes the everyday practice of the local Curves operation.

The second important aspect of religion at Curves relates to a nationwide incident that disturbed some members of Curves franchises across the United States, including the one in Waterville. The controversy began with two articles printed in the San Francisco Chronicle in 2004 about Curves founder and CEO, Gary Heavin. The first, written by Jon Carroll, identified Heavin as a "heavy contributor to several organizations allied with Operation Save America, the rather more muscular successor to Operation Rescue, the anti-choice group" (Carroll, 2004). In a second article, historian and journalist Ruth Rosen alleged that Heavin "has given at least \$5 million of his profits to some of the most militant anti-abortion groups in the country" (Rosen, 2004). These statements provoked a response via press release from Heavin: "Neither Curves International Inc., nor my wife, nor I gave money to Operation Save America or any other radical pro-life group. The newspaper in question flat out got it wrong" (Curves International, Inc., April 30, 2004:1). The newspaper then issued corrections which now appear with each article. The first refutes Carroll's assertion of an alliance with Operation Save America: "Operation Save America has praised those recipients [the ones to which Heavin donated] on its Web site but does not provide financial support, nor does it have a formal alliance with them" and the second labeled Rosen's above assertion as "not accurate" (Carroll, 2004, Rosen, 2004). Despite these retractions, the articles caused sufficient controversy, leading some Curves members to take action.

A Curves member in San Francisco named Teresa started “Curvers For Choice” the day after Rosen’s piece was published ([www.curversforchoice.org](http://www.curversforchoice.org)). As Teresa explains on her website, she was “distressed” as a member of Curves when she heard about the donations. She admits that the original publications were “inaccurate” and that the facts are “far less extreme than the initial rumors” but insists, that, “nevertheless, many pro-choice Curves members face a dilemma” (Pro-Choice Curves customers unite!, 2004). For Teresa, Curves was a positive part of her daily routine which she was not prepared to abandon. Nor did she want to hurt the owners of the local club, of whom she was fond. Hence, she created a website imploring conflicted members to donate to an organization of their choice which supports a woman’s “right to choose.” The website provides recommendations in the form of short descriptions and links and offers a way to personalize the donation by contributing to groups in Waco, Texas, where most of Heavin’s donations are concentrated. One suggested organization is “The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice,” and the description asserts, “Yes, you can be pro-faith, pro-family, AND pro-choice” (Pro-Choice Curves customers unite!, 2004). In addition, the website offers links to viewing and purchasing pro-choice wear, including “Curvers For Choice” T-shirts and buttons. The creation of this member resource was a direct result of Gary Heavin’s position on abortion.

Gary Heavin’s statements and actions show that he is opposed to abortion and women’s “right to choose.” In an article in Today’s Christian in January 2004, Heavin expressed his beliefs: “There’s nothing healthy about abortion...I’m not afraid to tell the truth.” Although Heavin did not explicitly link this to his religious beliefs, he discussed his born-again experience earlier in the article: “I told God, ‘I’ve lived life my way and it’s a mess. Now I’m giving it to you’” (Kennedy, 2004). In an editorial written to the Waco Tribune Herald on February 28, 2004,

Heavin referenced the groups he donates money to as places where “women can receive the care they need without compromising their values at an abortion mill” (Heavin, 2004). The reference to values and Heavin’s outspoken identification as an evangelical Christian imply a connection between his religious beliefs and his position on abortion. In response, Teresa’s website offers a service to those Curves members who do not share his beliefs on this matter, even if they share his broader religious views. On the website she details the facts regarding the controversy (she has a link to the press release provided by Curves, International listing the recipients of Heavin’s donations). Also, she provides links to Christian pro-choice organizations. Although Teresa made a conscious effort to find a solution that allowed conflicted women to remain active in the franchise, other Curves members, including one in Waterville, supported more drastic measures.

The controversy led one woman in Waterville to quit Curves and she encouraged other members to do the same. Jenna, an interviewee, explains, “I got an email, um, telling me how I should boycott Curves because they’re pro-life. They’re, you know, and how terrible-awful that is and women oughtta’ have a choice and who do they think they are...” (NS5:14). This email angered Jenna because she is pro-life. When she confronted the Curves management about distributing her contact information, she was told that they did not give her email address to the woman who sent the email. Though irritated, Jenna identified this incident as being an individual action: “That’s what I felt bad about was that that happened and Curves didn’t have anything to do with it, you know, it was just this one woman who took a stand and used Curves, she used them” (NS5:15). Although Jenna identified as pro-life, she indicated that she would continue to come to Curves even if Heavin was donating to pro-choice groups because “everybody has a right to their own opinion” (NS5:15). This appeal to individual liberty was one which the majority of interviewees also adopted.



Out of the seven women with whom I spoke about this particular controversy, not one would quit Curves based on Heavin's contributions to pro-life groups and only one would quit if he donated, instead, to pro-choice groups. That person was Jessica, the young missionary. Her view could be related to her occupation, degree of religiosity, age, or some combination of these factors. But her position as a former Curves employee at a different Curves franchise allowed her to offer important observations about how she felt members would react. Her response was telling: "...I think that a lot of people don't feel that strongly about it, in my experience talking with women...I think it would be a minority that actually feels so strongly about people being pro-choice or pro-life that they would actually change their lifestyle, which...would include Curves" (NS3:29). She also suggested that the members' views were age-related: "I strongly doubt that most women, that [Gary Heavin's donations to pro-life groups] would make them leave Curves, most women, these are grandmas and..." (NS3:29). Although interview data support this conclusion that women would not leave Curves, the email incident in Waterville and the creation of "Curvers for Choice" demonstrate that some women do feel strongly enough to act. Jessica also raised two other issues that should be considered; she distinguished between Heavin's donation of personal funds and a check directly from Curves International and observed the fact that most women at Curves are only concerned with exercise.

Jessica's assertions need to be addressed because they have an impact on the larger understanding of Curves as a social phenomenon and the interests of the women involved. After declaring that most women would not leave Curves, Jessica added a qualification: "...especially if it's not, if it's his money, his, you know, pay or whatever from Curves, if it's not actually Curves signing the check, this is from Curves to you, I think that would be a bigger deal" (NS3:29). This is a point that many women brought up: the fact that it was personal profit, not

company funds, and he had the right to donate it to anyone he wanted. Another member said, “It’s his money, let him donate to who he thinks he should donate to” (NS8:8). For these women, Heavin’s profits were seen as separate from his involvement in the company and thus did not necessitate action.

Jessica’s final point with respect to this controversy was that “a lot of women are just--just want to work out” (NS3:29). My research confirmed this fact; when asked on the survey why they joined Curves, only one respondent out of fifty-six listed a response not related to exercise or health; that was, to meet new people. This response pattern and Jessica’s clarification are interesting because, in addition to being a gym, Curves offers a chance for women to become active in the community and also to create connections with other women. However, it clearly remains for most a place of exercise. Jessica’s qualifications support the need for further study of Curves locations and members nationwide.

The third important issue to consider when exploring the relationship between Curves and religion is the comparisons to be made with other organizations based on religious foundations or biblical principles. For instance, Alcoholics Anonymous, also known as AA, is a fellowship for those wishing to recover from alcoholism; the Salvation Army is a religious organization that engages in evangelism and extensive charitable work; and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) is a non-sectarian community service organization which aims to meet community needs. These three organizations operate at different levels of religiosity, but all are influenced to some degree by religious principles. Although these three organizations are not-for-profit groups, they can still be compared with Curves International as associations that are run according to general or specific religious values because Curves operates differently from other for-profit franchises. Curves caps the royalty that franchisees pay to the company rather

than requiring franchisees to pay more in fees when they make more money (Wellner, 2006:121). This cap thus situates Curves between non-profit groups and typical franchise businesses and allows it to be more closely compared with non-profits than other franchise operations.

According to its website, Alcoholics Anonymous is “a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2007). The means with which they accomplish this goal is laid out in the Big Book, first published in 1939 and now available online in a fourth revised edition, published in 2001. In a chapter entitled “We Agnostics,” the guide addresses the religious necessities of the organization and the implications this has for participants. The chapter characterizes alcoholism as “an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001:44). The authors explain the importance of believing in a higher power in order to overcome the addiction, but accept this in an unspecific manner: “We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001:46). Thus, despite the reliance on belief in a higher power for strength and the use of the term “God,” AA is inclusive of all religions. Their website confirms this position: “AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2007). This serves as a useful comparison to Curves, which also has religious origins in its founding and practice, but does not require franchise owners or members to associate with a particular religious group.

Curves International was founded by an evangelical Christian and is based on biblical principles and AA uses the belief in a higher entity to empower members to overcome addiction.

In both cases, religious beliefs were important in leading the founders to starting their organizations; the co-founder of AA, Bill Wilson, was an alcoholic who found that belief in a higher power was the only way to overcome his illness (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001:13). Gary Heavin's born-again experience led him to believe that it is his calling to help women in part by providing non-intimidating exercise facilities. Participants in AA are able to use their own personal conception of a supreme being, although the language in the manual uses the common name God and only substitutes the male pronoun for the term. Thus, the overall conception is rooted in a Christian consideration of a higher power, with individuals allowed and encouraged to substitute their own meanings. Curves functions in a similar manner; because of the founder's beliefs, the clubs follow certain guidelines such as recommended community service, yet each club owner is permitted to add a more overt religious component if desired and each participant can choose to participate in service activities for non-religious reasons and avoid any overtly religious causes.

AA and Curves share another important characteristic: the use of biblical quotations in printed materials as a means of inspiration. Alcoholics Anonymous is affiliated with a group called Al-Anon, begun by founder Bill Wilson's wife Lois and intended for family members and friends of alcoholics (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 1981:xi). Al-Anon produced a publication entitled "One Day at a Time in Al-Anon" which offers daily encouragement for those supporting recovering alcoholics. Despite AA and Al-Anon's insistence on non-sectarianism, the book has a page for every day of the year that includes a daily reminder with a quotation taken from an Al-Anon member; a famous person, such as Thomas Merton; or the Bible. For example, the quotation selected for January 9 is from the Book of Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall

direct thy paths” (Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.,1989:9). This is similar to the Curves practice of including biblical quotations as inspiration in the food recording section of the Member Guide. Each publication is intended to use religious foundations to encourage participants to remain dedicated to their goal, whether it be supporting a loved one suffering from alcoholism or self-motivating to eat healthy and exercise. Regardless of AA and Al-Anon’s assertion of religious non-affiliation, the discussion of God and use of biblical quotations originates in the Judeo-Christian tradition and can thus be connected to Heavin’s use of biblical principles in his company.

Another comparison can be made between the Salvation Army and Curves International. The Salvation Army is more overtly connected to the Christian faith than AA and Al-Anon. According to its website, “The Salvation Army is an integral part of the Christian Church...Its objects are ‘the advancement of the Christian religion...of education, the relief of poverty, and other charitable objects beneficial to society or the community of mankind as a whole’” (The Salvation Army: What is The Salvation Army?, 2007). The Salvation Army thus differs from Curves because it was founded with the explicit purpose of spreading Christianity. However, the organizations are similar in that they are both founded on biblical principles. The Salvation Army lists these clearly on their website, stating: “**We believe** that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship” (The Salvation Army: Doctrines, 2007). This poses a stark contrast to AA and Al-Anon and is more direct than Curves, which does not specifically list its religiously based principles. However, like Curves and Al-Anon, the Salvation Army website offers daily prayers from various authors and a daily Bible reading guide with suggestions of what passages to study (The Salvation Army: Daily Prayers, 2007).

Similarities between Curves and the Salvation Army are important because they help place Curves in the larger context of religiously based businesses and charities in the United States and the world. Moreover, the Salvation Army has a more direct relationship with Curves than AA and Al-Anon: Curves donated money to the Salvation Army after Hurricane Katrina. According to a press release from Curves International, the Salvation Army was presented with a check for one million dollars from Gary and Diane Heavin which included donations both from individual franchises and their own monetary resources. Upon acceptance of the check, the Salvation Army representative, Captain Timothy Gilliam, said, “Curves International has been very good to the Salvation Army for a number of years, and this is just another example of their extreme generosity” (Curves International, Inc., November 17, 2005:2). Although non-Christians donate to the Salvation Army and Curves International also presented checks to the American Red Cross and other Gulf Coast non-profits without religious ties, it is significant that Heavin and Curves have a history of donating to the religiously affiliated Salvation Army.

The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) must also be considered because it has both religious affiliations and a strong history of promoting exercise, and thus is an important comparison point to Curves. According to its website, the YMCA began in London in response to the unpleasant conditions in cities fostered by the industrial revolution. Its purpose was to “substitute Bible study and prayer for life on the streets” (YMCA: About the YMCA). It was started by evangelicals, but was rare in that it was tolerant of all faiths in its early days, despite its origin and the suggestive title of the organization. The website explains that today, as they have been for the past fifty years, “Ys are for all people of all faiths, races, ages, abilities and incomes” (YMCA: About the YMCA). The YMCA’s religious foundations influenced how the movement spread. Two lay evangelists played a large role in the sending missionary-type

workers overseas to start local YMCAs. In addition, in their early years YMCAs provided Bible study, an activity that remains available at some locations today. However, this practice fell off in the late nineteen twenties and early nineteen thirties, while exercise activities became more popular (YMCA: A Brief History of the YMCA Movement). The YMCA also plays an undeniable role in the promotion of physical activity and health and as such can be compared to Curves.

According to its website, the YMCA has been committed to serving body, spirit, and mind since the late eighteenth century (YMCA: A Brief History of the YMCA Movement). Basketball, racquetball, and volleyball were invented at YMCAs, and Ys today continue to run many sports and fitness programs for members of all ages (YMCA: A Brief History of the YMCA Movement). This corresponds with Curves' desire to involve women in some type of physical activity. For the YMCA, the promotion of spirit stemmed from activities such as Bible study, and for Curves, spirit is cultivated by offering women a place where they can feel comfortable exercising and receive support from other women, goals which some members attribute to Heaven's religious beliefs. The early YMCA offered support for the mind through classes and at Curves, trivia activities and book swaps exercise the minds of members.

The YMCA's current slogan conveys its objectives: "We build strong kids, strong families, strong communities" (YMCA: About the YMCA). As the slogan suggests, the YMCA places itself in a privileged role in bringing people together and the website asserts that it is "more than gym-a community" (YMCA: About the YMCA). This is similar to the notion that Curves is more than just a place for autonomous exercise. In a video on the Curves website Heaven explains Curves-as-community: "It's more than a workout, it's an environment where women can acquire the habit of exercise, a culture where they'll get the support and

encouragement” (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? The Curves Difference). In addition, the support of community involvement through national corporate-sponsored food drives and other events contributes to the sense of Curves as a community. The YMCA’s religious origin and emphasis on community, exercise, and full body health are important because Curves shares many of these qualities. Admittedly, however, today’s Y’s offer a vastly broader array of services than does Curves, which focuses explicitly on women and fitness.

Lastly, religion is important when considering Curves because Heavin’s leadership, the ritualized practice enacted at Curves, and the salvation myth of health and fitness connect Curves to other religious institutions. Heavin’s position as the founder and CEO of Curves locates him in a hierarchy comparable to that of a religious group and his interactions with franchisees are similar to those of a preacher leading his flock. For example, in an article in Inc. Magazine, journalist Alison Stein Wellner describes Heavin opening a session at “Club Camp,” the training program for new franchisees. After being introduced, he addressed the attendees; “We’re going to make you masters of your own fate...I’m going to tell you exactly what this job requires to be successful. If you follow my advice *exactly*, you will prosper. You can’t screw this up! But if you want to do it your own way, you’re going to have problems” (Wellner, 2006:118, her emphasis). He positions himself as the leader of a people to whom he intends to bring success, implying that he is the only one who can provide this service. In this sense, Heavin is a secular figure who projects a clerical authority. In addition, Heavin’s belief that he has been called by God to serve women supports this characterization.

In the Inc. Magazine article, journalist Wellner explains Heavin’s history as he reported it to her. When he was thirteen years old, Heavin’s mother died in her sleep at the age of forty; she was obese, depressed and had high blood pressure. These ailments were treated with medicine



rather than recommendations of exercise and this practice later angered Heavin. After a failed attempt at a women's fitness center left him in debt and in jail, Heavin "found God" and renewed his efforts at developing a business enterprise aimed at providing fitness services to women. He saw his later success in his first two Curves locations as a "calling." Heavin explains that he "had the epiphany that what my life had been about was healing women because of my mother...And that was what my destiny was going to be" (Wellner, 2006:120-1). As mentioned earlier, this calling also directly led to the decision to franchise the club. The gift of success had to be used to help other people (specifically women) as it had helped Heavin's family out of debt.

This part of Heavin's religious history provides another strong link to Weber's analysis of the congruence between religious beliefs and our current economic system; capitalism. According to Weber, the Protestant Reformation fundamentally changed the attitude toward worldly activities: "The effect of the Reformation as such was only that, as compared with the Catholic attitude, the moral emphasis on and the religious sanction of, organized worldly labour [*sic*] in a calling was mightily increased" (Weber, 1958:83). Weber explains the importance of this calling: "...the fulfilment [*sic*] of worldly duties is under all circumstances the only way to live acceptably to God. It and it alone is the will of God, and hence every calling has exactly the same worth in the sight of God" (Weber, 1958:81). Heavin's explanation of his religious past, his self-professed goal to serve God, and the "epiphany" that his life must involve healing other women who suffer like his mother suffered places him directly in this religious tradition. This position explains how he can reconcile his incredible monetary success with his desire to be a religious man. Indeed, in interviews online, he frequently mentions that if he were to lose all his money he would still be happy because he considers himself a child of God and he would simply rebuild (Wellner, 2006:123).

In addition to Heavin's views, Curves itself involves the ritualized practice of deeply held beliefs and in this sense can be compared to a religious institution. The organization approaches the program of exercise in ritualized ways. Participants go around a circle of alternating machines and "rest stations" to keep their heart rate up for cardiovascular fitness and build muscle for strength training. Although women can improvise while at the rest stations, the machines at Curves require specific movements and a member who breaks these rules is subject to correction by a Curves employee or from other members. While attending Curves in my hometown, for example, I was informed that I was doing the squat machine incorrectly and was corrected by the staff. The program prescribes certain actions and, as such, the workout involves important characteristics of ritual-like activities as identified by religious scholar Catherine Bell. In her book Ritual, Bell emphasizes the importance of invariance: "A disciplined set of actions marked by precise repetition and physical control," and, also, of rule-governance: "we tend to think of ritual in terms of formulated norms imposed on the chaos of human action and interaction," in delineating between ritual and non-ritual activities (Bell, 1997:150,155). The use of machines at Curves involves both invariance and rule-governed behavior. In addition, every thirty seconds a female voice instructs participants to change stations and there is near simultaneous compliance as the women rise and move to the next station. This action also supports invariance and rule-governance and recalls the collective action of rising and kneeling during many Christian religious services.

Attending Curves on a daily or weekly basis is an important ritual in itself, one that members emphasize as important. One interviewee, who used to work at Curves, observed the regularity with which some members workout: "They've been coming for four years and they come religiously three to four times a week, if they're not there you know something, an

emergency has happened” (NS3:18). In addition, a large majority of survey respondents, about eighty percent, indicated that they had a regular schedule at Curves. For these women attending Curves is a ritual action in their lives. The routine employed at Curves and the habit of attending on a regular basis allow the members to lose weight and build muscle, which in turn provides self-esteem and empowerment and supports emotional health.

At Curves the workout is a ritualized practice of the belief in the power of health and exercise to promote and sustain both physical and emotional well-being. The website features success stories of women who have joined Curves and lost weight, comparable to testimonies of recovering alcoholics in AA. These stories include before and after pictures and a short description of the respective member’s story, including personal quotes. For example, Nancy says that before her weight loss she “didn’t experience the joy in life,” and she exclaims, “Curves has been a healing experience.” Pat says, “Curves came along and it was a blessing” and the description under Cindy’s picture claims that “Now, more than 150 pounds lighter and healthier – emotionally as well as physically – there’s no turning back” (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? Success Stories). These three characterizations of experiences at Curves demonstrate that the company is marketing weight loss as a means to achieve emotional and spiritual benefits. In addition, the testimonies serve as witnesses for the faith--weight loss generally but, more specifically, the power of Curves to heal.

Interview respondents also emphasized that Curves offered positive mental and spiritual renewal through exercise in addition to allowing members to lose weight. One woman explained the benefits of joining Curves: “...I discovered how much of a stress reliever it was so i-it’s become more about that than it has about weight or inches” (NS5:16). Another characterized the toned muscle she noticed after attending Curves as secondary: “It’s [seeing results] just a side

benefit...it doesn't bother me [not seeing results], I don't have to, I know how I feel, the results are a bonus" (NS4:5). For these women Curves has an important impact on their mental and spiritual state in addition to its function as a weight-loss and toning program. These benefits render Curves comparable to religious practices and this spiritual function of Curves locates the franchise in Catherine Bell's typology of ritual action. Bell offers rites of affliction as an organizational category and asserts that such customs "attempt to rectify a state of affairs that has been disturbed or disordered," more specifically, "they heal, exorcise, protect, and purify" (Bell, 1997:115). This function is demonstrated by member's discussions of the Curves workout as an activity that eliminates stress acquired at work and returns the individual to a calm and relaxed state. The function of Curves, as identified by participants, allows it to be placed in a typology of ritual action and thus compared with religious activity.

Curves also fits into a larger societal pattern in which health and fitness are elevated to the sacred and represent an ideal bodily state that is worshiped through exercise. The interview respondents overwhelmingly expressed a desire to obtain a healthy body. When asked about the features of their ideal bodies one woman said, "Just for me [an ideal body] would be just to be healthy" (NS3:25). Another identified more clearly her view of an ideal body which was tied directly to health and the desire to avoid certain diseases: "I have a strong uh genetic component to uh hypertension and which I'm on blood pressure medicine, you know, you go as long as you can and you exercise and do all you can environmentally...it's about control" (NS4:13). Other members were more concerned specifically with weight. More than half of the survey respondents indicated the desire to lose weight as a motivating factor for joining Curves and one member explained her results, "So far that's what I've been able to do, lost some weight and kept it off" (NS2:16). Another was concerned solely with weight, when asked about her ideal body

she replied, “thin” (NS8:8). These responses indicate the importance of thinness and health as a pursuit, comparable to the quest for the Holy Grail, for these women.

Religious scholar Michelle Lelwica discusses the pursuit of this ideal in American society. She describes the existence of a “fitness ethic” in which “marketers and consumers claim that its primary goal is not slenderness per se, but overall ‘health,’ signified by a body that is light and lean” (Lelwica, 2005:179). This objective is seen in respondents’ desires to remain healthy and active and also avoid disease. However, Lelwica explains that these goals remain related to weight-loss and states that most women still exercise to lose weight, assertions supported by my data (Lelwica, 2005:179). Furthermore, for Lelwica, the fitness ethic and focus on thinness are directly related to religion: the “terms and promises resemble those of traditional religion” and she says, “...the weight-loss ‘gospel’ is constructed and preached through conversion idioms of before and after” (Lelwica, 2005:181). This practice can be seen in the testimonies on the Curves website; women confess their sins and are converted to the Curves method of weight-loss which provides happiness and acceptance, what Lelwica terms the “salvation myth” (Lelwica, 2005:183). At Curves, health and fitness are promoted as a means of saving women and this idea is solidified through ritualized exercise practices.

In sum, religion plays an important role in understanding Curves, both at the local and national levels. My interviews in Waterville uncovered the importance of religion as a motivation for owners and members to participate in the club, resulting in religious undercurrents in the charity events and fitness classes available at that location. Religion is salient at the national level because the founder of Curves, Gary Heavin, is an evangelical Christian and donated money to pro-life groups. This action provoked a nationwide response; it inspired one Curves member to create a new organization for conflicted pro-choice participants and led one

member in Waterville to quit and attempt to get others to join her. Over the course of American and world history popular community service organizations, including Alcoholics Anonymous, the Salvation Army, and the Young Men's Christian Association, have been tied to religious ideals or inspirations and Curves fits into this more general category. In addition, the push for health and fitness in American society can be characterized as a ritualized pursuit of a deeply held belief, in this case the necessity of health and thinness, and as such the rituals performed at Curves take on a sacred quality and can be compared to other religious practices.

## Chapter Four - Curves and Gender -- Gendered Curves

“Would you rather exercise in an environment designed especially for women? Would encouragement from other women help you reach your fitness goals?” If the answer to these questions is yes, then the Curves website suggests that you find a Curves location near you and sign up (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me?). Indeed, one of the company’s major selling points is that there is something special about exercising with women, and the respondents in this study overwhelmingly agree. The role gender plays at Curves is complex and varied and is central to understanding Curves as a social phenomenon. Gender is also important at Curves because CEO Gary Heavin is a man who believes God called him to serve women and because the value of Curves emphasized by the corporation and the members is directly related to its position as a gendered space.

First of all, it is important to understand that Curves as a business is focused specifically on women; the large majority of franchise owners and co-owners and all of the clientele are women. The Curves’ mission statement, “Strengthening Women,” reveals the importance of gender to the Company and Curves supports this goal through its business practices. For example, content analysis of Diane Magazine reveals the importance of Avon and a 2004 press release confirms this relationship. The press release announces a partnership between Curves and Avon and frames this connection specifically in gendered terms. Diane Heavin explains Curves’ goals and their relationship to Avon: “Our goal is to help women regain their health and beauty...We know relationships between women are the foundation of Avon’s business. They’re also the foundation of ours” (Curves International Inc., November 15, 2004:1). The press release also quotes an Avon representative who echoes this view: “Both companies understand the busy lives of today’s women and create supportive communities and products to fulfill their needs” (Curves

International Inc., November 15, 2004:2). In addition, the Curves' website claims that it is the only place that "can give you the strength of over four million women" and asserts that the machines are designed especially for women (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? The Curves Difference).

As the founder and CEO of Curves Gary Heavin has almost, if not total, control over the company's general business practices. His wife Diane, however, is sometimes tacitly mentioned as a co-founder. Although Curves is a franchise and the owners enjoy relative autonomy, Heavin emphasizes his position in the organization: "We certainly get a lot of good ideas from members and franchisees. But the big ideas, they come primarily from me" (Wellner, 2006:122). In the case of Curves, the vast majority of members and franchisees are women, while Heavin is a man. Also, by his own admission, Heavin is inspired by God to serve women; his decisions are guided by God and thus are imbued to some degree with infallibility. This attitude translates into a strong belief in his system of exercise, weight loss, and weight management.

From a practical standpoint, Heavin serves women because his model, he claims, works for them. The Curves website attributes the extraordinary growth of Curves to word-of-mouth advertising. In an interview for Inc. Magazine, Heavin stated that when he was asked by a franchisee about starting a comparable service for men, he replied, "When Hell freezes over" (Wellner, 2006:122). According to Heavin, men are less loyal than women: "For five bucks off the dues, he's going to go down the street. Also, in a gym environment, men don't bring their friends. When you're sitting at a table with several people, does Bob get up and say, 'Come on, Jim and John, let's go the bathroom together?' Men don't work that way" (Wellner, 2006:122). Although Heavin believes that the machines could work just as well for men physically, he does not think that his business method would work. Thus, he invites other entrepreneurs to address



men's issues and asserts that "we're going to take care of the women" (Wellner, 2006:122). For Gary Heavin, serving God is achieved specifically by serving women and this connection has precise effects on his business practices. Heavin's monetary donations to pro-life groups demonstrate that Heavin is serving women in the ways he thinks they should be served. More practically, Heavin asserts that men and women "work" differently and this belief both justifies and frames the Curves operation.

Heavin's beliefs about women become problematic because the world of women's only fitness centers is not a buyer's market. With Curves controlling forty percent of the share of fitness franchises, with many in small, rural communities without other options, women are offered little to no choice of where to work out in an all female environment (Wellner, 2006:122). As one interviewee noted, they are "the only game in town" (NS8:8). The company's national presence is also important because it provides travel passes and membership transfers for mobile women that other clubs do not (see Figures 4 and 5 in Appendix B). In this sense, Heavin's franchises, which are deeply intertwined with his beliefs about women, marketing, and health are often the only choice for many American women.

The fact that Curves is a gendered space is an important selling point for Curves International, as evidenced by the website's insistence that the machines are specifically for women and the implication that women-only facilities offer unique benefits: "The laughter, conversation, and sense of support that you see at the typical Curves is different from any other health club you may have visited in the past" (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? The Curves Difference). This aspect of the club was discussed by the respondents as being of central importance. All the interviewees praised the female-only environment, indicating that the positive atmosphere was directly linked to the absence of men. One woman said she liked

working out with women because men were just interested in showing off how much they could bench press and she stressed the importance of gender separation: “I guess I wouldn’t mind working out at a gym where there was, you know, the men had their place and the women had theirs, its just its less intimidating and more comforting and cozy and friendly” (NS2:7). Another woman explained that the women at Curves would be turned away from other gyms because of the presence of men: “A lot of the women coming to Curves are very concerned about their weight, they’ve never worked out before, they’re fifty and above and they don’t want to look silly in front of guys and women are a lot less likely to, you know, go into a place where they know there’s, there’s men, no matter what age they are” (NS3:14). Another woman said, “It’s such a nice atmosphere now, I love being around all a bunch of women...women act differently when men are around, they just do” (NS8:7). These women support the company’s belief that a gendered space offers members unique benefits and respondents value that Curves is a female-only space.

The importance of maintaining this gender separation became more apparent when the respondents were asked about the consequences of hiring a male employee. This issue was raised in discussions online, and also became salient during a visit I made to a local Curves franchise in nearby Augusta. While exercising I saw a sign explaining that, due to financial problems, the co-owner of the club, a man, would have to cover a few shifts. It was clear from the message that complaints had been made by members and that the management was trying to appease them by explaining the situation. When asked about the possibility of having a male employee in Waterville, most women rejected this option. Even if they were not bothered by it personally, they recognized that other women might be: “I don’t know, I guess uh it [having a male trainer] doesn’t bother me...[but] if people don’t have a good self-image...they’d kind of just like to have

an all girls' club" (NS4: 9-10). Another explained, "some people might not be bothered [by a male trainer] but I think there's some women that would...they wouldn't come here training because it is a women's, that's why women like Curves because it's for women" (NS6:51). Some women took a stronger stance and rejected the need to have a male trainer at all, one responded "I would say, 'why not get a female trainer?' There are enough of them out there now" (NS3:14) and another asked, "Why would you have to do it [hire a male trainer]?" (NS8:8). These responses demonstrate the importance of Curves as an exclusively female space.

The significance of a gym dedicated specifically as women's space is also important because it stems in part from past experiences in mixed-sex fitness environments. When discussing other gyms in comparison to Curves, many women identified the presence of men as negative. These women positioned their goals--as women—as being different from the aims of men. One woman explained, "I just don't know, guys are so jocky about this stuff, you know, they have to be, you know, they have to have their torn, sweaty t-shirts, you know, and all that stuff, and screaming with the weights" (NS2:7). Other women characterized men in gyms as predatory: "Gyms like Champions or any of the other ones that are like, there's a lot of guys in there and apparently their only reason for being there is to check out, you know, ladies that are also there, I just don't want to have to deal with that when I'm working out, I'd rather just not have to worry about getting hit on" (NS3:13). Another related a past experience working out at the YMCA: "Some of them [guys at the Y] were absolutely ridiculous, they were, they were hitting on different women...I mean they're hitting on the younger women...it was so obvious they felt they were looking good and in shape and, you know, I can take care of myself...if they were in their fifties they'd hit on someone in their twenties" (NS8:11). These respondents, women of varying ages, identified with the other women in the gyms and articulated the goals

and actions of the men as being completely separate and antithetical to their own desires. This ideological separation translates into physical division in the gendered space of co-ed fitness facilities such as with the above respondent who identified the weight room as dominated by men.

The characterization of differing fitness activities for men and women is supported by sociologist Shari L. Dworkin's ethnographic study of gym life which uncovers the de facto gender segregation that persists in co-ed American exercise facilities: "The proportion of men to women in the weight room at any given time is approximately eighty/twenty or ninety/ten...the aerobics classes are usually 100% female...The CV [cardiovascular] room is predominantly filled with women" (Dworkin, 2003:132). Studies and reports conducted and released by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and other organizations support the importance of physical activity in preventing disease, specifically supporting the importance of strength training in improving "stair-climbing power, gait, and other measures of physical function" which in turn prevent falls (CDC: Chapter 4:132). However, the weight room remains a gendered space because women see men at fitness facilities in a negative light: as being intimidating, arrogant, and possibly the perpetrators of unwanted advances.

Both Curves and the gyms in Dworkin's study are gendered spaces. They serve certain social functions, but, what are these functions? According to the respondents, Curves offers specific benefits to members because it is an all-female facility. It empowers women by providing them a separate space in which to have control, network, and gain access to vital health-related information. One woman discussed the importance of Curves in contrast to the rest of the world: "It's so male-dominated the world anyway, it's kinda nice to have our own thing, where we can say 'no guys', you know, they have, they certainly have plenty of those for guys so,

you know be strong and all those kinds of things” (NS4:9). Her view supports Heavin’s argument that by having an all-women’s fitness facility women are empowered. In addition, this respondent’s insights point to gender disparities in American society: men have many places in which “to be strong,” and pursue physical activity, while women do not.

As a gendered space, Curves also offers a place for some women to make contacts with other women and organize for causes they support. For example, the co-owner of the Waterville Curves explained her desire to use the club to provide important networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs: “Something that I really enjoy is actually trying to promote other uh women’s businesses” (S1:17). She gave one example of a woman who comes in and sells water purifiers. During my observations, I saw business cards and samples in the bathroom for body products being sold by another member (see Figure 6 in Appendix B). In addition, before Christmas, one of the workers at Curves took orders for wreaths, made them at home, and delivered them to women through Curves, and another provided sign-up sheets and came to offer her reflexology services. The franchises provide businesswomen with a vital client base which is especially important for those selling products, specifically those aimed at women, such as cosmetics. In addition, Curves provides a place for more women to become involved in charity events. For example, one respondent listed activities sponsored by her local Curves, including a walk for the cancer fund. When I asked if she participated in the walk, she said, “Not physically, I mean, I donate yeah, but I don’t walk” (NS8:5). The ability to use Curves as a place to secure sponsors for fundraising and other events involves members who may not otherwise participate in these projects. It also allows women to bring up issues they find important and to acquire support from other members who share their views.

Lastly, Curves as a gendered space serves as a resource for information regarding

women's health issues. During the research I collected pamphlets from multiple Curves locations providing information about breast cancer, domestic violence, and medical tests important to maintaining "a woman's good health." In addition, breast cancer awareness month is promoted at the national level and at the Waterville club new members could join during that time without paying the initial membership fee. As a completely female environment, Curves is a readily conducive site for providing support for women's health issues. In addition, it allows women to receive health services from other women whom they know and trust. One member, who is also a nurse, ran a blood pressure clinic. She said it was "For anybody that wanted...I tested pretty much every person, every person that came in and I did it from like eight to twelve" (NS4:8). There were signs advertising this service in advance and the woman related the positive outcome of the clinic: "I actually caught a couple possible hypertensive people" (NS4:8). She then referred these persons to their doctors; her professional knowledge provided a vital service that they may not have been received otherwise. These examples demonstrate the important social functions of Curves as a gendered space.

The functions of Curves are largely positive for the women who workout there; it is empowering, allows for networking, and provides important health benefits. Does this hold true for other gendered spaces? What about the segregated co-ed gyms discussed above, is this gendered space positive as well? When discussing experiences at co-ed exercise facilities respondents confirmed Dworkin's observation of gendered space, but identified negative results of this division. One woman explained, "I mean you kind of felt intimidated to go into the [weight] room cuz, you know, here was, you know, tall sweaty, chesty guys standing around doing their things and you're gonna pick up your little fifteen pound weights and work for five minutes and leave, you know" (NS2:9). The creation of Curves as a female space is necessary,

in part, as a response to the gendered atmosphere in other gyms where women may find strength training intimidating. For the respondents, complete segregation, such as at Curves, is positive, whereas divided space at co-ed facilities is viewed negatively.

In her book Gendered Spaces, urban planning scholar and sociologist Daphne Spain focuses on the negative consequences of such divisions. She discusses the importance that space plays in enforcing status differences between men and women and explains that, “women and men are spatially segregated in ways that reduce women’s access to knowledge and thereby reinforce women’s lower status relative to men’s” and that gendered spaces “separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege” (Spain, 1992:3). A closer look at interview responses reveals that Curves’ position as a gendered space may support women’s lower status relative to men as much as gender segregated facilities do.

Certain aspects of Curves can be seen as keeping women in a lower status position. First of all, the program asserts the view that it is all women need to become and stay fit. According to the Curves website, “Women around the world are discovering that Curves is 30-minute fitness, commonsense weight loss, and all the support they need to reach their goals” (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? The Curves Difference). Testimonies on the website also support this belief: “Two years ago, Pat Franklin had high blood pressure, sleep apnea, joint pain, and swelling. Weighing 333 pounds, she found stairs a challenge. She joined a gym but felt out of place. Diets failed,” but joining Curves solved all these problems: “Today Pat is fitter than ever. Her health problems are gone. Her weight is down 138 pounds” (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? Success Stories). Reading a success story about someone who has repeatedly failed on other programs, but whose involvement in Curves eliminated high blood pressure and other medical conditions supports the assertion that Curves offers a fool-proof cure for all health problems. Respondents

in this study supported this notion that Curves could help them regardless of the amount of work they put in while exercising. One woman explained that Curves was important because “they’re [members] moving more than they would be at home” (NS3:18). This supports the general sentiment that Curves is better than no exercise program, but, although this may be true, it is not clear whether Curves offers enough physical activity to its members.

Though they appreciate the atmosphere and service provided by Curves, some respondents question whether Curves is enough of a workout. One woman deemed the Curves workout inadequate: “It really isn’t enough, that’s why I, you know, walk the dog several times a day” (NS2:1). In addition, she mentioned her desire for cardiovascular equipment throughout the interview and discussed another women’s gym, called “It Figures,” in relation to Curves: “I was pleased to see that they [It Figures] had um, you know, like what they had was just treadmills and exercise bikes...that’s where my sweat would come from would be working on the cardiovascular” (NS2:19). One woman believed that she had gained the most that she could at Curves and felt limited by the equipment: “I think I’m maxing them out...I can’t seem to go any faster...I think the hydraulics...I hope I don’t pop them or something” (NS5:8).

These limits are supported by an interview in Shape magazine with Cedric X. Bryant, Ph.D., chief exercise physiologist for the American Council on Exercise. Bryant explains the limitations of circuit training: “It’s a bit of an overstatement to say you don’t need to supplement a Curves-type workout with aerobic conditioning...Circuit training will cause improvements in aerobic capabilities, but they tend to be rather small” (Schlosberg, 2004). This speaks to the earlier respondent’s belief that the Curves workout does not provide true cardiovascular training and her desire that the facilities add cardiovascular machines. In addition, Bryant compares hydraulic weight machines to traditional ones found in other gyms: “There comes a point where



the machine doesn't provide enough resistance. Inside of six months, you'll probably need a greater challenge, such as a workout with free weights or with machines that use weight plates (Schlosberg, 2004). This is important when considering the claim of one respondent that she “maxed out” the machines. Thus, although Curves offers an important first step for many sedentary women and is better for them than no exercise program, it is important to understand that this gendered space, and gendered prescriptions of physicality, may enforce inequality between those who exercise at other gyms and those who use Curves. Women who wish to exercise without the intimidation of the presence of men may be forced into an inferior gendered space.

Furthermore, Heavin's near uncontested power in the company allows him to put his own perception of what women need into his business practices, and his self-conception as a “savior for women” supports the view that women must rely on men to reach their goals. This is especially important considering that all ten thousand Curves franchises are owned by women (Bartirromo, 2007).<sup>3</sup> Related to this is the fact that even though Curves has a focus on health and not specifically on being thin, the testimonies from the Curves website clearly support the idea that women need to change (lose weight) to be valued by society. This is explicitly linked to acceptance from men and an assumption of the power of the male gaze. The story of Kimberly Luzier is illustrative: “She lived on chips and soda, slept 10 hours a day, struggled to turn over in bed, and spent Saturday nights at the computer. Today, at 24 Kimberly's lost 120 pounds and is happy, energetic, and social. Saturday nights are spent with her boyfriend” (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? Success Stories). In addition, Heavin's focus on expanding his business may prevent him from addressing other important women's needs.

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<sup>3</sup> Although Bill Free is listed as an owner earlier in this paper, it is possible that he has since sold his franchises, or that his wife is a co-owner. According to Free, he wanted to own a business his wife could run if something happened to him and his wife and daughter are involved in the Curves franchises (Scott, 2005:16).

Although Curves is meant for women, it fails to offer some members the support they need to achieve their exercise goals by not providing childcare services. In the Inc. Magazine interview Heavin explains that his other women's gym provided costly services, including childcare, which required higher membership totals that could not be sustained in small towns. In order to ensure the success of Curves in rural areas, Heavin decided to cut the extra amenities (Wellner, 2006:120). This decision was made apparent during visits to local Curves locations where I saw signs explaining that children were not welcome and imploring members to "find someone to watch the kids for half an hour" while they exercised. This philosophy contradicts Curves' goal of empowering women. Survey responses confirmed that most of the women at the Waterville Curves were mothers (about eighty percent of respondents) and, although most of them had older children, some had children young enough to not yet be in school. One interviewee explained that her adult daughter, a former member, could no longer attend Curves because she recently had a baby (NS4:3). Thus, although Curves offers some benefits as a gendered space, it does not serve all women's needs and it may in fact prevent them from being able to participate in their fitness activities.

In sum, gender is important at Curves because it is a franchise that caters exclusively to women. It is vital to recognize that although it excludes men as members, the CEO and founder is in fact a man who believes he was called by God to serve women and this has important implications for how the business is run and for the members. His views of what women need influences company policy. Gender is also significant at Curves because the exclusion of men makes the club gendered space. According to the Curves website and interview responses, this fact offers members many positive benefits; it creates a comforting atmosphere which members desire to maintain as evidenced by their negative responses to the prospect of hiring male

employees. As a women's-only facility, Curves can offer women important support, not just with their weight loss goals, but in their business and social service ventures. However, it is necessary to realize that gendered space may also have negative effects; it may reinforce women's inferiority relative to men by offering separate but unequal facilities. Gender was a salient issue for many of the respondents and these reactions are closely linked with other important concerns including understandings of exercise and the body.

## Chapter Five - Crafting Body Image at Curves

Curves, first and foremost, is a place of exercise, a place to modify the body either visibly through weight-loss and muscle tone, or invisibly, through increasing energy and cardiovascular health. Medical research reveals the importance of exercise in maintaining health and the women interviewed in this study experienced Curves primarily for this purpose. The women also offered valuable insights into the problematic place of exercise and the body in contemporary American culture and the importance of personal determination in exacting change. Understanding the importance of Curves requires understanding members' exercise history and engagement at Curves, what they perceive as limitations to exercise, and their conceptions about the body in American society.

### *Curves and Exercise*

Exercise, important for everyone, is particularly vital for women and is even more essential for older women, the demographic group typically found at Curves. According to sports nutritionist Nancy Clark, exercise, in connection with a healthy diet, can lower cholesterol, prevent osteoporosis, regulate blood glucose, prevent cancer, and enhance immune function (Finn, 1998:811). Survey respondents indicated that they joined Curves to combat or prevent high cholesterol, osteoporosis, and diabetes, in addition to seeking to maintain more general health and fitness. Two interviewees expressed a desire to prevent the development of health conditions common in their families. One emphasized the importance of controlling “blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, all those things I have strong family tendencies towards” (NS4:13). The other spoke of the influence of witnessing the health problems of older relatives: “A lot of them [my aunts] are experiencing, like, hardcore osteoporosis...so that has been a very big contributing factor and you know just, just reading, you know, things to prevent

osteoporosis” (NS3:24).

Although exercise is useful for everyone, it is especially important for women who may not have been encouraged to participate in organized athletic or exercise events as children and young adults. Changes in legislation are significant in understanding this historical divide. About thirty-five years ago, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, now known simply as Title IX, was passed. According to the U.S. Department of Labor website, the law states that “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (U.S. Department of Labor: Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972). One consequence of this law and subsequent amendments was the creation of many sports programs for women. According to a report by the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, “Girls now comprise about 37 percent of all high-school athletes, representing an increase from one in 27 girls who participated in 1971 to one in three girls in 1994. The ratio for boys during this timeframe remained constant at one in two” (Sabo:1).

Most of the women who I interviewed at Curves grew up before the implementation of Title IX. Michelle Segar and coauthors explain a possible consequence of this lack of support: “Women who were socialized before the passage of Title IX in 1972 may have had less opportunity to develop comfort with and skills for being physically active” (Segar et al., 2002:2). Sports nutritionist Nancy Clark concurs: “Historically, women were not brought up to be athletes or exercisers” (Finn, 1998:811). This observation is confirmed by older interviewees, who recalled limited access to sports in school: “I played basketball, softball uh they didn’t have soccer or field hockey so pretty much that was it for the girls when I was growing up” (NS4:7). These activities were not played as team sports against girls in other schools: “I’m old enough

that we didn't have unfortunately, you weren't, we didn't have anything but intramural sports" (NS2:13). In addition, the sports that were available were adapted to the premise that girls were less capable of physical endurance: "There was, you know, you ever played half-court basketball? You know you can't go across, that was girls' basketball, you couldn't cross the center line, it was so stupid" (NS2:13). One woman compared her experience to contemporary women's athletics: "...it's much better now, much better for girls now" (NS4:7-8). For these women, sports and exercise were not encouraged through school and these histories may have a lasting impact on their lives.

Scholar Michelle Segar asserts the existence of gender differences in contemporary exercise patterns: "Although regular exercise has important health benefits, women's physical activity participation remains low...physical inactivity is more prevalent among women than men" (Segar et al., 2002:338-339). With this in mind, it is important that Curves exists for women who might not otherwise be exercising. Indeed, half of the survey respondents in this study were not involved in fitness programs before they joined Curves. Age is also important when considering exercise because, according to scholar Diane L. Gill, aging is usually associated with the increased development of physical ailments and chronic diseases (Gill et al., 1997:3). She explains the role of exercise for older individuals: "Although some declines with age are inevitable, considerable evidence indicates that physically active older individuals maintain healthy functioning longer than do sedentary peers" (Gill et al., 1997:3). One woman I interviewed explained her goals at Curves in these terms: "I'm sixty-three years old, what do you expect, you know, but, uh, I just wanna stay as active as long as I can" (NS2:16). Both the experts and the women themselves expressed this belief in the importance of exercise for maintaining health over the lifespan.

The Curves workout is a thirty-minute circuit training session with a stretching period at the end. Curves owner Barbara describes the five stages of the workout: “The parts of the Curves workout is [*sic*] the warm-up and then you have the cardio and then you have the strength training and then you have the cool down and then you have the stretching” (S1:21). The first and last few minutes of the workout are the warm-up and cool down, respectively, when the participant exercises more slowly to allow the muscles to adjust. The cardiovascular and strength training are achieved simultaneously during the workout and the stretching is completed at the end. The Member Guide explains the technology, “Our hydraulic strength training machines allow you to perform cardiovascular and strength training at the same time” (Heavin, 2005:12).

Curves owner Barbara elaborates:

It’s all based on resistance. The machines all have cylinders, in those cylinders there’s liquid, much like swimming, you get that resistance through the water when you’re swimming...so that’s kinda how the hydraulic is based, you get that resistance through that liquid in that cylinder. The faster that you go, the faster you push or pull, the more resistance you create through that, so that’s where you get your strength training (S1:21).

She also explains the source of the cardiovascular training: “The first three minutes is, you warm up and then you wanna...get to that target heart rate and then you wanna sustain that heart rate the next twenty minutes and then you wanna cool down before you stretch” (S1:22). According to the Member Guide, resistance machines are vital to the cardiovascular portion of the workout: “You push forward with one muscle group and pull back with the opposing muscle group...This intensity easily elevates and sustains your target heart rate” (Heavin, 2005:12).

The Guide further explains the timing and organization of the workout. “For thirty minutes you move around the circuit, changing stations every thirty seconds” (Heavin, 2005:12). The circuit is comprised of these hydraulic weight machines alternated with “recovery stations” or exercise pads which allow the participant to maintain the target heart rate in between machines (S1:22). Barbara explains, “For that thirty seconds you’re on that machine you’re like

doing a sprint, you're going as fast as you can for that thirty seconds and then you will go over to what's called a recovery station for thirty seconds to let your muscles recover from that sprint before you go on to the next one" (S1:22). The machines in the circuit are organized in a specific manner: "Our circuit is designed...you have a lower body piece of equipment then you rest, then you have an upper body and then you rest...there are some core machines thrown in there as well" (S1:22). This ensures that the muscles receive adequate rest before they perform another "sprint."

The machines included in the Curves circuit vary between franchises, but there are some that all are required to have. Owners may add equipment as they see fit based on need, financial resources, or a desire for greater variety. Local Curves owner Barbara explains, "When you first open a Curves you start out with eight pieces of equipment and then eight stations and as your club grows you add more" (S1:7). The eight required machines are Biceps/Triceps, Leg Extension/Led Curl, Shoulder Press/Lat Pull, Hip Abductor/Adductor, Chest/Back, Squat, Ab/Back, and Leg Press. There are also six other machines for the circuit: Pec Dec, Dip Shrug, Oblique, Glute, Lateral Lift, and Recovery Stepper (see Figure 7 in Appendix B). The Recovery Stepper does not work any specific muscle group, but is, instead, intended to replace one of the recovery stations and I went to one local Curves franchise that had two of these machines in the circuit.

The final portion of the workout is the stretching. At the Waterville Curves, a poster on the wall includes pictures and descriptions of twelve stretches with directions to "Hold each stretch for seven seconds and then gently extend further for another seven seconds" (Heavin and Colman, 2003:185). There is one new machine which is intended for use during the stretching portion of the workout that the Waterville ownership intended to purchase soon. It is a large and



square and three stretches can be done on each of its four sides. Barbara explains the benefits of this piece of equipment: “The stretching is much better...than if you just do it freestyle like we do it here and it eliminates also the floor stretching for some of the ladies that have a little bit harder time getting down on the floor and up...and you can fit four ladies on an once” (S1:8). I used this machine when visiting local Curves franchises and Mary praised its arrival at the Curves in Meredith, New Hampshire.

At Curves, the machines, with the exception of the stretching station, are laid out in a circle and they face toward the center. This allows women to talk to each other while they are exercising and adds to the sense of community and support. Interestingly, at one local franchise I visited, the Abductor/Adductor machine faced away from the center of the circuit, perhaps so women would be more comfortable using it. In addition, the workout is performed to fast-paced music to add to the high energy level. Sociologist Tia DeNora discusses the importance of music in aerobics classes she observed in the UK: “Music may be understood to have power over bodies...Music is, in short, a material against which to shape up bodily processes, whether these are physiological...behavioral movements...co-ordination in some setting...self-perception of bodily state...or motivational levels” (DeNora, 2005:99).

Curves offers one more exercise related program to its members; the advanced workout. According to Barbara, the advanced workout was developed by the corporate office and will soon be added as an option at the Waterville Curves. Barbara explained this new option: “Person by person we as trainers help them determine the number of repetitions they can do just to go maybe to the next level of exercise. Right now we recommend that your heart rate be between sixty-five to seventy percent, but with the advanced workout you’re allowed to get your heart rate up to eighty percent” (S1:20-21). Barbara then explained the benefits of this new workout:

“You can burn a lot more calories, plus I did it with one lady so far just to see what it was gonna be like...she has been a member since the beginning, but was getting kinda bored with it, she comes five days a week, it is the same thing over and over again so she was kinda looking for somethin’ else” (S1:21). The advanced workout offers a higher level of exercise intensity for women who feel the Curves workout is too easy and although none of the women I interviewed had heard about it, many indicated their interest; it could become very popular. One woman said, “I hadn’t heard about that [the advanced workout]. I’d like to hear about it, cuz this is kinda mundane after a while” (NS2:1).

Although all respondents were interested in reaching fitness and health-related goals, the women expressed varying degrees of engagement with Curves. The recommended Curves workout is thirty minutes three times a week, but there is significant variation among members in Waterville. Survey respondents’ attendance ranged from two to six days a week with the length of workout varying from thirty minutes to two hours. However, for the women, a difference in time spent at Curves did not necessarily correspond to a different amount of exercise. One woman who used to work at Curves explained, “A lot of women, they’re talking and they’re just, and they go around a few extra times and I think they get the same workout” (NS3:7). This assertion is not necessarily true. If their heart rate is not within a certain range, they are not getting a cardiovascular workout, which is an important component of the Curves program.

In addition, while some exercise “religiously,” others vary their attendance with the seasons (NS3:18). When asked about the busy times of year, a former employee explained, “Springtime, pre-bathing suit season, we had tons of people join up, um, and then they would work out really hard, you know, until vacation time, which was like July/August, and then we wouldn’t see them and then they’d come back” (NS3:11). Although the travel pass allows

women to continue to attend Curves at other locations, one member who utilized this service described a change in her level of engagement while on vacation: “I kinda rush through it too, in Florida, because I’m so busy. I have a lot of family there and, you know, my mind is on vacation mode” (NS5:3).

Women also modify the prescribed workout to better suit themselves. For example, although some women come at the same times every week, others fit the workout in when they have errands or other commitments in the area. One woman explained how work affected her schedule at Curves: “I work a swing shift so I work different times different days that’s what, you know, doesn’t let me come [to Curves] at the same time all the time” (NS7:8). Since the Curves workout runs continuously throughout the day, women can enter and exit when they please, which is important for those with busy or flexible schedules and commitments. The hours of operation vary between franchises and some close during slow lunch hours, but in Waterville they are open six days a week: M/W 5:30am-7:00pm, T/Th 6:30am-7:00pm, F 5:30am-6pm, S 7:00am-11:00 am. One woman explained the benefit of Curves in comparison to other places, such as Champions: “They [Champions] have, uh, classes, aerobics, that was the time frame of ten or nine-thirty. I don’t want to have to be anyplace at a special time with this type of an activity” (NS4:12). Women also alter the actual physical activity they engage in at Curves.

The Curves workout offers a degree of individuality by letting women do whatever they please while on the recovery stations in between the machines. I observed some women dancing, jogging in place, or jumping rope. However, women also modify other aspects of the workout. For example, some women do not take their heart rates during exercise and others use the machines differently from the way they are instructed by Curves personnel; I observed one woman sitting on and using a machine backward. Barbara comments on those who use the

machines incorrectly: “Some people, you know, think they can do it better, think they have a better way, but Curves has spent millions and millions on research. They want us to get the maximum benefit out of the equipment, so even though it seems like something petty, it has a purpose” (S1:24). Barbara and other Curves staff members monitor the women and attempt to correct mistakes, but some women continue to use the machines incorrectly. Also, some women skip around the circle and do the machines out of order or do only the machines or only the rest stations to emphasize certain components of the workout. One interviewee explained: “I’ll, you know, I, you look around, you know, and everything like that, I just keep going to an empty uh exercise station” (NS2:11).

Overall, most women who completed surveys and interviews enjoyed the Curves workout. Survey respondents were asked about their favorite part of Curves and replies included the workout in general, the machines, the ability to work at their own pace, the music, the high energy atmosphere, the ability to socialize and network, support from fellow members, the fast pace to combat boredom, the small time commitment, the all-female atmosphere, and the stretching. Women also enjoyed the results; having higher spirits and energy levels, feeling great, and being in “good shape” and maintaining this condition for an extended period of time. The only complaints about Curves surrounded the lack of cardiovascular equipment and the desire for a harder workout addressed in the previous chapter.

According to exercise physiologist Cedric X. Bryant, who was cited earlier explaining the limits of circuit training and resistance machines, the Curves workout should be supplemented with other cardiovascular exercise such as jogging, brisk walking, or using an exercise machine (Schlosberg, 2004). Some interviewees were indeed engaged in these types of activities. One woman runs on a treadmill at home and another participates in other exercise activities at another

gym and does workout videos at home. A few of the women walked and one did so religiously: “I walk like seven or eight miles on the weekend with another girlfriend so I call it my cross training...I have one friend that walks in any kind of weather...there might have been three times in twenty-five years [that we didn’t go]” (NS4:5). A couple of other women expressed an interest in outdoor activities and one enjoyed being outdoors all year round: “I’ve been hiking and backpacking, I’m an avid cross-country skier and snowshoeing” (NS5:12). She believed that Curves also helped her continue to do these activities: “One thing Curves does is it helps me to be able to go hiking and to be able to go backpacking and snowshoeing because you need strength to do that” (NS5:17-18). In addition, a couple of women enjoyed golfing and one got exercise from her job at the railroad. Thus, some women attend Curves in addition to participating in outside exercise activities.

If they were already active, what made these women join Curves? Many of the women spoke of limiting factors that prevented them from getting enough exercise solely from these other activities including time, age, monotony, and the weather. Two women interested in outdoor sports conceded that they were not activities that could be done daily. One explained: “You can’t golf all the time obviously, you can’t bike all the time obviously” (NS4:7). Another added that her job precluded exercise: “I don’t do physical work, I have a desk job. I’m in management and so my only way to really get exercise is to go to Curves or go hiking or backpacking or you can’t do that every day of the week” (NS5:17). On the surveys some women also stated that the short workout was an incentive to add Curves to their lives and others listed it as one of their favorite things about Curves. In addition, Curves is important because it can be done alone: “I don’t have to rely on anybody, I just go when I want, do what I want, if, if I’m with a friend that’s great, if I’m not I-I meet somebody here” (NS4:2). In some cases, life

changes such as aging and retirement led women to join Curves. One woman explained the importance of physical limits: “I can’t get too rigorous like I used to. I used to be a runner, but I had arthroscopic surgery on my knee and that’s gone and just getting older” (NS2:1). For another woman, retirement meant a decrease in physical activity: “I have good bone density because of the physical job that I do, but I don’t do as much physical activity as I used to because in the last six or seven years my job changed...I’m probably getting half the amount I used to get and where I’m getting close to retirement time in a couple of years I wanted to increase my activity level” (NS7:2).

Another important limitation was monotony. One member explained: “Working out is very boring and I have to do different things all the time to be able to keep my motivation” (NS3:16). She also mentioned the importance of adding Curves because it provides strength training, something she felt had been “left out of women’s exercise” and some women indicated on surveys that this factor was important in the decision to add Curves (NS3:16). The last limitation is important specifically for the Curves in Waterville, or more generally for those in harsh climates, whether they be hot or cold. Women indicated specific limitations of winters in Waterville: “I tend to suffer a little bit of um Seasonal Affective Disorder [SAD], you know, I, this time of year drives me insane, so, and you’ve gotta get out and get exercise” (NS5:16). Another agreed and took a supplement as a result: “I have a tendency to get SAD in the winter times so, um, I take extra vitamin D” (NS6:16). The weather also restricts exercise for some women. One interviewee explained: “The sidewalks are cleared poorly, the streets are cleared poorly, you know, everything gets frozen, wet and then freezes and its very difficult to walk and dangerous so that’s why it’s always harder to get a nice workout in the winter” (NS2:2). Although I only spoke with women in New England about winter weather, warm weather could

cause problems as well, such as the danger of dehydration, sunburn, or heat stroke. More research is needed across the United States to investigate this claim.

As women who exercise, the interviewees were able to offer vital insight into what types of exercise programs are successful; women need to remain motivated, which can be achieved by making the workout fun, inspiring, and not boring. Music is one way to reach this goal. Barbara explains, “The music tries to get them excited and keep their heart rate up, keep them, you know, motivated” (S1:12). This assertion is confirmed by sociologist Tia DeNora, who emphasizes the motivational power of music on bodies. Some members also believed the music served this purpose: “You have to have something upbeat because otherwise you don’t feel like exercising to something that’s melancholic or slow, you know, up beat is good” (NS6:53). The camaraderie and social aspects of Curves also keep the workout from becoming boring: “I like it when it’s social, it goes by much faster when you’re talking to someone” (NS8:12). Mary expressed the importance of other distractions: “They have puzzles on the wall that you can do, like try and figure out, you know, while you’re going around” (NS8:12). Puzzles are also important because there are often prizes, including Curves merchandise or Curves “bucks” used to buy products, for those who complete them correctly. One interviewee explained: “You gotta find something you like to do. If you have to push yourself to go to exercise every day you’re not gonna do it, there’s no way, uh, so I think you need to make it part of your day, just like you take a shower...It [exercise] is a lifetime commitment, so you have to choose...something that you can do forever” (NS4:4,12). Curves is something that busy women can fit into their schedule, even if they vary the times they come. It is something they can do even if they are on vacation or don’t have a lot of energy. For many women, it can be lifetime commitment.

### *The Body at Curves*

Curves is a place of exercise and as such it is vital to consider conceptions of the body among members. In Waterville, these understandings became salient in discussions of clothing. My observations at Curves revealed a wide variety of clothing choices for women participating in the exercise program. While some came in workout clothes or changed upon arriving at the facility each day, before working out, others wore work clothes or jeans and sweatshirts. Even though most wore sneakers, some exercised in flat work shoes or just in socks. During one session I overheard a discussion between an employee and two members about clothing choices at Curves. One woman in work-type clothes was talking to Patty about clothing choice because Patty's pants had a hole in them. The woman said that she wore dingy pants to Curves once but hasn't worn them since. Patty encouraged her to wear them again because "no one at Curves cares because everyone does their own thing." Another woman said, "That's the great thing about Curves" and when no one replied she repeated herself and the other women agreed. Thus, for some members, Curves is a place where women can wear whatever they please and not feel judged. Though this may be the case, most women wore pants or capris (I observed during the colder months, this could likely change in the summer) and one woman explained the relationship of clothing choice to workout intensity: "I have to admit, when I'm wearing long pants and everything like that I'm less inclined to do it, but in the summer and spring when I'm in my, you know, the capris or the shorts, um, I will run in place" (NS2:11).

Clothing is also important because of the availability of apparel featuring the Curves logo sold at Curves locations by display and through Diane Magazine. The apparel is mostly t-shirts, but I saw women wearing Curves sneakers and also carrying around their workout clothes in bags with the Curves logo on it. In addition, during my observation, a display was put up selling



t-shirts advertising how many workouts the wearer had participated in; 100, 200, 300, 400 or 500. I saw one woman at Curves in Waterville wearing the 500 workouts T-shirt and Mary said she planned to buy one when she got to 300 workouts. There were also periodic orders placed for shirts saying “I’m Curvin” with the club location underneath and I saw women wearing these shirts at multiple Curves locations and sometimes shirts were given as prizes. These items serve both the women and the company. They are free advertising if the women wear them outside of Curves, even indicating a location where interested parties can sign up. They can also foster feelings of solidarity or shared belonging when they include the specific town name of the home club or even just the general Curves logo. In addition, they may serve as a status symbol or a motivating force when they indicate the number of workouts achieved or when they are given as prizes, for example, to women who refer new members.

To better understand the role of the body in the lives of Curves members I asked interviewees about their own ideal body, whether they were concerned about the ideal body image held by young American women and the growing problem of obesity, and their feelings about the body image promoted by Curves. When discussing their ideal bodies, many women focused on remaining active, internal health, disease prevention, and the importance of feeling healthy rather than looking a certain way, which nevertheless may have indirectly involved losing weight. When discussing contemporary American society, they expressed concern over the emphasis on appearance. One former employee explained that many women come to Curves with a negative body image: “Many of them were just so warped, you know, with their ideas of what they wanted to look like, which was just unrealistic for them to do...it’s not about, you know, comparing and all those things, it’s about you and figuring out your health and the goals that will work for you that are realistic and attainable” (NS3:16). Another respondent echoed this

concern in the larger society: “It just kills me when I see anorexic girls and people who are skinny say they’re fat or fat say they’re doomed or, you know, I just, that’s my dream someday is to work with people and help ‘em to get a better body image. No matter what you look like it’s not what you look like, it’s what’s inside” (NS5:18). Mary explained the importance of the media in fostering the problem: “They [young women] all think they have to be stick thin because of the models, television, movies, they’re ridiculously thin...sometimes I look at them and think how can they be that small and still be healthy, they just can’t” (NS8:9). These responses could be partly due to generational and age differences, but there is a general sentiment that many models and actresses are too thin and the women were also concerned with the well-documented dangers of obesity.

Obesity was recognized as a problem by all the women I interviewed and they offered various solutions. One woman was concerned with obesity and its effects: “I’m well aware [of] the health problems because of, it can lead to heart problems and arthritis and so and shorter lifespan and quality of life. I think quality of life is huge, I mean who cares if you live to be ninety if you’re in a bed, you know, if you can’t get up a flight of stairs and you can’t go anywhere or do anything” (NS6:54). This was particularly important for this woman because her sister-in-law was obese, had to have both knees replaced, and could not exercise at all. The women recognized a number of factors as contributing to the obesity crisis and offered solutions. One woman blamed the current American lifestyle: “People aren’t cooking and eating together, healthy meals. They come home, they sit in front of the TV and eat junk food instead of really getting out, I mean even toddlers...way too much TV, way too much computer, I mean they’re all fine, but there has to be time to be outside and play” (NS4:14). Another indicted consumer culture more generally and recognized the need for education and incentives: “Marketing is just

selling sell sell sell sell anything and everything they can between the magic weight loss pill or, you know...people are not educated at all and the doctors I think should be doing more...and we need insurances to pay for it [education for overweight or underweight individuals]” (NS5:22). One respondent recognized these issues and offered exercise as a solution: “I think that exercise really has been a missing link in both of those issues [obesity and eating disorders] that, you know, it’s all about dieting or not eating or, you know, make-up or surgery or whatever and less about taking care of your body” (NS3:15). Many believed that Curves offered a solution for obese women.

This claim is also made by Curves founder Heavin. The Curves Member Guide includes an appendix detailing the results of research supported by Curves International and performed at Baylor University to study the impact of the Curves weight management and exercise plans. One abstract on results relating to body composition concludes, “Results indicate that the Curves program is effective to promote and maintain weight loss particularly when following a VHP (very high protein) diet (Heavin, 2005:270). Heavin uses these studies to support his own belief in the ability of Curves to exact positive change, through weight loss, among members.

After discussing problems with body image in American society, I asked the interviewees if Curves promoted a positive body image and if it could make a difference in the obesity and body image crisis and many of the respondents believed that it presented an opportunity for women to create positive change. Most women believed Curves promotes a good body image. One said it was important because it’s “actually health-centered instead of looks centered...Curves is just ‘how are you feeling,’ you know, you know what I mean, ‘how are you meeting your goals, you know, like, really very encouraging, positive, atmosphere” (NS3:30). Other women supported the importance of this emphasis on health: “I think they promote a

healthy body image...they're not saying that if you come here you're gonna be skinny or beautiful or we're gonna help you find a boyfriend, you know what I mean, we're not the magic pill" (NS5:20). One woman explained that the positive body image promoted at Curves came not just from management, but from other members: "I think it's also the-the camaraderie, the encouragement of the members...for instance I was here the other day and a woman was telling me how her sister used to tell her how fat she was and she wasn't, she was fine" (NS4:15). Thus, for these women Curves promotes a positive body image by emphasizing health and feeling over appearance and also creating a place where women can define their bodies on their own terms and correct misconceptions adopted throughout their life experiences.

Is this true, is the body image promoted at Curves really positive and inclusive? If Curves is focusing on health it would seem that it is a positive body image, but some argue that in our society the importance of internal health cannot be separated from that of appearance. Sociologist Mike Featherstone explains this position: "Within consumer culture, the inner and outer body become conjoined: the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body" (Featherstone, 1982:171). Religious scholar Michelle LeLwica emphasizes this point in her discussion of the fitness ethic. Even if health is the focus, it cannot be completely separated from appearance. The Curves website, though emphasizing health, also implies that Curves is a magic pill of sorts for women who have struggled with weight loss for their entire lives. The story of Nancy Gale, mentioned earlier, is important. According to the website, she joined Curves and: "Now, two years later and 151 pounds lighter, healthier, and finally, happy...Her 22-year-old daughter is no longer ashamed of her. Now her daughter's friends say she is the 'coolest mom in the world!'" (Curves: Is Curves Right For Me? Success Stories). This story implies a direct connection between losing weight,

happiness, and acceptance and contradicts interviewee respondents who claimed Curves did not offer itself as a magic pill, perhaps pointing to differences between corporate publications and local clubs. Although not instantaneous, Curves is sold as a guaranteed solution, giving women feelings and attention they never had before. In addition, while observing at Curves I noticed that the Waterville club charges more for plus-size t-shirts. While this is a common practice in contemporary American society, the management, corporate or local, could have chosen to adjust the prices of the other sizes in order to charge the same for everyone.

Regardless of whether the Curves body image is completely positive, founder Heavin believes that the program is a success and that it has single-handedly halted the increase in the rate of obese women in the United States (Wellner, 2006:119). The women interviewed agreed that Curves can exact change. One woman believed in the power of Curves so strongly that she is considering opening one when she returns to her home country, The Netherlands. Others believed that Curves offers a comfortable environment in which women can reach their goals: “The right atmosphere for women, I think it’s great what they’re [Curves is] doing that way” (NS6:54). Another woman thought Curves provided good motivation for exercise, but could do more: “Encouraging people to uh take part, do more, you know, be here more often, keep it going [is good], um, maybe pamphlets on diet, health [would help]” (NS7:10).

#### *Other Offerings at Curves*

Curves members may also elect to take advantage of the weight management class or the Curves nutritional supplements. The Curves weight-loss class is called the Curves 6 Week Solution and local owner Barbara describes its purpose: “It teaches the Curves way of weight loss and weight management” (S1:10). The Curves website offers a more detailed description: “Six weeks of small, intimate classes where you’ll learn how to lose weight and keep it off for

good. The power lasts forever. The 6-week program costs include a tote bag full of the tools you need to help you reach your goals. The power lasts forever” (Curves: Weight Management Plan). The additional cost of this program prevented one interviewee from joining, but I spoke to one woman named Carolyn, who was concurrently participating in the weight loss class. She said that the group consisted of about eleven women and was taught by Beth, Barbara’s sister and Kaitlin’s mother.

At the time of the interview, there had only been one meeting, but she explained the Curves diet and her reaction to it so far. The Curves Member Guide, the text used in the class, explains the main points of the weight management program: “A specific period of time and effort to lose body fat while protecting muscle. Increase metabolism back to pre-diet levels without regaining lost weight. Begin to lose again until goal weight is achieved and then increase metabolism. Maintain goal weight by eating normally and dieting a few days or so each month” (Heavin, 2005:25). Carolyn explained the specifics of the diet, which has two variations:

They test you at the beginning of the book they kind of ask you, you answer questions, and based on those questions that you answer you can figure out which you are if you’re carb sensitive or calorie sensitive and if you’re calorie sensitive that means you should be on a higher carb diet, if you’re the other you should be on high protein” (NS6:2).

She explained the differences between the diets, but noted that the results are the same: “You’re gonna lose weight either way...if you’re doing the higher protein your protein percentage a day is forty-five percent, your carbs are thirty percent and fat is twenty-five percent, if you’re doing the higher carb the carb and the protein switch so it’s basically the same diet” (NS6:8). Although Carolyn took the test, she was not strong in either category so Beth said she could do either, but explained that on the higher protein diet you will lose weight faster (NS6:2). The Member Guide also offers more specific information about each diet including meal plans, recipes, and pages to record food intake.

Each version of the Curves diet has three distinct phases. Phase I is intended to produce rapid weight loss and involves a twelve hundred calorie a day diet, with the above percentages of proteins, carbs, and fats, depending on the version used. During this phase, which lasts one week, participants must make sure to drink eight (eight-ounce) glasses of water a day and take a “good multivitamin and mineral supplement” and they have the option of having one “Curves Protein Shake” each day. All three can be marked off at the bottom of the daily chart. During Phase II, participants increase caloric intake to sixteen hundred calories a day, continuing to drink water, take a multi-vitamin, and have the option of drinking a Curves shake. They remain in this phase until they reach their goal, plateau, or need a break from dieting. If they are losing at least one pound a week they should stay on Phase II, but if they have gone two consecutive weeks without weight loss, have reached their goal, or are sick of dieting they shift to Phase III to increase metabolism (Heavin, 2005:29-30,153).

Phase III is used when the goal weight is reached, weight loss has plateaued, or a break from dieting is necessary. The Guide explains: “Phase III is not really a diet; in fact it is mostly eating. Eating is what stops the hormonal changes associated with starvation and raises metabolism” (Heavin, 2005:234). This idea is the key to the Curves diet. Other diets restrict caloric intake, but do not take account of the fact that the body’s metabolism will slow down to compensate for this loss. The Guide states: “As we begin to lose weight on a diet, our bodies sense that we are starving and hormonal changes occur which make us more fuel efficient. The longer we diet, the heavier the saturation of starvation hormones and the slower our metabolic rate becomes” (Heavin, 2005:28). The Curves diet offers a solution: “the key to raising metabolic rate is to never regain more weight than you can lose within two to three days. That’s how long it takes your body to begin producing starvation hormones. Eating and time will allow starvation

hormones to dissipate and will increase metabolism” (Heavin, 2005:28). For those women who have reached a plateau, the book recommends staying on Phase III for a month or two to increase metabolism, while not regaining weight already lost (Heavin, 2005:235). For those who have reached their goal, Phase III offers a maintenance scheme. They pick a low weight (their current weight) and a high weight (3-5 pounds over the current weight) and begin eating normally (two thousand to twenty-five hundred calories a day). They weigh themselves daily and when they get to the high weight, do Phase I for two to three days until back to the low weight then do Phase III until they reach the high weight and repeat the cycle. The book offers a chart for recording weight during this process. The idea is that it will take longer and longer to gain back the weight until dieting is only necessary a couple of days every month. There is also an option to control Phase III cycles by counting calories instead of closely monitoring weight. Phase III is the secret to the Curves claim of “permanent results without permanent dieting” (Curves: Weight Management Plan).

The weekly meetings offer information specifically on the Curves diet, while also addressing general health issues. Carolyn explained the first meeting: “We watched, um, the founder...he talked the first night and, uh, for a little bit and gave us some ideas and then we talked a lot and then Beth...talked about the importance of water” (NS6:12). She continued, “Some of it I knew, of course, just common sense from experience, but some of it, she, I didn’t know, you know, details of what being hydrated does for you...we learned that it’s water that flushes out the toxins” (NS6:12,13). Carolyn added that she passed this information on to another woman she saw at an Augusta Curves, a retired nurse who didn’t drink anything except coffee: “I said, ‘Yeah we learned about water last night’ and I said, ‘You’re poisoning yourself’” (NS6:13). Thus, the meetings provide valuable health information that the women can share with



others. In addition, the meetings involve a weigh-in so that participants can track their progress.

The week that I spoke with Carolyn, Beth was out of town, but left instructions behind: “She said we should do that [get weighed and measured] even though Beth’s not here” (NS6:19). The weekly meetings provide information, consistency and support for the women participating in the weight management class.

Although she had only been on the diet for about a week, Carolyn was enjoying it and already saw results. First of all, she felt much better generally and attributed this to the increase in water consumption: “I think that’s part of why I feel so good cuz I probably wasn’t drinking enough water” (NS6:12). She also believed the water helped with other ailments: “My lower back was starting to get sore with arthritis and since I’ve been on this diet I think again the water, just drinking the water, it lubricates the joints” (NS6:21). She also believed the diet was helping with symptoms from another condition she had; hypothyroidism: “One of the major symptoms [of improper medication for hypothyroidism], you’ll feel tired, more tired, and, uh, mental confusion, and fuzzy brain and all that which actually, since I’ve been on this diet has improved, both of those things have improved a lot” (NS6:17). She explained her feelings about the diet: “I feel really good, you know, as far as energy, I’m not hungry obviously, I’m eating so much food, I’m eating now” (NS6:9). She used this as a point of comparison to other diets, such as Atkins, where certain food groups, like fruits or vegetables, are forbidden and explained that eating fruit prevented her from craving sweets (NS6:9). Lastly, the diet affected her participation in other Curves activities: “Now that I’m doing this weight management thing I’m really feeling like I need to come more often [to workout]” (NS6:2). Carolyn experienced many positive outcomes during her short time on the diet and mentioned that if the long-term effects were positive, she would recommend it to her sister-in-law, who was in desperate need of losing weight for health-

related reasons.

The weight loss class offers members another level of engagement at Curves, but there are also varying levels of commitment within this group. During the class there were bingo boards posted on the wall in the back room for each participant with spaces for attending the weekly class and losing a certain number of pounds. While some boards were covered with stickers, others indicated that the participant missed weekly sessions, which is important considering there are only six meetings. One interviewee who used to work at another Curves franchise sat in on a class there and witnessed similar variation: “There were, you know, two [in the weight management class] that just weren’t working very hard” (NS3:3). She explained that, in contrast, the other women in the class were able to maintain their weight loss and remain energetic members of Curves. Thus, though members can become more engaged at Curves by joining the weight loss class, not all who participate pursue their goals with the same dedication.

In conjunction with the weight-loss class, Curves offers nutritional supplements especially for women. A pamphlet lists the following offerings: Complete Biomultiple, Bioavailable Calcium, Joint and Connective Tissue Support, Herbal Fem Support, PMS Formula, Glucose Management, and the Meal Replacement Drink which comes in chocolate or vanilla flavors. The pamphlet explains: “Just like our workout, these formulas have been specifically designed for women and their special needs. We’ve worked with the global leader in dietary supplement production to make sure that our entire line of products is on the cutting edge of the nutrition industry” (Curves Premium Dietary Supplements). The Member Guide explains the importance of nutritional supplements in contemporary American society: “Even if you eat well, chances are you are missing nutrients in your diet. Most minerals are no longer in the foods we eat. Given enough time, a nutrient deficiency will ultimately manifest itself in disease” (Heavin,

2005:34). Heavin discusses the importance of anti-oxidants to protect cells from free radicals (Heavin, 2005:35). Although Curves offers these supplements, interviewees did not feel pushed to buy them. One woman explained: “I don’t know anybody that does [take the Curves supplements] cuz they don’t really push them at all, it’s just there, if you want it you get it and I’ve never seen them push it on anybody and they never even mentioned it to me” (NS5:7). Using the supplements is simply another way to engage in Curves.

The Curves Weight Management program includes recipes and menus for the women to follow during each phase of the diet, but allows a measure of self-control. It reminds them that they do not have to do the days in the order listed in the book and also offers a page of substitutions. For example, three ounces of tofu is the same as one egg, three ounces of turkey breast or three ounces of chicken breast, so it can be replaced if the woman does not like tofu (Heavin, 2005:68). Carolyn explained how it works: “If you’re changing what’s already there, um, we, they have a place we can write in calories and the differences and whatnot” (NS6:15). She also makes other unauthorized changes: “Today I’m just gonna do a Wendy’s chili, I figure that’s high protein, you know, I brought in a small apple to go with it so instead of making lunch today I’ll just do the small apple that’ll be something I can eat and I don’t have to worry about it so I don’t think you have to be so rigid” (NS6:18). She made smaller modifications to suit her own interests, such as buying “natural” deli meats because of her concern with the nitrates found in regular deli meat.

In addition, some women supported certain aspects of the Curves program while rejecting others. For example, one woman strongly believed in the weight-loss class, but denounced the need for additional supplements, although she recognized their importance for some women at Curves:

That whole understanding of 'I need to fuel my body to raise my metabolism and continue working out' it seems like a very good easy way to maintain a good healthy weight for yourself...I'm not a big proponent of special supplements. I think if you try hard enough you can get, you know, have a good healthy diet and just take a multivitamin or something like that, but some people are really, you know, if that's what it takes to get you, you know, motivated 'I'm gonna have my Curves milkshake' I think that's wonderful (NS3:3,4).

Another woman rejected the need for supplements completely: "I'm such a fanatic of you need to eat healthy and if you eat healthy you don't need a nutritional supplement" (NS5:7). Although Heavin insists that nutritional supplements are necessary in contemporary American society as a result of food processing methods, not all women accept that aspect of the Curves program.

Women spoke about other motivating forces at Curves. One interviewee explained that they stopped publicizing individual weight loss achievement in Waterville, something she believed to be an important source of inspiration (NS2:17). Individual weight loss was publicized at other Curves locations I visited, although it is possible that they were removed in Waterville to emphasize the importance of health and feelings over weight and numbers. However, the women also expressed the importance of self-motivation to achieve success. One woman stated: "They [Curves] can only have an influence if that person is ready for it" (NS5:19). One said, "It's like the old cliché that says 'you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink'" (NS6:54). Another explained: "If you can keep people motivated and coming back, um, you know, I think it's [Curves is] a good thing, you know, it helps" (NS4:15).

In sum, Curves is a place where women can work to change their bodies and their conceptions of themselves. It provides exercise, which is medically proven to be vital in promoting health and this is the reason many of the women joined. Exercise history and understandings of the body are important when investigating the role Curves plays in the lives of its members. The women offered helpful insights into the problematic place of exercise and the body in contemporary American culture and the importance of personal agency in exacting change.

## **Chapter Six - Curves: Issues of Autonomy and Constraint**

My investigation of Curves revealed the importance of its status as a franchise as well as the salience of specific issues relating to religion, gender, and exercise and the body. However, it is important to note an underlying theme that can be seen in each of these facets of life at Curves: the balance between autonomy and constraint. In order to understand Curves as a social phenomenon it is vital to consider the tension and relationship between individual action and the influential power of the franchise system, and specifically at Curves, the beliefs of the founder as they relate to and influence his business practices.

Curves allows women, whether they are owners or members, a certain degree of autonomy, but the franchise system necessarily involves a balance between the individual owner and the corporation. In the case of Curves, there is a certain degree of corporate standardization, with only minimal oversight by the company. For instance, the regional manager in Maine is responsible for seven or eight hundred clubs and has not personally visited the Waterville Curves in the last year. Barbara explained that although it is not officially permitted, some owners add tanning beds or other fitness classes in addition to the standard Curves workout. At Curves in Waterville, the owners use the franchise to promote their own products, such as non-Curves supplements and home-made holiday wreaths.

Some franchise owners would appreciate greater corporate oversight in certain circumstances. Recent events at Curves franchises in the area led local Curves owner Barbara and another former Curves employee to ask for more corporate intervention. Barbara expressed a desire to receive more information from the corporate office on the closing of the nearby Fairfield Curves. Former employee Jessica wished management had reacted faster when informed about the situation at the Curves in Fairfield where the owner stopped paying her

employees.

The lack of corporate oversight allows franchisees to have autonomy in decisions regarding their clubs. Owners may inject their own personalities into the franchises by choosing the music they will play, the charities in which they will participate, and the machines they will include in their circuit. These personal decisions also include the power of the franchisee to determine the place of religion at their Curves franchise.

Religion is an important part of the Curves corporation for founder Gary Heavin, but owners are allowed some autonomy in shaping the use of religion, if it is present at all, in their own clubs. Curves franchisees do not have to belong to a certain religious denomination in order to own a franchise. Heavin explains his criteria for new franchisees: “We're looking for people with passion, and we'll teach them how to run a business” (Wellner, 2006:121). In order to reach this goal, many owners are former members of Curves, like Barbara and Kaitlin in Waterville. Through visiting other area Curves locations I found that at most franchises the religious beliefs of the owners were not evident as there was no religious material posted and no Christian music was played. While browsing online message boards, I discovered a discussion on religion at Curves on the Cooking Light Community webpage. Some women said they did not encounter it at all: “The one I belonged to and the ones I travelled [*sic*] to had absolutely no religious overtones.” Others stressed the individuality of each franchise with respect to religion: “I used to belong to a Curves and never saw anything slightly religious being pushed there. While not all locations push the founder's particular brand of evangelical fundamentalist Christianity, some do.” Also, one woman went to a Curves where the owners were non-Christian: “The Curves that I used to belong to was owned by a Jewish family. Since Curves is a franchise, individual owners may choose to make their religious or political views known, but many do not” (Cooking Light

Community: Curves Members: Is religion pushed at your Curves?). Curves' religious overtones may also vary by region.

Two women on this particular message board were Canadian and discussed the difference between Canada and the United States. One said, "I believe the Canadian franchises (at least in my area) are not like that [openly religious]. In Canada, for the most part, religion is not quite so "in your face" as it is in the States." While this is a personal opinion, it demonstrates the autonomy that individual franchisees have with the use of religion in their clubs. Another Canadian explained: "I belong to Curves in Montreal and have been to quite a few across Canada and in Florida. Not one of the many Curves that I have been to had any type of religious promotions going on. The music has not been religious either. IMHO [in my humble opinion], each Curves is different and should be judged on their own merit." (Cooking Light: Curves Members: Is religion pushed at your Curves?).

As evidenced from these posts, religion is important for some women who workout at Curves; members may choose to join a Curves that suits their individual religious needs, whether that be a location that is overtly Christian, like the founder, or one that does not address religion at all. For example, the Canadian woman above who goes to Curves in Montreal stressed the importance of judging each individual location and made no indication that she planned to leave the club. However, for other women the religious emphasis at some locations is a turn-off from the entire company. The woman who started this online discussion did not know about the religious affiliation of Curves, but learned about it when she saw a Bible placed prominently in the center of the exercise circuit while using her travel pass. She was upset that she had not been notified of the religious aims of the company before joining and concluded, "I have chosen to leave Curves at the end of the month." Thus, members may choose to exercise at a Curves

without overt religious messages and always have the option of withdrawing their membership, although this might have health implications.

Curves members may also choose to remain at a Curves franchise with subtle religious messages and simply ignore them. One former Curves member explained her experience: “While not told that it [Curves] was "Christian-based" or whatever language you want, it was fairly apparent to me that the franchisee/owner wanted to have a Christian-themed room -- there were murals with some Scriptural quotes and a few Christian knicky-knacky things (wall plaques, etc) around. None of that particularly bothered me, as I didn't feel that anyone was out to convert or preach to me.” This member eventually left because of foot problems; until then, however, she was able to ignore the Christian undertones and focus on working out.

The issue of religion also becomes salient when considering community service events at Curves. The founder’s position as an evangelical Christian is partially responsible for his desire to sponsor and encourage these activities and individual owners may choose whether they want to support outreach programs sponsored by religious groups. My interviewees stressed the importance of choice with regard to participation in these activities; not one felt pressured to partake in these events, whether or not they were religiously affiliated. Thus, members can choose whether to participate in certain activities based on their religious beliefs.

Curves members who are bothered by religious undertones at the franchise or corporate level have the opportunity to organize themselves to assert their own opinion without forfeiting membership. This is especially useful for those who enjoy the workout and have an attachment to certain aspects of Curves, such as a connection to the franchise owner. The woman with foot problems explained that this personal connection was one of the reasons she wanted to remain a member, “Also, I really liked the owner, as she was funny, bubbly and "real" (opposed to another



location that I had visited which had a lot of plasticity [*sic*, unfriendly women there).” One woman Teresa seized on this opportunity, creating “Curvers for Choice,” and now other Curves members who may want to continue at Curves but remain uncomfortable about the implications of the religious affiliations of their franchise or the corporate office can exercise their own opinions in a constructive and organized manner.

Some aspects of Curves support a different type of independence: freedom from men in the larger society and the male gaze. Many women expressed a desire to have a space where they could exercise separate from men, who may hit on them in a co-ed exercise facility. They wanted an all-female space where they could feel comfortable and empowered where they could do “their own thing” and escape from the largely “male-dominated society.” (NS4:9) In this sense, Curves is empowering because it provides women a place to build community and organize around issues they find important. It allows them to advance their entrepreneurial enterprises, especially those that are catered especially to women, such as the sale of body products.

Members also enjoy significant autonomy with respect to their level of engagement with services offered by the franchise. Women can choose to participate in the weight management class, take the nutritional supplements, read the complimentary Curves magazine, buy the Curves workout apparel, and, at some locations, do the more intense advanced workout. There are also levels of variation within these activities. For example, women in the weight management class have some measure of autonomy when constructing healthy meals; they can replace foods that are comparable in calorie levels and fat, carbohydrate, and protein composition and they can mix and match the daily food suggestions. Participation in the actual workout also involves individual agency. Women can come at any time of the day and although the standard Curves workout is three times a week for thirty minutes each time, members may come as often as they like, stay as

long as they want, and put in as much effort as they see fit.

These levels of autonomy in the use of exercise at Curves are important because they may offer the empowerment and motivation necessary to continue membership at Curves and provide the dedication to reaching individual goals. For example, many women mentioned the danger of a workout program that is boring. The autonomy at Curves means that women can adjust their workout if they begin to feel that it is monotonous. For example, Barbara explained that the advanced workout was developed in part to combat boredom that may have set in after years of attending Curves and to offer women a higher level of exercise. In addition, the weight management class is intended for members who have not seen sufficient results simply by adding Curves to their daily routine. The Member Guide explains, “Many of our members who have less than twenty pounds to lose may reach their weight loss goals without having to diet...For those who need to lose more than twenty pounds or who have sabotaged their metabolism through years of yo-yo dieting, they will need an effective weight loss method” (Heavin, 2005:25). The interviewee in the weight loss class explained, “I like this weight thing I’m doing right now too, ‘cuz I think that’s an important thing too. I think that, you know, I haven’t really lost weight just exercising” (NS6:55). She also mentioned that participating in the weight management class motivated her to come to Curves more often than she used to. Thus, the ability to personalize the Curves experience is vital to women’s continued involvement.

In a similar vein, the Curves workout and weight loss plan does not prescribe that women reach a certain goal body type or weight. When members join they are weighed and measured and then asked about their personal goals. If they are unsure what these may be, as I was, the Curves staff can help them determine appropriate goals. Many women expressed their goals at Curves as being health-related; to prevent osteoporosis or diabetes, for example. The emphasis

on individual achievement is empowering and also allows women some, though not complete, autonomy from the larger society and gym culture, which often emphasizes thinness over health

### *Limits to Autonomy: Constraint at Curves*

The aspects of Curves discussed above support the autonomy of franchisees with respect to the parent company and of members with respect to both Curves International and individual franchise owners, but certain characteristics of the Curves program impose problematic constraints on franchisees and members. The franchise system implies that there is some form of control from the corporation. In the case of Curves, this involves standardization of machines and control over use of the Curves name and logo. Although having identical machines is important for women who utilize the travel pass and exercise at various Curves locations, it can also be seen as a type of control. It is possible that other types of machines would be useful for the women that participate, such as the availability of cardiovascular machines for those who want a more focused cardio workout.

The franchise system perpetuates corporate constraint in another sense because it was developed to meet the founders' goals and as such it places limits on the services that the clubs can provide. For example, Gary Heavin's religious beliefs led him to understand it as his calling to serve women by providing them with exercise facilities. As a result, Heavin chose the franchise system to ensure that it could reach large numbers of women. In addition, he aimed to reach women in areas not currently served by gyms. To reach this goal, he cut amenities found at other exercise facilities, such as childcare and showers. While the enterprise is extremely successful, the corporate decision to exclude childcare may limit the ability of women with young children to participate in the program.

The franchise system is also related to the issue of religion in that the founder is an evangelical Christian and his beliefs impact company and franchise operations. Although franchisees may choose the extent to which they proselytize through their clubs, if at all, a tension prevails that stems from Heavin's beliefs, such as the corporate promotion of charity events. Community participation through donating food to shelters and pledging money to Breast Cancer walks is likely to be considered positive, even by those franchisees and members who are not religious, but it is important to understand that the close relationship between Curves and community service stems from Heavin's religious beliefs. The issue of religion becomes more pertinent through his personal donations.

Gary Heavin's donations to pro-life groups are related to his religious beliefs. The money he earns through Curves is a result of the millions of women who pay membership dues, and is especially connected to those who purchase Curves merchandise, such as t-shirts, sneakers, and other workout apparel. According to the Inc. Magazine article, the royalty cap limits income to Curves International, but the practice is useful for attracting new franchisees and additional money is generated through product sales. The author explains, "Franchisees are required to purchase all of their Curves t-shirts, water bottles, vitamin supplements, and so on from Curves; such products currently are a \$25 million-a-year business" (Wellner, 2006:121). Thus, Heavin's personal income, the funds he donated to pro-life groups, come from Curves members. In addition, Heavin has a long relationship of donation to the Salvation Army, a group significantly more active in proselytizing Christianity and converting than is Curves.

Corporate and societal constraints become salient when discussing Curves because of the lack of childcare, but also through Curves' position as a gendered space. This characterization is closely related to constraints on exercise and the body. Curves caters only to women and can be

seen as a reaction to other gendered spaces, namely the gender divisions in co-ed exercise facilities that can make it uncomfortable for some women to participate in strength training. By offering an alternative, Curves is empowering these women. However, there are some concerns that the Curves workout may not be enough; Cedric X. Bryant insists that additional cardiovascular exercise is necessary and that hydraulic resistance machines are not sufficient over the long term. If this is the case, Curves can be seen as a separate, but unequal space which enforces women's inferiority relative to men. Also, Curves is run by a man who believes he has been called by God to serve women, and, as such, it re-enforces the idea that women must be saved by a man, they are not capable of doing it themselves. In addition, despite a general focus on health, Curves success stories support the importance of losing weight to achieve "health" and to gain respect and approval from the larger society, including from men. This underlying message constrains women by requiring them to comply with societal goals that may not be healthy or realistic.

This research project revealed the importance of Curves as a franchise, while also highlighting the salience of specific issues relating to religion, gender, and exercise and the body. Through the course of the research, I discovered that an underlying theme is present in these seemingly diverse aspects of life at Curves--the balance between autonomy and constraint. Recognizing and considering this tension between individual action and constraint through the lens of the franchise system and the beliefs of the founder as they relate to and influence his business practice enriches the understanding of Curves as a social phenomenon.

## Chapter Seven - Curves: Postscript

This project gave me a deeper understanding of field research and taught many lessons of value, not just for myself, but for anyone interested in pursuing a similar study. My experience in the field helped me to understand the important aspects of successful research, including time management and issues related to literature reviews, participant observation, survey development, interviews, unexpected topics, and the writing process. This project, as an exploratory study, also raises many questions that could be addressed in future research projects on Curves.

When beginning any research endeavor, it is important that the researcher carefully plans the amount of time available for completing the project and even overestimates how long he or she believes it will actually take to complete. In this case the research had to be completed in one academic year and, although I deem the project to be a success, I would alter the amount of time spent on the different components of the research if I could go back and start it over. The first semester was spent doing literature review, participant observation in Waterville and other area locations, and in beginning the interviews. Although the original goal was to finish the fieldwork in this three-month period of time, in actuality I needed the month of January to complete this segment, in part because I took on too many other classes in the first semester. In addition, transcribing and coding the interviews was a painstaking process that took longer than I imagined and ultimately delayed the process. Coding is time consuming because it is a multi-step process. Initially, I coded each interview pulling out important topics on which to focus my research. As I began to explore these issues more carefully, I had to perform more focused and in-depth coding on each of these main subject areas. In the end, time was short and, unfortunately, I was not able to complete follow-up interviews with Barbara, the owner, and other interviewees with whom I would have liked to have talked to more extensively. I will be

more attentive to this important aspect of the research process in future projects.

Designing and completing my own research also allowed for valuable insight into issues surrounding the particular methodologies I chose: participant observation, surveys, and interviews. My notes from participant observation were handwritten as they were taken in the field. However, in retrospect, I would have typed them up after each session because they were significantly harder to read when I went back to them later in the project. The surveys, though extremely useful in providing background information and the contacts with women who would serve as my pool for the interviews, could have included more questions relating to the body and gender at Curves which might have enhanced and complimented the interview data. In addition, had there been more time to pursue the project, it would have been interesting to distribute these surveys at other Curves locations in the area. The interviews were the most important aspect of the study, as they provided the bulk of the data and allowed the women to speak extensively in their own words about Curves. However, in retrospect, I would have taken notes in addition to tape-recording these guided conversations, as there was sometimes background humming on the tapes that made some segments of the interviewee responses nearly impossible to understand.

One of the most important aspects of the project is the write-up because it allows the researcher and the readers to make sense of the data obtained in the field. I found that this was both the most rewarding part of the research and the most challenging because it required me to do extensive coding and make theoretical links between the established theory and the data. Forcing myself to write a new section or edit a completed one each week was vital to continuing the momentum of the project and meetings with my advisor regarding these sections were invaluable to me. However, as a result of the delayed fieldwork mentioned earlier, the writing process was pushed back and writing extensively in a short period of time can be especially

stressful and tiring. As a result, I lost focus and began placing more emphasis on the theoretical side of the research instead of accentuating my own data. Luckily, my advisor was able to catch this change and pointed it out to me, but during this confusion, I found it necessary to take a week off in order to regroup. I suggest that when devising a writing schedule, the researcher include one week around the middle of the process in which they plan to take a break and not write at all. For me, these days were essential in allowing me to pull my thoughts together, rest, and give the amount of focus and energy required to finish the project.

One consequence of completing this research project is the affirmation of my passion for qualitative research methods. I always found it fascinating to read qualitative studies because I feel there is an inherent value in learning directly from conversations with others. My research at Curves supports the importance of such projects. I learned a lot from observation and from collecting surveys, but the interview data was priceless. In the interviews I was able to get information that would not have been available to me otherwise, such as the details of owning a Curves franchise. The observation helped me see how Curves worked. The surveys provided me with demographic information and general areas of interest, but the interviews let me hear the women tell their own stories. This multifaceted qualitative research allowed me to gather background information and then interact with real people and I feel that I was truly able to learn the importance of Curves in their lives.

Due to specific time constraints and to the nature of exploratory research more generally, it is inevitable that this project raises many questions for future research on Curves. My research focused explicitly on the Curves in Waterville, Maine, with supplementary visits to franchises in the surrounding area. As such, it would be interesting to conduct a study of Curves in another part of the United States. Specifically, looking comparatively at Curves locations, for example,



in Texas where the franchise began or on the west coast would be illuminating. These geographic regions may possess different understandings of the importance of religion or exercise and the body that would be reflected at Curves. They are also in different climactic regions, which may be of importance. It would also be interesting to study Curves locations in more urban areas, where there is likely to be competition from other exercise facilities. Do other fitness centers change their marketing styles or offer women-specific services to compete with Curves? A comparison between Curves and other women-only fitness franchises such as “It Figures” and “Lady of America Fitness Clubs,” which include services such as aerobics and may have tanning, saunas and childcare would also be worthwhile (Lady of America: Company Profile). It would be interesting to compare women who choose these franchises to those who choose Curves and find out why they pick the program they do.

It would also be interesting to explore issues of class and race both in terms of the class and racial characteristics of Curves participants and the roles of these social variables in shaping exercise patterns of women in general. Does Curves in fact cater to all women or is it only serving certain subsets of the population? I would also like to look more closely at the role age plays at Curves. In areas where there is competition from other exercise facilities, do women choose different programs based on their age? Related to this question is the effect of the female gaze or young persons’ gaze in general. I briefly explored the impact of the male gaze, but I feel that the women at Curves may also feel intimidated by younger women at other gyms. It would be worthwhile to investigate further the women’s motivations for joining Curves as they relate to class, race, and age.

A last point of comparative study could be Curves locations in other countries. What are the differences between franchises in other countries? Does Curves face competition with

franchises started in these specific countries? Does Curves change its image when marketing in other countries, such as toning down religious messages? Can Curves grow in countries with different beliefs about the role of women in society?

My research, though stressful at times, ultimately was enlightening and rewarding. I hope that this exploratory study raises awareness about Curves and issues about the place of gender, religion, and exercise and the body in contemporary American society. I hope, also, that this research inspires further study of Curves, both in the United States and abroad, because with one Curves for every two McDonald's in the United States, it is a significant cultural phenomenon.

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## Appendix A

### *Curves Survey*

**Directions:** Please answer as many of the following questions to the best of your ability. **This survey should only take you about 5-10 minutes to complete.** When choices are given please circle the best answer or enter your own response in the “other” category. Your responses in this study will remain confidential and anonymous and the records in this study will be kept private. Your name will not be placed on any of the questionnaires you complete and research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. Please place your completed surveys in the envelope provided, seal it and place it in the box. Thank you in advance for taking the time and effort to answer my questions and help me better understand Curves.

### **Personal Information**

- 1. How old are you?**
- 2. What is your marital status?**
  - a. Single
  - b. Married
  - c. Separated
  - d. Divorced
  - e. Widowed
  - f. Other (please explain, i.e. in a committed relationship with a live-in significant other)
- 3. Do you have any children? If yes, how many? (If no skip to question 6)**
  - 4. What are their ages and genders?**
  - 5. Do they live with you full-time? If not, what percentage of time do they reside with you?**
- 6. What town do you currently live in?**
- 7. How long have you lived in the town you live in now?**
- 8. Do you have paid employment? (If no please explain below and then skip to question 11)**
  - 9. What is your occupation?**
  - 10. How many hours do you work a week?**



**11. What is your annual household income?**

- a. Under \$25,000
- b. \$25,000-\$40,000
- c. \$40,001-\$55,000
- d. \$55,001-\$70,000
- e. \$70,001-\$90,000
- f. above \$90,001

**Curves Participation**

**12. How long have you been a member of Curves?**

**13. Why did you decide to join Curves?**

- a. To lose weight
- b. To meet people
- c. I was unhappy with my current gym
- d. Other (please explain)

**14. How did you hear about Curves?**

- a. Word of Mouth
- b. Newspaper or magazine (please specify which one) \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Television show
- d. Curves website
- e. Other website (please specify which one) \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Other (please explain)

**15. Were you involved in any other gyms or fitness programs before you joined Curves?  
(If no, skip to question 20)**

**16. What were the other programs?**

**17. Are you still involved in them? (If not please explain why and skip to question 20)**

**18. What made you add Curves?**

**19. Do you plan to continue membership at Curves and your other gym?**

**20. Did you join Curves alone or with friends?**

**21. Do you find Curves to be a significant financial burden given your household income?**

**22. How often do you attend Curves? How many days a week and how long each day?**

**23. Do you find Curves to be a significant burden on your time? Why or why not?**

24. Do you have a regular schedule at Curves? If so, what is it? If not, why not?
25. Do you always attend the same Curves location, in this case the one on Main Street in Waterville? If not, what other locations do you attend?
26. How do you feel about the staff at Curves?
27. Are you involved in any other activities outside of your home such as a church, service organization, PTA, etc? Please explain.
28. Has Curves met your expectations? Please explain why or why not.
29. What part of Curves do you like best?
30. Have you had any negative experiences at Curves? If so, please explain.

**Other Comments:**

If you are willing to meet with me - at a time and place of your convenience - to discuss your participation in Curves more thoroughly please contact me by phone at (207) [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED] or leave your contact information (name, telephone number or email address, and best times to contact you) on the bottom of this form. Thank you for your participation.

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Contact information deleted for reasons of privacy.

## Appendix B

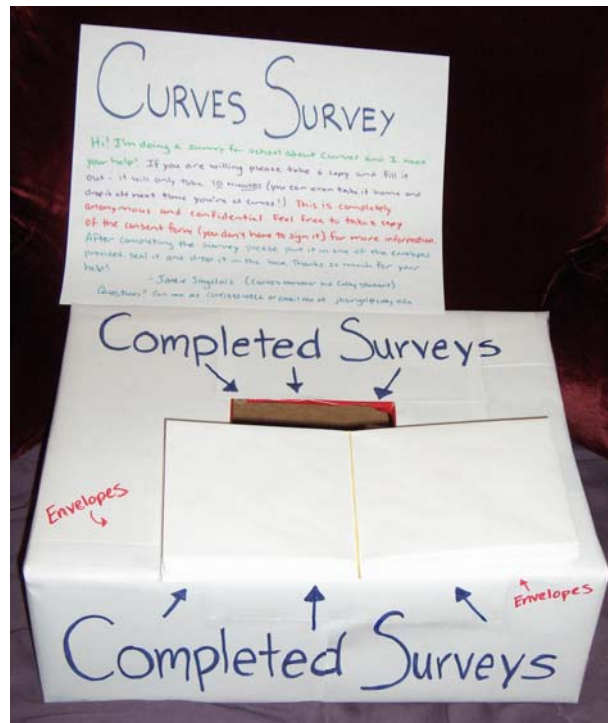


Figure 1. Box used to collect surveys at Waterville Curves, shown with sign and envelopes.

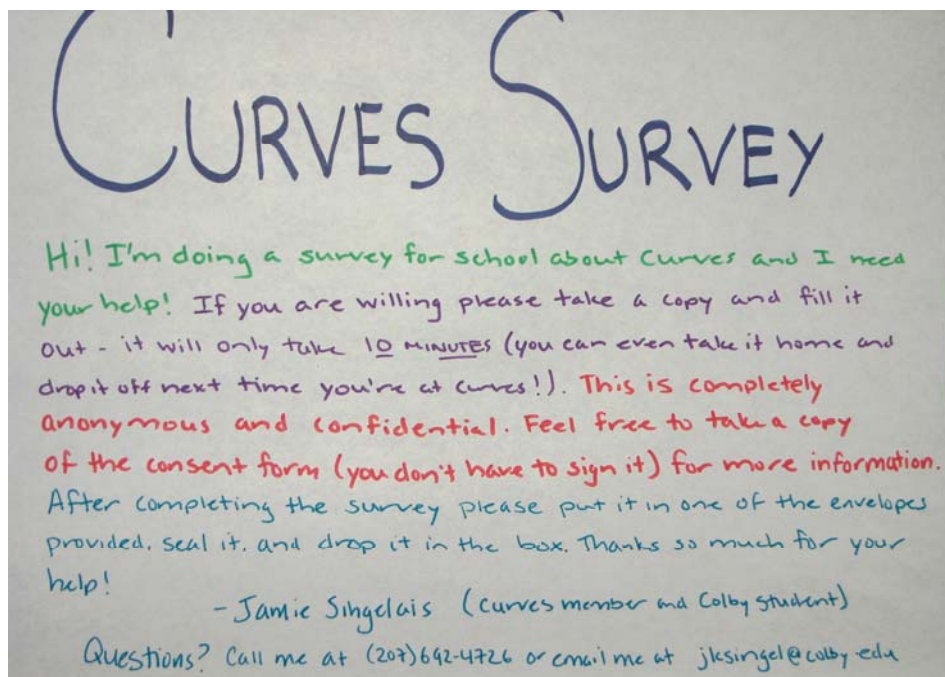


Figure 2. Close-up view of Sign posted with survey collection box in Waterville.



Figure 3. Front side of key tag, the back side has a bar code that is scanned by the computer.

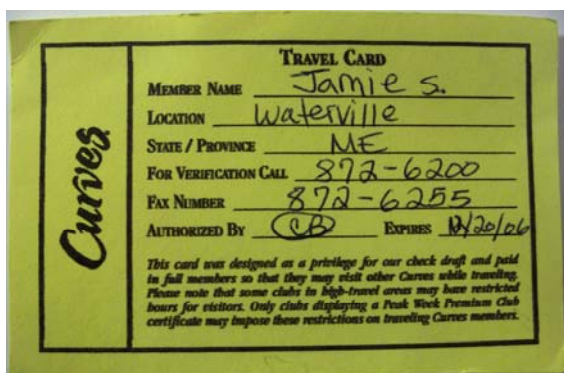


Figure 4. Curves travel pass, front

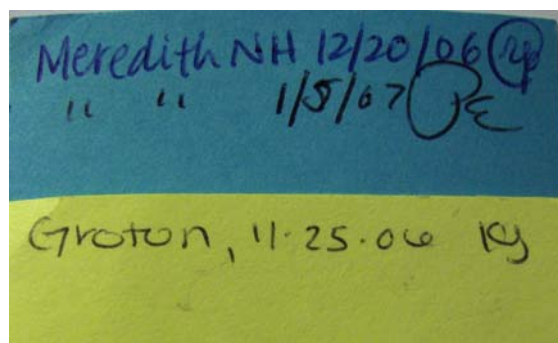


Figure 5. Curves travel pass, back with location, location, date, and signature of Curves employee



Figure 6. Card left in Waterville Curves bathroom.

Figure 7. Curves circuit machines, from left to right starting on the top row: Biceps/Triceps, Leg Extension/Led Curl, Shoulder Press/Lat Pull, Hip Abductor/Adductor, Chest/Back, Squat, Ab/Back, Leg Press, Pec Dec, Dip Shrug, Oblique, Glute, and Lateral Lift.

