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The minute hand of my watch had just settled upon the half hour mark as I strode towards the door of the Jazzercise facility in Fairlawn Plaza Shopping Center. It was 6:30 in the evening when I pushed open the clear glass door that led into the exercise center and followed a small staircase down into the area where the Jazzercise classes are held. I walked down a short hallway, past the daycare room and approached the front desk. I was blasted by a wall of pop music and cool streams of air as I entered a large, yellow room that was lined by small black cubbies, exercise-mats, dumb-bell racks and posters advertising Jazzercise workouts. There was also a small trapezoid-shaped stage, about 3 feet high, in the far right corner that had special speakers to project the leader's voice. Then at 6:45, twenty-three Caucasian women, all of which were between the ages of 40 and 60, and one Caucasian man that was roughly 65 years old began to file into the long room and stretch in their chosen spots. After participating in a Jazzercise workout, I came to realize that the world of Jazzercise indeed possesses many important properties that make it a true culture and that the Jazzercise culture itself ultimately affects parts of the American culture.

The Jazzercise community indeed has its own culture, which is defined as the taken for granted but powerfully influential understandings and rules that are learned and shared by members of a group. It is learned through the classes themselves, as a knowledgeable leader guides the group, it is based on symbols, most notably language, it changes constantly, it is shared by the members as they invite others to partake in classes, and it is also taken for granted by those that participate in Jazzercise classes.

Jazzercise is not a set of innate abilities that an individual is born knowing; rather one must attend the classes to learn the special moves and routines that are choreographed by licensed Jazzercise instructors. The people that come to the classes watch the instructor closely to learn the proper moves and behaviors, and through these meticulous

4/ observations they engage in the social process by which culture is learned and transmitted, also known as enculturation (Kottak, 18). Learning how to Jazzercise is not a difficult

process by any means, as the company makes great pains to clearly identify the instructor so that they may be recognized and mirrored. The leader typically wears exercise clothing that brandishes the Jazzercise logo, wears an electronic headset to convey their

instructions and advice to the crowd, and performs the routines upon a small stage that stands above the main floor. They have the moves and songs memorized so that they may

good (pep up the crowd and *inspire* the exercisers to push on. This is very similar to the Head Men or Big Men in the Tribal Political System. Like the Big Men, the lead instructor cannot force anyone to do anything; they can merely suggest what might be better, such as

recommending a low impact move for the elderly. The instructor also has the exercisers' best interest in mind and encourages bigger moves to increase heart rates, which is similar to the Big Men that throw feasts to give away their wealth to their fellow tribe members.

good (The instructor is most similar to the Big Men in that they try to provide a positive and instructive example for their people to learn from.

Jazzercise also utilizes its own unique set of terms to convey the moves to the exercisers. Typically a mixture of dance and fitness terms are used, such as "lunge," "plié," "flex," "relevé," "tighten" and "chassé." The dance terms are mostly traditional French words taken from ballet and jazz styles of dance, and this integration of terms from other

languages shows that a majority of the Jazzercise "language" consists of borrowed terms.

To plié means to bend one's knees, to relevé means to rise up on one's feet and to chassé

means to do something similar to a graceful gallop. This special language that Jazzercise

uses is their most important symbol, something that arbitrarily and by convention stands for something else with which it has no necessary or natural connection (Kottak, 18). The

language of Jazzercise conveys the moves that are desired and the exercisers automatically associate the words to the appropriate movements. This also shows that the language of

Jazzercise expresses duality: it has two separate levels, the sound and the meaning.

Jazzercise is not only expressed through its own special language, but also through its

trademarked logo. Their logo is a symbol that represents this type of exercise and is found

everywhere: on T-shirts, exercise pants, bags, bumper stickers, flip-flops, beach towels and

much more. The logo itself is only the word "Jazzercise," but it carries with it the idea

behind the exercise: get fit and look good. This symbol is meant to convey this idea to others and entice them to join the Jazzercising masses.

Like other cultures, Jazzercise changes constantly. The routines that are taught to the exercisers are changed and rotated every week so that customers do not become bored with the choreography. The songs that the dances are set to are also changed weekly: one week a routine might include "Misery Business" by Paramore and another week it could include "Fly Me to the Moon" by Frank Sinatra. The Jazzercise Company also provides monthly competitions to provide more incentive for exercising. The competitions are never the same and the prizes change based on the season or the competition theme. Having variety is extremely important for Jazzercise, as well as the Jazzercise customers.

While dancing around and getting a good work out is good fun, Jazzercise must be shared in order for it to continue to thrive and maintain its established culture. The members that participate in the daily Jazzercise workouts of course share this culture amongst themselves, but they can be rewarded if they bring in new individuals to also partake. This system of "rewards" is similar to the idea of Balanced Reciprocity, which entails that when a gift is given between close individuals an equal gift must be given in return in the near future. Jazzercise represents one individual and a customer represents the other. If the customer "gives" a new customer to Jazzercise, Jazzercise must

good ("compensate" for this gift with rewards such as merchandise or free visits. This system is very similar to the way that the Yanomamo Indians would trade amongst themselves and visitors. One would "give" a gift, such as tobacco or psychedelic seeds, and would expect the other to "give" them a gift, such as a machete, in return.

As any culture, Jazzercise is a seemingly commonplace practice that is largely taken for granted by the customers that utilize it. When something is taken for granted, it is thought to be a "silent language" that consists of the usually unconscious rules and traditions that guide our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. While taking the Jazzercise class, I noticed that there are very particular behaviors that are encouraged, but none of these behaviors are specified verbally. I realized this when I Jazzercised a little too close to another individual. Her outward body language quickly became negative and irritable, and my first impulse was to vacate her area as soon as humanly possible. I also noticed that those who took too many water breaks or talked during the workout were given scowls and judging looks of disapproval. This unspoken monitoring of proper behaviors is very good (similar to the way the !Kung bushmen of the Kalahari keep the arrogance and pride of their

people in check. The !Kung will verbally mock those that try to exhibit any superiority and they will even resort to non-verbal body language that shows their irritability and ostracism to convey their displeasure with the negative behavior. Jazzercise has an appropriate set of desired behaviors for a workout class setting: do not speak while Jazzercising, do not get too close, try not to seem lazy, be polite and wait your turn, and pay your full attention to the instructor. If these behaviors are not displayed, judgment shall be passed upon you by your peers.

While culture may be an abstract part of human society, it is still a crucial key to what makes us human beings. We possess the innate urges to eat, drink, procreate, and *9 out of 10* even defecate, but what will show us the proper methods and behaviors for these practices? What will show us that we must use utensils when we consume our meals, or drink certain liquids at certain times of the day? Culture. Culture is the necessity of our lives that allows us as human beings to teach one another and share our skills and knowledge, and culture is what inspires the human race to change and better itself everyday. After participating in and observing the culture of Jazzercise, I have seen that culture can truly be found anywhere and shared by all, and through this I have also realized that American culture itself is shaped by the Jazzercise culture in that it supports the *go* (American mentality to look good and exercise frequently.

Works Cited

Kottak, Conrad Phillip. *Mirror for Humanity: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. 8th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1999. Print.