

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

LAURA SPIELVOGEL *Working Out in Japan: Shaping the Female Body in Tokyo Fitness Clubs* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press. 2003, xi + 250p. Paperback retail: US\$19.95

Spielvogel provides a meticulous examination of the ways in which fitness clubs in Tokyo, in downtown Roppongi and outer suburban Chiba, inculcate and promote hegemonic notions of healthy and beautiful bodies. The author draws on a broad ranging sociological and anthropological tradition that embraces Allison (1991, 1993, 1994), Bourdieu (1977), Goffman (1959) and Kondo (1990, 1992) to demonstrate how fitness clubs serve as a location from which the intersection of globalisation and consumption, physical discipline and display, and the creation of everyday meaning can be explored.

Using her knowledge and experience as an aerobics instructor in the United States, she makes comparisons with Japan. Rather than masking her perspective, Spielvogel's voice is explicit, making her comparisons clear and compelling. She is always engaged with her knowledge-production, not passively creating it for putatively objective consumption. Not limiting her analysis to a geographical binary, however, the author examines how practices of consumption in Japan may collaborate and contradict normative standards of beauty. The rigorous perfection of the ideal feminine body type in Japan, Spielvogel argues, requires strict physical, intellectual and social self-control. As women contest the ideal, she focuses on how contestation and conformity are performed differently in different club locations. She describes the ways that fitness instructors and members discuss diet and fitness regimes while eating cream cakes and smoking a cigarette. Linking theoretically to Scott's (1985) work, her analysis shows how such practices are small acts of resistance to the often overwhelming gender hierarchy of Japanese society.

Spielvogel provides a history of fitness in Japan, to describe how fitness and health are inextricably linked with normalizing notions generated by modernity, nationalism, and fantasies of sustained economic growth, and she links contemporary fitness regimes within historical and ongoing practices of disciplining the body and the spirit. Yet she explores the subtle contradictions and complexities of Japanese fitness as well, describing how people choose to avoid excessive exercise and pain, and prefer to inhabit space that offers relaxation, massage, yoga, and swimming as gentler ways of relaxing, rather than building muscle and stamina. In so doing she demonstrates how fitness clubs are also arenas in which young people can

(collectively) express individuality and trendiness. Nonetheless, she does not turn away from a detailed discussion of difficult social issues, offering an examination of the ways in which acute slenderness can coterminously be expressed as selfishness and selflessness within a society that demands women construct a socially appropriate identity through acts that care for others, particularly those centering on food preparation and distribution.

The author explores how young working women, who have disposable income for leisure and recreation, are consequently targeted as a market, and the anomalies that arise. For example, young women are often demeaned as frivolous and uncommitted and their income is considered 'pin money', yet their economic independence and buying power is courted assiduously before they settle into late youth domesticity. Her astute analysis includes an examination of the use of space in and outside fitness clubs, and how female aerobics instructors, via the co-optation of male behaviour, negotiate their social position as young, relatively low-educated, low income women in a hierarchical and patriarchal society, where gendered glass ceilings for women everywhere and glass escalators for male instructors in the fitness industry, in particular, constitute the structuring structures that limit women's potential to achieve. Her vivid examination adds culturally distinct examples to Wikan's (1990) similar work with young women in Bali.

While occasionally repetitive, this animated investigation fulfils two key needs in ethnographic writing; it is exceptionally readable, and provides sociocultural insights anchored in thoughtful participation in and acute observations of daily relationships.

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