RESEARCH ARTICLE

Power play: The use of space to control and signify power in the workplace.

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Abstract

The findings of this article emerge from an eight-month study examining career identity practices amongst a select group of fitness professionals in the U.K. We examine how the inter-relationship between physical and social space can denote how power is acquired, displayed, and used by individuals interacting in a shared space. The findings show that power is signified through spatial practices as individuals negotiate through triadic space, creating an identity of space and place for both trainer and client that identifies power, and signifies who has power. Fitness professionals with high levels of symbolic power are able to subvert organizational spatial norms to better serve themselves and their clients, while those with lower levels of symbolic power are forced to, or choose to, negotiate or abdicate space to others. These findings are relevant to a wide range of occupations where self-employment and contract workers interact in shared space

Keywords:

Power, Shared Space, Fitness Professionals, Protean Career

Introduction

In this article we explore how a group of protean-career oriented fitness professionals signify and display social power in a shared working space. Self-employed protean workers are self and value driven in pursuing a career that encompasses a whole-life perspective (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2005), and often seek career opportunities outside of traditional hierarchal-structured organizations (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004). The voices that form the narrative of this article are predominantly self-employed and contract workers, sharing the same work space of a privately-owned gym. Few organizationally-bound rules govern their day-to-day work activity, and so informal social rules mostly govern their actions and behaviour (Barker, 1993). Though this exploratory work follows a specific set of seventeen informants, the findings may be relevant to a wide range of occupations where self-employed and contract workers interact in shared space. We believe this work also helps move research forward regarding the lived experiences of workers in new alternative work arrangements (Ashford, Caza, & Reid, 2018; Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garrett, 2017).

Part of our social identity within work organizations is created through the ability to identify our 'place' by knowing where, when, and how much power we have in that particular setting (Park, Lee, & Kabst, 2008). In formal hierarchies, we know our place and our level of official power through descriptors including job title, team assignment, who we report to, or where we are physically located within the work space (Becker, 2007). In informal meso-level groups, such as experienced by the informants of this study, it is through social and symbolic interaction in shared physical space that rules, norms, and identified power are constructed (Bourdieu, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991).

In this article we demonstrate that those with more social-power had control of *representational space* that altered *spatial practices* for all those who were located in the space at that time. Further, social-power had very little to do with the authority-power tied to an organization, but rather power was acquired, displayed, and used by individuals' interaction in a particular space. First, we provide a framework that outlines how shared spaces can create and signify social -power. Second, we describe the design of the ethnographic study used to explore symbolic interaction amongst protean careerists, and third, we explore the findings related to space and social power that emerged from this eight-month ethnographic study.

Contextual Literature

Workplace power

The ability to control others can be granted through formal authority or social power. French and Raven (1959) outlined five basis of social power; reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent power. Operationally, in workplace settings, reward, coercive, and legitimate power can be conferred to an individual based on authority and position, and is visible through the hierarchal structure (Dahl, 1957; Blau and Scott, 1962). For example, a front line manager can reward staff who comply with rules and requests, or coerce, through threat of punishment, those who do not (Hodson, Roscigno, & Lopez, 2006). In traditional workplace organizations, most individuals are subject to some level of authority-power via hierarchal structures (Schein, 1978). Even in these organizations, workers also often work towards their own goals, or the subversive goals of teammates. These non-organizational goals can be adjusted and manipulated by the norms of their direct team or work social group (Barker, 1993; Crowley, Payne, & Kennedy, 2014). Shaping the will of others, beyond striving towards the organizational goals, requires social -power that is embedded in expert and referent forms of power (Dahl, 1957; Grimes, 1978; French & Raven, 1959). Additionally, while authority-power may temporarily shape a followers behaviour, expert and referent forms of power may be more effective in creating long-term attitude conformity and socialization (Warren, 1968).

French and Raven (1959) theory of power continues to be relevant to examining power in the workplace. For example, Aiello, Tesi, Pratto and Pierro (2018) built on the theory to examine power strategies used by employees and supervisors to maintain intergroup hierarchies. However, many large organizations are flattening this hierarchal leadership structures and historically permanent jobs are being networked through contract work (Lakhani, Kuruvilla, & Avaga, 2013). Additionally, more individuals are choosing self-employed work to obtain flexibility and work-life satisfaction (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Direnzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2015). These new ‘alternative work arrangements’ (Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garett, 2018) create changes in individual and organizational workplace identities by eliminating traditional authority-power sources. Understanding how new authority-power and social -power controls worker behaviour is becoming necessary. Research on these new work identities and power relation is beginning to be explored. For example, recent work by de Jong, Wilkin & Rubino (2018) examined temporary

workers (one form of alternative work arrangement) perceptions of power in their temporary work settings. Our work adds to this by looking at self-employed workers that have to share resources.

Research has already demonstrated that when formal structures are relaxed, the political and social mechanism inherent in meso-level groups begin to create informal structures of hierarchy; identifying those with social power and those without (Barker, 1994; Blau & Scott, 1962; Fine, 2010; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Those with social power may be those who have been granted expert or referent power, or may be those who are networked in such a way as to have more control over resources (Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Burt, 2005).

While identifying those with authority-power can be easier in hierarchal structures, people can perceive who has social -power through observation and interaction in shared spatial settings (Warren, 1968, Zitek & Tiedens, 2012).

On space and interaction

As social creatures, we compare ourselves to others to get a sense of how much power or competence we may have in relation to others (Van Dijke & Poppe, 2004). When work production is visible in shared spaces, we are provided with an opportunity to monitor, evaluate, and judge who has more power (Kanter, 1977; Haynes, Suckley, & Nunnington, 2017) regardless of hierarchal authority positions. The purpose of this article is to explore how the sharing of spaces shapes workplace social power.

Many organizational studies of space are examined from an ecological and psychological stance, such as exploring how the physical environment affects the workplace individual (For examples see Becker, 2007; Dul, Celyan, & Jaspers, 2011). Through this lens, there is a one-way relationship with space, where the individual is seen as reacting to the physicality of space, such as the size of an office, or where a desk is placed. However, there is an inter-relationship between the physical space, and, a symbolic space, in which individuals are both acted upon, and are able to act on (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre (1991) defined a three-dimensional concept of space, with each type of space consuming and subsuming one another. First, *spatial practices* encompass our habits in the way we interact with space on a day-to-day basis (Dale, 2005). Second, we enter into and out of physical *representations of space*, for example, the physical structures of our buildings, the layout of our cities, or how big or small interior rooms are. These are also conceptual spaces though, and thus, not just material spaces. These are not spaces created by happenstance, but are

conceived with a purpose, designed by architects, urban planners, or others and the intended design of any given space has an impact on our behaviour. Our actions, to a degree, are limited by the physical boundaries of the physical space, for example, an adult cannot stand upright in a car. Furthermore, physical space suggests the way we should behave in that space. For example, a highway is designed for vehicles that are able to travel at an established minimum speed, in contrast to a small side street where cars, bicycles, and pedestrians share the right-of-way with motor vehicles. In the former, the laws of the space are monitored by authority, such as police prohibiting those who can cause an accident to self and others from using the space, whereas in the latter, strict adherence to law may be overshadowed by social custom, such as pedestrians freely crossing or walking on the street when they deem it safe to do so. These examples illustrate that the creators and multiple users of 'conceived' space may have differing needs, or ideas, of how space should be used (Hurdley, 2010). The *representations of space* can also include formal hierarchal positions with organizations that represent who has formal power over how space is used, by whom, and when (Fahy, Easterby-Smith, & Lervik, 2014).

Within conceived environmental space is our *representational space* (Lefebvre, 1991), which is fundamentally social and symbolic. Social space is not an object itself, such as a building or desk, but is a space where self-serving interpretations and meanings of that space can be constructed (Lefebvre, 1991). Part of what creates the social dynamics of space is the need for individuals to find a sense of belonging or 'place' within a space (Tuan, 1977). This could be a feeling anchored to a physical space such as a desk that 'belongs' to you, or a social space such as where your status measures in relation to others (Bourdieu, 1989). Place helps create our identity by helping us differentiate ourselves between those who share our social space, and those who do not (Ford & Harding, 2004). However, the need to make our own place can give rise to territoriality, which is a social action to claim a space, either symbolically or physically, in such a way that prevents others from claiming the same place (Short, 2014). Territorial boundaries are learned through social experiences, such as which neighbourhoods we can safely enter, or which table we can sit at for lunch (Clayton, 2012). In the workplace, we can use symbols to mark our territory, such as putting name plates on doors, pictures on desks, or 'saving' space by leaving folders on a shared desk (Brown, Lawrence, & Robinson, 2005). While a sense of place may increase levels of employee organizational commitment (Park et al. 2008), territoriality may also cause tension and conflict between colleagues (Brown et al. 2005).

Because social space is symbolic, where social actors are creating and altering rules and meaning found in that space, many social spaces can exist within one physical space. We can see the multiple layers of social space in many workplace settings whereby the same physical space may become private or public, masculine or feminine (Ford & Harding, 2004). For example, in Lewis's (2008) study on hospital staff, she indicated that the daytime workplace was masculine because the 'normal' management practices happened while the administrators were present, yet the same physical space during the night-shift was transformed into feminine space, where rules were less fixed, emotions more openly displayed, and a more 'service' orientation towards patients was allowed.

In this article, space and meso-level group interaction is explored based on symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969). Created or produced artefacts such as space, whether they are physical or symbolic, have symbolic or cognitive meaning when they are created, communicated, and interpreted by the individuals within that space (Charon, 2007). Our findings demonstrate that power is used and needed in the creation of spatial boundaries. Those who have more social power will have greater ability in establishing *representational space*, that is, how the physical space should be used, and establishing which social norms should be used within that space. Additionally, similar to studies on social power in neighbourhoods (Atencio & Wright, 2008), workplace individuals who are observed by others in the shared space as demonstrating more skill, are then rewarded more social power. It is through our interpretation of interaction with others in this three-dimensional space that negotiation, resistance to power, and the creation and evolution of power occurs.

Context and method

The empirical findings of this article emerged from an eight-month study exploring career identity practices amongst a select group of fitness professionals. The setting of this study was a small, 4,000 square foot, family-owned fitness facility, which we named Private Gym, located in the South West region of England. The names and unique identities of each informant has been anonymized in all documentation of the study, from field notes and research memos, to published material. Informants included two owners, fifteen individuals who worked in the space, and on rare occasion, a few club members.

There were three main typologies of workers in Private Gym; self-employed personal trainers, paid staff members, and contract workers. Almost all the self-employed trainers had previous experiences working in franchise gyms. The trainers moved to Private Gym when they felt secure in their existing book of business, and, experienced in generating additional client base. As a small gym, clients were seldom generated through the existing club members, and therefore the trainers had to have a strong external network. The trainers paid a flat-rate monthly rent to the gym, and the clients paid the trainer directly and did not have to be a member of the gym to work with the trainer. Trainers had no additional obligations to Private Gym regarding additional sales, nor assisting general club members who were not their clients. At a minimum, the self-employed trainers were required (by Private Gym's policy) to be qualified through the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) at a minimum of level 3, but in addition, many of the trainers were well educated with BSc and Masters level in Sports and Exercise, and were also part of professional sporting bodies such as a former professional UK rugby player and current head coach for a regional team, an international triathlete, and several members of World Powerlifting.

Staff members were on Private Gym's payroll and performed a variety of duties such as covering the reception desk, helping club members on the gym floor, general maintenance and cleaning, and teaching fitness classes. Staff members were generally new fitness professionals qualified at REPs Level 2, and were training for REP Level 3 and beyond. These staff members generally had goals of becoming either a self-employed personal trainer, or moving into coaching team sports.

Contract workers taught fitness classes and invoiced the gym at the end of each month for services rendered. These instructors typically were also qualified at REPs Level 3, and additionally certified to teach their own specialization such as Pilates or combat. The contract workers maintained contracts with others gyms and physiotherapist offices throughout the region and therefore did not work exclusively in Private Gym. Some individuals were both self-employed personal trainers and contract worker.

-Insert Table 1 here-

To maintain the clarity of this ethnographic account (Van Maanen, 2011), the first author is referred to as 'I' in several parts of this article. I was immersed in the study of the setting for

eight months, adopting the role of a participating club member / overt observer. I had been a casual member of the gym prior to the beginning of the research study, only saying 'hello' and 'good-bye' to whomever was at the front desk when I would arrive and leave. I had never interacted with any of the trainers, nor taken any of the fitness classes prior to the start of the study. However, Private Gym contained actors and situations that related to concepts of career identity, therefore I used my existing relationships as an opportunity to negotiate access to the setting and its actors for an overt study (Buchanan, Boddy & McCalman in Bryman, 1988). Upon university approval of the research project and methodological approach, and utilizing the sponsoring university ethical guidelines for research, I first approached the two owners of the gym and provided a three-page proposal that detailed the aims and objectives of the study, practices of confidentiality and anonymity, obtaining informed consent from each informant, and avoiding harmful practices that could create emotional discomfort or affect the fitness professionals professional standing in the community (Hammersely & Atkinson, 2007). Once the owners approved of the study, the three-page proposal was left at the front desk for the duration of the study. A one-page briefing sheet was then created for each potential informant. Each fitness professional was approached individually and invited to participate in the study. A copy of the briefing sheet was provided, along with a referral to the research proposal at the front desk. Once the fitness professional had sufficient time to review both documents and to reflect upon the study (approximately one week) I approached them to confirm if they would like to be included in the study. All the trainers used in the study provided verbal consent. Two fitness professionals, who due to their unique and somewhat solitary work at Private Gym were not approached, nor included in the study. Similar to other ethnographic studies in public or semi-public settings, not all members who used the space were approached for consent (for example Gale, 2007). For example, club members, who were not the direct subject of the study, were not approached for consent, though they were aware that the study was taking place, and often volunteered information when I had my research notebook out.

Understanding the social dynamics of the club member is important however. The owners discussed their experiences managing corporate gyms, outlined that the corporate gym model is based on people not coming in, and constantly replacing new members with those that leave each month. Private Gym wanted to maintain a higher club member adherence rate, and a higher weekly attendance rate than the large corporate gyms. And there was a number of very committed individuals who had been with the gym since its opening (and based on Facebook feeds are still

members). During one overheard conversation two club members were chatting while they cooled down on the treadmill. One club member told the other that he used to be at Corporate Gym because they had classes he enjoyed, but he switched because Corporate Gym was too big and corporate. He preferred Private Gym because it was small and everyone knows everyone. The other club member said "*Yes. It is very sociable*."

As a participating club member, I was able to spend time in the activity spaces during operating hours and could take any classes offered, as often as I liked. On average, I spent two to three hours a day, five to six days a week in observation. The only limitation to the amount of time I spent was the physical ability to be active for extended periods of time. I varied my schedule from week to week to observe classes, trainers, and the culture of Private Gym at different times of the day. When attending classes, I took on the role of participant/observer, meaning that I fully participated in the class activity while observing the trainer and their interactions with the class. When observing trainers during their one-on-one sessions I took the role as observer/participant, participating in the setting as a general club member while observing the trainer but not participating directly in their activities. I also observed trainers during their public social time within the setting of Private Gym. This included 'downtime' spent in the reception area, or the occasions they would come to the gym on their days off.

Data used for analysis was collected into field notes gleaned from observations, informal ad-hock interviews (Todd in Coffey & Atkinson, 1994), and audio-recorded, semi-formal interviews. Due to the active nature of the setting, and the shared nature of public space, capturing field notes in a dedicated book, on site was abandoned after the first few weeks. However the gym was a ten minute walk from my home. Upon completion of each observation I would return home and promptly record an account of the activities in a Word document.

All the informants of the study participated in the semi-formal interviews conducted towards the end of the observation period. I used a semi-structured interview guide based on both them objectives of the study, and, on the themes that emerged from the field (Bryman, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The scheduled semi-structured interviews were on average an hour and half long. Ad-hock interviews occurred in-situ based on immediate symbolic situations when the opportunity arose.

Field notes were initially open coded by the first author, which was used to identify concepts and categories that were either salient to the informants or related to the original

theoretical framework of the study (Straus & Corbin, 1998). The open coded process was started shortly after the beginning of the observation period began which allowed for theoretical sampling of emerging themes (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Once the most salient themes were identified using axial coding on the open codes, a model of theme reduction was used for selective coding (Charmaz & Mitchel, 2001; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Subsequent review of the analysis was provided by the co-authors. The concepts of power and space represented in this paper are themes that emerged from the setting of the study. Having identified this theme, a new Word document was created containing all field notes and interview transcriptions, and the data was selective coded to these themes. The following section highlights these most salient themes

Findings

Private Gym's *representations of space* were designed by the owners to best utilize every possible space of the 4,000-square foot building. The owners had purchased the gym eight years prior to the start of this study, from a failed operation. The previous owners had tried to operate the small facility on par with larger corporate gyms, employing many staff, and outfitting the gym with large expensive single-use equipment. The new owners consciously redesigned the space with smaller, multipurpose, and less expensive equipment such as having a wide range of free weights rather than an assisted bicep curl machine, leg press, etc. These changes opened the visibility and usability of the space but also meant that both trainer and club member had to be more experienced with cross-functional fitness. The placement of dumbbells, cages, benches, treadmills, and cushioned stretching areas signified the way the owners perceived that trainers and club members should interact with equipment and one another on a regular basis. However, as the findings demonstrate, the *spatial practices,* that is, the way the individuals did interact with the space, oftentimes differed from the conceived space. More importantly, many of the individuals had different representational space within this conceived space that signified their level of social power within Private Gym.

Claiming space

Worker versus worker

The concept of social power is important in Private Gym. There were only a few who held authority-power in the space (Blau & Scott, 1962), and those who did, including the two owners, were not often the individuals working and interacting in the activity spaces on a regular basis. With limited physical space, and no official policy regarding access to space and equipment, club members and trainers had to negotiate the use of resources with one another. The ability to claim space, place and physical resources was generally granted to the individuals who had more experience and longer Private Gym membership status; this applied to both trainers and club members. At times, this control was overt and acknowledged by those interacting in the space. For example, Ethan was in his mid-thirties, and although educated and an experienced worker in general, he had recently retrained and only been in the fitness industry less than two years. Additionally, he had just started working at Private Gym the month before this study began, and this was his first outing as a fully self-employed personal trainer. Therefore, he is both less experienced than many of the other trainers in Private Gym, and, is a newcomer to the setting. Many observation periods witness him deferring space to other trainers. During our interview he stated:

> *"I notice with other trainers they've got their little area of the gym, and where they like to train, which cage they like to use…I don't think it's a problem. I think all the trainers get on pretty well compared to other places that I've been in. one or two of them, you might know where they're going to train so you steer clear of that…"*

As a newcomer he compares his own past experiences to his present day, making sense of where he fits in in Private Gym's social process. By stating 'other trainers' he is indicating that he himself has not yet claimed any particular space, and tries to 'steer clear' of already claimed space. There is little official structural power in Private Gym (Tost, 2015). Even though each self-employed trainer is equal in their contractual relationship with Private Gym, there is a conscious and unconscious symbolic ranking against one another over who has rights to space and this shapes the agentic and communal behaviours of the trainers (Tost, 2015). Their *representational space* influences their spatial practices. My field notes describe how two experienced male trainers claimed and held onto space while working their clients:

When I first go onto the cross trainer William's client was doing a strength routine. William was standing against the seat of the bench, leaning against it, his legs spread out wide, his arms folded across his chest. A few minutes later he pulled the bench over to 'his' cage area and had her [his client] sit on it. He must have been saving the bench to use with her. Sam also stayed in his same place at his cage, bringing different equipment to his own client. When I first got to the gym Sam and his client were taking a break. She was on the outside of the cage, near the rower, and he was on the inside of the cage, leaning on the frame with his right foot perched up on the lowest bar and his right hand holding onto the side. (Observation session)

In the above field note, both male trainers have moved beyond symbolic territorial markers (Brown et al. 2005), such as leaving a clipboard on a bench, but have physically claimed both the space, and equipment, by sitting, standing, and guarding their areas. The space has been staked out and they are homesteading. Though neither have authority-power, they are utilizing a form of expert or referent power that has been granted to them by others in the setting. As the following field note demonstrates, trainers with less power had to negotiate the sharing of space and equipment:

Kate was coming around the weight rack from the mat area and asked Eugenie if she was using the bench. Eugenie tapped one of the benches with her foot and said she was using that one. Kate and her client quickly exchanged which bench they were using and then Ethan jumped in to see which bench he could use with his client. (Observation session)

William and Sam rarely negotiated space and resources with other trainers or clients but here, two female trainers, and the new comer Ethan, negotiate space with one another, asking one another what equipment is already in use, and what is free. Eugenie often claimed that she felt like a 'crap' trainer [her words], which seemed to result in her not having self-identified as having social power claim space. In both Ethan and Eugenie's cases their spatial practices are influenced by their own interpretation of their social power in the setting – Ethan was new and Eugenie perceived herself to lack expert/referent power. Their own interpretations resulted in them abdicating space, place and resources to others.

In the situations above, the main gym space was not officially allocated to any one trainer, but was open to first-come-first-serve, a ritual of negotiation, or through outright power play. The studio space was different. The studio could be considered a *representation of space*, in so far that during scheduled classes the purpose of the space had a legitimate use for the scheduled class. Therefore, the class instructor who is responsible for the class should also have legitimate power over the space during their scheduled time. However, there were several instances where the class instructor had the studio space taken over by other trainers. This was especially true for those contractors who only taught one or two classes per week which supports the presmise that a certain amount of duration in the setting is necessary to create social power (Lapalme et al. 2009). In the following field note, a Pilates class is scheduled to start. A club member approaches Harry, who is standing in the reception area, to ask for help with back and shoulder stretches. Rather than guide the club member to the matted area at the back of the gym that is specifically designed for stretching, Harry takes the club member into the studio. Two wall sides of the studio are large picture windows which allow people to see in and out of the studio. It is visible that Virginia is setting up for a scheduled class:

> *They went into the studio and the trainer set him up on one of the foam rollers, with weights down on his shoulders. Virginia eyeballed them both in a way that seemed to say 'why are you in my studio when I'm supposed to be starting a class'? I joked and said it looked like we had two new people for Pilates. Harry didn't respond at all to the joke and didn't say anything to any of us. We set up the studio around the guy and finally he was done stretching and left. (Pilates session)*

Harry is in the transition from paid staff member to self-employed trainer, and is also a professional athlete. Though young, (under twenty-five), his professional status and level of embeddedness in Private Gym rewards him with considerable informal power. Virginia has the legitimate right to the space, but she spends only a few hours a week teaching at Private Gym, and thus, because of her low levels of consistent duration at the site, has less social power. She is unhappy that her space has been occupied by one of the trainers, but does not take direct control over the situation. Instead, she pulls faces and has the class members set-up the studio around the two interlopers.

Club members in the mix

The examples above demonstrate scenes of trainer-on-trainer control, where spaces and resources are controlled to help clients. During classes, space was also controlled – sometimes by the trainer, but oftentimes by class members as well. The two passages below demonstrate how trainers try to control club members occupying studio space while taking a class:

> *I set up my bike at one end of the studio and the other girl set up her bike at the other end. T was setting up her bike near the other girl and Harry told her to fill in the gap. She moved the bike over to me and he scolded her, saying that he said to fill in the gap, not just move all the way over to the other side. She laughed and moved her bike a little bit back further away from me, towards the centre of the room. (Spinning session)*

> *There were only four of us in today's session and three mats were left behind on the floor. Archie went around the room picking them up, saying he would clean up the place a little. The four of us were congregated towards the back of the room and to one side. As he walked to the front of the room he said "Don't be afraid of the front". When he got to the front of the room and turned around to look at us, he told us again we could spread out, and that if we were all in one corner, the room was going to tip over. We spread out a bit and moved closer to him. (Pilates session)*

The placement, or location, of each club member does not alter our ability to work-out, especially in a class such as spinning where we are stationary, but each trainer has a feeling of how he wants the class members to be distributed across the floor, and makes overt demands to get us to move. The club members make an attempt to comply with the trainer's request. In the following passage, it is the club member that gives cues of how we should be positioned within the space:

> *At the end of the sequence Amanda was getting ready to start a new sequence with all of us sitting up. Because of the way we had finished the last sequence we were all facing the door with our backs to her. She did not say anything about repositioning us, just started to go into the next sequence. One woman finally turned around to face the Amanda, and then the Amanda kind of laughed and said we could turn around if we wanted and all the class turned around to face her. (Pilates session)*

In the above session, the trainer taking cues from the class member is a stark contrast to sessions held by trainers such as Archie and Mustard. The passage represents typical sessions with Amanda, and I often noted how she rarely directed, nor engaged, with club members, but rather followed the lead from dominate class members. Though Amanda should have access to legitimate authority through her role as class instructor, and expert power through her experience and knowledge as a certified trainer, she demonstrates the lowest amount of social power in the setting.

However, it is not just trainer-to-trainer, or trainer-to-club member where these power relations occurred. Club members also demonstrated non-verbal power over one another. The following passages demonstrate my own social movement regarding *representational space* and finding a place in the site:

> *During circuits we usually form a giant oval, all facing one another. I got pushed out of my position by one guy and ended up next to W, in what I consider to be the front of the oval. This is not my favourite place, especially in a class that I don't do well in. (Circuits session)*

I had been in the setting for a little over a month when I captured the field note above. As a new person in this already socially-established class, I had no power to hold onto my preferred space. Through iterative engagement with my field notes I began to observe the non-verbal interactions between new class members and in-group members (Tajfel, 1978), making notes regarding who stays in what place during classes:

> *The entire core group [in-group] stays down at the end where the bikes are stored and the music station is. This is where the instructor usually stands. It seems in most of these classes with both Imogene and Eugenie. The better the member knows the instructor, the closer the member stays to the instructor during class. Those who attend less often or don't have a relationship with the instructor are at the end of the studio. (Research memo)*

Club members who had a strong in-group identity with the trainer demonstrated social dominance over other club members through the spatial practices of keeping nearest to the trainer. Novelli, Drury, & Reicher (2010) indicated that members of in-groups seek out closer proximity to one another in shared spaces, and this was frequently demonstrated at Private Gym. In classes

this was accomplished by club members overtly setting up equipment near the trainer, or covertly, such as using more space while performing star jumps or lunges, forcing the other person to give way or risk a collision. But, as the next two passages demonstrate, club members did acknowledge that space and place were significant symbolic concepts inside the studio:

> *[Male in-group club member] joined the class and Eugenie was surprised and excited because he never does the pump class. He grabbed a step and looked around the studio space. He then asked her where he should go so that he* "doesn't take anyone else's space"*. She told him to go anywhere. (Pump session)*

> *At first I walked to the far corner of the studio, where I normally stand for the Wednesday circuits, but then I noticed that a lot of the regulars weren't there, so I moved in closer to stand by [Female in-group club member] who always stands near the instructors. I said sometime to the club member about taking the space next to her and she joked about the space she was in, drawing an invisible square box around her, then Imogene started talking about one of her classes last week and that a man was getting into everyone else's space and that we should be glad the guy wasn't here today. (Circuits session).*

In this first passage, Eugenie seems oblivious, or unconcerned, that space and place are important. But in the second passage, both the club member and the trainer acknowledge space and place, and joke about the serious nature of claiming or invading the space of other club members during studio sessions. This last passage also further demonstrated my social movement into space and place. I had been in the field for over five months and had started to develop a low-level in-group status, and had also been 'trained' by the social customs of the members regarding which spaces I could claim. I was experiencing, first hand, how consistent interaction within an informal meso-group created a set of common rules regarding behaviour within the setting, and that there was an informal status ranking within this group (Blau & Scott, 1962). On this particular day I was able to 'move-up' both in regards to the physical space nearer the trainer, but also as place regarding my status in the class, only because a majority of the in-group members were not there.

Controlling air space

Control of the air space also helps depict the social norms of Private Gym. Early in the case study I had asked one of the owners how they decided what kind of music to play in the gym. Philip said they paid a small fee to the Performance Right Society, and then he and Imogene sat down with their iTunes account and tried to "avoid anything with bad language", suggesting that in the social space of the gym, even the owners could not play whatever type of music they liked, but deferred to what was less likely to offend club members.

During the holiday season, the owners had gone on holiday, leaving a staff member in charge of the gym. Though staff members had more responsibility and official authority for Private Gym, as apprentices in the industry they had little to no social power over the self-employed trainers. This can be demonstrated through a series of observations regarding the control of the gym's stereo system. During a busy day, Thomas, a university student, who at 19 was the youngest member of this study, is on staff duty. Sam, a self-employed personal trainer, is in the gym doing his own personal workout:

> *Sam was walking back to the weights from the reception counter where he had been changing the music. He was near me when I heard a familiar fiddle riff coming over the music system. I looked at him and said "The devil went down to Georgia?" He gave a short laugh and said "yes, I love this song" and he continued walking on to Harry. 1970's hill billy bluegrass is not what I would have expected coming from the gym's music system. After the song was done playing Sam went and turned on another 'song'. It was mostly just applause so I'm guessing it's a recording of a live performance of some sort but it seemed a long time before any music came on. (Observation session)*

In this situation, not only is Sam controlling what he wants to listen to during his own workout, but also what every club member must listen to, regardless if the music fits what is considered 'normal' for a training session. Although the staff member officially had control of the studio sound, because of low social status and lack of personal power (Leach, Weick, and Lammers, 2017) he defers control to the long-term trainer. A few days later, during the same holiday period, observations captured Thomas working in the gym in the absence of any of the self-employed trainers:

Thomas was working the front counter, but he seemed to also be doing his own workout and hanging out with his buddy. He was in charge of the music this afternoon. He kept running back behind the reception desk to change songs on his mp3 player. I think there may have been a 'bad' song coming up because he dashed behind the counter once and then told his buddy he had got there just in time. When I left the gym he and his buddy were both sitting behind the reception desk looking at the computer and talking about uni starting back in a few weeks. (Observation session)

This field note illustrates that while he is 'in charge' both officially, and now socially, he has control of the music and the physical space, which includes the ability to invite his friend into the 'employee' space. It also demonstrates that even in the absence of the owners, he is compelled to maintain the standards of the gym by avoiding certain songs. In this sense, the organization has power over him.

A month later, another situation regarding the stereo system arose where Sam was put into his symbolic place by one of the owners.

We were hanging out in the reception area, Eugenie was eating and talking to a woman and then asked if anyone else could hear two different songs being played. At first everyone thought she was nuts, but then Philip reached behind him and turned down the gyms stereo. The second song was coming from the weight area. It was Sam playing music on his iPhone. Philip said loudly to us "what? Our music isn't good enough for him? Just for that I'm going to turn our music up even louder!" *and reached back behind him to turn the gyms stereo up much louder. (Observation session)*

Philip chooses to not directly confront the trainer. As the owner he has the official authority-power to ask the trainer to turn down (or off) the music from the iPhone, but instead, with club members as an audience, he uses his power to turn up the volume of the gyms stereo to drown out the iPhone.

In these examples above, the power play is happening between the workers and we club members are witness. But some of the trainers also directly controlled the airwaves that had a purposeful and direct impact on club members. For example, when the studio was not in use for scheduled classes, club members were free to use the space and the stereo. Adam, a high social-

powered trainer, had no qualms asking club members to turn off their music if he came into the space to work with a client, but other trainers did not do this. Another occasion where a trainer controlled the air space demonstrates the strong culture of Private Gym. I was participating in a 10:30 a.m. class on 11th November. In addition to the members of our class, a few club members were in the gym on the main floor:

> *At the end of the second set Harry walked into the studio and turned off the music and said we were going to observe two minutes of silence in honour of Remembrance Day. He then went and turned off the gym music and televisions as well. He set his stop watch. Everyone in the gym stopped what they were doing to observe the two minutes of silence. At the end of two minutes he said* "Thanks guys. I'll give you 30 seconds to get your head back into the game*" (Circuits session)*

The trainer has decided to observe Remembrance Day. His actions of turning off all of the music and entertainment systems, ad to stop our class for two minutes, provides, or compels, everyone an opportunity to do the same. Everyone in the gym stopped moving and came to a complete silence. My continued residency in the UK for several years following the study provided me the experience to know that this action was not followed in several other franchised gyms in the same region.

Visibility in shared space

Being watched, evaluated, emulated, and judged, is a constant part of the fitness professional's working life. First, the production of work is done in front of others, and while the trainer is working with a client, club members and other trainers are able to watch their technique and style. During classes, members are watching the trainer to try to mimic their actions. Additionally, the 'product' a trainer is selling is health, weight loss, or muscle gain. These are visible changes that happen to the body. When the client's body changes shape it is noticeable to other members of the gym, friends, family, and colleagues. It is only through using shared physical space that both the production and the product of a trainer's work is visible. When a trainer has been evaluated as producing a successful product they earn an increase in expert power (Atencio & Wright, 2008). Therefore, the visibility of their work aids in the *creation* of social power and provides signals to members in the setting of who *has* the social power (Bourdieu, 1989).

The trainers often talked about the product of their work both other trainers when socializing in the gym, and with me during our interviews. They understood that overall changes to a client's body was up to the client deciding to be committed to a programme on a long-term basis. However, they all discussed that other people's perceptions about their client reflected on the trainer's ability, not the client's dedication. Many of the trainers referred to their clients as a 'walking billboard'. One trainer went so far as to provide a formula, saying that the positive change of one successful client generally resulted in gaining three additional clients. The trainers were also quick to point out that it was bad for business when a client was not embodying positive physical changes, or were using incorrect techniques on the gym floor when working out on their own:

> *"you don't want to be seen with the same client for an extended period because then people, especially people in the gym will look at you and think 'well, that person's been training with that PT for quite some time and they're not changing so that PT's not very good'" (Ethan, interview)*

> *"If people know that's your client and they're doing it wrong that looks bad on you so you've, you need to go up and try to get them to look the best they can." (Harry, interview)*

In this last excerpt, Harry is describing the need to spend extra time outside of the scheduled appointment, not from a sense of duty to the client, or performing extra-role behaviour (Bowling, 2010), but rather because a client performing incorrectly reflects poorly on the trainer, diminishing the trainers social expert power. Some trainers also admitted to adjusting the training schedules of their clients, either to 'hide away' a client who is not achieving results, or to increase a sense of competition between clients of other trainers.

Trainers were used to the visibility of their work, and both accepted and manipulated the benefits of their clients as walking billboards. The downside to the high visibility of their job was that some felt uncomfortable being judged about their work ethic or job performance by their peers (Lewis, 2011). Similar to work by Halford (2005), the full-time trainers who produced work in a variety of locations throughout the region often felt that trainers who worked predominantly in Private Gym doubted their work capacity:

> *"I do all my PT [personal training appointments] in the morning and then I go to school where I teach at lunch time and then I do all my classes evening, so I've got all my PT first thing and even like, comments, like Cornmeal always asks me 'so, you're not working? When do you do all your PT?' and I'm like 'I've done it this morning' it's just like little things, pressure from other people, and I hate feeling like I'm failing so then when Cornmeal say's 'when are you doing your PT?' I feel like I'm failing, I feel like he's judging me because I'm not busy enough." (Eugenie, interview)*

Though Eugenie's feelings may be her subjective interpretation of interactions with others, field notes captured during an observation two weeks prior to our interview provide an example of why she may have had these feelings:

> *While William was bent over digging stuff out of his filing cabinet he asked Eugenie if she was doing much PT lately. She said yes, and he said something about how she's not doing a lot of it here [meaning Private Gym]. She said she was already done for the day, had a few appointments at various locations. But she was somewhat evasive and defensive with him. Not really looking him in the eye and giving very vague answers. (Observation session)*

It is difficult to know what prompted William to question Eugenie about her work schedule, but it was Eugenie who brought this subject up during our interview. Her sensitivity to the situation, two weeks after my observation, suggests there were other times when he, or others, made similar inquiries.

Julie also talked about how, as a new trainer in Private Gym, she felt that she was constantly being monitored by other trainers. In my field notes I had also recorded a unique situation on the night Julie taught her first spin class at the gym:

> *Sam and Harry came into the studio and asked Julie if she wouldn't mind if they used half the studio for their own work out. She just looked at them and didn't say anything at first. Sam asked again a little more forcefully. I wouldn't say he even asked for permission but more said they were going to use it. She didn't say anything and went to her bike.*

Whilst it was common for trainers to squeeze every available minute of the studio prior to the start of a class, or to briefly come into the studio while a class was underway to grab a piece of equipment, no other observations in eight months captured this kind of behaviour when trainers continued to use the space during someone else's session. It appeared that the two experienced trainers were 'spying' on her.

The sharing of space also created situations where the club members themselves would attempt to use their social power as in-group members to become pseudo-trainers:

> *During our one minute break (Female club member) came in to the studio. She pulled out one of the spinning bikes to sit on, just to hang out with the class. When Harry got us set up for the next circuit and had turned on the music, he walked over to her and gave her a hug. For the remainder of the class he would go back and forth between setting us up and standing in the corner talking with her. Sometimes she would call out to members of the class to have them increase their efforts, or she would spy and tell Harry to give someone an extra five seconds for cheating.*

This sharing of work and social space creates a dynamic where the trainer is both worker and friend, and the club member is both friend and has become worker. She has been granted symbolic power through her relationship with a high-powered trainer, which allows her the ability to have both the trainer and class members listen and follow her orders.

Discussion and Conclusion

The empirical data gleaned from observations and interviews provide examples of how social power is demonstrated in the *representational* or 'lived space' (Watkins, 2005) of a certain type of worker – namely, the self-employed protean fitness professional – in the work setting. Much of the work on power in the workplace focus on the employer/employee dynamic, such as how employers subjugate employees (Hodson, Roscigno, & Lopez, 2006), managers control work groups (Lewis, 2011), how employees need to draw on personal referent power to shape organization policy (Budjanovcanin, 2018) or how employees can control space to subvert employer control (Tayler & Spicer, 2007; Villareal, 2010). In some corporate gyms, personal trainers can be part of the hierarchal system; their goals resemble the organization's goal, such as achieve sales quotes and team achievement (Chiu, Lee, & Lin, 2010) and there are opportunities

towards advancement such as joining management teams, and therefore may be subject to the traditional concepts of power. While those works are important, it is also crucial that we begin to understand how non-organizationally bound workers in 'alternative work arrangements' (Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garett) such as the self-employed protean careerist (Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot & Baruch, 2012) use shared space to create their own place beyond organizational control (Shortt, 2014) and to advance their own careers by creating and using social power (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). In the setting of Private Gym, gone are the hierarchal forms of authority-power. Instead, the three types of worker – self-employed trainer, contract worker, and staff member – negotiate social power that is granted in the three-dimensional spaces of Private Gym (Grimes, 1978; Lefebvre, 1991).

Similar to findings by Hodgson & Briand (2013), workers in Private Gym found themselves in 'informal power hierarchies'; those with less social power were informally controlled by those with more social power. However, what is unique to Private Gym is that the power is irrelevant to the connection to Private Gym as an organization. Though all of the actors participate in a bounded setting, and are subject to *spatial practices,* not all are bound to Private Gym in a hierarchal contract way. The self-employed fitness professional shares the setting with staff and contract workers but is autonomous. The self-employed trainer acquires their own clients and trains according to the trainer's programme. The self-employed trainer does not have structural authority over any other worker or club member, however, the findings demonstrate that the self-employed trainers with the longest tenure in Private Gym, and, that had the most professional experience, had the most control (Astley & Sachdeve, 1984), such as claiming preferred space, equipment, or music. The *representations of space* were set out through the demarcation of cardio equipment in one area and weights in another. Through the visibility of shared spaces, trainers could display their knowledge, level of experience, and education, which granted them an 'expert' status. In the shared space, people are able to observe and identify who they perceive to have social dominance by even the look of someone's face, or body language (Zitek & Tiedens, 2012). People with power are observable by people who abdicate power and thus accrue even more power (Atencio & Wright, 2008). Furthermore, the ability to manipulate the *representational space* in order to pair like-minded club members together, or allowing some club members to adopt a pseudo-trainer role, creates an in-group following, thus increasing their referent power (French & Raven, 1959; Warren, 1968).

Individuals with high status do not always need to conform to group norms regarding how space is used (Barker, 1993; Blau & Scott, 1962). Some of the scenes reported in this article may be seen as humorous anecdotes, but the scenes represent how high powered protean workers act against the formal norms of the organization, or, how the owners of the organization take control back, while other scenes demonstrate how trainers either appropriate or negotiate shared space in order to produce work. In many instances involving low-powered individuals, 'negotiation' involves passive work- arounds to the high-powered individual. In this way, the findings are similar to Bosch-Sijtseme, Ruhomake, & Vartianinen (2010) in so far that workers sometimes violate 'policy' or *representations of space*, regarding the use of shared space. However, in our setting, it is the power to violate perceived spaces, rather than Private Gym's official policies.

This article enhances the notion that power has a spatial dynamic. Schubert (2005: p.16) demonstrated that the "social concept of power is embodied in vertical spatial positions". Those with power are vertically placed above, on top, or over, those without power. Formal organizations have vertical spatial positions, as documented by the organizational structure. Flat organizations, or, the example of self-employed professionals in our study, do not have this spatial/visual representation. It is through the dynamics of the *representational space* that we see evidence of the social power.

This article adds a new dynamic to studies on contract workers. For example, Lapalme et al. (2009) demonstrated that contract workers can often adopt an 'insider' status as they spend an equal amount of time inside an organization as permanent employees. In our study, the contract workers is hired by the organization and delivers a service according to the standards and needs of the organization (Van Den Born & Witteloostuijin, 2013). They had legitimate power over the space of the studio, but had very little social power; over other trainers, nor club members.

Finally, this article helps our understanding of how protean workers use service space – that is, space where work is 'produced' and 'consumed' at the same time (Bitner, 1992). Sallaz (2001) indicated that in service spaces there is a three-way relationship between employer, employee, and customer and that an employee can choose when to use organizational rules to aid both themselves and to control how the customer acts in the shared space. Conversely, Belanger & Edwards (2013) indicate that there is a not a three-way relationship because the customer does not have equal power as they do not "directly shape the development of the productive system" (p.436). Private Gym provides a unique insight into these two camps. In this setting, there is a

great deal of blurring between second space (a place of production) and third space (an informal place of consumption) for the trainers and in-group club members (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012; Crossley, 2008). Furthermore, the trainer is not a service worker in the sense of creating client commitment to Private Gym, but rather they are trying to create client commitment to themselves (Sierra, Heiser, & McQuitty, 2009). In Private Gym, there are few 'house rules' (Sallaz, 2002) and trainers and club members alike will use power afforded via social interaction, to get what they need from the space.

This is a study on fitness professionals working in a small privately owned gym in the UK. In some regards, from their own discussions, some of their experiences may differ from fitness professionals embedded in large, corporate gyms. Therefore, a limitation of this study is that it cannot generalize practices and experiences of people in their working/social space. Using an ethnographic approach provides an opportunity to explore in-depth experiences of these particular fitness professionals. Data generated through participation/observation and interviews is co-created between public-self of the informants and myself. The findings are interpretations based on authentic experiences that occurred within Private Gym and were iteratively discussed with existing literature on space and power. A further study could include longitudinal research that follows a cohort of new trainers through their initial stages of employment to self-employment to understand when, where, and how 'power' begins to materialize. We believe these findings may be important for other self-employed and contract workers shared work space. For example, in some situations, hair stylists, building contractors, attorneys, accountants, software developers, etc, may be self-employed, contract worker, or a mixture of both. Future studies are needed to explore how power and space impact the social-working lives of these individuals.

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Table 1: An overview of the informants of the study

Informant	Tenure with Private Gym at beginning of study	Years of fitness industry experience	Role within Private Gym
Julie	1 month	3	Contract – Teaches various fitness classes, mostly on a substitute base
William	8+ years	10+	Self-employed personal trainer
Archie	8+ years	Undisclosed	Contract – teaches Pilates
Thomas	0 month	<1	Intern/Staff
Eugenie	3 years	5+	Self-employed personal trainer Contract – teaches 8 classes
Amanda	6+ years	10+	Contract – teaches Pilates
Oliver	Co-Owner	8+	Co-owner / Financial director
Imogene	2 years	2	Staff – teaches variety of classes (Migrating to self-employed personal trainer)
Harry	2 years	4	Staff – teaches variety of classes (Migrating to self-employed personal trainer)
Kate	8+ years	10+	Self-employed personal trainer
Sam	8+ years	20+	Self-employed personal trainer
Philip	Co-Owner	10+	Co-owner / Managing Director
Virginia	6+ years	10+	Contract – teaches Pilates and subs other classes
Ethan	1 month	2	Self-employed personal trainer
Ben	8+ years	Undisclosed	Self-employed personal trainer
Adam	8+ years	Undisclosed	Self-employed personal trainer