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# **COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDERS AND IDENTITY**

**Insights from New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Business  
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# **ABSTRACT**

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This research explores competitive bodybuilders in New Zealand and their identities. Bodybuilders have often been construed as being broadly similar – excessively muscular people, who build their physiques for sometimes questionable reasons, such as for a cover for internal insecurities. Bodybuilding is often considered acceptable for men because muscles are symbolic of masculinity – on women they are seen as unnatural and unfeminine. While external critiques have tended to portray bodybuilders in a negative light, phenomenological accounts have often emphasised participants' positive experiences.

Existing research concerning the identity of bodybuilders has only scratched the surface. Identities reflect an understanding of 'who one is' – the continuing meanings people associate with themselves and as members of social groups. Furthermore, bodybuilders are not just 'bodybuilders', they are also people. Bodybuilding is not their only identity, it is one of their numerous identities. This research explored not only the meanings participants attribute to bodybuilding, but also how it is lived and experienced within the broader self.

A phenomenological-inspired, mixed methodological approach was adopted using quantitative and qualitative methods. Participants were male and female competitive bodybuilders of varying ages residing in New Zealand. They were at different stages in their bodybuilding career and represented a range of competitive experience. A postal questionnaire was completed by 382 competitive bodybuilders, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 32 participants. Photo elicitation was also used.

A key outcome of this research has been to highlight the changeable, complex, contradictory nature of bodybuilder identities. Fluidity, ambiguity and pluralism existed amongst the everyday practices and identities of participants. Although bodybuilders shared commonalities, their identities were not identical or stable: bodybuilding could be about transforming the body, looking good, being competitive, creative and/or healthy. It could be a lifestyle, involve personal challenge, self-development, social belonging and friendship. Identity experiences could be influenced by personality, background, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, work, family and church. The bodybuilder identities were also found to be closely connected to participant perceptions concerning their natural body, genetic advantages and limitations. Furthermore, their identities were not depthless but entailed commitment, passion, mental, social and emotional dimensions. Competitive bodybuilding was a meaningful activity, that often left an indelible mark and continued to shape participant lives even after they had ceased competitive bodybuilding.

## **DEDICATION**

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For mum.

She completed her entire University degree by correspondence, while working and raising us. At the time, I was young and rebellious and did not appreciate the enormity of her accomplishment.

But now I do. This is dedicated to her memory.

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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Identity is an integral part of everyday life. It embraces how people see themselves, conduct themselves in differing roles and situations, and how they think of others. Identity, or meanings attached to the self (Burke, 2003), come about because of social interactions, their interpretation and application to the self and to others. Everyone has a personal identity – a unique biography of roots (where they have come from) and routes (places, situations, contexts, roles, and experiences). There is a consistency to the self – the person that people come to know, and biological inscriptions – sex, height, skin colour, able-bodiedness. Identity is not fixed or static. During the course of life we age, we experience various events and places, and we meet a range of people. Social engagement presents us with an array of constraints, influences and expectations, but it also presents us with opportunities.

This research investigates competitive bodybuilders and their identities. Competitive bodybuilding is an aesthetic pursuit where, through deliberate interventions on the part of the participant, such as weight training and dieting, the body is sculpted into a muscular, lean physique, and then assessed in a competitive arena in relation to its muscular mass, symmetry and definition, against other competitors (Roundtree, 2005). The research stems from my own journey and a curiosity about the journeys, lives and realities of others. I am a bodybuilder who has competed on several occasions. Being involved in this activity has impacted on my identity – how I perceive myself, the meanings I attach to myself, how I feel, interact, experience, and live my life.

What it means to be a bodybuilder and how it has connected with my life and identities is quite complex because it has evolved and been subject to shifts and changes, not only over time, but also context. Even as I write this account, I am conscious of the varying ways my bodybuilding

experiences are connected to facets of my identity. For example, there are my recollections as a teenager of having posters of bodybuilders on my bedroom walls; experiences of learning to become a bodybuilder; the day I discovered I had biceps; the difficulty of looking at myself in the gym mirrors; the strangeness of doing bodybuilding poses; my physical transformation; the sense of difference from others, my feelings of pride, arrogance, superiority, inferiority and envy when I compare myself to non-bodybuilders; how I relive bodybuilder moments; the sensation of being muscular; the times I wish I could just forget being a bodybuilder; and bodybuilder links to my family and background values. But there is a particular moment I recall, and it served as a launching point for this research.

I was four weeks out from my first bodybuilding contest and I was on the treadmill. Exhausted, tired, hungry – I had been walking on it for 50 minutes since 5 am. I wanted to get off, but I still had 10 minutes left to complete my session. ‘Why am I here?’ I asked myself. ‘It is the middle of winter. It is cold and dark. Am I insane? I should be curled up in bed.’ I recall inner voices debating my involvement in bodybuilding. One reminded me of my goals and the initial reasons for competing – to improve my soft, frumpy body – inspired by a friend, even older than me, who I had seen compete at a bodybuilding show, and her transformation into this Amazon-like creature; a lean, hard, muscular, strong, confident women. I remembered the discovery that training for a bodybuilding competition was hard work; feeling torn and confused; wanting to look and feel good, not bad; wondering if other competitive bodybuilders experienced this as well; wanting to give up; experiencing the detrimental impacts on my job. Was it all worth it? Yet feeling challenged – that somewhere deep inside I was pushing myself to the edge. Where would it take me? Maybe this was a good thing. My hour on the treadmill was complete and suddenly whether to continue or not no longer seemed a moot point. But what I discovered that morning was that my involvement in bodybuilding was tied in complex ways to my identity. It moved me, connecting, challenging, influencing, and ‘pressing my buttons’ in a myriad of ways. I began

thinking about other competitive bodybuilders and considered how their involvement in bodybuilding connected with their identities.

Competitive bodybuilding is an aesthetic pursuit where participants develop a culturally defined muscular, lean physique and their bodies are judged at bodybuilding contests. The people in this research either are, or have been, involved in this particular activity. In New Zealand, competitive bodybuilding is a minority sport that takes place in a nation where team pursuits such as rugby and netball reign supreme (SPARC, 2001). So who are the bodybuilders in New Zealand? How and why do people become involved in this activity in this country? How does it connect with their lives and identities and what does, or did, it mean to them to be a competitive bodybuilder? Although research on competitive bodybuilders and identity exists (Fisher, 1997; Klein, 1993a), much of this work is British or American based. Furthermore, these studies have predominantly focused on gender and its links to the muscular bodies of bodybuilders. While identity may include gender, it is not limited to it. Furthermore, bodybuilders are not just ‘bodybuilders’, they are people engaged in a range of social spheres and identities. This research, therefore, questions not only the meanings participants may attribute to bodybuilding, but its relationship as lived and experienced within the broader self. There may be variations in how bodybuilders experience their identities, what bodybuilding means to them and how it interfaces with their other identities. Does it reinforce and/or conflict with other identities? And if so – how are such experiences managed?

These areas of interest reflect the purpose of this research. Specifically, it addresses the following questions:

- How and why do people become competitive bodybuilders?
- What does it mean to be a competitive bodybuilder?
- Do bodybuilder identities evolve over time? If so, in what ways and why?

- Do bodybuilder identities intersect with other identities within the self? If so, how are they experienced and managed?
- What are some of the reasons participants stop being competitive bodybuilders? What happens to their identities then?

As this research stems from my own interest and engagement in the sport, as well as a desire to learn from experiences of other bodybuilders, a phenomenologically oriented, mixed-method approach was adopted from an insider perspective (Probert, 2006). Participants in this research were male and female competitive bodybuilders of varying ages residing in New Zealand. They had diverse levels of competitive experience and involvement in competitive bodybuilding. Research methods included both quantitative and qualitative tools. The bodybuilders completed a postal questionnaire, and in-depth interviews were conducted with some respondents. Photo elicitation was utilised during the interviews.

The thesis is structured into a series of chapters. Chapter Two critically discusses the literature pertinent to this research. Key areas include an overview of identity theory and its application to sport. The chapter concludes with an examination of existing research concerning competitive bodybuilding and identity. Chapter Three details the research process, highlights the research questions and the methods involved. Chapters Four to Eight discuss the research findings. Chapter Four provides insights into who the New Zealand competitive bodybuilders are based on the findings from the postal questionnaire. Chapter Five provides further analysis of the quantitative findings from the postal questionnaire and reflects the views and experiences of respondents in relation to a cross-section of bodybuilding issues. These outcomes highlight statistical differences and provide leads that inform the research process. Chapter Six investigates the journeys of participants – their transition from non-competitive to competitive bodybuilders, detailing the construction and evolution of their identities. It explores why people become

competitive bodybuilders and what its means for them. Chapter Seven considers bodybuilder identities within the broader context of the self. For example, their identities may include their gender, age, and ethnicity, and participants may also be involved in other life spheres such as family and work. This chapter documents research findings concerning the extent competitive bodybuilding reinforces, challenges and/or influences other identities and life spheres of the participant. Chapter Eight investigates the reasons why people stop being competitive bodybuilders – and what then happens to their bodybuilder identities. Chapter Nine discusses the research findings in relation to identity, demonstrating its relevance and links with existing literature. Finally, Chapter Ten concludes with a summary of the key research outcomes, contributions to knowledge, final thoughts, and suggestions for future research.

This research seeks to contribute to a greater understanding of competitive bodybuilding – the nature of this activity and the experiences of those who participate in it. Identity theory in this respect has barely scratched the surface. The findings add to broader scholarly arenas – such as those concerning sport and leisure, gender, age, ethnicity specifically, and identity theory generally. Finally, this research adds value to the work of sports specialists and coaches as it provides insight into athletes' motivations and meanings – the pleasures and rationale they attach to participation, as well as areas of concern and vulnerability. The Thesis begins with a review of the literature – identity, its application to sport and then, specifically, to competitive bodybuilding.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

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To explore the relationship between competitive bodybuilding and identity, the following areas of existing literature have been reviewed on the basis that they are pertinent to this research.

### **Theory Overview and Position**

This includes theoretical literature concerning identity theory, social identity theory as well as psychological perspectives. It discusses how identity may be defined; concepts such as personal and group identity and their interface; how identities are formed and may be developed; and the notion that bodybuilders will have multiple identities that identities may conflict, require negotiating and may differ in terms of their importance to the self.

### **Sport, Identity and Key Identity Intersections**

#### *Sport and identity*

Competitive bodybuilding is considered a sport and therefore the identity literature as it relates to sport is reviewed. Additional focus has been placed on specific sport and leisure activities which may share similarities with competitive bodybuilding. This section will explore motivations and meanings underpinning sport participation; how people acquire and develop sporting identities; their commitment, implications for other life spheres, and reasons for sporting retirement.

#### *Key identity intersections with sport*

Linkages between sport identities such as gender, age, ethnicity, and class in the literature are also reviewed.

### **Competitive Bodybuilding and Identity**

Existing literature as it relates to competitive bodybuilding and identity is reviewed. The status of the field is considered and informed by the previous sections. Gaps are identified and highlighted, setting the scene for the focus of this research and its contribution to knowledge.

## **2.1 THEORY OVERVIEW AND POSITION**

### **What is identity?**

Identity is an integral part of everyday life. It embraces how people see themselves, the way they conduct themselves in differing roles and situations, how they think others perceive them, and how in turn, they assess others. Identity can be defined in numerous ways and there is no commonly agreed framework (Burke, 2003; Cote & Levine, 2002; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Woodward, 2002). According to Breakwell (1986), trying to theorise about identity is like trying to traverse a battlefield, except instead of unexploded shells, its debris and dangers are unconsolidated thoughts. Trying to compare, include and/or recognise the diversity of approaches relating to identity would prove an epic, if not impossible, task and a significant detour at this point. The intent of this section is to instead provide an overview of how understandings of identity and key debates have evolved over time, followed by a discussion of concepts pertinent to this research.

### **Identity: Progression to date**

Consideration of identity within the social context is pertinent. People are social creatures and their identities function not in isolation, but within this broader social arena. Social theory provides a useful framework as it adopts a multi-disciplinary approach when focusing on a particular area of research. Intersections may include, for example considerations of philosophy, evolutionary biology, religion, economics, sociology, anthropology, geography and sport (Friedland & Boden, 1994; Rail, 1998a). Understandings and debates concerning identity can be therefore be viewed as connected with understandings about social life, and these have also been inextricably tied to philosophies about truth and reality.

Enlightenment – also known as “the age of reason” was a period during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century when human knowledge replaced superstition and fable as the basis of the truth. Knowledge became viewed as something that was acquired, built upon and therefore progressed. Modernism, aligned with this era, reflected a time when progress was perceived as linear, cumulative and was considered a process of advancement towards the acquisition of complete knowledge or the truth. “Modern people’ knew more than their predecessors because “they possessed all the ancients’ knowledge plus some of their own” (Hatch, 2006 p.36).

Hall (1992) provided a conceptual framework of how discussion about identity has evolved over time. He acknowledges that identity has been approached from a variety of perspectives, largely associated with three key social theory perspectives – the enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject. Table 2.1 summarises this progression route, the details of which will now be discussed.

Hall (1992) referred to early concepts of identity as the Enlightenment Subject. Identity was something which was individualised and already attached to a person at birth. During the course of a lifetime this inner core of identity unfolded, yet the person remained “essentially the same” (p.275). Identity was therefore pre-determined. People were considered fully-contained, rational, thinking beings “before whom the whole of human history was laid out for understanding and mastery” (S. Hall, 1992 p.282). They were creatures of reason and within this context identity was innate, stable and predictable with interpretations universally understood and singular in nature.

However, this notion of identity was challenged by proponents who believed that there should be greater recognition of the social interface with identity. For example, symbolic-interactionists considered reality as something that took effect as a result of human interaction, negotiation and the meanings which were formed in social contexts. Identity was therefore something constructed

and conveyed through the use of, for example, symbols, language and rituals. As individuals functioned in complex worlds with numerous settings, they therefore required multiple identities in order to fit in and respond to the expectations of these numerous social spheres. There were social ‘hats’ such as work, home, mother, father and partner with associated performance expectations and patterns. Mead (1934), Cooley (1902) and Goffman (1969) contributed to these understandings of identity which became increasingly viewed as an extension of a self-conscious social self that adopted appropriate social selves mindful of its social arenas. The influential powers of social expectations in terms of shaping identity advocated within social constructionism were also highly pertinent in this approach. Foucault and feminism, for example, have fuelled discussions and debate on the significance of social forces and their relationships with identity.

Modernists perceived the world as stable, comprising traditional categories such as gender, age, ethnicity and class which served to define and shape identities, as well as predictable phases (e.g. youth, middle age and old age). However, this modernist approach to identity was challenged by individuals such as Giddens (1991) and postmodernists who argued that the world was no longer stable, controlled and predictable. As the result of increasing globalisation, technological advancement, mass media and consumerism people had become exposed to many identity options and sources of information. These changes subsequently altered the way that people think, interact and experience their lives. Whereas modernists conceived identity as comprising a core with multiple parts, postmodernism argued identities had now become fragmented, fluid, changeable, very image-oriented, subjective and arguably depthless. The traditional categories that had once defined individuals no longer applied. Instead, identities have become more individualised and self-determined. Although people could utilise traditional categories such as gender, age and class to define themselves, the point was that these categories no longer defined them.

Furthermore, within a postmodern approach, the options within identity categories extended considerably. For example, within all female groups femininity could take numerous forms, as well as between men and women. Pluralism within and between identity ‘groupings’ have been emphasised and promoted by advocates. Giddens (1991) argued that as people have become exposed to greater levels of information, they have become more self-aware of the notion of choice yet also troubled, uncertain and self-questioning about their identity. Increasingly people were engaging in self-therapy to find out ‘who they are’ and identity became entangled with acts of self-determination – to become who they wanted to be. Postmodernism is a complex approach which has, within it varying strands and extends into numerous field such as art, literacy, anthropology, criticism and geography (Rail, 1998a). Yet beneath the umbrella of postmodernism there is common ground: what once constituted the (singular) truth and view of reality has become less certain. Instead, interpretations are considered fluid, ambiguous and diverse. These principles, as they relate to identity are summarised by Kelemen and Rumens (2008) as follows:

- Fluidity – the concept that reality is not stable and universal, but subjective and formed in context. Proponents share a belief that there is no objective, defined reality or singular notion of truth.
- Ambiguity - meanings are not fixed and nor are they bonded to specific ‘things’. For example, behaviours viewed as cheating may also be considered admirable, tactical competitive behaviour.
- Pluralism - the celebration of complexities, multiple meanings and variances. For example, masculinity or class can be portrayed in differing ways reflecting intersections with age, culture, time, sexuality, context, conduct and personal preference.

Postmodernists have challenged the ‘modern age’ perspective that scientific progress is advanced, linear and/or beneficial. Postmodernism disputes the notion of a singular truth and that there is a predictable reality that is universally understood or encompasses an absolute truth. The shift from

modernism (including Enlightenment to the Sociological Subject) to postmodernism is displayed in Table 2.1. As these identity possibilities are interwoven with broader philosophies concerning truth and reality, these connectivities are also highlighted.

### **Research Position**

Debates concerning identity continue. The lure of postmodernism is that it appreciates and accommodates the heterogeneities that may reside amongst identities and that identities pertaining to the same person may prove multiple, fluid and contradictory (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). In other words, what may constitute the truth and reality may vary not only between people, but for the same person when conceiving themselves in varying states of time, context and mind. Postmodernism therefore encourages and challenges the researcher to explore an individual's "full range of being" (Cerulo, 1997, p.391). This possibility has implications for bodybuilder research - for example with respect to participant experiences at differing points of their competitive cycle or in differing contexts such as sport, work and family. Postmodernism also appreciates that scientific and technological developments have enhanced the possibilities of identity in terms of physical change. The body for example, has become less fixed and more open to personal design and determination – a notion which resonates with bodybuilding given its focus on manipulating bodily shape, muscularity and fat levels.

Postmodernism, however, has been criticised as being abstract to the point of being out of touch with the everyday practices of people (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). For many individuals their daily lives remain embedded with socially predictable patterns such as work, motherhood or fatherhood and these categories continue to reflect important ways that people define themselves. Furthermore, postmodernism arguably fails to recognise the powers and limiting factors of society in relation to identity (Rail, 1998a). For example, there is an uncomfortable fit between postmodernism and feminism which often highlights the social structures, disadvantages and the struggles for women (Rail, 1998a). There are limits to freedoms and choice. Yet feminism is also

utilising postmodernism to appreciate the diversity amongst women and the complexities of their identities (Rail, 1998a). Postmodernism, with its emphasis on the aesthetics also tends to by-pass the internal dimensions of identity which may also prove important components of identity. Arguably postmodernism lacks appreciation of internal processes, psychic experiences and the emotion of how identity is felt in everyday lives (Craib, 1998; Rail, 1998a) and may not consider internal dimensions of identity such as commitment and authenticity (Wheaton, 2000a).

Some would argue, therefore, that postmodernism needs to recapture some of the structure of modernity such as acknowledgment of the inequalities which can accompany gender, race and age (Bradley, 1996; Gubrium & Holstein, 1995; Jarvie & Maguire, 1994) and identity must include the experiential, ‘felt’ dimensions (Craib, 1998). In other words, that the shift has been too great and needs to come back to some degree, as well as consider creatively broader elements. Yet a return to pure modernism would also prove undesirable. Modernism is arguably guilty of being out of touch with the implications of social change in relation to identity, but also the diversities that reside amongst people (e.g. women, men, ethnicities, ages).

Adopting a position of modernism or postmodernism is not necessarily about taking sides. Kelemen and Rumens (2008) argue that postmodernism is not about a rejection of modernism but rather a continuation and refinement of this model. Postmodernism reflects “the unfolding of the modernist tapestry” (p. 63). However, in response to this stand point, it can also be pointed out that postmodernism represents a critical and sceptical extension of modernism. Bradley (1996) has positioned modernism and postmodernism as adopting differing social perspectives – one depicting structure, patterns and predictability, whilst the latter promotes chaos, confusion, and a series of unique events. However, despite their disparate nature, she believes that social worlds reflect a combination of both dimensions. She cites age as an example. Whilst postmodernism may emphasize how, through technological advances, age may be defied, Bradley (1996) also points out that “it is only members of elite and wealthy groups who are normally in a position to

transgress age specific norms and afford plastic surgery” (p. 160). Social class, therefore, reflects a social sphere which modernist approaches to identity would consider relevant.

Ultimately the focus of this research is to adopt an appreciation and recognition of the participant’s perspective of identity. Whilst acknowledging academic perspectives, it is important that this research retains a phenomenological investigatory approach in order to appreciate the complexity of the topic and also the varying ways that participants may perceive their identities in real life settings (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003; Woodward, 2002). Within this context, despite shifts in thinking from modernism to postmodernism, it is possible that bodybuilders may conceive their identities as innate, biological, psychological, socially-responsive, a combination of these dimensions or conceive their identities from a completely different perspective. Whilst postmodernism may have its shortcomings in many respects it also offers the greatest potential as a mode of creatively exploring bodybuilder identities. However, modernism and even biological dimensions also have important contributions. Craib’s (1998) argument that in considering the everyday experiences of people and their identities, the internal processes including emotions, feelings, ‘unthoughts’, psychic possibilities, as well as the entanglement of self and bodies should not be overlooked. By adopting this multidisciplinary approach, this research not only retains the integrity of its purpose, but also offers its greatest potential in terms of contributing to theory, including that of bodybuilding, sport and social theory.

Table 2.1: Paradigm shift: modernism to postmodernism and implications for truth, reality and identity

(derived from: Hatch, 2006 p. 56)

PARADIGM	MODERNISM >>>>>>>> >>>>>> POSTMODERISM		
	Enlightenment	Sociological Subject Symbolic-Interpretive	Postmodern
Reality is a	Pre-existing unity	Socially constructed diversity	Constantly shifting and fluid plurality
Knowledge is believed to be	Universal	Particular	Provisional
Knowledge is developed through	Facts and information	Meaning and information	Exposure and experience
Knowledge is recognized via	Convergence	Coherence	Incoherence, fragmentation, deconstruction
Model for human relationships	Hierarchy	Community	Self-determination
Overarching goal	Prediction and control	Understanding	Freedom
<b>Implications for Identity</b>			
Identity formation	Innate, pre-determined, rational, “subject of reason”	Self-conscious Responsive	Self-determined
Identity Composition	Full contained, Singular	An inner core with multiple social selves	No inner core, fluid
Identity Change	Unfolding but remains essentially the same.	Responsive to social dynamics. Evolves over life. Identification.	Subjective. Changing. Choice. Freedom.
Identity Interpretation	Predictable, constant, universally understood.	Particular identity formed in context as a result of human interaction and shared meanings	Heterogeneities Ambiguous Plurality

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### Implications for Identity (cont)

	<b>Enlightenment</b>	<b>Sociological Subject Symbolic-Interpretive</b>	<b>Postmodern</b>
Identity ‘truths’	Singular universal truth or understanding regarding identity interpretations.	Situational conditional. Identity interpretations depend on the social context, human interaction and shared meanings.	What is the ‘truth?’ Identity is simulated, contextual, situational, ambiguous, conditional and interpretative

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## Identity Concepts

### *Personal and Social identities - The Enlightenment Subject and Sociological Subject (Modernism)*

Concepts used for discussion about identity often include the notion of personal and social identity (Schreiner, 2006; Woodward, 2002). Personal identities reflect a sense of who the person is as a unique individual (Howard, 2000); including characteristics, traits, history and biography, and the person’s self – the ‘type of person I am’; the person others ‘come to know and expect’ (Schreiner, 2006). For example, bodybuilders may describe themselves as coming from a poor background, as someone who is hard working, honest, ambitious, and has a great sense of humour. Social identities conversely, reflect the affiliations people may have with various groups and stem from perceived commonalities (Hogg, 2003; Jenkins, 2004). In contrast to the individuality of personal identities, the emphasis of social identities is that of similarity with others, a sense of belonging to a particular group. This may be, for example, on the basis of gender (e.g., women relating to one another), age (e.g., feeling similar to those of similar age), occupation (e.g., the camaraderie of those in the army), hobbies, sports, interests or beliefs (e.g., belonging to a rugby club, church). People have a sense of individuality – they have a unique self – but people also seek to fit in and belong as social creatures. Both personal and social identities

are therefore important dimensions of the self and well-being (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Baumeister & Muraven, 1996).

Competitive bodybuilders can therefore be understood both as individuals, but also as people who belong to a common social group – that of competitive bodybuilding. Scholars have sometimes interchangeably referred to terms such as roles, categories and social identities (Callero, 1985; Vryan, Adler, & Adler, 2003). Clarifying these distinctions is valuable. This research adopts the perspective that people can share a common role (e.g., they may all be bodybuilders) or be categorised as such by others (i.e. as a label); however, identity can be viewed as something more. Identity is about meanings (Burke, 2003), not just about being or doing bodybuilding. It is about how it is experienced, interpreted, made sense of and connected with the self. In other words, to say “I am a competitive bodybuilder” is to classify the self, but that alone does not encompass what it *means* to be a competitive bodybuilder. This approach highlights that there is a connection between the social group and the personal. While people may all be competitive bodybuilders, and share certain commonalities influenced by the group, what it means to be a bodybuilder, and how it connects with their sense of self, may also be personal in meaning. This acknowledges the possibility of heterogeneity – that people may all be competitive bodybuilders – but what such a definition means to them may differ.

#### *Multiple identities - Sociological Subject (Modernism)*

In the course of everyday life people engage in a multitude of social interactions, assuming varying roles such as work and family that require various ‘social selves’. Depending on the situation, there will be differing representations of the self, such as how to behave, dress, and interact (Burke, 2001; Thoits, 2003). Bodybuilders, as multi-dimensional and socially active beings, will therefore also have a conglomeration of identities they manage as part of everyday life. Their bodybuilding identity will be one of their multiple identities.

Furthermore, in the course of their life time, there may be various social identities that they assume, others that may evolve and change, and others that may be potentially discarded. There is thus not only complexity but also changeability and evolution associated with identity, especially social identities (Jenkins, 2004; Vryan et al., 2003), which will add to a person's biography. These identities feed into the template of personal identity, and therefore influence the identity matrix – how life is viewed and experienced – which may in turn influence future identities and meanings. However, consistency is also associated with identity, especially personal identity. There is a continuity to the self, where people ‘come to know’ each other as well. From this perspective, humans are not totally chameleon-like creatures. Rather, their identities comprise an inner core with multiple social selves with the capacity to reflect, adjust and respond to a variety of social contexts and expectations. There is also an evolutionary dimension to identity. Jenkins (2004) describes identity as a process – one that is ongoing and constantly evolving.

#### *Fragmented Identities - Postmodernism*

Whereas identity has been described above as comprising a core with multiple aspects, post modernists regard identity as fragmented – having no fixed inner core or dimension of consistency (Vryan et al., 2003). Instead, identity is considered a “moveable feast” which is “formed and transformed continuously” (S. Hall, 1992, p.277). The notion of individual identities according to post-modernism has moved beyond stable identifiers such as gender, ethnicity and age, to being affected by much broader influences as a result of the media, imagery, electronic connectivity, as well as scientific developments. Identity has become “more mobile, multiple, personal and self-reflexive, and subject to change and innovation” (Kellner, 1992). Whilst definitions of postmodernism vary, this perspective conveys the notion of an image-based, depthless society where consumerism plays an important role in enabling individuals to manipulate their appearance and therefore their identity. Self concept is thus arguably replaced with one of self-image (Vryan et al., 2003). Postmodernism is dismissive of a universal

perspective of reality and the ‘truth’. Instead, what is the truth and real is considered subjective, open to multiple meanings depending on the person, their interpretation, the social setting and its conditions (Powell & Longino, 2002). Identities from this perspective can therefore be conceived as complex, fluid and open to multiple meanings. This implies not only variance, but the possibility and acceptance of contradiction in identity experiences and interpretations. This position appreciates, for example, that bodybuilders may be as ‘old as they feel’ – suggesting that bodybuilder experiences in relation to their age may be relative, changing and reflective of their state of mind. Understandings of gender within the context of competitive bodybuilding may vary from the interpretations of a non-bodybuilder. In other words, what may be admired for its masculinity in a bodybuilder setting may prove at odds, or hold differing meanings if performed in the workplace or an alternative sporting context. Postmodernism appreciates the contradictory identity experiences of off-season competitive bodybuilders who be considered may ‘fat’ in the presence of competitive bodybuilder colleagues yet ‘in shape’ relative to non-bodybuilder friends.

### **Assuming identities, and their changing evolving nature**

Considerations of identity are entangled in debates concerning naturalism and social construction. According to Jenkins (2004) the process of identification begins at a very early age. When people are born, biological factors such as sex, skin colour, and race contribute to the template of identity. Furthermore, as babies, people begin to gain a sense of existence and realise that they are similar, but different from others (Jenkins, 2004). However, for some cultural groups, identification may also connect pre-birth to ancestry links - an example of which is the New Zealand Māori (Metge, 1986).

Whilst naturalism may assume varying approaches, according to this perspective, the body is fundamentally a pre-social, biological template upon which other aspects of the self and society are founded (Monaghan, 1997; Shilling, 2003). However, from a sociological perspective, the notion that the biological body determines social life and is not influenced by social dynamics is

considered an untenable position. As stated by Nettleton (1995, p. 105) “these ideas are criticized for being reductionist, overly deterministic and scientifically flawed”. Some scholars have taken the extreme position - that at birth people have no identity – that identities are something acquired over time, that take meaning and effect in the social context (R. Ryan & Deci, 2003).

There may be varying positions and combinations aligned to the naturalism-social constructionism identity continuum or composition mix. However, the social constructionist position, whilst an umbrella for various approaches, including those utilised by feminists, anthropologists and sociologists, is usually united by a philosophy that the body and self-identity is something shaped, constrained and, arguably, even invented by social dynamics (Shilling, 2003). Foucault has played an influential role in social constructionist debates advocating possibilities that identity and the body (e.g. shape, size, appearance) are subject to the controlling forces and powers of society (Bartky, 1988; Monaghan, 1999b; Rail & Harvey, 1995). Whilst originally studying institutional settings, such as schools, hospitals and prisons, and how their systems and knowledge served as regularly powers, Foucault believed that bodily practices which people engaged in on a daily basis were also inextricably linked to institutional settings, that being, those with powers a broader, albeit invisible, nature which were embedded in the patterns and social expectations of society. However, Bartky (1988) pointed out that a shortcoming of this Foucauldian analysis was` an implied assumption that the bodily experiences of men and women were the same. She believed that there were added pressures placed on women by society concerning the body such as the need for slimness (thus dieting) and appearance management. There were differences in terms of bodily conduct (e.g. femininity and the need to be graceful and not take up space as well as being fragile and weak). Subsequently the practices utilised by women such as the use of makeup were often undertaken in order to conform to the normative expectations of femininity. However, Bartky (1988) highlighted that some women engaged in oppositional discourses to these powers, indicating that women who pumped iron were an example on the basis they transgressed the normative bounds of feminine body shape and

conduct. Bartky's (1988) viewpoint is pertinent to this study, given its focus on bodybuilding, however, her analysis reflected the position of a non-participant, a different country and era that may not be consistent with contemporary female competitive bodybuilding within New Zealand or the potential female diversities that may reside amongst this sporting group.

From a social constructionist approach, as people grow up they interact with other people and groups. These include role models, ideas and influences from parents, peers, social institutions, the media and society. They become exposed to appropriate modes of conduct, appearance, forms of masculinity or femininity, cultural traditions and lifestyle patterns (Bourdieu, 1978; Connell, 2001, 2005; Krane, 2001; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004; Mennell, Murcott, & Otterloo, 1992). However, the specifics of these may be subject to variation on the basis of culture, time, and place. For example, what makes sense or is attractive for a young female in New Zealand in 2008 may differ from that of a person growing up in England in 1958.

During an individual's life cycle, certain rituals and expectations may also have a bearing on identity formation and development (Erikson, 1980; Kroger, 2007). Typical identity patterns may occur or emerge. For example, youth is often construed as a phase of identity imitation, experimentation and/or rebellion. There may be freedoms and/or a willingness to try out new things and identities. During mid-life, people are often expected to become more focused on work, family, and career. They may experience a consciousness of their age and/or mortality. This may also prove a time of mid-life crisis. During old age, people are expected to slow down, retire and take life more easily. This is also a phase associated with physical and mental decline (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Kroger, 2007). Identity and its development may also be influenced by changes in social circumstances such as getting married or divorced, having children, experiencing the death of a loved one, moving towns or changing jobs. These create new

circumstances that in turn can influence identity pathways (Goossens & Phinney, 1996; Kroger & Green, 1996).

Social influences and interactions clearly play a critical role in identity formation, development and experiences. However, to dismiss relevance and applicability, at least in part, of the naturalist approach to bodybuilding research would be premature and unwise. Bodybuilders place significance on the construction of muscle and this has ties not only to social, but also to biological dimensions, as well as arguably intersections with sex, race and potentially age (Monaghan, 1997; Roundtree, 2005). For example, some individuals due to genetic disposition may have bodies which are more able to develop muscularity. Individuals of certain racial backgrounds may have greater predisposition towards muscular physiques than others (Frable, 1997; Monaghan, 1997; Roth, Wang, Kammerer, Miljkovic-Cacic, Bunker, Wheeler, Patrick, & Zmuda, 2007). Furthermore, when people draw connections between their identity in relation to their race/ethnicity, age, sex and sexuality, these assessments tend to include not only social constructs, but also often biological ‘facts’ that they align with their overall self concept (Frable, 1997).

According to Craib (1998) an over emphasis on social dimensions can downplay the significance of internal factors and overshadow the notion that people can have free will and be active agents who also shape and determine their own lives (Thoits, 2003). For instance, Lawy (2003) has documented the account of a teenager as she shaped her identity over time. The researcher discovered that whilst social dynamics were important, the participant also engaged in internal processes that enabled her to fashion her own life. The participant reflected on options, challenged and questioned previous knowledge. These considerations then contributed to new understandings and meanings which were used to “construct and produce a sustainable and coherent self-narrative for her future use” (Lawy, 2003, p. 331)

The dominance of the social perspective can lack an appreciation of the lived body and its multitude of layers, including its emotions and internal dimensions. A more internally driven approach to identity tends to be found in psychologically oriented view points. This perspective often positions identity as something that lies within a person, and people then seek out and/or adopt identities that fit their selves and needs. Identities may be assumed because they provide continuity to the self. They may complement an individual's personal and biological profile, capabilities, needs, interests and/or ambitions (Cote & Levine, 2002). Identities may be adopted because they provide a sense of uniqueness or distinctiveness for the person, or offer personal and social benefits. Other reasons may include the desire for belonging, competence and/or autonomy (Breakwell, 1986). What these notions share in common is the position that people tend to assume identities because they perceive they offer an attractive proposition – an end state which they consider desirable.

However, identities may also be assumed not for their benefits, but for less voluntary reasons such as parental pressure, necessity, guilt, and the avoidance of sanctions or negative outcomes (R. Ryan & Deci, 2003). They may be assumed so as to fit in and/or appease others. However, while conforming to social expectations and traditions may be important, and can underpin identity developments (as emphasised in social constructionism) transitions can also prove less predictable. People may want to create new identities or reinvent themselves (Kroger & Green, 1996). This may be because they feel a sense of personal discontent or are at a significant turning point in their life. They may hit 'rock bottom' or experience 'the last straw' (Goossens & Phinney, 1996; Kiecolt, 1994). In response, they may establish new goals (e.g., to lose weight, get fit), engage in self-improvement initiatives, or cultivate an amended view of their current and future identities (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003). People may adopt identities that reflect something completely out of their known character that they have always wanted to do. Identities may enable certain fantasies to be lived out in some shape or form (Woodward, 2002). A conservative accountant during the day for instance may cheerfully function as a Star Trek fan at

night. However, being different and adopting identities that disregard social acceptance can also be embraced by individuals. Such identities may provide a refreshing release from the mundane; they may prove personally and/or politically rewarding. These pleasures and benefits may outweigh the sanctions experienced in the face of others (or certain others).

Identities can also deviate from social norms as people may pursue identities despite social disapproval, stigmas and sanctions. These notions are pertinent for bodybuilders – as their identities have frequently been perceived by others in a less than favourable light. Bodybuilders may therefore relate to what Becker (1963) referred to as ‘outsiders’ – individuals or groups deemed deviant by society on the basis that they function in ways that are perceived as being outside the bounds of normality or acceptable behaviour. Becker (1963) emphasised that “deviance is not a quality that lies in behaviour itself, but in the interaction between the person whom commits an act and those who respond to it” (p.14), and that society encompasses a multitude of groups, each of which may have their own rules. Deviancy is therefore a judgment imposed on an individual but may not be shared by that individual. Indeed the act may not be considered deviant within the realms of their social grouping – to the contrary the act may be acceptable and/or normal. Furthermore, there can be differing forms, understanding and levels of deviance, which may shift over time in response to changing social values. For example, steroid use was once a behaviour without repercussion or risk to health, but now within sporting, medical and criminal codes, it is considered unhealthy, a criminal offence and the behaviour of a sporting cheat (NZSDA, 2004/2005, 2007; Charles Yesalis, 2000).

Being different and having an identity which is not readily socially accepted, may not be an identity choice voluntarily sought by the participant. For example, a person may become unemployed or bankrupt. As a result they may feel and/or be viewed by others in a less desirable manner. Identities can therefore be threatened and/or spoiled (Breakwell, 1986).

The point is that people may take up bodybuilding at different stages in their life. It will connect with their personal, biological and internal identity in different ways and their reasons for assuming this particular identity may vary. When and how does it connect with an individual's personal journey? Was it triggered by social influences or significant events? Does it relate to personal and/or internal reasons? These are the types of questions that theoretical frameworks raise and can be considered within the context of competitive bodybuilding and identity formation. Social constructionism suggests that bodybuilding identities will also be influenced by involvement with society, including social groups and institutions. Concepts and processes in this regard, will now be discussed.

### **The nature of groups**

The groups that people belong to (e.g., competitive bodybuilding) have a significant impact on identity, shaping how people spend their time as well as their attitudes, values, and conduct. They can affect how people may perceive themselves, how they may perceive others and also, how in turn, others may perceive them (Hogg, 2003). An appreciation of group identity is thus pertinent to this research. A group can be defined by its member commonalities – the ideologies, meanings, understandings, and passions shared by its participants. These factors contribute to a sense of community and kinship among the group, even though they may not know each other personally (Jenkins, 2004). They also create a sense of difference from others (i.e. non-members). Groups may be based on a specific activity (e.g., competitive bodybuilding); however, identification may comprise not only overtly shared practices, such as language, conduct, and style of dress, but also less visible dimensions such as the connectivity surfers may have towards the sea (Hogg, 2003).

Groups have their own way of functioning and doing things – commonalities and norms that members understand and appreciate. They explain for example, why business people dress (often

in suits) and conduct themselves in their ‘professional manner’ in the workplace; religious groups congregate for prayer on certain days; and rappers talk, dress, and share music in their distinctive style. Hogg (2003) has referred to the multi-dimensional nature of group norms. In other words, they do not simply entail the activities and attributes that appear visually in common, but encompass internal elements as well, such as ways of thinking, acting, and being. Group norms are about connectivity with group ideology. To become a group member, participants (especially those new to the activity) must learn, master, and conform to the norms of the group. Existing members often serve as role models or prototypes (Hogg, 2003), demonstrating appropriate behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions. They serve as exemplary members and are often popular within the group, whereas those who are non-conformists may find themselves marginalised. Although people may seek out groups (e.g., on the basis of similar interests) and become a member in this fashion, Jenkins (2004) has also highlighted that groups can recruit members. There may also be an acceptance or affirmation process that underpins group acceptance. However, even as a member, social membership can never be assumed as ongoing. There is often uncertainty attached to identity. Therefore in addition to rites of passage, there may also be occasions when members and/or groups engage in behaviours that reaffirm their commitments to certain identities.

These principles of group behaviour may apply to competitive bodybuilders, that is, the notion that as a social collective, they will have their own pattern of group behaviour. It also suggests that new entrants (i.e. novice bodybuilders) will logically need to learn and adopt such ways and that in order to be a member they will need to conform to group behaviour. Existing bodybuilders may play a valuable role in modelling appropriate group ways of thinking and doing things – and there may be times, places, and occasions when they need to reaffirm their identities and commitment to the group identity.

## **Managing identities**

Traditionally, research has focused on single identities (e.g., the bodybuilder, being a mother etc) however, there is now increasing focus on identities and how they may function together (Frable, 1997; Howard, 2000). However, during a lifetime, people (such as bodybuilders) will have, and assume various social identities. They will also have to manage multiple identities that individually reflect different ideologies, ways of thinking, acting, and behaving. For example, how people act at home, may be quite different from their identities at work and/or at the gym. Sometimes social interaction may lead to the simultaneous enactment of multiple identities within the self. This may occur, for example, when a person meets someone from work while shopping with their family – their work and family identities are called into play. This may or may not prove problematic. Enacting a particular social identity in a given situation may have minimal consequences for their other identities (Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003). Furthermore, although identities may prove interconnected and overlap, they may be compatible and complementary and the resulting process of enacting them simultaneously is thus straightforward and potentially beneficial (Settles, 2004). However, this may not always be the case. In a situation when a partner does not approve of the amount of time the bodybuilder spends at the gym, for example, believing it detracts from family, the partner may feel a sense of internal conflict about what to do as they grapple with various choices and consequences (Settles, 2004; Smith-Lovin, 2001; Thoits, 1986). Much of the research concerning multiple identities is embryonic and theoretically driven. There are calls for greater appreciation of how they are lived and experienced by participants in real life settings, and how they are managed (Frable, 1997). The experiences of bodybuilders, not only as ‘bodybuilders’ but as holistic beings where bodybuilding is considered one of their many identities, will contribute to these understandings.

### *Salience*

In the face of identity options, Stryker (2000) and McCall and Simmons (1978) believe that choice can be influenced by factors such as commitment. Identities are not conceived as equal, but envisaged to assume rankings within the self. Identities may hold varying levels of importance to the individual (McCall & Simmons, 1978), which may be influenced by their support structures, levels of personal commitment, and the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards associated with the identity. Stryker (2000) believes hierarchy is based on salience, that salient identities are those activated more readily than others. He perceives such characters as assuming a higher hierarchical position amongst a person's multitude of identities, and that in times of identity conflict they are likely to be more favoured over less salient ones. Stryker (2000) also claims that salience is influenced by commitment. Commitment has, in turn, been defined as comprising two key elements: its social connectivity (e.g., the number of people the identity is linked to), and the strength of its bond i.e. the personal sense of affiliation or attachment (Burke, 2001; Stets & Biga, 2003). This would suggest for example, that if an individual has a strong commitment to their bodybuilder identity they will tend to assume this identity more readily and often than others. They will also probably have many friends who are bodybuilders and strong ties with this social group. This analysis also suggests that although for some competitive bodybuilders bodybuilding may assume a significant and defining part of the self, for others, this may not be the case. Commitment levels may vary. These differences may have ramifications for self-identity, how people prioritise their activities and conduct themselves in varying situations and for the nature of their social networks and friendships.

Studies such as Ryan and Deci's (2003) have also highlighted the relevance and implications of 'fit' between social and personal identities and linkages to commitment. They have suggested that when people enact some social identities they feel 'truly themselves' – these identities fit their persona, and fulfil important inner needs, beliefs, values, and their personality. These types of

identities may reflect a more salient and stable part of the self. In the face of identity choice, participants may more willingly gravitate towards these identities, and integrate them into their identity expressions. Conversely, other roles and identities may be less voluntary or are assumed out of pressure and/or guilt. This suggested, for example, that there can be differences in commitment between someone who goes to church due to their faith, as opposed to reasons such as guilt or social expectation.

Andes (1998) claimed commitment may not only be defined differently by group members but that individual members may also change how they express their commitment during the course of their involvement. She found that in the early stages, group friendship was important to group commitment, but in later stages internalised ideologies may assume greater relevance. Andes (1998) therefore argued that people can adjust what commitment means and how it is defined – they can renegotiate commitment during the course of group involvement without necessarily changing its position in the hierarchy of salience.

Stryker's (2000) concept of salience and commitment implied that people have freedom and choice in terms of their identity hierarchies. However, this concept has been challenged by feminists and sociologists who have highlighted that these experiences and decisions can be influenced by social powers, inequalities and differences (Howard, 2000). Some identities may prove more fixed than others (e.g., physical impairment versus the more voluntary nature of occupations and hobbies) and this may restrict room for manoeuvring freely among identity options. There can be social expectations, pressures and stereotypes, such as those relating to gender, age and ethnicity, and these may also affect freedoms and experiences concerning identity (Atkin, Ahmad, & Jones, 2002; Settles, 2004; Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996). However, Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) discovered that identity struggles can also prove empowering, and contribute to an enhanced sense of personal strength. In their study of African-

American females they found racial identities, for instance, to be the most salient (more so than gender), as these reflected struggles against racial stereotypes and celebrations of ancestry.

### *Reflexivity*

Scholars have also referred to cognitive processes called self-reflexivity. Although there are varying interpretations of how this relates to identity (Crossley, 2006c), it can relate to the internal reflection of individuals as they consider and choose identity options (Aron, 2000; Crossley, 2006c; Giddens, 1991). Crossley (2006c) has referred to the internal voices that are sometimes played out in people's minds as they contemplate identity options. People may mentally anticipate the reactions of others, and then rehearse possible responses to them. They may also develop counter-arguments, for example, weigh up whether the opinion of others matters. These processes reflect consistencies with the work of modernists Cooley (1902), Mead (1934) and Goffman (1969), whose founding concepts are frequently aligned with identity work. Cooley's (1902) 'looking-glass self' refers to the possibility that people often imagine how they appear to others. Mead (1934) conceptualised that there were two facets to the self – 'I' and 'Me' – and that I (the subject) imagines how I am viewed by others – as Me (the object). Goffman (1969) viewed people as being akin to actors playing roles – they presented and performed the self and engaged in impression management. However, self-reflexivity and identity portrayals can also be conceived in a less conscious, more spontaneous light: they can comprise unconscious processes such as dreams, hidden desires, unexplainable gut feelings (Craib, 1998; Woodward, 2002). People also get into habits and routines and therefore make identity decisions and judgments with seemingly little thought (Crossley, 2006b, 2006c).

Giddens (1991) provides valuable perspectives on reflexivity not only because of their relevance to the body and self-identity, but also their relationship with self-discovery and lifestyle choices which are pertinent to bodybuilding. In contemporary society (which Giddens calls "high" or

“late modernity”) changes in traditional social structures have lead to an increasing focus being placed on the self and individualism (Giddens, 1991). As people have become exposed to greater levels of information as a result of technological advancement they have also become more aware of identity choices. They view themselves as active agents, who consider their options and subsequently shape their identity. These psychic processes may also have implications for the body. According to Giddens (1991) “the reflexivity of the self extends to the body where the body is part of an action system rather than merely a passive object” (p.77). In other words, decisions to engage in bodywork can be understood as a choice that a person makes which is also interwoven with their identity and lifestyle. Identity decisions, however, are not just about ‘finding yourself’, but also “what we make of ourselves” (Giddens, 1991, p.75). Decisions to engage in bodybuilding may therefore be further extended to acts of self-improvement, which may also prove rewarding, therapeutic and future-focused.

The importance and relevance of this section is to highlight why bodybuilding, as a singular identity, should not be considered in isolation, but instead considered in the broader context as one of numerous identities within the self and social system. The complexities of real life, demand multiple social selves (Jenkins, 2004) and choice. This, however, has implications for identity management, negotiation and the commitments people may apply to these identities. It begs the following questions which are the focus of the Thesis – What are the ‘real life’ identity experiences of bodybuilders? Does bodybuilding complement and reinforce other identities within the self? If so, which ones? Do bodybuilders experience identity conflicts and struggles, and if so, what kind? And if they do, how do they resolve them?

### **Bodies, embodiment and identity**

The concepts presented in the previous sections are valuable, but seemingly portray to this point a relatively disembodied view of identity. They arguably emphasize the cognitive and social

processes of identity, but neglect its emotive and biological dimensions (Shilling, 1999). The significance of the body is pertinent to this research, as bodybuilding is an activity where the body assumes a central focus.

Physical appearance – how a person looks – can be a powerful means through which identity is conveyed and read (Woodward, 2002). However, as argued by Waskul and Vannini (2006, p. 6) “people do not merely ‘have’ a body – people actively *do* a body”. Meanings concerning the body take effect in social settings and are frequently subject to cultural and situational interpretation. For example, what may constitute happiness, a welcoming gesture or an attractive body may vary between cultures (Reischer & Koo, 2004) and between gender (Connell, 2001, 2005; Kotarba & Held, 2006; Reischer & Koo, 2004). There may be differences between groups in terms of how they feed, nourish and treat their bodies (Mennell et al., 1992); for example, tattooing may be embraced in some cultures but not others (Van Wolputte, 2004). This highlights that social groups can influence how people view their body, assess it, shape and interact with it, how they treat it, and perform. This suggests bodybuilders will also have their own way of looking at, engaging with, treating and experiencing their bodies – a logic and meaning which bodybuilders may collectively understand as these form important parts of their group identity, but which may differ from the identity of other social groups.

Moving into postmodernism, increased focus has been placed on the body as an extension of self-identity during the last few years (Shilling, 2003). People appear to have become more attentive to the health and appearance of their own bodies. Influential forces, such as the mass media, have played a role in promoting culturally desirable bodies and lifestyles. Furthermore, technological advancements (e.g., cosmetic surgery and supplements) have enhanced the choices available to people of how they wish their body to look (Featherstone, Hepworth, & Turner, 1991; Shilling, 2003; Turner, 1996). The body has therefore become more malleable – able to be worked upon –

sculpted to create preferred exteriors. According to Shilling (2003), people engage in body projects – deliberate interventions to change the size and shape of their body. Such interventions may include weightlifting and dieting to cultivate the desirable physical outcomes surrounding muscularity and body fat. In so doing, engaging in body projects have become an important facet of an individual's self-identity (Shilling, 2003).

Bodily choices have become a means to express individuality, taste, and character (Poole, 2001). In Western society, for example, having a lean, toned, appropriately muscled body has come to symbolise someone who is attractive, in control, disciplined, fit, healthy, hard-working, ambitious, and an achiever. Conversely, being fat and out-of-shape reflect laziness and a lack of self-control, and indicate an indulgent persona (Brownell, 1991; Woodward, 2002). Therefore being in good shape can function as a form of social capital and distinction (Bourdieu, 1978; Featherstone et al., 1991; Loy, Andrews, & Rinehart, 1993; Shilling, 2003; Turner, 1996). Although Shilling (2003) frames body projects as a form of self-expression, he also questions their underlying drivers. He wonders if they have less to do with agency and more to do with living up to social bodily expectations. Feminist and sociological/cultural studies have also considered the social pressures to look good – especially in relation to women, although such pressures are now being aligned to men as well (Bordo, 1988; Brownell, 1991). Bodybuilder motivations and experiences may therefore relate to body projects, for they entail similar practices (weight lifting and dieting). In so doing, such decisions may relate to modes of self-expression and/or a response to social influences concerning the body, and the desire to cultivate an attractive physique.

On the other hand, being attentive to physical appearance can also attract less flattering social interpretations. Bodybuilders can be considered too appearance-oriented, shallow, self-absorbed, obsessive, and narcissistic (Dutton, 1995). Studies have also shown appearance work can be

experienced as pleasurable and impact on identities beyond the aesthetic. For example, in the case of cosmetic surgery, motivations for such procedures often relate to internal factors – such as self-confidence – not simply aesthetics. Furthermore, by transforming their physical appearance participants of cosmetic surgery may change how they view themselves, the self they project to others, and in turn, how others respond to them. In other words, such transformations can alter their way of being in the world and their experience of social encounters – they can become ‘different people’ (K. Davis, 2002). The relevance of this to bodybuilding is that experiences and motivations aligned with bodily changes should be considered beyond the aesthetics and/or need to respond to social pressure. Motivations and outcomes may be more than skin deep. They may constitute extensions of self-care (Ziguras, 2004), creativity or spiritual engagements with the body and self, with transformations of the body potentially leading to transformations of the internal self.

Despite this, bodybuilding may not fall within the realm of socially attractive bodywork. Muscular bodies may be considered outside the desirable bounds of attractiveness by being considered grotesque, unattractive and unnatural. They may appear dominant, unfriendly and unapproachable (Dutton, 1995), in which case, bodybuilding would not fit the motivational pattern of being driven or encouraged by social conformity. On the contrary, it would reflect an identity that risks social stigmatisation and sanction (Crossley, 2005a). Body modification such as nose piercing, large facial tattoos, or Mohawk hair cuts could also fall into this category. Studies highlight that the reasons people engage in such acts may include spirituality, group affiliation, rites of passage, fun, aesthetic pleasure, shock value, and for specific sensations such as pain (Klesse, 1999; Myers, 1992). Modifications such as tattooing are also valued because it enables people to express themselves, differentiate their bodies from others, and feel unique (Sanders, 2006). Depending on their placement they can prove a visible permanent facet of the body (e.g. facial tattooing) however this may reduce identity flexibility. For example, display of tattoos may

be welcome and/or appropriate in some settings, but not in others, yet depending on their physical placement may not readily be shown or hidden accordingly. They may differ, therefore, from body modifications, such as the wearing of religious clothing, where for example Muslim women may choose to cover their heads in some situations but not others. Body modifications, identity meanings and repercussions may therefore be distinguished on the basis of choice, social settings and flexibility, such as coverage.

Connectivities are possible between competitive bodybuilder identities and people with other forms of body modifications or physical difference. Competitive bodybuilders and physically disabled identities both represent a form of stigmatised bodily appearance, yet function in a range of social worlds. Studies have found that disabled people may seek to avoid uncertain or risky public settings potentially unfriendly to their physical appearance. They may also seek to manage their social displays by refusing to wear mechanisms such as supportive neck braces therefore reducing attention paid to their stigmatised physical aspects (Charmaz & Rosenfeld, 2006; Sanders, 2006). This in fact highlights the sensitivity people have towards their appearance in the face of how others may assess them. While value can be drawn from such studies, bodybuilders could be viewed and evaluated (in the face of others) as different or distinct from disabled people. Bodybuilders have consciously chosen their physical ‘abnormality’, whereas those who are disabled have not.

These examples highlight the significance of the body, including how decisions to alter the body may relate to self and identity. They highlight the need to appreciate meanings and motivations which may reside beneath the surface. Decisions to alter one’s physique can impact on the broader sense of self and may prove a source of pleasure and accomplishment. However, body projects can also be subject to cultural appreciations, variations, and appearance. Links with both valued and stigmatised bodily identities have been documented on the basis that both may prove

pertinent to this research, as bodybuilders ‘wear’ their bodies not only for competition but in other settings, life spheres, and identities.

The embodiment of identity is not simply about inhabiting a body. Bodybuilders are also living, feeling beings, and embodiment encompasses not only physical, but mental, emotional, and spiritual dynamics. This section therefore examines the relevance of these elements as important facets of identity and embodiment. Emotions relate to both personal and social identities – there can be impulsive, non-reflective and genuine reactions to a person or event (Craib, 1998). A person may define themselves by their emotional tendencies (e.g., being predominantly a cheerful person). The feelings, sensations and emotions experienced by people can also be linked to reasons why people assume identities. As discussed by Lawler (2003), people tend to become involved in, and remain with activities that make them feel good or reflect positive emotional ties. This can explain why people continue with an activity – the pleasures they gain from participation, the sense of belonging, and the emotional ties of friendships. Stronger emotions are often associated with identities people feel are important or to which they are committed and passionate about (Stets & Burke, 2003). Emotions can also be understood as an extension of the socialisation processes and aligned with appropriate social and/or group conduct (Kemper, 1987; M. Rosenberg, 1990). For example, sales people are expected to assume a happy face for the sake of clients (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Zapf & Holz, 2006). On the soccer field the hugging of team members may reflect jubilation when a goal is scored; however, such emotive displays are usually inappropriate in the business arena when a member secures a new client. These diversities suggest that bodybuilders will also have their own form of emotional code of conduct and display as an integral component of group identity.

Emotions can be subject to variances in terms of expected and/or appropriate emotional conduct, for example, on the basis of gender, culture or time (Craib, 1998). Emotional behaviours can also

be distinguished from a person's emotional experiences – what they are really feeling inside. People often try to control their emotions; they may convey a public face (e.g., of happiness, confidence) that may differ from what they feel internally (e.g., sad, tired or nervous).

The point of this section is to highlight that identity is also an embodied experience. It exists on a number of levels – physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. It encompasses the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of a person, and there is a relationship between the personal and the social (Woodward, 2002). Therefore, to explore and understand the identity of bodybuilders will require an appreciation of all these dimensions, and entail comprehension both of bodybuilders and their identification as a social group and also as individuals with personal identities. Bodybuilders are likely to have multiple identities that may intersect and influence how they experience bodybuilding and their lives. Their identities may shift, change, assume different meanings and importance depending on time, place and over the course of their involvement in bodybuilding. Identity is an embodied experience – and the body itself can prove a powerful element in terms of their identity. It is also visual – an outward manifestation interpreted by others. The views of others can impact on the self and feelings. Who and how bodybuilders project themselves in terms of their identity may be consciously undertaken, unconsciously portrayed, a genuine expression of who they are, or a less authentic reflection of how they really view themselves.

### **Identity – Synthesis and summary**

Synthesising ‘identity’ has been challenging due to the diversity of approaches which are relevant to this research, and the fragmented manner in which the topic has been studied in literature. For example, whilst self-identity and individual behaviour has been explored by some researchers, group identity has been the focus of others (Burke, 2003; Cast, 2003; Hogg, 2006). These positions can be related to broader positions such as whether identity should be perceived as self-contained, individualised and unfolding (the Enlightenment Subject), shaped and responsive to

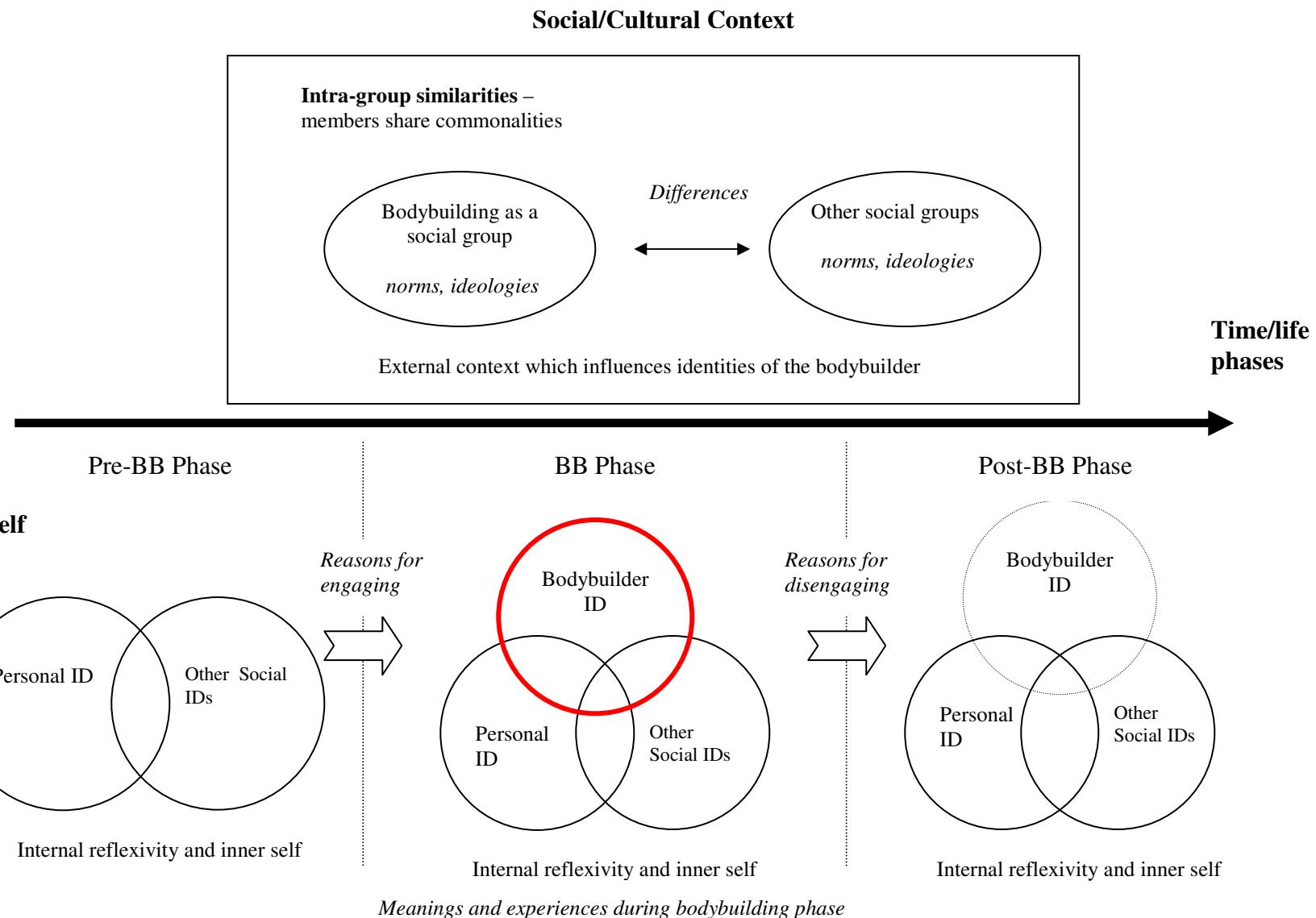
social settings, and multiple (Sociological-Modernism) or fluid, ambiguous and depthless (Postmodern). The accounts of research participants, however, when discussing identity seemingly traverse these delineations (Bradley, 1996; Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003).

Acknowledgment of traditional social structures such as sex/gender, race/ethnicity, age, family and work is pertinent. Yet, this social landscape has also changed due to the rise of consumerism, the media, health and fitness industry and new technologies (e.g. medicine, surgery, drugs, supplements, implants). The imagery of muscle, the dieted body and its connectivities in relation to various social groups, including intersections with social status, youth, gender and sexual attractiveness is relevant to this research (Featherstone et al., 1991; Glassner, 1990). However, the identity connectivities which participants may make with their muscular body may not be image-oriented. Identity may be associated with internal experiences such as commitment, work ethic and authenticity (Wheaton, 2000a). Bodybuilder identities and experiences may also vary. The possibility of heterogeneity amongst the identities of the same social group is a notion advocated by postmodernism. Entangled in this perspective is a stance that there is no singular ‘truth’, as the ‘truth’ is what is considered to be ‘real’ to an individual and these meanings may vary. There is fluidity to identity, but arguably there is also the structure of traditional patterns, as well as the possibility of innate, psychological and biological dimensions. This broader outlook acknowledges the multi-dimensional layers of identity and the possibility of how identity may be experienced and ‘lived’ by people in real life settings.

Figure 2.1 relates these identity elements to a specific identity – that of the competitive bodybuilder. The framework acknowledges that identity entails considerations of motivations and meanings, and therefore seeks to explore why people have become bodybuilders and what being a bodybuilder means to participants. These reasons may stem from internal (psychological) processes and/or the external (or social) context. The framework recognises that identity may entail experiences of similarity and differences relative to others (Jenkins, 2004). Competitive

bodybuilders will each have their own unique self, their personal identity. However, being a competitive bodybuilder means they are also part of a group and will therefore have commonalities with other members due to their shared practices, understandings, and activities. They may experience difference from others who are not part of this group. Bodybuilding is viewed as an identity that may evolve with time and experience. Bodybuilders will also have other identities (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity) and life spheres (e.g., work, family). These may not be self-contained, but interface with bodybuilding-affecting experiences. There may be varying levels of commitment towards bodybuilding during their course of involvement, and participants may decide to give up the sport. This raises the question why people retire from the sport and what then happens to the bodybuilding identity.

This section has considered identity from a conceptual perspective drawing on fundamental principles, contemporary developments, key debates and how they can be applied to competitive bodybuilding. The next section explores identity in relation to sport.



**Figure 2.1:** Identity framework to inform this research

## **2.2 SPORT, IDENTITY AND KEY IDENTITY INTERSECTIONS**

### **a. SPORT AND IDENTITY**

By adopting Coakley's (2007) definition, competitive bodybuilding can be viewed as a form of sport. Not only does competitive bodybuilding appear consistent with the traditional notion of sport (i.e. entailing physical exertion, a contested activity and participant rewards) but it also aligns with some of his broader thinking – that sport can also be performative and include activities people think of as a sport. This chapter will therefore review identity within this more contemporary context. Furthermore, given the close association of competitive bodybuilding with the body, its construction, aesthetics, and performative display, particular focus will be placed on those sports and leisure activities that also align with such elements.

This chapter also considers the intersection of sporting identities with identities such as gender, ethnicity, class and age, followed by a brief discussion and examples of postmodern sporting identities. As signalled in the previous chapter, there are limitations in the extremes of both the modernist and post-modernist perspectives. Jarvie and Maguire (1994) have shared similar concerns with respect to sport claiming that postmodernism has “lost its way”, yet stating that modernity has “shifted and disintegrated” (p. 226). Identity in sport is ultimately conceived as a composite and paradox - occurring within the context of a social landscape which is both stable, and fluid.

#### **Meanings and motivations**

Competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand functions predominantly as an amateur sport. There is no prize money and although a few individuals may have professional status, competitive bodybuilders are people who train and compete, but usually also have other professional lives. Sport in this respect could be viewed as something a person does with their residual time (Roberts, 1999). Involvement in a particular sport may be viewed as a freely chosen identity,

adopted for its perceived benefits and potentially more easily exited than other roles, such as motherhood (Thoits, 1986). Sport as a form of physical activity can be aligned with health, avoiding obesity, and the desire to be in shape (Henderson & Hickerson, 2007; Seippel, 2006) and may therefore be associated with helping create and maintain physically attractive bodies. Crossley (2006a), in his study of motivations and meanings of gym participation, found that people may join gyms to recapture their former glory and also to construct improved future identities (i.e. to lose weight, get toned and/or fit). In addition, people can become obsessed with certain aspects of their bodies – there can be pivotal moments of self-discovery when they realise they have put on weight – signals such as not being able to fit into a favourite pair of jeans, which can motivate them to join a gym and begin working out. However, continuation may be driven by other meanings and experiences. People may get into the habit of visiting the gym and appreciate the social dynamics of these linkages. With such social connections come the obligations of attendance, resulting in guilt if they do not go and potentially concern that if they do not go they may get out of the habit. Meanings such as ‘enjoying’ the gym can be viewed as complex, learned, and sometimes contradictory; for example, people may not want to go to the gym, but will convince themselves they will enjoy it when they get there. Furthermore, they often learn to reframe experiences – they acquire new meanings in the context of this social group relationship. Sensations formerly considered unpleasant, such as having sore muscles, being exhausted or feeling out of breath, turn into pleasures that participants associate with achievement and well-being (Crossley, 2006a).

Seippel’s (2006) research covering a cross-section of sport highlighted that participation can be fun and provide a mental outlet – a form of escapism, diversion and/or release from other life spheres. Sport also provides experiences and forms of expression – physical, mental, emotional, artistic, and spiritual, which may not be possible in other settings (Duquin, 2000; Nasco & Webb, 2006; Seippel, 2006; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Competitive sport provides an arena where

capabilities can be demonstrated, and participants can gain a sense of satisfaction from the experience.

Competitive sport can also encompass an enhanced public component, a facet that can differentiate it from more private types of identities. When people compete in front of spectators and sporting group members their identities are often subject to the views of others – they are able to be seen – and their performance is judged. A win or loss on the sports field is a more visible form of success or failure than that of cooking dinner at home (Nasco & Webb, 2006). This public dimension of sport can prove a powerful connection for some participants – the sense of recognition in the eyes of others; the attention it brings; the popularity it may accord; the status that may be aligned to their success; their skill; and the crowd dynamic. Adler and Adler (1989) have referred to the fame that can be attached to such identities, and how it can affect status and become a ‘master’ identity that overshadows others within the self. However, competitive sport is also an arena where the self is risked. Just as there are rewards, there is the possibility of failure (Frey, 1991), and this may have repercussions for emotions, self esteem, and athletic identity (Mummery, Schofield, & Perry, 2004).

Sociologists have tended to emphasise how participation and meanings in relation to sport are influenced by factors such as talent, interests, interactions with family, friends, teachers and coaches, the media, as well as economic and locational factors such as access to water, land, hills, money and life events (Brewer, Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Coakley, 2007). For example, the family may play an important role in terms of teaching and/or role modelling a particular sport, as well as encouraging the adoption of its norms. Social class and access to resources may also impact on participation and exposure to sport. Peer groups may prove more significant than parents/family for older children, as appearance and other social pressures concerning what is ‘cool’, play an influential part in identity decisions (Frost, 2003). Schools and communities may encourage skill

development and exposure through sports programmes and the media may influence choices through the promotion of role models and sporting celebrities (Leonard, 1993).

Psychologically oriented perspectives have investigated potential connectivities between the characteristics, traits and personality of individuals and their sporting involvement (M. Weiss & Ferrer-Caja, 2002). In other words, such involvement is more inwardly driven. Motivations may be linked to personal needs such as a desire for mastery, competence, and the enhancement of self-worth (M. Weiss & Ferrer-Caja, 2002). People who participate in team sports may desire social acceptance or tend to be more social and outgoing than those who gravitate towards individual sports (Sharma & Shukla, 1986). Those in individual sports may also be more reserved, self-sufficient, self-contained, and introverted (Farge, Hartung, & Borland, 1979). These studies are useful as they suggest people may elect to become involved in activities that fit and provide continuation of their personal identity, skills, and capabilities (Breakwell, 1986), fulfilling personal needs; conversely, the personal identities of people may evolve to fit the nature of the sport. The importance of ‘fit’ between the person and the sport may be relevant to competitive bodybuilding.

### **Identity construction aligned to specific sports**

Identity development can be viewed as a much more distinctive affair when people become involved in a specific sport. Different sports can be viewed as distinct social groups (or subcultures): they have their own unique features, behaviours, ideologies, rules, code of conduct, beliefs, style of dress, form of language, material properties (e.g., equipment), and values (Yiannakis & Melnick, 2001b). Surfers, for example, dress in their distinctive attire, have surf boards, and vehicles with surf board racks; there are sensations – connectivities between themselves and ocean waves – and ideologies, such as how participation may reflect a form of escape from society (Farmer, 1992). Conversely, martial arts may be viewed by participants as a

form of spiritual engagement with the self; a type of self-protection against victimisation; a form of self-control and discipline; and a way to develop mastery in specific bodily techniques and skills (Columbus & Rice, 1998).

According to Donnelly and Young (1988), when a person becomes a participant in a specific sporting group this inevitably requires adopting the appropriate subcultural identity. This is not a passive affair, but one that entails a deliberate, active, and often distinct process (Donnelly & Young, 1988; 1999). First, the individual becomes aware of the sport - the pre-socialisation phase. At this point perceptions of the activity often exist in a stereotypical manner and may contain misconceptions about what participation is really like. This stage is followed by selection and recruitment when group contact is made. An approach may be made from the participant to the group or from an existing group member to the potential participant. Opportunity, interest and motivations may play a role at this stage. In the case of lawn bowls this stems from a range of factors – encouragement from others, recruitment from those in the sport itself, a response to life events (such as retirement or death of a loved one), injury (thus a need to take up a less physically demanding sport) and/or a means to extend a lifetime of physical activity (Heuser, 2005). Identity construction takes place over time, when the individual is progressively socialised into the ways of the sport by its members. Although novices may have certain perceptions about the sport before beginning, they often have a general lack of mastery and understanding of group culture when they first begin. They often learn through modelling the behaviours, attitudes, style of dress, and dialect of more experienced group members, accepting the characteristics, skills, values, and ways of the group. During this process they may also discover the realities of participation to be quite different from their initial view of the sport. In the course of learning they may make rookie mistakes such as inappropriate behaviour and emotions that set them apart from more experienced participants (Donnelly & Young, 1999). Confirmation - group acceptance - occurs when individuals are considered by existing members to have the experience, skills, values, and

appropriate group behaviours to be considered an insider. Within the group, greater levels of status and recognition may be afforded to those who demonstrate particular achievements, success, courage and intelligence in their social environment (O. Weiss, 2001), suggesting that hierarchies exist within certain sports.

### **Group cultures similar to competitive bodybuilding**

Group cultures potentially reflecting similar characteristics to those of competitive bodybuilding will now be explored in more depth to expose potential meanings, issues, and implications pertinent to this research. Bodybuilding is an individualistic pursuit and places significant importance on the body and its aesthetics. Training often encompasses a cyclical bodily regime – bodybuilders diet down to create lean bodies and make weight for competition. During competition, participant bodies are displayed in specific ways - posed, as well as freely, to movement and music. It is therefore both a performative and a creative process. Judging is undertaken in accordance with rules that entail an element of subjectivity.

The identities of runners, gymnasts, figure skaters, ballet dancers, and rowers may therefore prove conceptually relevant. Some of these are individualistic in nature (marathon running, gymnastics, figure skating); have a routine-orientation (running, ballet); use specific bodily techniques to shape the body (running, ballet, gymnastics); involve pose, performance and incorporate artistic dimensions (ballet, gymnastics, figure skating); have subcultural appreciations of the look/shape of the physique (arguably all of the above – but especially ballet, figure skating and gymnastics); participants must make weight for competitive requirements (rowing) and/or bodily aesthetically ideals (ballet, figure skating, gymnastics); and include judging based on display (gymnastics, figure skating).

Hockey (2005) has argued that maintaining regular training routines is important for runners. They are creatures of routine and time management is considered crucial, creating the need to ensure domestic and work requirements are completed efficiently so as to accommodate their training time. The daily training routines of ballet dancers encompass long hours of dance class, rehearsals and performance. To master specific training regimes requires a value system that reflects discipline, hard work, and mental toughness (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). This has to be underpinned by commitment and a persona that is emotionally, spiritually, and artistically connected to the activity. Ballerinas are also ‘passionate’ about dance (Wainwright & Turner, 2004).

Through their regimes, ballet dancers and runners shape their bodies. The bodies of runners have a distinctive gaunt appearance and are shaped by their training regimes. While genetics may influence body shape, running long distances on a regular basis also creates lean bodies with a low fat-to-muscle ratio (Hockey, 2005). Gaunt by Western standards, their bodies were frequently viewed by outsiders as looking ill, haggard or of persons engaged in illicit drug use (Hockey, 2005). Group members, however, considered these types of bodies as being “racing fit”.

According to Wainwright and Turner (2004) the dancer body is so central to their identity that it is virtually the sum and substance of the dancer’s identity. Their regimes also shape their bodies – they become thin and supple. Dancers learn that their bodies can be moulded to reflect the ballet ideal more closely (Aalten, 2007). However, there can be easy and difficult bodies. Easy bodies can assume the look, shape and suppleness of the ballet dancer without too much pain and effort. For difficult bodies, however, the transition to becoming this physical ideal is much more challenging (Aalten, 2007).

Ballet, gymnastics and figure skating also entail elements of artistic posing and performance to appreciative audiences. They provide avenues not only for physical, but also for creative expression. While dance and sport may have conventionally occupied culturally different realms, their commonalities and contribution to identities should be increasingly recognised and explored (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). Athletes involved in more display-oriented sports (e.g., ice skating) and those involved in more non-display sports (e.g., rugby) must both learn bodily techniques in accordance with their sport. This implies that movement – whatever the context, including movement based on creativity and display – is still culturally defined. For example, the creative movements of an ice skater are still influenced by and even taught within the dynamics of the particular sport and culture – just as the rugby player must learn to pass a ball skilfully. Furthermore, art and creativity are to be found in the movements of rugby players as they pass the ball and score the try, just as they can be seen in rhythmic gymnastics or in the tango. Competitive bodybuilding as sport and display could be viewed as an extension of this philosophy. In other words, instead of debating which arena (sport, art or creativity) it fits, the focus should be on how to encompass and reflect all these elements.

A point of difference in more display-oriented activities such as figure skating, gymnastics and diving lies in its competitive judging, which, although bound by rules, may prove subjective. Unlike running, swimming or soccer, where results can be more clearly and transparently awarded, in more display-oriented sports, who constitutes a winner in one judge's perspective may not be shared by another. Display-oriented activities are imperfect sciences and encompass the human element factor (J. Ryan, 1996). Studies have highlighted the inaccuracies, differences and biases that may be found in these types of sports (Zhai, 1991). In gymnastics the nature of judging left room for politics and perceived favourites to influence the competitive evaluation of athletes (J. Ryan, 1996). These notions are pertinent to bodybuilding, as it is also a more display oriented, aesthetically judged contest where this form of subjectivity may exist. Although athletes

may vary in their ability to bounce back after competitive defeat (Mummery et al., 2004), minimal research appears to have been undertaken into the perceptions and experiences of athletes and how outcomes from these more subjectively judged sports may impact on self-views and implications for identity.

Studies of runners, ballet dancers, and gymnasts, where aesthetic and lean bodies may prove advantageous to performance, have exposed a tendency to certain health risks, such as eating disorders. To create and maintain sporting bodily ideals participants may engage in bingeing and purging as a means to control their weight (Johns, 1993; 1998; Prussin & Harvey, 1991; Ringham, Klump, Kaye, Stone, Libman, Stowe, & Marcus, 2006). However, it is uncertain whether it is the culture that creates these types of risks or the type of person who tends to be attracted to such sporting cultures (Goldfield, Harper, & Blouin, 1998). Risk, pain, and injury can also form important facets of subcultural identity. Wainwright and Turner (2004) found that for ballerinas, niggling injuries were a normal part of everyday life and considered part of their commitment and dedication to dance.

Competitive bodybuilders, however, although requiring lean bodies for their events, do not have to maintain such leanness throughout the year. It is cyclical. Studies of rowers have highlighted the experiences of athletes who diet in a seasonal manner to meet competitive weight expectations (Chapman, 1997). These experiences were often negative: participants experienced cravings and became obsessed about food. However, a positive spin-off from being required to lose weight was that they looked in good shape for the summer. Later when they regained weight, however, participants said they felt fat and physically unattractive (Chapman, 1997). The cyclical nature of dieting, the guilt, the cravings, and the mental and emotional impacts lead some participants to give up rowing and take up another sport.

Loland (1999) found that ski jumpers are also required to be thin to enhance their performance. However, unlike rowers, the male participants in her study felt the thin bodies they had to adopt to enhance their sporting performance were not necessarily the bodies they would desire if they were not athletes. They expressed a desire to be much bigger (Loland, 1999). This highlights the contradictions and discrepancies that can occur between sporting bodies and other identities within the self (i.e. gender).

Although sports such as running may appear individualistic, social networks exist among them. Hockey (2005) found that participants often encountered other runners on their regular running routes. Runners could also identify fellow members by how they dressed, the look of their bodies, and the shoes they wore, and could connect through this identification process. They engaged in runner talk and shared meanings concerning intervals or hill sessions, ‘hitting the wall’ or lactic-acid build up. There were differences between runners and joggers, as well as between their levels of running experience and the relative importance placed on social linkages. Novice runners often focused more on physical issues, such as their health and weight, but as their experience evolved these issues tended to become more psychological and performance-oriented. To veteran runners, maintaining their social identity – ensuring they competed regularly, participating in group activities, remaining abreast of happenings, and engaging in various forms of recognition work – was important (Masters & Ogles, 1995). This suggests that sociability may take varying forms (e.g., friendships, intersecting regimes, and group bonds) and its significance to participants may change with time and involvement in the sport. In the case of triathletes, Granskog (1992) found that men often socialised in a different way to women. They adopted a more functional focus to their social training networks linked to training, which was tempered by competitive interactions, while women used their networks for both competitive and cooperative support helping their competitors, and also supported each other beyond training (e.g., celebrated birthdays, shared family stories).

These studies highlight how subcultural appreciations of the body and identity elements can be shaped and take effect in social and sporting worlds. Their findings are relevant to competitive bodybuilding and therefore may prove helpful in informing this research and understanding identity. These issues include the importance of regimes; the existence of social networks despite a seemingly individualistic nature; the importance of bodies and aesthetics as part of sporting culture; risks and impacts of bodily pressures, requirements and expectations on identities. The literature also highlighted interactions between sport, performance, and creative/artistic expression and how judgement of more aesthetically-oriented sports may be influenced by the human factor.

### **Commitment and Salience**

Sport for some participants may reflect a residual, casual use of time (Roberts, 1999); however, for others it may reflect a central, salient part of identity (Coakley, 2007; Stebbins, 2003). Commitment is considered a factor that defines and contributes to an activity, becoming a central, serious form of engagement (Stebbins, 2003). According to Coakley (2007), sporting participants who are highly committed also tend to be highly competitive, willing to push themselves beyond the ‘norm’, taking sporting risks and being prepared to make sacrifices to progress their sporting endeavours.

Quantitative studies have tried to evaluate levels of athlete commitment, while qualitative studies within sport have highlighted the diverse and multi-layered ways commitment may be felt, expressed and affect sport participants, who take their activity ‘seriously’. Quantitative tools, including The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1993; Groff & Zabriskie, 2006) and PEAK – Project on Elite Athlete Commitment (Scanlan, Russell, Wilson, & Scanlan, 2003), seek to evaluate the importance, salience and/or commitment individuals have towards their athletic identity. AIMS measures the extent to which participants may identify

themselves as athletes, exclusivity (i.e. how much participants' sense of self comes solely from that athletic identity); and 'negative affectivity' (i.e. associations between poor performance and impacts on self-identity). PEAK, meanwhile, views sporting commitment as being influenced by enjoyment; involvement opportunities; attractiveness relative to alternatives; the resources already invested; and social constraints and levels of support (Scanlan et al., 2003). According to this model, perceptions of higher enjoyment, personal investment, involvement opportunities, and pressure to cease the activity (e.g., investments, social pressures, feeling of obligation) should increase sport commitment, whereas perceptions that other activities would be more attractive would lessen commitment.

Being committed and having a strong sporting identity is considered desirable, to a point. Committed athletes are likely to spend more time involved in their sport, and their skills and competitiveness often improve. However, being overly committed may also lead to negative consequences, such as becoming vulnerable in the event of poor performance or inability to play; injury; over-training; the use of performance-enhancing drugs; living an unbalanced life; becoming socially isolated; and experiencing detrimental impacts on relationships (Brewer et al., 1993; Coakley, 2007; Groff & Zabriskie, 2006; D Smith, 2006). Balague (1999) argues, however, that committed, elite-level athletes should not be expected to lead balanced lives due to the demands of their training and competitive cycles. Furthermore, well-meaning attempts to encourage these individuals to lead more balanced lives may prove destructive, pulling them in all directions as they seek to satisfy expectations. Studies have also found that salient sporting identities are not necessarily destructive. For example, studies of marathon runners have found there are positive spin offs as a result of their heightened commitment, including physical and mental benefits, as well as expanded social networks (Horton & Mack, 2000). Furthermore, significant commitment is not necessarily the preserve of the winners. Along with fast runners, very slow marathon runners were also very committed.

Participation in amateur sport can form a very defining, intense ‘serious’ facet of the self. For example, although lawn bowls may to some people be an activity in which they participate from time to time, for others it may constitute a very active, consuming passion in which they immerse themselves, investing considerable time and resources following competitions, studying the game, and evolving their own skills. Stebbins (2003) investigated participants who are engaged in amateur sports, yet find the activity so interesting and significant that it becomes a key focus of their lives. He found that such participants often went through a process of strengthening commitment and involvement: beginning (where interest took root); development (where participation became more routine); establishment (when the basics have been learnt); maintenance (when involvement is in full bloom); and perhaps followed by decline. This involvement reflected a process not dissimilar to a career (Stebbins, 2003).

Qualitative research has found that commitment is often a reflection of the priority accorded to the sport compared with other choices. Yair (1992), in his study of runners, found commitment was not only an extension of competitive drive, but also of the personal, social and financial investments made to the sport. Committed windsurfers based important life decisions, such as work and where to live, on windsurfing (Wheaton, 2000a, 2004). Those committed to windsurfing viewed their activity as being more than just a recreational pursuit – it was a lifestyle, an activity around which their life revolved. Studies such as Wheaton (2000a; 2003) and Yair (1992), highlight that the commitment participants give to their sporting pursuit not only involves the identity itself (and its adoption), but also how it is negotiated, prioritised, and experienced in relation to other life spheres and identities within the self. Salient and important identities tend to be favoured, but what happens when sport and other social world identities present different, even conflicting ideologies, demands and expectations? How do participants negotiate between their sporting passions and their other social world expectations in the course of day-to-day functioning? Barrell, Chamberlain, Evans, Holt and MacKean (1989) highlighted

some of the strategies adopted by serious runners to secure time for training. Option one: Running was accepted by the family as the priority. The athlete ‘took time’, thus finding time was not problematic. Participants tended to be male and the spouse supported (or had resigned herself to supporting) her partner’s running activity. Option two: time was negotiated. Runners tried to accommodate family needs and plan running around them, for example, running early in the morning (e.g., 5.30 am) so as to be free in the evening for family time. This reflected the majority of cases. However, despite best endeavours, there were often disruptions and tensions. Option three: running and family time was shared. This was rarely the case in serious male runners. However, in cases of serious female runners both parties (runner and spouse) tended to run and/or share a passion for sport.

McQuarrie and Jackson (1996), in their study of skaters, argued that just because people participate in an activity does not imply they do not experience constraints. They found that other spheres were often modified and sacrifices made to accommodate skating. Participants rearranged schedules and dedicated time, money, and resources to the activity when such resources could have been allocated elsewhere. The strength of their commitment outweighed the constraints (McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996). They also found that in managing options, choices included not only modifying the behaviour of the participants, but also the activity (e.g., its regimes, timing) and behaviour of those around them.

These studies examine the culture of commitment to a particular sport, its relationship with broader life spheres, and its applicability to competitive bodybuilding. Participants may experience conflicts – there are limits to time, money, resources, differences in roles expectations, ideologies, and pressures from others. Potential implications for family, relationships, work, and gender are also identified.

### *Exiting and giving up*

The willingness to continue to dedicate time, effort, and resources to sport identities may decline, passion and interest in a particular sport may wane, athletes may experience burnout, and/or participants may simply wish to do other things with their lives (Coakley, 2007; Lavallee, 2000; Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). These may have positive and negative implications for identity. Sporting retirement can be viewed as a form of social death (E. Rosenberg, 1993), where participants have experienced a loss of status, purpose, and psychological and even drug problems (Lavallee, 2000). However, exiting may also free up the self to do other things in life – it can also be a form of rebirth (Coakley, 2007).

Curtis and Ennis (1993) found that although hockey players may have retired from participation at the elite level, many continued to be involved through playing at a recreational and also at an institutional level (e.g., being on committees, coaching). According to the researchers this provided further evidence of their continued affection for the sport. In the case of professional tennis players, Stier (2007) found that before exiting athletes often experienced “signs” that all was not well such as niggling injuries, not playing as well as they were used to, and feeling less enthusiastic about their game. This in turn, led to reflection on whether they should or should not continue in the sport. Athletes often talked to significant others (e.g., partners, other players) about their future options. Those who left often went through a process of dis-identification – relinquishing elements of self-identity, having to redefine themselves (Stier, 2007), and readjusting to a new life. During this time they often reflected on themselves and considered their new identities relative to active players. Curtis and Ennis (1993) found that former hockey players varied in their views and experiences – 54.3% found giving up the sport difficult, while 45.7% stated it was not that difficult. Many also reported that the positives associated with giving up the sport at an elite level meant having more free time, less risk of injury, and the ability to spend more time with friends and family. Participants often remained in the sport at a social and/or

institutional level. However, in the case of gymnasts, Dacyshyn (1999) reported that only two of the seven participants found the transition unproblematic. Although retirement meant the gymnasts were now free from the need to be vigilant about their body shape, it also created body dissatisfactions and weight concerns, and some gymnasts felt they were still self-monitoring. These studies not only highlight why sporting identities may be given up, but also experiences of retirement, and how despite exiting, some elements of these identities may still influence positively and negatively future identities.

#### **b. KEY IDENTITY INTERSECTIONS WITH SPORT**

This section builds on the previous one by examining key identity intersections such as gender, age, class and ethnicity in greater detail, and what impact they may have on sport identities and experiences. The relevance to bodybuilding is that when people engage in sport they are rarely just one identity but experience other identities and/or are read by others as someone who is also gendered, aged, classed, and (potentially) racialised (Jamieson, 2001; Tsang, 2000).

##### **Gender**

Sociologists have made distinctions between sex and gender. Whereas sex is considered more biologically determined, expressions of gendered identity are conceived as more socially influenced and often shaped by ‘disciplinary practices’ (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Stewart, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987). People ‘do’ gender, which may be conveyed via appearance, behaviours, styles of interaction, and a way-of-being in the world. Differences between these practices may reflect, reproduce, and reinforce masculinities and femininities. The nature of sport – its competitive encounters and demonstration of skills, mastery, force, risky play, aggression, strength and toughness – often reflects dominant masculinities (Messner & Sabo, 1990). Engaging in physical exercise may also be considered contrary to traditional feminine social expectations. Dominant femininity is more aligned with poise, prettiness, vulnerability, and non-

aggressive behaviour, with not being overtly competitive, aggressive, dominant, and/or sweaty (Vertinsky, 1999; Weiten, 1992).

Furthermore, taking time out for sport and leisure is often construed as less problematic for men. They either already have the time they need for such activities, or are more easily able to claim it (Roberts, 1999). For women taking time for physical exercise has been found to involve greater levels of perceived constraints, such as a lack of time, energy, and family responsibilities (P. Brown, Brown, Miller, & Hansen, 2001). However, women are increasingly participating in sports (Scranton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999), including those historically deemed ‘male-dominated’ (Wedgwood, 2004), such as boxing (Halbert, 1997), rugby (Wheatley, 1994), football (Scranton et al., 1999; Wedgwood, 2004), ice hockey (Theberge, 1995, 2001), soccer (Cox & Thompson, 2000), snowboarding (Anderson, 2001), and windsurfing (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 2001). Many women emphasise the pleasures they gain from these experiences, the friendships and feelings of enhanced self-worth, strength, power, and control (Birrell & Cole, 1994). Women value the enjoyment and social factors associated with sport, the feeling of being physically fit and having space for themselves (Liston, 2006; Markula, 2001). These experiences have in turn, been found to impact positively on other facets within themselves, such as a sense of personal development, enhanced control over their life, decision making and goal setting (Blinde, DianeTaub, & Han, 2001). Cox and Thompson (2000) found that the increased confidence soccer players had acquired transferred into other areas of their life, such as public speaking and the assumption of leadership roles.

Gender expectations and norms, however, have also been found to restrict female participation, conduct, and motivations (Wedgwood, 2004). Women may avoid sport in general, and specific type of sports in particular, reflecting concerns that their bodies may become hard, muscular, and therefore unfeminine (Choi, 2003; Dworkin, 2001). Women may gravitate more towards specific

types of sporting activities in keeping with gender expectations, such as aerobics. These often tend to be less aggressive, less competitive, and more aesthetically focused (Koivula, 2001; Royce, Gebelt, & Duff, 2003).

Women may experience conflict between their athletic and feminine identities and subsequently engage in strategies to resolve or negotiate such discrepancies. They may seek to emphasise both identities – to be both athletic and feminine (Royce et al., 2003). Strategies may include wearing feminine uniforms and makeup while engaging in sport, and having long hair (Cox & Thompson, 2000; Halbert, 1997), which feminists view as an apologetic stance (Collins, 2002). Women may repackage their sport into a more feminine form such as a style that is less hard and more tactical as in boxing (Mennesson, 2000). These practices show sport and gender identities may be evoked together and negotiated by blending them. However, women may also seek to separate their feminine and sporting identities – ‘put aside’ their femininity while on the field, but ‘do girl’ in social contexts (Krane, 2001; Krane et al., 2004; Royce et al., 2003). In other words, they seek to separate their sport and feminine identities.

Sporting participation for men can also be problematic. Not all forms of sport, for example, male cheerleading and aerobics, may reaffirm the masculinity of men (L. Davis, 1990; Koivula, 2001). In such cases, men have also been found to engage in strategies to resolve identity discrepancies. Male cheerleaders avoid ‘feminising’ routines and include more stunts into their act to demonstrate their physical prowess and risky play (L. Davis, 1990). Men may also feel pressured to engage in sport in a stereotypical masculine manner, for example, not crying in the face of competitive loss, and this may prevent them from expressing their feminine side (Kidd, 1990). However, what constitutes masculinities and femininities can vary according to culture, time and place. Klein (2001b) found that Mexico/Anglo male baseball identities were able to be more emotive and expressive than their white American counterparts.

### *Sexuality*

A presumption of heterosexuality is associated with male sporting identities, and sometimes accusations of homosexuality are linked with female sporting identities, unless femininity and heterosexuality identities are also emphasised (Wellard, 2002). Thus being gay and athletic is considered threatening by others and may be experienced as an identity conflict between an individual's sporting and authentic self (Butterworth, 2006; Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002).

Women who participate in sport in masculine ways may have their sexuality questioned and feel under threat of being accused of being lesbian on the basis of sporting behaviour (Krane et al., 2004) or of playing a traditional male sport. These threats impact on women's experiences and identities in sport. Research with gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in sport has often highlighted the difficulties they experience in terms of identity negotiation. Eng (2003) found that homosexual athletes often remained closeted, and sometimes ceased their sporting involvement, due both to the perceived incompatibilities between their athletic and sexual identities, and to homophobic attitudes within the sport. These attitudes related to the changing room environment, the sharing of showers, notions of body intimacy, the awkwardness of contact, and general intolerance towards and for homosexual and bisexual athletes. In these settings, homosexual athletes were sometimes perceived by other athletes as unwanted voyeurs. These perceptions are pertinent for competitive bodybuilding, as the changing room is where athletes prepare their bodies for the stage. It is an environment where there is nudity and people assist each other with bodily preparation (e.g., covering the body with fake tan).

### *Gender and bodies*

Women have been considered more body-conscious, as society may judge women more on their bodies than men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This attitude may carry over into the sporting arena, for example, women have been found to align their fitness pursuits more with keeping in shape to address bodily appearance (Frederick & Ryan, 1993; D. Gill, 1996). Men, conversely,

have aligned physical activity with functional needs and their desire to be healthy (R. Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005). However, men are facing increasing social pressures and concerns over their bodies – the need to reflect ideal masculine bodies, strong, muscular, lean, and in shape. Gill et al. (2005) found that men tend to be very individualistic and view bodily appearance as something within their control. Therefore being out of shape symbolised a lack of personal control. However, the research also discovered that men may have to negotiate between their bodily concerns and masculine identity. To be a man also means that vanity should be rejected. Gill et al. (2005) highlighted that men could be concerned about their body and appearance, but only within acceptable boundaries. As a result, male participants often referred to going to the gym as a health rather than appearance activity because it was not masculine to be seen as too obsessed and committed to the body.

#### *Gender differences and closing the gap*

Women have been found to be less competitive than men (D. Gill, 1996). Male sporting motivations revolve more around the need to prove themselves against others. Female motivations are more personally centred, for example, to lose weight or to improve personal skills (Granskog, 1992). Women also engage in a more cooperative style of sporting interaction and a mode of social interaction that is different from that of men (Granskog, 1992). Male triathletes formed networks that were more homogenous in terms of age and ability, with discussion tending to centre more on functional sporting matters. Conversely, female triathletes established training networks that encompassed a wider age bracket; offered greater levels of emotional support and encouragement, and shared not only sporting techniques but broader life matters (e.g., discussions also centred on family and work issues, birthday celebrations). Women may also engage in less risky sporting activities and seek to avoid pain (Nixon, 1996). Recent research, however, indicates that gender differences in competitiveness may be diminishing. Some studies highlighted that, particularly at more elite levels, men and women have much in common.

Competitive motivations appear similar – they both strive to be the best (Liston, 2006). Both men and women often prioritised their sport over other activities, such as work, family, health, and relationships (Thorpe, 2005). Women may also engage in risky play (Thorpe, 2005). Committed female athletes may view themselves as different from less committed sportswomen. Furthermore, while in the throes of sporting participation, women consider themselves first as a person and an athlete and not specifically as a woman (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 2001).

Relationship status can also affect sport participation and experiences. Barrell et al. (1989) commented that being single can be advantageous, as participants are more able to structure and arrange their lives around their sporting pursuits. They also found that relationships can prove constraining; however, this also depended on the makeup of the household, on whether people were married, had children (and if so, their ages), and relationships within the family. Studies have indicated that mothers believe being a good mother means they always need to be available to their families and children (Currie, 2004), which can negatively impact on leisure and physical activity participation. Women may also place the needs and commitments of others above their own.

Although research documenting fathers' insights concerning leisure appears limited, Such (2006) stressed that fathers may adopt different strategies to mothers. For example, she found they tended to schedule their regular physical commitments (e.g. running) formally, to ensure continued participation in such activities. These strategies differ from women with children, who, according to Currie (2004, p.225) will be "selflessly available for her family 24 hours a day". Participating in sport is often conceived in the minds of women as a privilege, not a right, and this may be influenced by broader notions that serious leisure is perceived more as the domain of men not women (Raisborough, 1999). Studies of women challenging this notion by carving out time for their activities rather than 'snatching' it, although limited, are being identified (Raisborough, 1999).

The support of partners and families has also been shown to play a significant role in sporting participation and identity construction, including emersion in the sport (Goff, Fick, & Oppliger, 1997; Granskog, 1992). For example, Granskog (1992) suggested that if the spouse was supportive or also a participant, then commitment could be reinforced. However, if there is a lack of spousal support this will affect participation and place a strain on the relationship. She believed that this often leads to a decision that, depending on relative commitments, will either go in favour of sport or of prioritising the relationship. Goff et al. (1997) concluded that no difference was detected between male and female runners in relation to spousal support. However, households where both partners were runners were most supportive of running. Other barriers for women in terms of sport participation and enjoyment may include a lack of sporting friends, religious constraints, and additional family responsibilities and expectations for some women from ethnic minorities (Walseth & Fasting, 2004).

## **Race and Ethnicity**

Race and ethnicity have been defined in varying ways including interchangeably. However, Coakley (2007) provides a useful distinction by describing race as “a population of people who are believed to be naturally or biologically distinct from other populations” (p. 282), and ethnicity as “a particular cultural heritage that is used to identify a category of people” (Coakley, 2007, p. 282). Race is therefore associated with the biological classification of individuals, whereas ethnicity focuses on aspects such as customs, language, and social views. As pointed out by Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov (2004, p.32), ethnicity is fundamentally “a perspective on the world” as opposed to a category of analysis. An ethnic group is one where members feel “socially distinct because they share a way of life, a collective history and a sense of themselves as people” (Coakley, 2007, p.282). The relational aspect of ethnicity is therefore important; it is how people define themselves relative to others. Race can constitute a visual form of identity difference where participants reflect a minority composition of a country or specific sporting culture

(Scranton, Caudwell, & Holland, 2005), which can affect experiences. Being different on the basis of skin colour can create a sense of affinity and togetherness between sporting participants. However, it has also been aligned with experiences of racism in sport (Lawrence, 2005; Scranton et al., 2005) with people of colour and/or those of a particular ethnic background feeling constrained in terms of their sporting activities.

Many studies generalise the experiences of white Western women and men to the wider population in sport. However, increasing research is focusing on diversities in experiences and meanings, such as those relating to race and ethnicity (Dewar, 1993; Y. Smith, 1992). Race and ethnicity may influence the choice of sport. Studies have pointed to the higher proportion of African-American men playing basketball and how fewer people from ethnic minorities in Britain participate in swimming (Walseth & Fasting, 2004; Yiannakis & Melnick, 2001a). There are debates on why this pattern has emerged – whether it is due to non-discriminatory factors (e.g., as a result of role models) or due to racism (Yiannakis & Melnick, 2001a). Harrison, Lee and Belcher (1999) found that perceptions surrounding specific sport participation by African-American and European-American men and women could be influenced by whether participants thought they could imagine themselves doing it – did it reflect a “possible me?” Participants were asked to respond to diagrams depicting participation in specific sports. Basketball was the only sport for which the African-Americans were more likely to respond ‘me’ than their European counterparts. The researchers suggested that self-linkages were potentially influenced by a range of factors – role models, resources, feelings of competence about the activity of choice, whether they practice it in everyday life, such as at schools, and enjoyment.

There can also be diversities in embodied conduct, which have been aligned with race and ethnicity. Teevale (2001) identified how Pacific Island women play netball with a distinctive flair. Majors (1990) has referred to the strong, proud “cool pose” of black US athletes. Athletes of

colour have also been viewed as having genetic advantages in sports. It is commonly assumed that they may have natural talent (Ogden & Hilt, 2003) and black dancers are also considered to be better than white dancers (Wiescholek, 2003). Similar comments have been made in New Zealand concerning Māori (Hokowhitu, 2004) and Pacific Island peoples (Teevale, 2001). While some studies have suggested there may be a scientific basis to these assumptions (Suminski, Mattern, & Devor, 2002), such implications have drawn criticism, as sporting success has been attributed to genetic physical advantage of ‘coloured’ people, whereas for white athletes such successes have been more closely affiliated to hard work and intelligence (Hokowhitu, 2003). Sport and ethnic identity may also be interwoven – to the enhancement of both. West Indian soccer players were found to combine their sport with use of their language, recruiting players, using member recommendations, and including ethnic-oriented policies. In so doing their sport also served as an arena where their ethnic identity could be sustained and promoted (Walter & Brown, 1991).

## **Class**

Social class has been traditionally associated with the categorisation of people based on shared economic positions in society due to work, income and position (Coakley, 2007). Within sport, there have been studies, for example, investigating whether class influences participation levels or the choice of sport (Coakley, 2007; Wilson, 2002). Ethnicity has often been linked to class (Beamon & Bell, 2002; Lawrence, 2005; Ogden & Hilt, 2003). For example, perceptions and role models surrounding sport and fame have been found to be particularly influential with those from ethnic minorities as a means to gain status, economic success and/or escape oppression. Class, background, where one lives and location can influence choice, access to opportunities, and resources for sport (Donnelly & Coakley, 1999; J. Wright, MacDonald, & Groom, 2003).

However, shifts in traditional perspectives concerning class have placed greater emphasis on processes such as lifestyle, culture and taste (Bottero, 2004). For example, by participating in activities such as polo, equestrian events, yachting, and skiing, a sense of being part of the ‘upper class’ may be conveyed (Bourdieu, 1978). Such notions, however, may not simply be one of perception, but also a response to the practicalities associated with the costs for some sports, for example, expenses associated with sports such as yachting, skiing or skysurfing can be high (Rinehart, 2000). Furthermore, these types of connectivities can be contested in other ways that prove ambiguous and contradictory. For example, Anderson (2001) found that snowboarders often used a street punk image to distinguish themselves from the more upper-class skiers, yet participants actually came from white, privileged backgrounds. The point is that class is often shaped in various social settings through the use of both economic and cultural practices. As explained by Bottero and Irwin (2003 p.470) it is not about class consciousness, but rather how “*classed* consciousness, in the recognition of social divisions – or rather social distance – is embedded in practices”. An example is Foote’s (2003) analysis of the uncomfortable fit between Tonya Harding’s<sup>1</sup> lower-class, unfeminine image and conduct and her success in the graceful, feminine, tastefully classed world of figure skating.

### **Age**

Ageing bodies and identities are frequently seen as less desirable forms of social self and identity, and even of spoiled identity (Tulle, 2007). Negative factors associated with ageing can include widowhood, physical decline, deteriorating health, less physical agility, less social attractiveness (e.g., middle-aged spread, loss of skin tone and elasticity), and loss of friends. Age can also affect the pecking order amongst men (Pease, 2002). The visuality and feelings associated with ageing may create a mind–body connection that is not always comfortable and can also serve as a reminder of one’s mortality (Cunningham-Burley & Backett-Milburn, 1998; Phoenix, Faulkner,

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<sup>1</sup> Tonya Harding is an American figure skating champion

& Sparkes, 2005). Such experiences may influence the meanings of sport, and can serve to threaten the physically active, athletic body and identity. In the world of ballet and often in elite competitive sports, for instance, being 30 may be perceived as old (Wainwright & Turner, 2006).

However, age and being ‘old’ is also subjective and can be influenced by self-perception, well-being, and how old one feels (Kaufer & Elder, 2002). Poole (2001) concluded that over 50 year old female participants who engaged in physical exercise felt younger and that the ageing process, was delayed. Health benefits (e.g., strength, mobility, endurance) and the social opportunities aligned with sport participation may prove particularly meaningful for older people (Hardcastle & Taylor, 2005). Participants can also feel empowered as a result of participation. There may be differences between the meanings assigned by participants on the basis of age. Older athletes may be more motivated by health, weight concerns, social affiliations, and broader life reasons than may younger participants (Ogles & Masters, 2000). Frederick and Ryan (1993) and Seippel (2006) suggested that while enjoyment and fun were less significant for older participants than youth, mental relaxation, personal challenge, and satisfaction were potentially more significant.

Tulle (2007) argued that the participation of older people in sport had the capacity to change how they experienced and identified with age. These participants were not in denial of their age. What such participation did, however, was deflect them away from aligning themselves with a social world typified by physical and mental decline. As athletes they conceived themselves as competent and active (Tulle, 2007). The research also found that ageing and retirement could create even greater opportunities for sporting participation, as it enabled participants to dedicate more time to their sporting regimes. Having a physically active athletic identity, however, can also serve to challenge age-appropriate expectations. For example, older runners have been questioned by non-runner friends about when they were going to “hang up” their running shoes (Tulle, 2007).

## **Religion**

Connectivities have also been drawn between religion and sport. Both sport and religion embrace meanings and beliefs associated with cultural identities and ideologies; however, these may also vary in the face of specifics and as a result of time and place (Coakley, 2007). Historically, religion has been aligned to sport and recreation through the biblical references – a means to address waning interest in spirituality within youth (Leonard, 1993). Sport and religion were seen as sharing a similar Protestant ethic, due to sport's emphasis on discipline, hard work, individualism, and the avoidance of being slothful or engaging in the excesses and pleasures of the flesh. There are also similarities in that both sport and religion recognise rituals, reflect places of bonding, evoke emotion, and give meaning to life (Brody, 1979). However, it is also agreed that sport and religion differ, as religion encompasses a more sacred form of belief system – it is often divinely inspired. Furthermore, the acts of sport, such as violence, aggressive competition, personal achievement, and conquest can conflict with religious identities and relationships (Coakley 2007; Leonard, 1993). Religion also varies in faith, country, and sport. For example, Shinto, sumo wrestling, and its meanings for Japanese may differ from those of other nations (Coakley, 2007). Religion may be used by cultures and sports to enhance success (e.g., prayer rituals), give meaning to participation (e.g., the use of god-given skills), create social bonds (e.g., Christian sports teams), assert power, and reinforce rules and beliefs (Coakley, 2007). For athletes, being religious and sporting can prove positive, but can also lead to identity conflicts (Kelley & Hoffman, 1990). In the face of conflicts athletes may focus exclusively on the positives of sport and/or the positive intersections with religion; however, they may also give priority to their religious beliefs, amend their sporting styles and behaviours and/or withdraw from participation on particular days (e.g., Sunday) or in relation to particular sports (Coakley, 2007).

## Postmodern Sporting Identities

Postmodernism has challenged researchers to look beyond their traditional institutional boundaries and consider how practices may have transformed or destabilised understandings of sport and the categories aligned to it, such as gender, race, class, age, and the body (Rail, 1998; Ohl, 2000). These include, the use of technologies to enhance performance; interventions such as weightlifting to alter physical appearance; fashion to construct sporting images and the ‘depthless’ portrayal of sport through media and electronic communication. These developments have fuelled debates concerning binaries, such as those relating to, for example, nature/culture, man/woman. For example, sports supplements, surgery and steroids have changed what was once considered the natural, fixed, ‘accepted’ physical body, including its shape and performance capabilities. As Rail (1998b, p. 149) argued “nature mercilessly contradicts the human dream of self-mastery, freedom or infinitude. If, as in a sign, the athletic body fascinates, because it signified this dream body”. Postmodern sporting studies have highlighted the heterogeneities which reside within identity categories. Fusco (1998) for example, expanded the repertoire of gendered identities by drawing attention to the accounts of lesbian athletes. Morgan (1998) explained variations in culture and religion for sporting experiences using the case of Hassiba Boulmerka, whose successes on the field won the accolades of the Algerians, but the scorn of the Muslim decree. Ohl (2000) referred to the changing nature of lifestyles, and its implications for class including the prospect of new social groupings and sport portrayals. Wheaton (2000), however, advocated a more cautionary tone in terms of the application of postmodernism to the identity of windsurfers. Despite adopting the appropriate look and image of a sporting group through fashion and equipment, Wheaton (2000) discovered that “looking like you were doing it, did not equate to attaining subcultural status or procuring a subcultural identity” (p. 269). The implication for competitive bodybuilding is an assumption that as the sport is aesthetically-oriented identity is, therefore, predominantly about the external look of the body. Member meanings, however, may prove multi-faceted and include internal connectivities.

## **Conclusion**

This section has addressed identity and intersections within a sporting context, discussing their application to competitive bodybuilding. Research into areas such as motivations and meanings underpinning participation, commitment, becoming serious about the activity, facets of group culture, how sporting identities are established, constructed, evolved and disestablished, can inform research into bodybuilding and identity. Interactions, such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, and religion, as well as those pertaining to other life spheres, provide valuable frameworks for considering how bodybuilders may engage in this activity and make decisions concerning participation that reflect their level of interest and commitment to bodybuilding in relation to other life spheres. However, a postmodern perspective argues that many of these traditional social structures have now dissolved, times have changed and that sporting identities should be conceived as fluid and diverse. This research will contribute to these debates by investigating the real life accounts of competitive bodybuilders, including reasons for involvement in the sport, participant identity experiences and their interfaces between competitive bodybuilding and their broader lives and identities. The research will consider these findings utilising social theory as a theoretical foundation and modernism–postmodernism perspectives as contemporary areas of scholarly discussion.

### **2.3 COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDING AND IDENTITY**

This section reviews the existing literature concerning competitive bodybuilding and its connectivity with identity. It has been structured into key themes. Competitive Bodybuilding and Identity Intersections focuses on studies of competitive bodybuilders and their relationship with gender, class, ethnicity and/or age. Group Identity discusses competitive bodybuilding norms, behaviours and subcultural descriptions of competitive bodybuilders as a collective. Personality tests that have involved bodybuilders have been collated and reviewed in the next theme: The Competitive Bodybuilding Personalities.

Within these themes, distinctions have been made between research that has adopted an external perspective of bodybuilders (i.e. from a Foucauldian approach, clinical or psychological point of view) and research that has emphasised identity experiences from the perspective of bodybuilders themselves (i.e. phenomenologically-oriented research). An assessment of the status of the research as it relates to identity, including a discussion of gaps in the literature and the contribution of this research to knowledge, is provided at the conclusion of this analysis.

## **COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDING AND IDENTITY INTERSECTIONS**

### **Bodybuilding and gendered identities**

A review of competitive bodybuilding and gender has been adopted as the starting point for this section, as this comprises the majority of existing research. Bodybuilding has been predominantly referred to as a male-dominated and masculine activity (Johnstone, 1996; Klein, 1993a; Roussel & Griffet, 2003; D Smith, 2006). The majority of the research describes how the crafting of a muscular body conveys a potent message concerning masculinity and the identity of its participant. Muscles for instance, are a signifier of masculinity (Fussell, 1991) and culturally symbolic of men who are strong, powerful, and in control of themselves and those around them (Wiegers, 1998).

Klein (1990; 1993a; 1993b; 1994; Klein, 1995; 2001a; 2001b) is arguably the most extensively published and cited writer on bodybuilding. His social-psychological ethnographic analysis of competitive-elite male bodybuilders and the bodybuilding subculture spanned 7 years, taking place in Southern California during the 1980s. Observing the activities of competitive bodybuilders and undertaking both formal and informal interviews, Klein (1993) concluded that men gravitated to the gym where crafting a hypermuscular body was seen as a means to restore, validate, and enhance their masculinity. His research showed that individuals predominantly

became involved in bodybuilding due to their low self-esteem, arguing that “recruitment to the subculture …stems from real, felt, unmet needs and personality deficiencies. In short, poor self-image lurks in the background of most bodybuilders” (Klein, 2001a, p.424). His assessment of such individuals was that beneath their muscular imagery they often suffered from low self-esteem, personal inadequacies (e.g., stuttering or a lack of height), and bodybuilding functioned as a form of compensatory, therapeutic activity. The construction of a hypermuscular physique enabled participants to present a powerful external image, which was a wall between themselves and the outside world, obscuring their perceived short-comings. He also believed that participants tended towards narcissism, fascism, obsession, homophobia, and a desire for self-mastery. Klein (1990; 1993a; 1994) argued that their narcissistic subcultural rituals, such as mirroring and muscular displays, functioned as a further means to boost their self-esteem and create a more secure sense of self, while their homophobic tendencies were an extension of their masculine neurotic insecurities.

Gillett and White’s (1992) feminist critique, not only reiterated many of Klein’s (1993) views, but discussed how male bodybuilding reflected a form of ‘masculinity in crisis response’ to broader social changes and pressures. Men were construed as being under new pressure to be in shape and felt their masculinity was being eroded by the increasing presence of women in traditional male and leadership roles. In summary, Klein (1993) and Gillett and White (1992) have depicted male bodybuilders as insecure, arguably panicky, men who have turned to bodybuilding as a means to validate their masculinity and meet manly bodily ideals.

Klein (1994) also claimed that male bodybuilders were uni-dimensional characters, who were essentially loners; bodybuilding was their life and the gym their home. He considered them competitive and goal-oriented with a ruthlessness in the competitive arena. These notions are consistent with broader sociological studies that align men, masculinity, sport, and competition

(Connell, 2001, 2005; Messner & Sabo, 1990). According to Vertinsky (1999) competitive bodybuilding combines muscular development and sport and this has created a vehicle for men through which they can not only stem the loss of their manliness, but also celebrate their accomplishments.

However, there are potential conflicts between participating in competitive bodybuilding and masculinity. To prepare their bodies for competition, competitive bodybuilders must engage in practices such as shaving and tanning, arguably feminising acts (Obel, 1996), and steroid use may lead to the growth of “breasts” (Saltman, 1998). Displaying the body on stage for the view of others, objectifies the male bodybuilder. His body is gazed at and judged by others, which potentially sexualises him. This diminishes his dominant masculine position as the subject, given that it is women who are often the objects on which to gaze (Vertinsky, 1999). Furthermore, the onstage routines and performances entailed in competitive bodybuilding may be construed as a form of dance – bodily movements that carry feminine overtones (Patton, 2001). Klein (1990; 1993a) states that in order to distance themselves from risks that they may be perceived as feminine or gay, male bodybuilders adopt an emphasised homophobic and/or hypermasculine stance.

Comparatively few studies have sought the perspectives of male bodybuilders in relation to gender. Although many of the studies cited in the previous section have involved male bodybuilders, their analyses arguably reflect an external assessment, not necessarily those of the bodybuilders themselves. For example, whilst some of Klein’s (1993a) participants admitted that before bodybuilding they harboured insecurities about themselves and their bodies, this does not necessarily imply they saw themselves as “insecure little men”. Drummond (1994a; 1994b; 2002) and Wiegers (1998) interviewed male bodybuilders about masculinity, and Monaghan, Bloor, Dobash, and Dobash about sexual attractiveness (1998). According to Wiegers (1998)

participants claimed bodybuilding boosted their confidence in terms of body image and general attractiveness, and they felt strong, powerful, and manly. She concluded that bodybuilding served to enhance the masculine identities of men as “its promise of greater physical and psychological self-control and aesthetic value...enabled respondents to construct a superior self-identity that was premised upon Western cultural ideals of hypermasculinity including power, authority and domination” (Wiegers, 1998, p.159-160). Drummond (1994a; 1994b; 2002) found that bodybuilding enhanced participants’ sense of their own masculinity. His study, which included case studies of male bodybuilders, triathletes, and surf lifesavers, highlighted that participating in sport contributed to a positive, popular self-image, provided social recognition, and enhanced sexual attractiveness. However, Drummond (1994a; 1994b; 2002) also noted that for the bodybuilding men, competitive participation was less about women and more about dominance over and impressing other men through their bodily accomplishments. While research by Drummond (1994a; 1994b; 2002) and Wiegers (1998) was therefore consistent with Klein (1993a; 1994) concerning masculinities and competitive tendencies, support for Gillett and White’s (1992) ‘masculinity in crisis’ theory concerning women in the workplace, appeared less definitive.

Both Wiegers (1998) and Drummond (1994a; 1994b; 2002) provide valuable insights, yet their findings must also be read in context. Drummond’s (1994a; 1994b; 2002) research, although in depth, entailed only four participants. Wiegers (1998) study involved more participants; however, many of them were not competitive bodybuilders. Both studies presented a Western white perspective of masculinity and one that was reflective of a limited age group. The median age in Drummond’s (1994a; 1994b; 2002) study was 27 years and Wiegers (1998) participants were aged 20–33 years. The topic was specific to masculinity, rather than emerging from a grounded approach contextualised more broadly with other identities. Furthermore, while both studies

highlighted that bodybuilding enhanced masculinity, neither discussed whether it also challenged dominant ideologies regarding masculinity.

Consistent with Drummond (1994a; 1994b; 2002), Monaghan et al. (1998) found that male bodybuilders believed their muscular body made them more attractive. Bodybuilding also evoked more favourable sexual responses from women in the ‘mate market’. The alignment Gillett and White (1992) made between bodybuilding and the desire of men to be socially and physically attractive and in shape is reinforced, at least in part, by these findings. However, Monaghan et al. (1998) also argued that while looking sexually attractive was important to the male participants, its significance as a driver to bodybuilding varied: it was potentially more significant to those single and in the mate market. Participants also indicated that the socially attractive muscular body was a double-edged sword. Male bodybuilders were concerned that they might be exploited for their bodies. Prospective partners could be attracted to them for their bodies, as opposed to their broader qualities and attributes as a person. Furthermore, the time bodybuilders spent on their bodies (doing bodybuilding) may be considered excessive by others – indicative of someone who is vain and overly self-absorbed. Therefore their identities as bodybuilders were also perceived in a less socially favourable and attractive light. The men also suggested that while their muscular bodies could be considered attractive, if they became too muscular they then became less attractive to outsiders. This highlighted that the muscular agenda of competitive male bodybuilders may not always be compatible with those of sexual attractiveness and manly ideals (Monaghan et al., 1998).

Monaghan’s (1999b) investigations of male bodybuilders also found there was heterogeneity among them concerning their bodily preferences. Not all men pursued excessive muscularity. Male bodybuilders desired and found a variety of shapes, sizes, and levels of musculature

attractive. These notions are contrary to Klein (1993a), who portrayed male bodybuilders in a more homogenous light – as creatures who sought to maximise their muscularity.

Compared with studies of masculinity and men, writings concerning bodybuilding, women, and their gendered identity appear more prolific. While early bodybuilding events for women were little more than bikini competitions (Lowe, 1998), the controversial arrival of muscular women in the film Pumping Iron II in 1985 triggered a flush of academic and public interest in female bodybuilders as it questioned the naturalness of the body in relation to sex, gender, and bodily ideals. The contrasting physiques of competitive bodybuilders, Bev Francis (deemed excessively muscular) and Rachel McLish (deemed less muscular and more feminine) created interest. According to Aoki (1999, p.26). They provided the film with “a natural hook: who will win...what will win? Or more precisely, what look or body will win?” The story and the issues it raised subsequently, have been the subject of numerous academic commentaries (Aoki, 1999; Balsamo, 1997; Klein, 1993a, 1994; Lowe, 1998; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Ndalianis, 1995; Obel, 1996; St.Martin & Gavey, 1996).

Holmlund (1997) and Johnstone (1996) have described how the excessively muscular development of women represents a transgression of social gender norms. Such muscularity is contrary to how they are expected to look – their portrayal of femininity – and interferes with the visual markers that have traditionally distinguished women from men (Balsamo, 1996). Bev Francis provided a highly visual and thus spectacular means of reflecting this disruption. The reality of her muscularity confused what were assumed to be the natural symbols of differentiation between men and women. This, coupled with the virtual elimination of recognisable womanly signifiers due to low body fat (i.e. breasts), resulted in a female body at odds with what society expected to be a naturally female and thus feminine body. Johnstone (1996) conveyed that the female competitive bodybuilder does not embody what people conceive

to be a traditional “female identity”. In so doing, she concludes they are viewed by outsiders as abject and repulsive, but in a way that both fascinates and repels people. Holmlund (1997) has referred to the body of the female bodybuilder as unnatural and thus unsettling, whilst Choi (2003) described these participants as masculine and therefore unattractive.

Deviant labelling (e.g., freaks and/or lesbians) may be assigned to female bodybuilders as a result of their appearance. According to Choi (2003), people may question the attractiveness of the male bodybuilder muscularity, but they do not question his gender. However, with muscular women gender is usually the first issue called into question. This confusion has led to ‘dyke labelling’ (Coles, 1999; Krane, 2001), as femininity tends to be socially aligned with the heterosexual women, and thus the transgressive nature of the muscular women has merged with notions of butch lesbianism (i.e. mannish women must be lesbians). As Coles (1999) stated, “accused of wanting to look like a man, and therefore necessarily of lesbianism, the female bodybuilders’ sexuality is marked as excessive, disruptive and, worse, indifferent to men” (p. 448). Scholars have also referred to attempts to normalise the female bodybuilder. They have highlighted that the bodybuilding institution, media, society as well as female bodybuilders themselves have engaged in strategies to ‘apologise’ for ‘her’ contravention of social norms (Coles, 1999; Krane, 2001; Choi, 2003; Ndalianis, 1995; St Martin & Gavey, 1996). Examples include the introduction of femininity within the judging criteria of bodybuilding competitions, ensuring muscles are covered; declining to flex in public; emphasising femininity through excessive use of makeup; reference to participants softer selves; the development of less muscular bodybuilding categories (e.g., Fitness and Figure); the adoption of sexualised clothing and postures; as well as pressure from friends and family not to become too muscular. There is also an increasing use of cosmetic surgery by female bodybuilders particularly in relation to breast enhancement (Choi, 2000; Ndalianis, 1995). Such practices are seen as a response by female bodybuilders to their loss of

femininity and/or a need to compensate for the masculinity of their muscularity, thus enabling a feminine but muscular appearance for judging (Ndalianis, 1995).

In summary, the capacity of the female bodybuilder to expose, challenge and/or reaffirm gender conventions has been of interest from a sociological-cultural and/or feminist perspective; hence the proliferation of academic work of this nature (Balsamo, 1997; Bolin, 1997; Coles, 1999; Guthrie & Castelnovo, 1992; Heywood, 1998b; Holmlund, 1997; Johnstone, 1996; Klein, 1994; Kuhn, 1988; Lowe, 1998; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; L. Miller & Penz, 1991; Moore, 1997a; Schulze, 1997; St.Martin & Gavey, 1996; Wesely, 2001). Female bodybuilding has fuelled academic commentaries and varying interpretations. On one hand, feminists have celebrated the female bodybuilder for pumping iron with “little concern for the limits of body development imposed by the current canons of femininity” (Bartky 1988, p. 83), for ‘taking up space’ and challenging the social structure, which has sought to contain, oppress, and normalise her (Heywood, 1998b). They have also argued that bodybuilding should not assess its female athletes in terms of their femininity or sexiness (e.g., Heywood, 1998; Choi, 2003) or try to restrict her muscular mass.

However, Shilling (2003) highlighted a social shift over the past 10–15 years towards a more body-conscious health and fitness society. These changes have led to new bodily ideals for women reflecting physiques that are hard, toned, and in-shape. Preferred female physiques have therefore shifted towards the ideals of the competitive female bodybuilder – and this has contributed to the normalisation of female bodybuilders. Muscularity and weightlifting have become more respected and desirable for women. Lean, toned, hard, in-shape bodies have become a new form of body currency (Cole, 1993), signifying identities that are successful and disciplined. Fatness has become aligned with laziness, self-indulgence and a lack of control or personal discipline (Choi, 2003). Therefore bodybuilding, previously celebrated by feminists as a

transgressive behaviour, has become increasingly viewed as agreeing with gender ideals (Bordo, 1988; Shea, 2001). Framed within a Foucauldian analysis, the female bodybuilder is conceived as a ‘docile body’ engaging in socially conforming bodily practices. However, other academics have differed in their interpretation. St Martin and Gavey (1996 p.46) have argued that the muscular bulk and definition displayed by female bodybuilders is quite different from the social conformity of a firmly toned feminine body, suggesting that “elite level women bodybuilders have bodies that, to the untrained eye, look virtually identical to the big and bulky forms of male bodybuilders”. Markula (2004) has questioned whether female bodybuilders are even seeking to challenge social bodily ideals. She claims that having a transgressive body does not in itself necessarily mean that the participant is resistant to social bodily norms. To resist, Markula (2004, p.316) argues such actions must also be coupled with “critical awareness” and a “conscious effort” to challenge social bodily ideals. Her interpretation seemingly suggests that for this to occur, female bodybuilders should have adopted a political form of social-female body-activism.

While these external perspectives provide valuable insights of female bodybuilders, the question remains, how do female bodybuilders perceive their own gendered identity and its relationship with bodybuilding? Studies entailing interviews with female bodybuilders include Guthrie and Castelnuova (1992), Klein (1994), Fisher (1997), Lowe (1998), Wesely (2001), Roussel and Griffett (2000; 2003), Grogan, Evans, Wright and Hunter (2004) and Boyle (2005). Boyle (2005, p. 136) discovered that participants did not view themselves as “feminist crusaders or aspiring muscle barbies”. Fisher (1997) similarly found her female bodybuilders were reluctant to describe themselves as feminists, although she claimed that due to their actions they had to be. Klein (1994) concluded that the female bodybuilders he spoke with were not trying to be like men, to be masculine or even to resist femininity. He emphasised they still wanted to feel attractive and be attractive to men, and he also challenged the feminist perception that female bodybuilders pumped iron with little concern for traditional female bodily ideals of excessive muscularity.

Rather, he believed that for women, bodybuilding was more about their endeavours to explore or experience womanhood in a new way. Their motivations in this respect differed from those of men, who he felt were more focused on trying to prop up gender conventions than to challenge them. In this respect Klein's (1994) analysis suggests there is a form of feminist agenda (conscious or not) influencing their participation, and also perceived female bodybuilders were less competitive and more supportive of each other than their male counterparts, reflecting traits often associated with femininity.

Despite such differences, however, Klein (1994) still argued that female bodybuilders' main motivations were very similar to men – women were attracted to bodybuilding as a result of personal inadequacies, such as low self-esteem and obesity. Participation in bodybuilding enabled them to feel in control of their bodies and lives. Fisher (1997), Roussel and Griffett (2000, 2003), and Grogan et al. (2004) also discovered that some female participants in their studies, before taking up bodybuilding, suffered from negative self-views. Bodybuilding served as a positive means of addressing these dissatisfactions; it provided a sense of control and boosted their self-confidence. Lifting weights and building muscle can translate into an enhanced sense of self esteem and sense of personal power in women. Schulze (1997) argued that “more than bodies are built and articulated through pumping iron. Social subjectivity shifts with an involvement in female bodybuilding, and it shifts in a way that seems to empower women” (Shulze, 1997, p. 22). Grogan et al. (2004) found that participants felt empowered, mentally strong, good about themselves, and more able to cope with difficult situations as a result of bodybuilding. Lowe (1998) referred to participant experiences of empowerment, and Heywood (1998) reported that bodybuilding may heal experiences of victimisation. Castelnuovo and Guthrie (1992) discovered there was an enhanced sense of personal control and agency felt by their female bodybuilders who did not believe they had to conform to the social bodily ideals for women – instead they defined their own criteria. Their resistance was a form of freedom (Guthrie & Castelnuovo,

1992). Roussel and Griffett (2000) concluded that female bodybuilders construed bodybuilding not only as positive for self-identity, but as being future-focused, contributing “to the ongoing construction of identity ....a new identity” (p. 140). However, Fisher (1997) said that many of her participants, while proud of their bodies, still suffered from low self-esteem even after taking up bodybuilding.

In terms of their bodies, Grogan et al. (2004) found that female bodybuilders perceived their muscularity and femininity to be compatible. Furthermore, their physiques made them feel sensual and sexually attractive. Monaghan et al. (1998) reported similar findings. However, their participants were concerned that they might be exploited for their bodies and that there were limits to attractiveness. As with men, the women said there were discrepancies between social bodily ideals for women and the ideals of a competitive bodybuilder physique. While muscularity was attractive, being too muscular was not. The competitive goals of a female bodybuilder which are often to maximise muscularity may therefore reach a point where they begin to run counter to a sexually attractive identity. In which case, according to Monaghan et al. (1998), the motives underpinning bodybuilding may be distinguished from those of seeking to enhance sexual attractiveness.

Female bodybuilder assessments of their bodies in terms of muscularity and attractiveness may not remain constant, as shown by Wesely (2001) and Roussel and Griffet (2000). Wesely (2001) highlighted cases of female bodybuilders who had happily evolved their musculature during a phase in their life, only to look in the mirror and consider themselves too muscular and unfeminine. They reconfigured their physiques, decreasing their muscularity to reflect their own shifting perceptions and ideals. Roussel and Griffet (2000) reported that female bodybuilders may initially perceive too much musculature on women as unattractive, but with increasing exposure to bodybuilding they came to view such bodies as increasingly attractive and desirable.

Participant experiences in terms of bodily changes, such as fat loss leading to a loss of breast tissue and the use of breast implants, remain relatively unexplored. Obel (1996), however, found that not all female bodybuilders perceived implants as ‘natural’ (or to look natural), as they may create an undesirable and artificial Barbie doll image.

In summary, studies concerning female bodybuilders and gender are more prolific than those of men. This interest has often stemmed from the complexities and variable interpretations of the female bodybuilder. As stated by Shea (2001, p. 44), bodybuilding “is both empowering and disempowering, simultaneously challenging and reinforcing hegemonic constructions of femininity”. However, the research has been dominated more by external and often feminist agendas than the views of the participants themselves. Furthermore, explorations of gender have predominantly focused on the body, especially muscularity, overlooking some of the other ways that gender may be experienced and expressed by female participants, such as social networking, competing, bodily techniques (e.g., shaving, dieting), conduct, and display. There are also limitations in their studies. Many involved comparatively small participant numbers: Fisher’s (1997) study centred on ten participants; Roussel and Griffet’s work entailed nine; Guthrie and Castelnuova interviewed eight; and Grogan et al. (2004) met with seven female bodybuilders. Participants were predominantly white women with some diversity in age. Lowe’s (1998) study appeared the most extensive. In the course of her research, fourteen women were interviewed, aged between 24 and 46. Some of her participants were married, whilst others were single. However, identity interfaces between bodybuilding and these other social arenas were not featured in her study, or any of the above research.

## **Intersections with other identities**

While existing literature concerning bodybuilding and identity has predominantly focused on gender, other types of identities are identifiable, although they comprise a minor area of scholarly focus. These often reflect commentary made within the context of broader bodybuilder research, and have included class, ethnicity, age, and culture.

### *Class*

Class may be subject to various interpretations and applications. For example, it may be embedded in cultural practices such as sport. Bourdieu (1978) claimed bodybuilding, due to its focus on the muscular body, was a lower-class sport; however, he also referred, in a somewhat contradictory manner within the same study, to aesthetically oriented endeavours of the upper class and how they spent time working on the body. While Bourdieu (1978) did not directly draw such connectivities with bodybuilding, given its focus on body work and aesthetics, such linkages could be made. Gillett and White (1992) argued, for example, that the attractiveness of the male bodybuilding physique can enhance a man's social standing – it is culturally valued and helps to pave the way for greater levels of recognition and acceptance in social circles.

Klein (1994), conversely, has discussed class in terms of the backgrounds and occupations of competitive bodybuilders. The male bodybuilders in his study predominantly came from blue-collar families. He has also referred to class differences between male and female participants, noting that female bodybuilders stemmed from more affluent, educated, professional backgrounds.

The embodied practices of bodybuilders, their conduct on stage and its interpretation relative to class, have been discussed by Boyle (2005). She highlighted that female participants sought to maintain their “middle class respectability” (p.145) by conveying that their bodily on-stage displays were undertaken in a tasteful manner, with participants condemning those who adopted

overtly sexual poses, as this reflected a lower class demeanour. Her analysis suggested that, depending on how they conducted and displayed their bodies in competition, the female bodybuilders might lend themselves to varying class interpretations.

In summary, class has attracted minimal scholarly attention. The comments above were predominantly extracted from broader studies; Bourdieu (1978) on sport generally, and Klein (1994) centred on gender. Boyle's (2005) analysis, while more expansive, reflected commentary from only a small sample of female bodybuilders. Class is therefore relatively unexplored as an identity intersection with competitive bodybuilding.

### *Race and Ethnicity*

Studies concerning ethnicity in competitive bodybuilding also appear limited and predominantly comprised extracts from feminist or critical writings. Heywood (1998b) has referred to the view that muscularity and black bodybuilders can sometimes be genetically entangled. Muscularity and powerful bodies are considered natural and therefore accepted as being expected in people of colour. Furthermore, due to their perceived natural tendency towards muscularity, people of colour are assumed not to have to work as hard to become muscular reflecting dominant race ideologies (Heywood, 1998). Feminist scholars have discussed potential connectivities between ethnicity, muscularity, and gender and how these may have influenced the controversial outcome of Pumping Iron II. As previously discussed, this doco-film contained a debate on who should win a female bodybuilding contest (i.e. the taut, toned, feminine, white Rachel McLish or the more muscular, white Bev Francis). The judges ultimately award first place to Carla Dunlap (the sole black competitor). Feminists not only considered this outcome to be a compromise in relation to muscular mass, as physically Dunlap whilst more muscular than McLish was less so than Francis (Mansfield & McGinn, 1993), but, according to Balsamo (1997), it highlighted that black

bodies were socially coded as being naturally muscular. In other words, Dunlop's muscularity was viewed as being acceptable, because her physique was interpreted in a broader identity frame that was inclusive not only of 'femininity', but also 'race'.

Research on the experiences and views of bodybuilders themselves about race and ethnicity appear limited. Boyle (2005, p. 140) found that "despite their ethnic background, [the participants] reproduced racist stereotypes about black female bodybuilders' bodies". Her comments, however, were made in passing and unfortunately did not convey what these were or explore them in depth.

#### *Age*

References to bodybuilding and age are identifiable, but limited. Monaghan (2001), while not exploring this issue in depth, believes bodybuilding has the capacity to foster a firm, muscular, and thus more youthful body. While, he argued that this may prove pleasurable and meaningful for older bodybuilders, he did not document the actual experiences of older competitive bodybuilders. Frueh (1999), conversely, has provided some insights from older female bodybuilders, and found that bodybuilding may reflect a double transgression of social norms for these participants – not only does muscularity challenge feminine bodily expectations, but also those traditionally aligned with aged bodies. She maintained that society perceives the older, sexy, female body to be an embarrassment, which is stigmatised by hostility, and that feminists tend to portray the older woman who works on her body as fanatical and desperately trying to cling to youth. However, her older female bodybuilders did not seek to imitate youth. Rather they experienced the gym as a "pleasure zone that provided challenge, sensual transformation, strength, and development" (Frueh, 1999, p.223). Bodybuilding was viewed by her older participants as a form of self-expression and a means to enhance themselves physically, mentally,

and spiritually. Age has not been a significant area of research interest within bodybuilding, and the few studies that have been undertaken, appear to address the aged, as opposed to youthful participant.

### *Country and National Identity*

Studies of competitive bodybuilding have predominantly been undertaken in Britain and the United States (Andrews, Sudwell, & Sparkes, 2004; Fisher, 1997; Klein, 1993a; Lowe, 1998; Mekolichick, 2001; Monaghan, 1997). A few have taken place in other countries, such as Australia and Israel (Drummond, 2002; Rubinstein, 2003). In these investigations there appears minimal consideration or contextualisation that competitive bodybuilding experiences or subcultures may vary between countries. Roussel and Griffet (2003) have, however, highlighted the intersection between country and competitive bodybuilding as it relates to female bodybuilding in a French context. These researchers discussed the lack of public and Government support for the sport, the social perception in their country that muscular women are unattractive, and that bodybuilders did not reflect their social ideal. These factors, therefore, have contributed to a decline in female bodybuilding; however, body fitness, with its new form of fit and appropriately muscled feminine body, is growing in popularity.

## **GROUP IDENTITY – THE SUBCULTURE OF COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDING**

Whereas the previous section focused on intersections between bodybuilding and other identities within the self, this section addresses connectivities between the competitive bodybuilder and the social world of competitive bodybuilding. As identified by Roussel and Griffet (2000, p.141), “one becomes a body-builder by mixing with bodybuilders. The bodybuilding spirit is forged alongside its advocates, through verbal exchange and reciprocal advice, mutual reading and shared feelings, common interests and similar joys”. Identity and meanings are not formed in

isolation, but as the result of social interaction, affiliation, and common understandings which may exist between people and groups. As highlighted in sections on Identity generally and Sport Identity specifically (see 2.1 and 2.2) different groups have their own norms, ideologies, patterns of behaviour, expectations, language, rules, values and systems (Donnelly & Young, 1988, 1999; Hogg, 2003). The world of competitive bodybuilding can therefore be defined as having its own distinctive group culture. Klein (1993a) has referred to competitive bodybuilding as being connected to, yet distinct from, the world of non-competitive bodybuilding. While bodybuilders, competitive and non-competitive, may share a common interest in constructing and evolving the muscular physique, there are also systems, a culture and extremeness attached to high-level competitive bodybuilding that are quite different from those aligned with weight training for general fitness and health.

Studies such as Klein (1993), Roundtree (2005), Fisher (1997), Andrews, Sudwell, and Sparkes (2004), Thirer and Greer (1978), and Bolin (1997) provide insight into competitive bodybuilding activities and practices. Roundtree's (2005) analysis documents its institutional framework: as an aesthetically oriented contest where the body is evaluated against a culturally defined ideal of muscular mass, symmetry, definition, and tone. He also referred to the advantageous nature of good genetics for bodybuilding, although he emphasised that weight training and dieting remain necessary in order to craft the competitive physique. Roundtree (2005) described how bodybuilders seek to manipulate their bodies, its look, size and shape, in accordance with these culturally defined ideals. Bodies are trained and peaked specifically for these events – often resulting in extremely low body fat levels to enable their muscular mass to be clearly displayed. Competitive physiques, however, are not permanent accomplishments; the look bodybuilders present on stage is not what they look like all the time. Roundtree (2005) detailed the cyclical practices of the competitive bodybuilder: the off-season period that centres on muscular growth; the pre-competition dieting to get lean; the complexities, significance, and precision entailed in weightlifting and nutrition regimes; and the intricacies of competitive bodybuilding preparation

processes such as dehydrating and sodium depletion. Thirer and Greer (1978) have also referred to how bodybuilders dedicate several months (usually a 12-week period) preparing for a specific contest – lifting weights, engaging in cardiovascular activity and subjecting themselves to rigid diets, only to spend a few minutes on stage in competition showing their physique to the judges. They claim that the ratio of time participants spend preparing for bodybuilding competition, relative to the time actually spent in competition is, “probably higher [in bodybuilding] than in any other sport” (Thirer & Greer, 1978, p. 188). Although these specifics may be debated (e.g., sprinters or swimmers may make similar claims), the point is that bodybuilders spend much time and effort preparing their physiques to be displayed for a moment.

While these studies are valuable in a technical sense, their methodology does not entail direct involvement with bodybuilders themselves and therefore do not provide significant insights from the field or the perspective of bodybuilders. Andrews et al. (2004), who provide an ethnographic perspective of competitive bodybuilders within a singular gym in the United Kingdom, found the bodybuilder lifestyle to be very regimented. Participants in their study said there was a need for strict adherence to routines revolving around eating and training requirements, which required being selfish with their behaviour. To be successful, participants often had to make sacrifices and prioritise bodybuilding over other life activities in order to maintain their competitive bodybuilding eating and training regime. Klein (1993a), who also spent time in the field, similarly found the competitive bodybuilders in his study to be very regime-oriented. He described how schedules were broken into days and hours, and matters such as diet were measured, monitored, and timed with precision. Klein (2001a) discovered that due to their restricted dietary requirements, eating often became an isolating activity for the bodybuilder. Furthermore, in the lead up to competition energy levels often declined, due to lack of calories.

Gordon (2005), who interviewed competitive bodybuilders about fatigue during their pre-competition phase also found they experienced decreased energy, lapses in concentration, and

mood changes. Klein (1993) noted that morale at this time became strained. Bodybuilders became self-focused and within the gym there were requirements for space. “There are no team sessions or mutual psyching ....no one dares to break into someone else’s [weight lifting] routine ...conversation, especially as a contest nears, is often kept to a minimum while working out” (Klein, 2001a, p.417). Klein (1993) perceived that the culture of competitive bodybuilding was essentially individualistic – comprising non-team players who were relatively antisocial, especially the men.

Klein (1993) highlighted differences between bodybuilders’ functions and the norms of mainstream society. Bodybuilders view their bodies as though they are distinct from themselves. This type of separation enables the bodybuilders to work on their body as though it is a machine, something that can be acted on and mastered. Thirer and Greer (1978) also alluded to bodily differences, but rather discussed the distinctive way bodybuilders may view their bodies in terms of its importance and malleability, suggesting that bodybuilders experience, and connect with, their bodies differently from non-bodybuilders. “For the average person in society, each person is a self within a body....The bodybuilder generally tends to see his body as a very integral part of his existence, with wondrous potential of its own” (Thirer & Greer, 1978, p. 189). Roussel and Griffet (2000) also referred to the relationship between the bodybuilder and the body as one where the body is subject to ongoing refinement. They found that competitive bodybuilders often set goals for the development of their bodies and, when those goals were achieved, they set new ones. Bodybuilders enjoyed this. It was pleasurable, meaningful and future oriented and, according to the researchers, explained, at least in part, their commitment and attachment to the activity (Roussel & Griffet, 2000).

Klein (1993a) has also referred to bodybuilders’ lack of appropriate modesty in how they view and interact with their bodies. He noted that whereas people in society may glance at themselves

in a shop window from time-to-time, they usually save self-inspection for the privacy of bedroom mirrors. Competitive bodybuilders, however, openly and unabashedly scanned their appearance and posed before gym mirrors, without any sense of self-consciousness. However, he acknowledged that such behaviours are also in part functional – as bodybuilders look at themselves in a detached manner, assessing their bodies and the parts that need working on, because their ‘bodies’ are assessed in competition.

This assessment lends itself to the different way bodybuilders view and talk about their muscularity and bodies. Klein (1993a) has also described how bodybuilders perceive their bodies, not as whole, but a series of muscular parts – ‘abs’, biceps, triceps, ‘quads’, hamstrings, back. This enables participants to isolate elements of the body and to work upon them in a specialised way to fashion them into champion form. There were also nicknames, for example, biceps were sometimes called guns (Klein, 1993a).

While the body has been the prime focus of scholarly attention, the dimension of the mind has not been subject to the same levels of scrutiny. Klein (1993) examines this in part through his analysis of how bodybuilders objectify the body from the self – thus separating the mind from the body, after which the body can be worked on in a clinical, detached way. However, Smith (2006), in his psychological commentary, has referred to the arduous nature of competitive bodybuilding, describing it as one of the most physically demanding sports (D Smith, 2006). He refers not only to the intensity of training, but also to the significance of the mental dimension to bodybuilding success, to matters such as concentration, focus, and goal setting. His analysis, however, was from the perspective of a sports psychologist and therefore did not provide insights into the mind/body connectivities or strategies of bodybuilders themselves.

Bolin (1997) emphasised the importance of diet and nutrition to the competitive bodybuilder, indicating that some bodybuilders have ranked its significance in the final phases of pre-contest

preparation as high as 90–98% of their focus. Furthermore, the dietary regime and the relationship the bodybuilder has with food and diet can differ from mainstream society (Bolin, 1997; Fisher, 1997; Scott-Dixon, 2006). For example, food is often considered a tool to manipulate bodily shape, as opposed to something more aligned with pleasure. Bodybuilders often eat more frequently – five or more small meals per day. They eat “clean” foods such as tuna, fish, vegetables, and oatmeal and may also eat significant levels of items, such as protein powder. Bodybuilders aim for precision in terms of macronutrient dietary composition, levels of carbohydrates, protein, and fat levels, and as a result, they weigh and measure their food items, especially as they prepare for competition.

Steroid use is considered to be widespread among the bodybuilding community (Klein, 1995). It is therefore positioned as a normative practice, and studies have often reaffirmed the presence of steroid use within the culture. Klein (1993) believes the motivations underpinning steroid use are largely determined by the bodybuilder’s pursuit of excessive muscularity and/or a desire for competitive bodybuilding success. Olrich and Ewing (1999) and Wright, Grogan, and Hunter, (2001) found that steroid use enhanced not only competitive success in bodybuilding, but also bodily confidence both in the gym and broader social settings. This implies that perceived benefits extended beyond the gym and competition to broader settings, including how the male bodybuilders experienced their bodies and manhood in these other life spheres. According to Olrich and Ewing, (1999) participants found steroid use to be a gratifying and positive experience.

Steroid use among female bodybuilders is considered less widespread, although potentially on the increase (Klein, 1994). Grogan et al. (2006) have provided one of the few insights of female use. They identified some differences compared with male users, in particular that while some female bodybuilders used steroids, their motivations appeared more competitively centred. Furthermore,

their concerns were not so much focused on health risks, but more aligned with potential masculinising effects (Grogan et al., 2006)

The medical community has referred to the use of steroids as risky to health, for example, potential liver and kidney damage, hypertension, acne, breast enlargement, heart attacks, strokes, mood disturbance, masculinising tendencies in women, aggression and/or ‘road rage’ (Gilbert, 2000; R. Hall & Hall, 2005; Keane, 2005; Kutscher, Lund, & Perry, 2002; Monroe, 2004; Saltman, 1998; C Yesalis, Bahrke, Kopstein, & Barsukiewicz, 2000). According to Klein (1993a), the rewards bodybuilders associate with steroid use outweigh its risks. Monaghan (1999) interviewed steroid-using bodybuilders and found that they were not dismissive of the risks involved in use but rather, evaluated pros and cons. They considered the opportunity, which steroids afforded them, to create the type of body they wanted. Both Monaghan (1999a; 2001a; 2001b; 2002) and Grogan et al. (2006) found bodybuilders to be cynical about the medical views of the risks involved and, when making health assessments, often placing greater accord on the knowledge, expertise, and experience of those in their own bodybuilding fraternity who used such products. These findings highlight both the strength of connectivity that can exist between individual bodybuilder and group identification, as a source of information, and the influence of these relationships relative to other outside arenas.

In summary, bodies – how they are viewed, treated, and moulded into a muscular, lean competitive form, and the nature of their display – reflect an important and distinctive facet of group identity. Indeed, the skills and knowledge about bodies to be found among competitive bodybuilders may even be considered valuable and superior compared with those of outside groups (Klein, 1993a). Bodybuilders know how to fashion the body – change its shape, size, muscular mass and body fat – through their subcultural practices and combinations of diet, supplementation, and weight training. However, interpretations of the bodybuilding culture, their

skills, techniques, and bodily practices have often been viewed by scholars as indicative of dysfunctional, unhealthy, and risky behaviours (Carman, 2001; Goldfield et al., 1998; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001).

Marzano-Parisoli (2001) claims bodybuilders are individuals who are unaccepting of their real body on the basis that it is not perfect enough. She has referred to their intensive exercise regimes and restrictive dieting as a state of denial in terms of fatigue, hunger, and pain. Rather than contributing to identity construction, she believes this attitude does the opposite. “By constructing their body, bodybuilders deconstruct their person and they are no longer able to rest in touch with their real needs and sensations” (Marzano-Parisoli, 2001, p. 226). Fisher’s (1997) analysis also depicts the world of competitive bodybuilding as very body-focused, centred on the need of participants to construct a perfect physique. She considered her female bodybuilders to be obsessed, perfection-oriented beings, who were very sensitive about themselves and often never-satisfied with their physiques and their lives. Scholars have referred to the bodybuilder’s attentiveness to body work and the construction of muscularity as indicative of pathological body obsessions and addictions (C. Davis & Scott-Robertson, 2000; Hurst, Hale, & Collins, 2000; Lantz, Rhea, & Cornelius, 2002; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001; D Smith & Hale, 2004). They have referred to afflictions such as muscle dysmorphia, where bodybuilders may have significant musculature, yet perceive themselves as small in muscle or not muscular enough.

The eating practices of bodybuilders have been seen as disordered and unhealthy (Carman, 2001; Goldfield et al., 1998). Carman (2001) demonstrated through her quantitative analysis that bodybuilders exhibited higher levels of “body-image disturbance, eating disordered behavior, obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours, self-focus, and decreased interpersonal closeness” (p.85) compared with her control group. Seeing her results as agreeing with existing works that indicated bodybuilder dietary habits were extreme, Carman construed them as conceptually akin

to other eating-disordered populations. Fisher (1997), after interviewing her professional female bodybuilders, considered them to be obsessed with their bodies and weight. Goldfield et al. (1998) concluded, after a review of the works on bodybuilders, food and body fat, that many bodybuilders “embrace abnormal eating attitudes and behaviour and engage in unhealthy weight control practices in attempts to achieve the exceptionally lean bodybuilding ideal” (p. 148). Furthermore, they suggested that by participating in such practices bodybuilders were placing themselves at risk mentally and physically.

Competitive bodybuilding has been referred to as a form of sport, art and exhibitionism (Klein, 1993a; Roussel & Griffet, 2000; Thirer & Greer, 1978). However, these principles have been subject to debate. For example, Klein (1993) defined what takes place in training as sport, but what occurs in the competitive arena as essentially art and spectacle. He questioned whether competitive bodybuilding has full legitimacy as a sport because the physical training of bodybuilders is not replicated by them in competition. His interpretation differs from Coakely (2007), who, as previously discussed takes a more contemporary view that considers culture and context, as well as the perceptions of the athletes themselves. References to what bodybuilders feel and experience on stage in the throes of competition does not appear extensively explored. Roundtree (2005) mentioned the fiercely competitive nature of the activity, but this reflects an outsider rather than insider perspective. Roussel and Griffet (2000) referred to bodybuilding events as a forum that provides bodybuilders with recognition for their hard work and accomplishment in relation to the body. Lowe (1998), detailing elements of the judging criteria, maintained that applying the criteria is not a science and there may therefore be varying interpretations between judges of which physique is the best. This reaffirms similarities with sports such as figure skating and gymnastics (J. Ryan, 1996). Lowe’s (1998) analysis of judgment centred largely on disagreements and inconsistencies in terms of judging female muscular mass – confusions about the types of bodies that judges were looking for. She found disillusionment

amongst the female competitors as a result. Explorations of male participants' views on judgment appear scarce. Furthermore, insights into the identities of both male and female bodybuilders as athletes, competitors, and performers as they prepare for and engage in the arena of bodybuilding as a sport, appear limited.

The artistic and performance connectivities and meanings of competitive bodybuilders have academic interest. Scholars have referred to the creative sculpting of the bodybuilder physique; its creative display, and bodybuilding events as a form of dance and performance (Orejuela, 2005; Patton, 2001; Roussel & Griffet, 2000; Thirer & Greer, 1978). Thirer and Greer (1978) referred to the routine section of competitive bodybuilding events and how it provides a space where bodybuilders have the stage to themselves to present their bodies in a manner of their choice set to music. They believe that while some bodybuilders enjoy this segment of performance, other bodybuilders dread it. However, they also inferred that as the crowd size at bodybuilding events is often small compared with other more popular sports, there would be difficulty referring to such performances as a form of exhibitionism.

Orejuela (2005), conversely, investigated notions of art and performance directly with competitive bodybuilders. She found that participants perceived themselves as artists and that bodybuilding served as a form of creative expression. Bodybuilders said it took skill and dedication to craft their physiques and these skills defined them in a hierarchical sense from non-competitive gym goers. To them, muscular lean bodies were beautiful and highly valued, not "a product of narcissism, obsession or psychological impairment" (Orejuela, 2005, p. 260). Furthermore, bodybuilding events provided an opportunity for bodybuilders as artists to present their bodily creations to their appreciative audience for critique. Orejuela (2005) has also referred to the theatrical nature of contests, which involved stage preparation activities (e.g., make-up, tanning) and opportunities for performance and display (competitive bodybuilding poses and

dance routines). However, Orejuela (2005) pointed out that bodybuilders do not seek solely to construct an attractive or desirable physical outcome, but also to test and push the boundaries of what is possible with the human body. In other words, the artistic appreciation in the bodybuilding culture was celebrated for its extremeness – the construction and display of freaky, outlandish bodies, a notion highlighted by Frueh (1999, p.219) - “the bodybuilder’s agenda is to show the bizarre – for it is unbelievable”. These views provide alternative and refreshing perspectives compared with more feminist accounts, which have tended to assess the staged performance of male and female bodybuilders in relation to gender – its erotic nature, the potentially homophobic connotations of gazing at men, and the sexualisation, desires and feminine judgment placed on female bodybuilders (Aoki, 1999; Patton, 2001).

Scholars have argued that competitive bodybuilders and their social world may be considered deviant and different from that of mainstream society (Roundtree, 2005; Wiegers, 1998). Several reasons underpin such outsider perceptions and labels. Bodybuilding is an activity marginalised by the general public (Roussel & Griffet, 2003), and appeals to a select few (Ndalianis, 1995). It has not enjoyed universal acceptance, understanding or appreciation by mainstream society (Dutton, 1995). People struggle to understand it and relate to it. “To the lay observer, a pre-judging physique comparison is just as confusing as a Leonardo da Vinci painting to an untrained art critic. The general public simply does not know what it is looking for or at” (Roundtree, 2005, p.42). According to Dutton (1995), watching bodybuilders pose on stage is unsettling and seems to lack purpose. Socially, there is unease with the values of bodybuilding, because there is the perception that bodybuilding is indicative of some form of beauty contest (Klein, 2001a). Furthermore gazing at the body so intently does not somehow seem right – there are connotations that such bodies are sexualised or such acts are indicative of some form of fetishism (Holmlund, 1997). Bodybuilders appear to be preoccupied with their bodies and how it looks, suggesting behaviours that are indicative of vanity and self-absorption. Their bodies are not viewed as attractive to outsiders, and may even be considered grotesque (Patton, 2001) with their overly

muscular bodies being considered excessive (Ndalianis, 1995) and hypermasculine (Johnstone, 1996; Klein, 1994; Roussel & Griffet, 2003).

Research conducted by Grogan et al., (2004) and Roussel and Griffet (2000) suggests that as a result of their perceived lack of mainstream acceptance and understanding, bodybuilders tend to gravitate to their bodybuilding community as their prime reference group. This community is a place where their bodies are appreciated and celebrated (Roussel & Griffett, 2000) and outsider negativity is buffered (Grogan et al, 2004). Within the bodybuilding collective there are also others who understand their experiences, values and norms (Fisher, 1997). However, Andrews et al. (2004) maintained that bodybuilders enjoyed their sense of difference. These researchers found that bodybuilders felt proud of their bodies, which contributed to a sense of superiority. Furthermore, they were often complemented on their bodies by the public. Negative feedback from outsiders was frequently ignored by the bodybuilders, and often aligned with connotations of jealousy.

## **THE COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDER PERSONALITIES**

Several personality tests of competitive bodybuilders are summarised in this section. They are pertinent because conceptually there may be a certain type of person who tends to become, or is, a competitive bodybuilder and such analyses lend themselves to discussion of personal and group ‘fit’. These assessments have often been conducted from a psychological perspective, with participants completing some form of personality questionnaire. There are different types of tests such as The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (Thirer & Greer, 1981), Cattell 16 PF (Darden, 1972), and Profile of Moods and Eysenck Personality Inventory (Fuchs & Zaichkowsky, 1983), which include a range of variables (e.g., measures of stubbornness, independence, self-sufficiency). Finkenberg and Teper (1991) found that bodybuilders differed from non-

bodybuilders as they scored higher on personal, social, and satisfaction scales and lower on self-criticism. Fifty-two competitive bodybuilders participated in the study (29 men and 23 women). Men scored significantly higher than the standardised mean on three of the nine measures of self-concept, and women scored higher on five. The researchers concluded that: “evidently the effects of training in bodybuilding provide an excellent tool for the development and delivery of positive information to participants” (Finkenberg & Teper, 1991, p. 1042). Fuchs and Zaichkowsky (1983) found that competitive bodybuilders ( $n=31$ ) displayed an Iceberg profile – a personality type often found in athletes in which they exhibit low tension, high vigour, and low fatigue.

Darden (1972) compared competitive bodybuilders ( $n=22$ ) with competitive weightlifters ( $n=30$ ), and found they were quite similar in profile. However, he did point out a few differences. Competitive bodybuilders were silent, introspective, and sober, while the weightlifters tended to be more aggressive, independent, and stubborn. “Both sports groups were inclined towards being self-opinionated, unconcerned about other people and poor team members” (Darden, 1972, p. 145). This analysis reflects consistency with Klein’s (1993) observation that bodybuilders tend to be individualistic, social loners, and not interested in team sport. Thirer and Greer (1981) compared personality characteristics of beginning ( $n=24$ ) and intermediate bodybuilders ( $n=14$ ) with competitive bodybuilders ( $n=14$ ). These groups were also compared with 49 people who did not lift weights and were not serious athletes. Competitive bodybuilders were found to be quite normal and average in their personality profile – even in autonomy and affiliation. The only real items of difference and therefore significance were that both intermediate and competitive bodybuilders were much more routine and achievement focused than the other groups. Thirer and Greer (1981) concluded that those more involved in bodybuilding tend to be motivated by a desire to achieve. They were also regimented in their daily routines and did not like to depart from these schedules. While this may imply that a particular personality type tends to become

more involved in bodybuilding, these results could also arguably reflect many athletes who become committed to their sport and training schedules.

The normality of many of Darden's (1972) and Thirer and Greer's (1981) assessments, contrast with the more extreme type of personality touted by Klein (1993a). His ethnographically based psycho-social analysis indicated that competitive bodybuilders were narcissistic, fascist, and homophobic, and had low self-esteem and a desire for self-mastery. Klein's (1993a) observations have also been subjected to specific psychological and empirical tests on bodybuilders, and the outcomes have served both to challenge and support his propositions (Mekolichick, 2001, 2003; Rubinstein, 2003; D Smith & Hale, 2004). For example, Rubinstein (2003) found narcissism levels to be higher in bodybuilders than groups such as fitness trainees and non-trainees, thus supporting Klein (1993a), but no significant difference was detected on homophobia, and this was contrary to Klein (1993a). Mekolichick (2001) found that contrary to Klein (1993a), competitive bodybuilders did not suffer from low self-esteem. Instead, they recorded above-average levels of self-esteem when compared with the norm. Hurst et al. (2000) discovered that experienced bodybuilders scored lower on social physique anxiety scales than participants with less bodybuilding experience. They believed, however, that bodybuilding could initially be premised on a self-view of physical inadequacies (e.g., poor body image), but that such anxieties may decrease with increased participation.

Although these types of studies are valuable, their results appear mixed and do not provide a consistent participant picture. There are also limitations. Such methodologies focus on the clinical assessment and interpretation of bodybuilder responses. These types of psychological conclusions may differ from those of the bodybuilders themselves. Various reasons and understandings may underpin why bodybuilders behave or display the behaviours they do. Such subtleties are less readily captured through quantitative methodologies. It would therefore be valuable to have

insights from bodybuilders themselves about what type of person becomes a bodybuilder, or ‘fits well’, given the nature of the bodybuilding group culture.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING GAPS**

Although much has already been written about bodybuilders and identity, in many respects this has only scratched the surface. Whilst identity may be viewed on one hand as stable and predictable, it is also considered complex, fluid, and evolving (Jenkins, 2004). Bodybuilders have personal identities – a unique sense of self – and at some point in their life journey took up competitive bodybuilding and then connected with this particular social group to varying levels (Hogg, 2003). However, just because these people all do bodybuilding, does not necessarily mean they identify with it in the same way (Burke, 2003).

Beyond gender research, however, existing works have presented bodybuilder identities as predominantly singular that are static, homogeneous, and isolated. Scholarly attention has often centred on the body of the bodybuilder and its muscularity (Gillett & White, 1992; Grogan et al., 2004; Guthrie & Castelnuovo, 1992; Johnstone, 1996; Klein, 1993a, 1993b; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Moore, 1997b; Schulze, 1997). Many of these explorations discuss interpretations of social powers and/or resistance *upon* such bodies, as opposed to experiences *of* these bodies (Guthrie & Castelnuovo, 1992; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; St.Martin & Gavey, 1996). There appears to be a lack of appreciation that there can be far more to bodies than gender, for example, how body and gender may be reflected by bodybuilders in movement, emotion, conduct, patterns of thinking, and forms of social engagement, including competition. Furthermore, while studies have predominantly focused on women, and some have addressed men as isolated genders, few have engaged both male and female bodybuilders and addressed comparisons, similarities and/or heterogeneities between and among them.

There is also far more to identity than gender. Indeed, gender may not necessarily be at the forefront of participant identity (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 2001). Although there have been some references to race, ethnicity, age, and class in bodybuilding, these are very limited, providing scope for more extensive explorations, for example, considering diversities in bodybuilding based on race, ethnic values, and stereotypes such as the perceived genetic advantage in muscularity. Does bodybuilding reinforce, promote and/or enhance racial or ethnic identity? Does age influence bodybuilding experiences and meanings? What are the experiences of gay bodybuilders? Is class a relevant identity marker for the competitive bodybuilding culture?

Furthermore, the bodybuilder identity can be viewed as simply one of many identities that participants have (Vryan, 2003; Burke, 2001) which have to be managed as they function within their social worlds. Bodybuilding research has paid scant attention to the interplay between bodybuilding and participants' other life spheres. For example, how does bodybuilding intersect with work and family life, parenthood, friends, family, hobbies, and religion? Does bodybuilding reinforce and/or challenge these other parts of the self? And how are these dynamics negotiated?

Identity may be subject to shifts and changes over time as the self evolves through social exposure (e.g., to bodybuilding), experiences, interactions, and various life phases and differing priorities. However, bodybuilding research has focused predominantly on bodybuilder identities as though they were generic, static facets of the self, when this may not be the case at all. How do people 'become' bodybuilders? How are these identities constructed and developed? Why do some people continue to be bodybuilders? Why do others leave, give up/retire? What are the implications and linkages with identity salience and commitment? These facets of bodybuilder identity (construction, evolution and retirement) appear unexplored.

As a generalisation, outsider perspectives have tended to portray competitive bodybuilders as unhealthy, extreme identities engaging in risky practices. Conversely, phenomenological studies have predominantly emphasised the positive experiences of these participants. Is this how bodybuilders perceive their identities all the time? Maybe bodybuilding also harbours a dark and unpleasant side. If so, what are the meanings and explanations attached to such experiences? Is steroid use a normative part of bodybuilding culture? Roundtree (2005) maintains that in recent years there has been a move towards ‘natural’ drug-free bodybuilding. What has been the impact of such changes on bodybuilders and their identities? Klein’s (1993a) study is, and continues to be, a foundation work on bodybuilding and identity. It is extensively referenced and cited by scholars. As such it continues to be portrayed as representative of competitive bodybuilders generally. However, identity should also be framed relative to its moorings such as place, time, culture, and people. Klein’s (1993a) research was undertaken during the 1970s/1980s – times and values have changed since then. It was based in Southern California, then the Mecca of competitive bodybuilding. Bodybuilding in that country, context, time, and place is poles apart from that of New Zealand in 2008, where many competitive bodybuilders are amateurs, drug testing occurs, and values, norms, practices, way of life, and bodily ideals may be different.

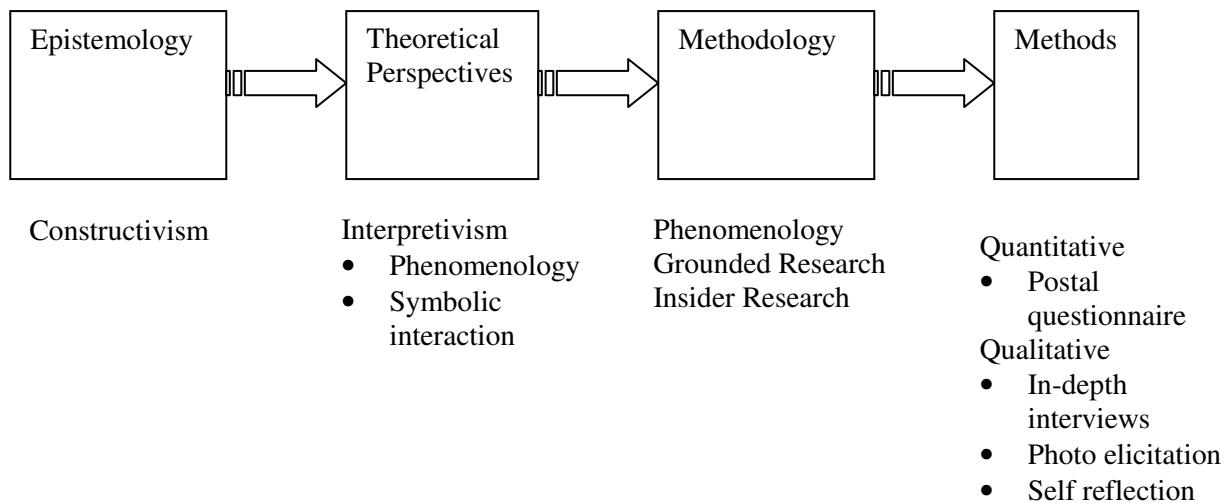
It would thus seem opportune, progressive, and logical to explore participants from a contemporary New Zealand perspective, not only in terms of the specifics of bodybuilder identities, but also in terms of how bodybuilders function within the context of their other identities and life spheres. In other words, where bodybuilding is not their sole identity but exists as one of their numerous identities or roles. In so doing, this research explores not only the varying meanings of bodybuilding to participants, but also its intersection with other identities. This research also appreciates the dynamic nature of identity – by exploring whether such meanings have changed over time as participants continue to define and redefine both who they are and their identity.

This chapter has reviewed and critically discussed the literature pertinent to this research. It has provided a theoretical overview of identity, and its application to sport and competitive bodybuilding. Gaps in the existing literature have been identified, and the following chapter details the research questions, together with the methodology adopted, for this research.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

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This chapter details the decision-making process in relation to the research approach, methodologies and methods employed. As mentioned by Crotty (1998), there should be a relationship between the theoretical approach adopted by the researcher, the methodology, and methods selected. The ontological view of ‘what is’ should be supported by the epistemological stance of ‘what it means to know’ – the type of knowledge considered legitimate (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2004). Combined, these facets embody a perspective of what is perceived to be real or the truth. The relationship between epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology, and methods, as it pertains to the research purpose and questions is summarised in Figure 3.1, and discussed below.



**Figure 3.1:** The research relationship framing this research

The purpose of this research was to explore identity from the perspective of the bodybuilder. In light of the literature reviewed and the gaps identified in the previous chapter, the research investigated:

1. Who are the competitive bodybuilders in New Zealand?
2. How and why do people become competitive bodybuilders?
3. What does it mean to be a competitive bodybuilder?
4. Do their bodybuilder identities evolve over time? If so, in what ways and why?
5. Do bodybuilder identities reinforce, challenge and/or influence other identities within the self or vice versa?
6. What are some of the reasons participants stop being competitive bodybuilders? What happens to their bodybuilder identities then?

The research also considers the relevance of the findings, where appropriate, to other sports and studies of identity.

### **3.1 THE RESEARCH APPROACH**

This research adopted the perspective that there is no one singular truth. Rather, individuals have the capacity to see, perceive, and experience the world differently. An objective stance is therefore rejected in favour of constructivism – meanings are not out there to be discovered by people, but rather people construct their own meanings about what they see, hear and do (Gray, 2004). This means there can be multiple views of reality, such as how bodybuilders perceive themselves and how other people perceive them; and there can also be diverse ways in which bodybuilders experience similar activities.

Flowing from this epistemological standpoint is a theoretical perspective that gravitates towards interpretivism. As opposed to a positivistic stance, interpretivism appreciates that meanings can be culturally and historically situated (Crotty, 1998). In other words, interpretivism recognises that this research occurred in a certain period (2004–2007), in a particular country (New Zealand), and explored identities as experienced, recalled, (re)constructed by bodybuilders at certain times, places, and points in their lives. The research investigated human and social reality – the meanings people attach both to their activities and to those of others (Crotty, 1998). This type of approach recognises that participant experiences and identities are formed in the context of their social worlds, such as the world of bodybuilding, work and family life. What they experience as real may be different for other people and what is experienced as true in one moment or setting may change or assume differing meanings in another. The methodology that flows from this theoretical perspective is mixed. While it is inspired and covered by phenomenology, it is also underpinned by grounded theory and the use of feminist tools (Probert, 2006). The rationale for this combined approach is now explained.

### **The Phenomenological Paradigm**

Adopting a phenomenological approach was appropriate as it reflected the study's intention to explore the experiences and identities of competitive bodybuilders from their perspective/s (Jasper, 1994). The decision was not one of methodological specifics, but rather inspired by philosophy. Phenomenology reflected an investigation of competitive bodybuilders beyond the qualitative description of what participants do, to exposing participant experiences from the context of their life world, or as Wessinger (1994 p.426) states their “inside view”. Undertaking this research necessitated an appreciation of not only what it means, but also what it feels like to be a competitive bodybuilder, which included, for example, participant emotions, attachments and reflective thoughts. This exploration required gaining insights of the participant's subjective

knowledge, acquired predominantly through indepth participant interviews, and also required putting aside personal experiences and biases. As highlighted by Bain (1995) suppressing personal beliefs and stand points is an important distinction as often the agenda of qualitative work is one where the researcher ultimately provides their interpretation of participant experience. Phenomenology, conversely, provides an in-depth analysis of the meanings as constructed by the participants concluding with the perspective from their life world.

The foundation work underpinning phenomenology is attributed to Edmund Husserl, although later, there were modification by philosophers and writers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992; Richardson, 1999). Husserl was interested in the relationships between mathematics and philosophy. His contemplation of such intersections developed into debates concerning ‘logic’ and subsequently notions which contributed to his ground breaking theory concerning ‘intentionality’. Husserl argued that knowledge was inextricably interwoven with a person’s life world. In other words, what makes sense to someone is also experienced by them as something which is logical or appears real to them. It reflects their actuality or ‘truth’.

Phenomenology therefore embraces the notion that reality is subjective, given that people make sense of life in their own way, through their own experiences, reflective interpretations and the meanings they attach to them (Creswell, 1998; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000). In so doing, it reiterates an epistemological stance that there is no singular truth or objective reality. Instead, the bodybuilder’s experience and the meanings they attach to it are perceived to be real. The focus of phenomenological investigations therefore, are an exploration of what can be understood as a person’s ‘taken for granted’ experiences and their ‘natural attitude’ (Vannatta, 2008). This concept implies not only a description of their experiences, but consideration of their context, how meanings are constituted, experienced and made sense of by the participant.

Recent methodological developments in phenomenology have also embraced a more ‘bodily basis’ of experience. Merleau-Ponty has been credited with modernising the traditional approach and applying its principles to the social sciences and human behaviour (Crossley, 2005b). Such notions recognise the presence of the body, including its fleshy, biological physicality, as well as its sentient dimension (Crossley, 1995). Nettleton and Watson (1998) believe that this perspective provides a valuable bridge between the naturalistic and social constructionist approach. An embodied approach acknowledges an interrelationship between the body and mind, and a sense of “being in the world” (Husserl, 1982, p. 5) where experiences are lived through the body (Williams & Bendelow, 1998).

Acknowledging this embodied and ‘lived’ perspective was pertinent and opportune for this research for two key reasons. First, bodies and bodybuilder identities are closely interwoven. Bodybuilding is an activity that places the development of the body as central (Monaghan, 1997). That is not to say that bodybuilding and its meanings are all about the body or only about the body. However, a bodybuilder’s body serves both as an important source of their self-identity (e.g., via appearance and conduct), as well as a site that may be influenced by social context (e.g., conforming to group norms). Interactions with others can also affect a bodybuilder’s assessment and sense of self. An embodied approach of phenomenology recognises the significance of the body and the diversity of bodily experiences. Second, the literature review revealed significant gaps in bodybuilder identity research, such as those dealing with age, ethnicity, health, risk, and competitive experiences. An embodied approach not only captures participants’ stories, but also has an appreciation for the feelings and emotions that may accompany such accounts. In other words, it not only documents these dimensions, but also how they are experienced by bodybuilders, for example, what it feels like to take a risk; to be healthy; to be old yet compete in bodybuilding. In so doing it captures depth, richness and potential new insights into identity.

### *Phenomenology principles, limitations and short-comings*

The traditions of phenomenology embrace a number of principles and explanations of how these principles were applied in this research are summarised in Table 3.1.

From the perspective of the researcher, a key focus of this phenomenological approach is to put oneself in the place of the participant – to embrace meanings and experiences from their perspective. The researchers are required to suppress their own personal beliefs and prior knowledge in favour of those of the participant. This implies a need to engage with, and listen to participants – their life view, logic, and sense making – irrespective of the thoughts that may run through the minds of the researchers. Husserl refers to this as epoché (Welton, 1999) although it is also discussed as a process of bracketing and/or reduction (Vannatta, 2008; Welton, 1999; Wessinger, 1994).

In Wessinger's (1994) study of children, and their experiences of scoring goals in sporting play, she explained the phenomenological steps utilised in the research. These included the identification of key words and phrases conveyed by the participants; the analysis of this list; the creation of themes reflecting grouping of the participant phrases and their patterns of shared meanings. These interpretations were then reduced to their central meaning – the essence. Wessinger (1994) indicated that this final stage of phenomenology was less well defined and often open to varying interpretations. Her view was that the 'essence' reflected the core themes and these encompassed not only primordial meanings but also higher level contextual meanings. With respect to her study, scoring goals was rewarding in itself, but connected to broader meanings such as the identifiable part the participant could identify they contributed to the overall game. As Wessinger (1994) explained "each of these acts, then, has contextual meaning. And being successful in any of these personal projects adds to my sense of self, my sense of identity" (p. 434).

**Table 3.1 – Fundamental Principles of Phenomenology**

Principles	Explanation	Application
Intentionality	The concept that the reality of an object is interwoven with one's consciousness of it. In other words, it is only through experiences and interacting with the world that meanings are created and an individual perspective of reality occurs.	Interviews formed the prime means of data collection. Participants were asked about their experiences, real life examples and reflections about competitive bodybuilding. To enhance understanding from their perspective explanations were sought concerning decisions and actions and descriptions as experienced through senses (e.g. emotions, seen, heard, mentally considered etc). Participants were questioned about changes in their viewpoints over time and with exposure to bodybuilding, differences they observed amongst bodybuilders and also how their experiences or meanings may change in difference circumstances. These questions appreciate the subjective nature of reality.
Description	The way to understand the reality of an object is thus through its description, as articulated in the participants' own words.	Interviews were sufficiently open so as not to lead the participant. Participants were encouraged to tell their life story of how and why they became a bodybuilder, and what it meant in their own words. Interviews were taped to retain flow and ensure accuracy. Transcripts were checked by the participant. They were asked for additions, amendments.
Reduction or Epoché	The researcher must suspend all judgments about what is real.	Although an insider stance was utilised in the research, epoché requires researcher detachment in ways that prevent preconceived thoughts colouring the participant

		<p>perspective of reality. Despite concern being expressed in this research regarding the achievability of total reduction, steps to bracket self views and judgments were undertaken. These included self-reflection and self-challenge and constant reminders of the participant view of life. The researcher asked participants for detailed explanations. Participant scripts were read not once, but replayed and reread multiple times in order to ‘come to know’ the participants, to dedicate time to understanding life from their perspective, to ‘get inside their head’. The self was constantly challenged to identify what is important and meaningful to the participant, despite the possibility it could be different from my view. Third parties were used (e.g. supervisors) to test and challenge my interpretations.</p>
Essence	Data are coded into themes, then analysed to uncover the central meaning or essence of the phenomenon.	<p>Themes were identified through combination of use of HYPERResearch, script analysis and handwritten notes. Connections between themes were identified. Participant accounts were assessed, not only for detail but also for the totality of what was important. What was the key message (or messages) which flowed through the totality of the story? They were considered conceptually. Research findings and conclusions gave predominance to the participant perspective of their world, as opposed to assessing their world from a pre-determined academic agenda or viewpoint.</p>

(Adapted from Baker et al., 1992; Creswell, 1998)

With respect to competitive bodybuilding, the literature review highlighted that few researchers had genuinely embraced the meanings participants attach to their activities. Often their analysis reflected an external analysis or their own scholarly interpretation. Investigating and advocating the bodybuilder perspective from a phenomenological approach was therefore seen as worthy and opportune. Furthermore, it encompassed an appreciation that the meanings attributable to competitive bodybuilding may also hold broader contextual implications for identity.

However, a phenomenological approach was not without limitations and potential shortcomings. The notion of epoché is arguably more an ideal, than an action which can be realistically achievable in a pure form by the researcher (Wessinger, 1994). Can a researcher really be that objective, detached or open-minded that self-bias and prior knowledge are completely eliminated? “Hygienic research”, where the researcher is considered an object without involvement, may prove an over-simplification of the research process as “personhood cannot be left behind”, or completely eliminated (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p.161). Furthermore, as a bodybuilder, as well as researcher, I wished not only to acknowledge, but also to include the self in the research process. In other words, position myself as an insider. On one hand this could add to greater understanding and appreciation of the participants’ world. Yet on the other hand, it conceivably was at odds with the bracketing process, thus could appear an incommensurable fit with the phenomenological tradition of epoché. As will be later explained, this ill fit was revisited by way of a pluralistic approach which encompassed an insider approach.

Another shortcoming associated with phenomenological principles lies in the detail associated with intentionality. This concept advocates that reality is not something out there in an objective sense, but can be understood as something constructed in a person’s consciousness, acknowledging that people can have different realities of the same event. The shortcoming lies in the use of the term ‘consciousness’. It is conceivable that reality may not always be an extension of consciousness; as argued by Craib (1998), behaviours, thoughts, and impulses may stem from

unconscious thought. There may also be facets of identity and views of life that stem from habit and automated patterns (Crossley, 2006b, 2006c).

Essence refers to how participants convey descriptions of their experiences and meanings to the researcher. But what happens when these accounts are not or can not be described with ease? Some people may be more articulate than others, more willing to speak openly, others may struggle to find the words that convey their view of reality. Phenomenology assumes rich accounts will be forthcoming when this is not always the case – researcher skill and rapport is also important. So efforts were made to make participants feel comfortable in the researcher's presence, the venue was of their choosing and photo illicitation was used to provoke discussion.

Finally, the principles of phenomenology refer to the unveiling of an essence relevant to a phenomenon. This suggests there is a 'thing' – a concept, event or state-of-being, such as being gay, or 'hitting the wall' – that emerges and can be summarised. However, identity has also been described as a process (Jenkins, 2004), something that is ongoing and may entail a multiplicity of elements. Encompassing these complexities, contextual factors, and dynamics is therefore also important, and questions were asked to unveil identity experiences in the context of bodybuilding as a phenomenon or thing and process.

In summary, phenomenology served as an appropriate overarching approach for this research as it embraced a desire to explore the lived realities of participants. Its philosophies resonated strongly with the intent of this research which seeks to explore beyond the qualitative description of experiences and a researcher interpretation of such accounts, but to capture and give prominence to the world as lived and expressed by the participant. Although this research acknowledged short-comings and potential limitations within phenomenology, the principles and its philosophy were seen as important, and this is why it formed the overarching framework. As Wessinger (1994) stated "it can be argued that total suspension of one's beliefs is impossible; nevertheless,

the awareness that results from consciously attending to one's personal commitment and assumptions is both helpful and necessary" (p.428).

With respect to encompassing greater appreciation of the process dimension of identity, and also resolving the bracketing vis-à-vis insider positioning, the possibility of combining phenomenology with other approaches – an idea known as mixing (Baker et al., 1992; Johnson, 2001) – was subsequently explored and adopted. In the case of this research phenomenology approach was mixed with grounded theory and feminist tools.

### **Grounded Theory**

The concept of mixing phenomenology with grounded theory appeared rational on the basis that grounded theory considers the processes underpinning human behaviour and their relevance to a particular situation or social world (Creswell, 1998). In particular, it therefore incorporated the contextual complexities of identity and its process that phenomenology had seemingly struggled to accommodate.

Grounded theory is an inductive approach developed by Glaser and Strauss and published in their 1967 book 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory'. It provides a systematic means of discovering "what is going on" (Glaser, 1978, as cited in Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992, p. 1357). This format was also pertinent to this research as the literature review had emphasised that the theoretical framework underpinning bodybuilding specifically, was limited. Grounded theory provided an opportunity to explore bodybuilders and their identity in an open manner – contributing to new ideas and knowledge – as opposed to simply testing outcomes against existing hypotheses.

In its development, Glaser and Strauss, both sociologists, combined their differing philosophical backgrounds to evolve this qualitative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Anselm Strauss, from the University of Chicago, was influenced by the Interactionist and Pragmatist perspectives of

George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. Mead was a social psychologist who argued that in order to understand the ‘self’ the individual needed to be considered in the context of their setting. Mead highlighted the conceptual notion and dialogue which occurred between the “self,” ‘me’ and ‘I’. The ‘self’ was a product that was constantly evolving and subject to refinement due to interactions with others. Whereas Mead’s work was predominantly philosophical, Blumer developed these ideas into a theory and research perspective called symbolic interaction. Pragmatists believe that people adjust to social settings and that the mind plays a crucial role in the assessment of these situations, their meanings, evaluation and therefore the appropriate responses and the behaviours people may adopt. Given these influences on Strauss, Grounded Theory has strong roots in symbolic interaction. For example, in order to discover ‘what was going on’, importance was placed on being out in the field, and in particular investigating the social actions and interactions of participants, their shared symbols and thus their understandings of each other. These concepts are relevant to this research as in order to understand and appreciate the varying experiences and self-perceptions of competitive bodybuilders, it is important their meanings are not read in isolation, but viewed in context as people engage in social worlds. As highlighted by Chenitz and Swanson (1986, p.7) “the researcher needs to understand behavior as the participants understand it, learn about their world, learn their interpretation of self in the interaction, and share their definitions”. In other words, bodybuilders’ accounts, their conglomeration of feelings, meanings, and behaviours only make sense when viewed within the context of their broader interpersonal and social worlds.

Barney Glaser, from Columbia University, contributed to the development of grounded theory through inspiration drawn from innovative quantitative methods. Glaser considered it important that the data collected in the field was analysed in a structured, systematic way. By utilising ideas from quantitative methods, Grounded Theory incorporated structured procedures which could

underpin its qualitative approach. These included processes such as the coding of data collected in the field, constant comparison and also hypothesis testing (Glaser, 1992).

Grounded theory can therefore be viewed as an inductive form of investigation, which entails systematic procedures, steps and testing procedures that should ultimately lead to the formation of a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Its fundamental elements include:

- entering the research setting without a pre-conceived hypothesis
- collecting and analysing data concurrently
- constantly comparing the emerging data with the data already collected, to identify similarities or differences
- theoretical sampling to fine-tune data collection procedures
- the use of coding, categorising, and memo-ing (i.e. notes written for the researcher's own use) to document the emerging themes (i.e. key variables and patterns in the data), interrelationships, and theoretical propositions
- using a review of literature as one element of data collation
- the formation of a “theory” (i.e. a conceptual model that explains the findings in an abstracted format, thus offering a broader theoretical understanding of the topic).

(Creswell, 1998; Skodal-Wilson & Ambler, 1996; Wimpenny & Gass, 2000)

Combining phenomenology with grounded theory thus retained primacy for the lived experiences of the participants, their identities, and their meanings, but also incorporated a way of exploring their linkages with the contextual factors, their social worlds, including asking questions such as “why, how, where, when, under what circumstances, and with what consequences” (Jeon, 2004, p.250) such identity linkages and experiences occurred. The process would be of value, not only to researchers, but also the bodybuilding community itself, who at times, has seemingly struggled

to find ways to help outsiders understand why they do what they do, and attachments they feel for this sport. Glaser's (1992, p.14) comments therefore resonate: "Generating theory by the systematic collection and analysis of data is a very powerful way of bringing concepts to reality to a substantive area both to others and subjects in the area itself".

Correspondingly, my proposed plan would be to enter the research setting without a preconceived hypothesis, select initial candidates in a purposeful manner, collect and then progressively fine-tune data through a process of constant comparison, and adopt theoretical sampling techniques. Field work would, therefore, be undertaken in a series of sessions, punctuated with periods of data analysis. My interview format would begin broadly with initial participants, then as themes and possible theoretical avenues emerge; sampling and data collection would subsequently become more defined, contributing to theory formation.

The timing and application of the literature review have been discussed in the grounded theory literature (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). Often, it is avoided in the early stages to reduce bias and enhance the likelihood that "the emergent theory will be grounded in the data" (Cutcliffe, 2000, p. 1480). However, there appear to be distinct phases to this process as I have already undertaken an initial literature review to formulate my research purpose. The prudent yet pragmatic stance thus appears to be "to access relevant literature *as it becomes relevant*" (Dick, 2005, Literature as Emergent subsection, para. 4, emphasis in the original).

Grounded theory, despite being portrayed as a different approach has much in common with phenomenology. Both methodologies acknowledge the participants' lived experience, explores their behaviours and meanings and considers the importance of understanding situations from the participant's perspective. Procedures, such as data collection and analysis, also appeared to reflect consistencies. Both approaches compiled units of meaning, which evolved into broader themes –

although Grounded Theory adopted a more constant comparative approach to this form of analysis, phenomenology emphasized the philosophy of understanding the lived experience – and the participant sense of ‘being in the world’ (Husserl, 1982). Grounded theory highlighted principles in the openness of data collection and the synthesis of identity processes, leading to the creation of theory, which, in the future, could also be further evolved by other researchers (Glaser, 1992). Phenomenology emphasises the creation of themes through identification of the commonalities within participant phrases followed by their reduction to a central meaning which can extend theoretical perspectives and debates.

Although basic data would stem from participant interviews, grounded theory also allows the inclusion of other methods. This is advantageous as I envisaged combining such accounts with insights from surveys, image-based research, and observation. Furthermore, although some researchers view personal experience as being irrelevant or potentially contaminating objectivity (Reinharz, 1992) “grounded theorists have never considered themselves objective” (Keddy, 1996, p. 451), thus prior knowledge can be included as another form of data. “No effort is made to put aside ideas or assumptions about the situation being studied. On the contrary, the researcher uses these in order to understand better the processes being observed” (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992, p. 1357). In contrast to phenomenology, grounded theory appeared to present a more inclusive perspective concerning the self and prior knowledge. However, I remained uncertain whether this position was universally shared amongst other academics, including Creswell (1998) who indicated theoretical ideas or notions should be set aside in grounded theory (p. 58). Thus I was left searching for a more definitive resolution of this issue.

### **Insider Research**

Adopting a pluralistic approach which encompassed an insider perspective offered a means to resolve and guide the placement of self within the research process. According to Reinharz (1992)

these methods include recognition of the researcher and relationships with the participants and the reader. The inclusion of self and the personal experience of the researcher are a “valuable asset” and “distinguishing feature” of this form of research (Reinharz, 1992, p. 258). They acknowledge the researcher as a person within the process as opposed to an object which is present without involvement. “Hygienic research”, suggested by some within phenomenology as ideal, is considered an over-simplistic account of reality as “personhood cannot be left behind” and indeed “should be capitalized upon” (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 161).

Procedurally, there is acknowledgement that there can often be a connection between the research purpose and the private life of the researcher hence works are sometimes framed with a preface or postscript highlighting such relevance (Reinharz, 1992). Furthermore, when engaging with participants, a more relational style of interface may be adopted by the researcher (Creswell, 1998). These procedures were pertinent to this research as being both a researcher and a bodybuilder such connections were important and relevant. In many respects, I considered that given my own experiences as a competitive bodybuilder I was effectively engaging in the study of my own social group (Naples, 2003).

Adopting this approach assisted in conveying the rationale for my research – how it stemmed from my prior background and experiences. There were also methodological advantages. Conveying my prior experiences to participants could enhance access, trust and rapport. This disclosure could encourage a sense of kinship that could potentially lead to greater openness in terms of their stories.

The application of these techniques have been encompassed in my introduction to this Thesis (refer to Chapter One), survey forms (where my bodybuilding background was disclosed); as well as the interviews where mutual experiences were shared (refer to pages 121 and 127). My familiarity with bodybuilding – its regimes, rituals, language, and dress forged connectivity with

participants. As a bodybuilder I talked a similar language and dressed as a bodybuilder. Interviews were sometimes conducted at gyms and, at times, I joined in with their workouts. When arranging and undertaking interviews there was consciousnesses of their competitive cycle, dietary timings and training regimes. Participant contact continued via my web site, where my own diary and research progress was logged, and through email exchanges which signalled ongoing interest in participant lives.

Insider research often utilised/advocated in feminist research offered a process and tools through which I could align my prior experience and research purpose and also humanise my encounters with participants, thus culminating in a rich and authentic account of the research process.

Such strengths, however, were also a double-edged sword. As a bodybuilder-insider, the subcultural processes and quirks I shared with participants were in many ways, normalised understandings and behaviours (refer to page 121). As a researcher I therefore risked overlooking and/or downplaying observations that someone external to the culture could potentially note due to their difference from mainstream patterns and social norms. To adopt an insider stance, while advantageous, therefore, also required consciousness, vigilance, and self-reflexivity on my part to ensure experiences, however normative, were documented and considered and efforts were made to consider phenomenology in terms of the participant experience over my experience.

Feminist tools sometimes advocated the extensive documentation of self-reflexivity (Reinharz, 1992), but this was not undertaken on the basis that I did not wish to sacrifice space that I would rather dedicate to the experiences of my participants. They were, afterall, the prime focus of the investigation, and I did not wish self-reflection to become a detraction. Personal insights were not documented within the Thesis, but written in my notes and personal diary ([www.nzbb.info](http://www.nzbb.info)). They also assume an unwritten element, as I frequently informally reflected upon the emerging

themes and related them to my experiences. This allowed me to acknowledge my experiences and stance and place at the centre of focus the experiences/perspective of the participants.

### **The Pluralistic Research Approach – “Mixing”**

The resulting pluralistic approach adopted - borrowing from the overarching perspective of phenomenology, but still availing myself of grounded theory procedures and insider research instruments-- gelled rationally, pragmatically, and emotionally with my research ambitions (see Figure 3.2). However, such a blend alluded to a smooth fairy tale ending which, ironically, had not been the case at all (Probert, 2006) .

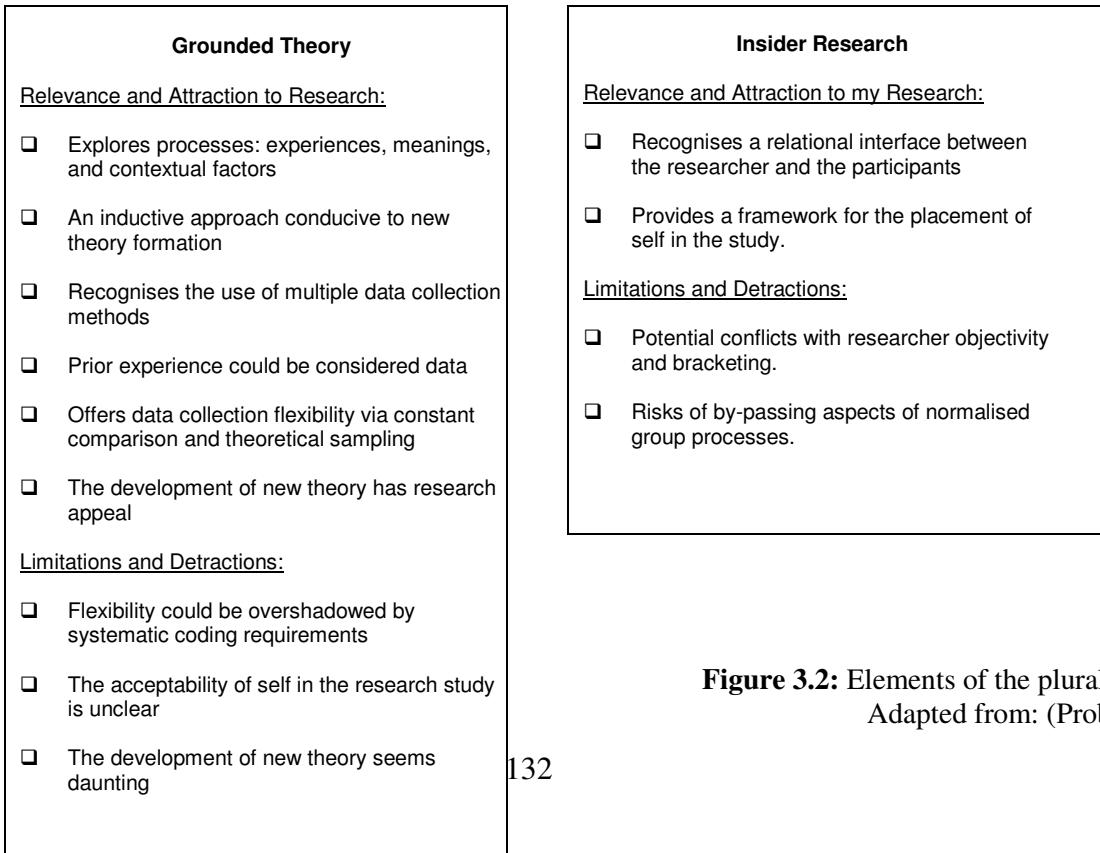
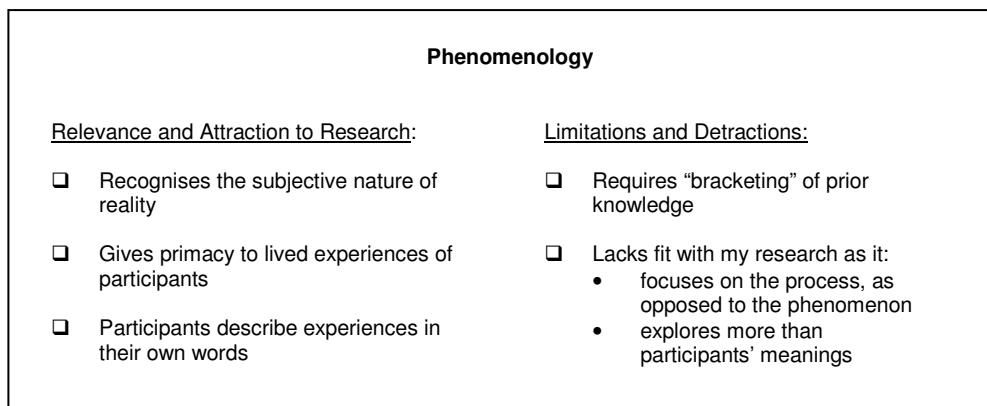
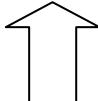
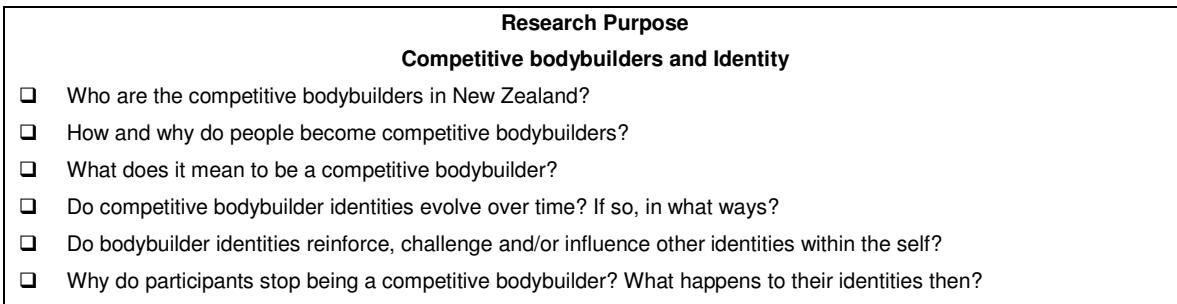
Creswell's (1998) description of grounded theory, which emphasised its rigorous and intricate coding formula (later further evolved by Strauss), made it appear overly systematic, rigid, and humanly insensitive. Coupled with its focus on new theory formulation, the prospect of grounded theory appeared positively daunting. Thus grounded theory was also initially dismissed it as an option. But, as other options were eliminated, grounded theory was revisited and a variety of studies on the subject were investigated. As familiarity increased, it was viewed in a new light--a more open, flexible, and achievable approach than first envisaged. In fact, after reading the inspirational work of Charmaz (1990), who viewed grounded theory as enabling the researcher to embark on a voyage of discovery, following a trail of “interests, leads and hunches” (p. 1162), I was virtually at risk of becoming a fan. Returning to Glaser's (1992) description of grounded theory also proved helpful as it refocused processes back on fundamentals such as the importance of discovery and the pragmatic dimensions of theory. For example, Glaser (1992) described a well constructed theory as one that reflects fit, workability, relevance and has the potential for modification. He claimed “if it fits and works then grounded theory has achieved relevance. The

theory itself should not be written in stone or as a “pet”, it should be readily modifiable when new data present variation in emergent properties and categories” (Glaser, 1992, p.15).

Some scholars have discouraged the combining of research traditions, or warned such a combination may lead to philosophical incompatibility and methodological sloppiness (Baker et al., 1992; Creswell, 1998; Hopwood, 2004; Johnson, 2001; Maggs-Rapport, 2000; Skodal-Wilson & Ambler, 1996; Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997). However, staying faithfully within one tradition for purity’s sake can also prove pointless, if it is ill-fitted to the research purpose (Baker et al., 1992; Johnson, 2001). As displayed in figure 3.2, the pluralistic approach adopted for this research is eclectic, but it has been developed in a planned, considered way. It reflects an aspiration to explore the identities and meanings of bodybuilders from their perspective, a desire to contribute new theoretical dimensions to this scholarly arena, and a means to capitalise on my own sense of place within this subculture.

### **3.2 MIXED METHODS**

In addition to a pluralistic approach, this research also combined methods. Mixed-methods entails the use of both qualitative and quantitative tools (Spicer, 2004). Historically, engaging in such processes has been criticised on the basis that quantitative and qualitative methods stem from differing and arguably irreconcilable paradigms (Spicer, 2004; Thomas, 2003); however, contemporary research has adopted a much more open view (Thomas, 2003). Indeed, it is the very different nature of these approaches and their respective contributions that made them appropriate and valuable for this research.



**Figure 3.2:** Elements of the pluralistic approach.  
 Adapted from: (Probert, 2006, p.8)

The methods adopted in this research were a postal questionnaire (quantitative), participant interviews and photo elicitation (qualitative). Research notes also included observations, informal discussions, and attendance at bodybuilding events. They documented additional insights to consider in tandem with themes emerging from the interview process, as well as my own reflective thoughts as researcher and bodybuilder.

The outcomes from the qualitative and quantitative process were compared at different points in the process for commonalities and discrepancies. There can be different ways of combining methods, and varying strategies that underpin their use. In this format, the use of quantitative and qualitative tools, while interrelated, are viewed as addressing different, but interrelated facets of the research question. Their combination enhances understanding of the phenomenon and their results inform each other. This approach can be distinguished from one of triangulation, where the results are used to cross-check for consistency as a means of testing confidence in the outcomes (Spicer, 2004). The mixed-method approach acknowledges that differing perspectives exist and that as a result outcomes may not necessarily converge. Not only are such discrepancies acceptable but, according to Spicer (2004), such diversities and contradictions should be incorporated in the research findings. They can also add to the discovery process by prompting further consideration of the data.

Interviews are consistent with a phenomenological approach, which advocates that prime means of accessing and understanding a phenomenon is through descriptions of it in the participant's own words. They offer rich insights into the lives and identities of research participants, capture the feel and emotion of stories, and enable complex issues such as meanings and motivations to be fully explored. The use of in-depth interviews was also consistent with a grounded theory approach; although grounded theory also provides for the inclusion of other methods (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000).

Before initiating the interviews, attempts were made to collate basic demographic information, such as participation numbers and gender composition, about competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand. This type of information was considered valuable as it could help frame the phenomenon and provide some introductory understanding of the activity and identity possibilities. However, discussions with the New Zealand bodybuilding associations (P. Langford, NZFBB<sup>2</sup>, Secretary, pers. comm., 5 April 2005; M. Poole, NABBA<sup>3</sup>, Secretary, pers. comm., 5 April 2005) and Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC, 2001) revealed there was a lack of such information, due to the limited resources of the associations and bodybuilding's minority sport status. A postal questionnaire was therefore developed to capture this type of broad scene-setting information. Questionnaires have the capacity to collect valuable statistical information in a relatively cost-effective manner from a significant number of participants (Spicer, 2004; Thomas, 2003), even though they can be functionally remote. Combined with interviews, the resulting combination of methods lent itself to a rich mixture of data.

Photo elicitation was utilised as an added dimension to the qualitative process. Although it is not an extensively used tool (Prosser, 1998), the aesthetic nature of bodybuilding and its extensive use of photography at competitive events provided an ideal opportunity for its creative inclusion. Furthermore, a review of existing research methods indicated no identified prior use of such techniques within bodybuilding studies – thus it reflected an innovative research application. Photo elicitation is a method where photographs are used in the course of interviews as a means of stimulating further discussion with the participant, through its added visual dimension (Curry, 1986). Photographs can be used in different ways and address a variety of subject possibilities (Curry, 1986; Heisley & Levy, 1991; Noland, 2006; Prosser, 1998). With respect to this research, participants were asked to bring their favourite photograph of themselves as bodybuilders to the interview. It was envisaged this would provide another means through which they could describe

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<sup>2</sup> New Zealand Federation of Bodybuilding

<sup>3</sup> National Amateur Bodybuilders' Association Inc. (New Zealand)

and express their identity (Dollinger, Preston, O'Brien, & DiLalla, 1996). As suggested by Noland (2006, p. 5) the use of photos can “help identify what people value, what images they prefer, how they define their world, and how they picture others”. Photographs can also contain important emotional and symbolic messages that are relevant to participant identity and their experiences.

There were also other advantages to their inclusion. Photo elicitation may help sharpen participant memories. They can be used to build rapport, focus discussion, and put participants at ease (Harper, 2002; Loeffler, 2004a, 2004b; Noland, 2006). However, there can be disadvantages to their use. Photo elicitation adds time and potentially cost to the research process. Outcomes may prove difficult to generalise to the broader population, and rather than adding rapport and openness to the interview process, in some cases the use of photographs may make participants self-conscious (Curry, 1986; Heisley & Levy, 1991). The decision to include participant photographs in the thesis was not undertaken lightly. Their inclusion would add visual appeal and help to showcase themes discussed. As photo-elicitation was rarely used in sports research it was methodologically adventurous. However, such inclusion risked compromising the anonymity of participants as competitive bodybuilding was a small community in New Zealand. Despite covering their faces, bodybuilders could sometimes recognise each other by their bodies and signature poses. Weighing up these factors, a decision was made to include participant photographs, however to instigate procedures to minimise the risk of identity exposure. For example, the corresponding pseudonyms were not placed with the pictures (to reduce identification) and not all pictures were ultimately included in the final publication (e.g. one picture comprised a competition poster which clearly identified the participant and event). These procedures were undertaken, in addition to all participants providing written consent for their photos to be used in the thesis.

### **3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND APPROVAL**

Confidentiality and trust are of considerable importance in this research. Participants are sharing personal stories and photographs of themselves. Bodybuilding in New Zealand is a small community. Pseudonyms have therefore been used in place of actual participant names, and faces concealed in photographs. Participant pseudonyms have not been placed with their respective photographs, and participant accounts have been separated from corresponding photographs to reduce participant identification further. Ethical approval for this research was obtained from Massey University and the research operated in accordance with its Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants (2004). This Code stipulates guidelines for ethical conduct that include Respect for Persons, Informed and Voluntary Consent, Privacy and Confidentiality, and acknowledgment of potential Conflicts of Interest.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

This section documents the quantitative and qualitative processes in more detail. It includes matters such as sampling, questionnaire content, interview selection, data analysis, and validity.

#### **a. Phase One: Quantitative – Postal Questionnaire**

##### **Measures**

The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide statistical background information on competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand to frame the research, as well as insights into a range of matters potentially aligned with bodybuilder identity that could inform the interview process. A questionnaire was developed based on issues highlighted in the literature and is attached in Appendix 1. It comprised 55 questions; the first 18 elicited the demographic composition of the participating bodybuilders (e.g., age, gender, and ethnicity), their participation in bodybuilding (e.g., competitive experience, category and future intentions), and information on their training

regime. Questions 19–54 invited participant feedback on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements concerning bodybuilding. These statements related to a broad range of issues referenced in existing bodybuilding theory, pertaining to concepts such as muscularity and gender, bodily perfection, discipline and control, personal health and social engagement. To develop these statements, a table with topics and accompanying research links were placed on one side of the table then survey statements generated on the other side. For example, ‘health’ was identified as a topic debated within the competitive bodybuilding literature. Corresponding research included Roussel and Griffet (2000) whose findings highlighted participant perceptions of health, while Klein (2001a) portrayed competitive bodybuilding as unhealthy. The following statement was subsequently developed and included in the questionnaire: “I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity”. The scale contained within this section comprised rating options of 1–4 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree). This meant participants could not elect a neutral position, and were thus forced to declare an opinion on each of the statements (Zikmund, 2000). Respondents were also provided with an opportunity to submit additional comment or explanation for any of the above issues. At the end of the questionnaire respondents were given the opportunity to indicate their interest in participating in the qualitative part of the research. Before distribution, the questionnaire was piloted on a former competitive bodybuilder, who provided feedback concerning the format, its comprehension, and completion time.

## **Sample**

Participants were competitive bodybuilders living in New Zealand, who were either actively competing, had competed in the past or were novice contenders in training for their first bodybuilding competition. The prime avenue for distributing the questionnaire was via the membership lists of the New Zealand Federation of Bodybuilding (NZFBB) and the National Amateur Bodybuilding Association of NZ (NABBA). In order to compete in New Zealand

bodybuilding events, bodybuilders must be members of either the NZFBB or NABBA. Both Associations host bodybuilding shows throughout the year, culminating with their respective national championships. The NZFBB is affiliated to the International Federation of Bodybuilding and is one of over 170 countries aligned with this sporting body. NABBA (NZ) was established after the creation of the NZFBB, and is aligned with NABBA International. Both New Zealand bodybuilding associations operate in accordance with the rules and processes of their respective international bodies. A Pacific Island Bodybuilding Association (PIBBA) also exists in New Zealand. Founded in 1997, it hosts an annual bodybuilding event for NZFBB members of Māori and/or Pacific Island descent, and sampling was therefore included via the NZFBB questionnaire mailing. The purpose of PIBBA is to raise self-esteem and promote bodybuilders with these ethnic roots ([www.pibba.org.nz](http://www.pibba.org.nz)).

The postal questionnaire was distributed in May 2005 to 1431 competitive bodybuilders, comprising, at the time of the research, current members of the NZFBB ( $n = 450$ ) and current and former financial members of NABBA since 1999 ( $n = 981$ ). The NZFBB posted the survey to its members in conjunction with their regular Association mailings. NABBA provided membership details to enable a mail out to be undertaken to their members specifically for the research. A cover sheet attached to each questionnaire introduced the research purpose, details about myself as researcher and bodybuilder, confidentiality, benefits of participation, and the option of participating in the next phase (the interview process) (see Appendix 2). Prepaid postal envelopes were provided and participants were asked to return the questionnaire within a 2-week period.

The questionnaire, with accompanying explanatory information, was also emailed to ten gyms whose electronic contact details were posted online at [www.yellowpages.co.nz](http://www.yellowpages.co.nz) (the New Zealand phone directory Yellow Pages), as well as to two New Zealand bodybuilding web sites ([www.gofigure.co.nz](http://www.gofigure.co.nz) and [www.nzbb.co.nz](http://www.nzbb.co.nz)). The purpose was to further promote the questionnaire to the competitive bodybuilding community and to reach bodybuilders, such as

those intending to compete for the first time, who may not be current members of the bodybuilding associations. Questionnaire forms were colour-coded to enable the researcher to distinguish their distribution source (i.e. NZFBB = yellow, NABBA = light brown, direct electronic approach to gyms/web sites = white).

## **Analysis**

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies, descriptives, and relevant statistical tests (e.g., T-test, ANOVA) were undertaken to explore potential trends and relationships. In situations where the Levene's test indicated significance, the "equal variances not assumed" value was reported (Pallant, 2005). Academic judgment (Hinton, Brownlow, McMurray, & Cozens, 2004) was used in adopting this position on the basis that the purpose of the questionnaire was exploratory and its intention was to generate 'possible', as opposed to necessarily 'definitive' leads. Factor analysis, which examines "the correlation between variables in large sets of data to see if a small set of underlying variables or factors can explain the original set of variables" (Hinton et al., 2004 p.340), was applied to questions 19–54. This analysis helped identify potential themes and dimensions for inclusion and further exploration within the interview process (Child, 1990). As I did not hold any prior hypothesis regarding factors likely to be identified to explain the data, or how many, an exploratory mode of factor analysis was applied, using a principles components analysis procedure (Pallant, 2005). The appropriateness of the data for factor analysis was tested using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, and Barlett's test of sphericity was used to confirm relationships existing between the variables. As the KMO value was greater than 0.5 and Bartletts Test of Sphericity indicated a p value < 0.05, factor analysis proceeded (Pallant, 2005). A combination of latent root and visual analysis of the scree plot were used to determine factors of importance. Despite listing eigenvalues greater than one, a straightening of the scree at an earlier stage resulted in fewer factors being extracted for further analysis for all the elected themes.

Although several rotation options were tested, resulting in similar outcomes, a varimax method was ultimately applied as it proved more conducive to factor interpretation (Kline, 1994). In some situations, variables loaded on more than one factor. While technically not encouraged (R. Miller, Acton, Fullerton, & Maltby, 2002), cross-loading was accepted in my analysis, as in many instances variables genuinely appeared to apply to more than one factor (Miller et al., 2002) and such additions and alternative interpretations proved helpful at this exploratory phase. For an item to be included in a factor, a loading above 0.3 was applied (Pallant, 2005).

## **Limitations**

While this questionnaire provided significant levels of data to help inform the research process, it was not without its limitations. The results can not be generalised as representative of all competitive bodybuilders in New Zealand, and there is no definitive list documenting all active, former, and intending competitive bodybuilders in New Zealand. While the mailing lists of the Bodybuilding Associations captured a significant number of current bodybuilders, not all members responded to the questionnaire. The membership contact details on the Association databases were also not necessarily up to date. Biases may have existed with respect to the type of bodybuilder who responded compared with those who did not (e.g., former bodybuilders still interested in the activity may have responded; those no longer interested may not). The use of quantitative questionnaire methods may also not necessarily appeal to certain groups, such as those from Pacific Island communities (Teevale, 2001), which may affect responses including the validity of the demographic results. The quantitative nature of analysis, while generating valuable statistics, also contains limitations. Factor analysis is a complex and often subjective procedure and not an “exact science” (Miller et al, 2002, p. 183). As a consequence, the results can be open to interpretation and differences of opinion, resulting in validation issues. Quantitative results offer limited insights to underlying explanations, motivations, and rationales that may have underpinned the responses. They therefore provided surface-level information, not detailed

insights of identity and meanings. Finally, the data generated were restricted to the topics covered by the questionnaire, potentially overlooking broader issues concerning identity, which may have been pertinent and meaningful to participants.

**b. Phase Two: Qualitative – In-depth Interviews and Photo Elicitation**

**Participant Selection and Interview Process**

Results from the quantitative process were used to inform the qualitative phase. The quantitative results provided an indication of New Zealand bodybuilder demographics, ideas for interview questions, and generated a list of potential interview participants. The selection of participants for the interview was undertaken in a purposeful manner (Zikmund, 2000), a technique in keeping with both a grounded theory and a phenomenological approach (Cutcliffe, 2000; Miklaucich, 1988). Participants were chosen to reflect a mix of gender, age, bodybuilding experience and ethnicity. Selection was also tempered by considerations of travel convenience, cost and practicality. Participants were predominantly based in the following locations – Auckland, Wellington, Hawke's Bay and Taranaki – reflecting a mix of city and provincial regions.

Demographically, the questionnaire results indicated Pacific Island Peoples comprised a relatively small percentage of participants (see Chapter Four). However, my informal observations at New Zealand bodybuilding competitions, coupled with the presence of ethnically-specific structures, such as the Pacific Island Bodybuilding Association (PIBBA) and the hosting of the Pacific Island Bodybuilding Competition, suggested that a higher rate of participation and interest may exist in bodybuilding within this ethnic group. A snowball technique was therefore utilised to enhance access to New Zealand-based Pacific Island bodybuilders. This process enlists the help of others to facilitate introductions and can prove a useful strategy for hard-to-reach research participants (Lowe, 1998). It was also more in keeping with the relational style of interface often favoured by Pacific people and their cultural sensitivities (Teevale, 2001). Leaders from the

Pacific Island Bodybuilding Association were contacted concerning the research, identified several potential participants, and arranged interviews on my behalf.

Information sheets and consent forms were sent to participants and a semi-structured interview schedule was developed (See Appendix 3). The content of the interview schedule was informed by the literature review, questionnaire results, and the research proposition. The questions provided guidance and structure yet were sufficiently open to allow participants to describe their experiences and life stories in their own way, style and flow. This format was consistent with a grounded approach on the basis it encouraged openness. Questions were flexible in their arrangement, to complement the direction of the interview and the rapport established, as well as receptive to further refinement to reflect emerging participant themes. Additional questions were sometimes added during the course of individual interviews to follow trails of dialogue. In accordance with the grounded theory approach, additional participants were sought for interview purposes, especially during the latter phases of the research process, to “fill out theoretical categories” and “discover variation” (Charmaz, 2003, p.325). These included young bodybuilders, participants of Māori descent, and the inclusion of more muscular and chemically enhanced bodybuilders. In total, 32 bodybuilders were interviewed, 17 women and 15 men, ranging in age from 19 years to over 60.

Interviews took place in locations that accommodated participant preferences and schedules. The shortest interview was 15 minutes; the longest lasted 3 hours and 15 minutes. Some participants were interviewed in gyms, including on treadmills, in gym lobbies, gym changing rooms, and toilet areas. Others were met at their homes, at cafes or at work. One was interviewed early in the morning on a street footpath (as shops and cafes were not open at that time) and others occurred at my motel unit. Although Easton, McComish and Greenberg (2000, p.705) wisely recommend that researchers arrange interviews “ahead of time”, to ensure they “take place in a quiet room” without interruptions and to request participants “set aside a designated time” so interviews can

“finish uninterrupted”, I found quiet rooms and uninterrupted interviews were rare. Bodybuilders are busy people. Many work and have families, and some were in the middle of training for upcoming bodybuilding contests. Time was at a premium and interviews were therefore slotted in with these other activities.

Although interview details were usually prearranged and confirmed directly between myself and the participant this was not always the case. In terms of the snowball approach, arrangements were undertaken on my behalf. I was required to turn up at a designated gym to meet several (unknown) participants who would be working out. The resulting interviews occurred in the gym lobby – one for only 15 minutes – and the official paperwork (e.g., information sheets and consent forms) had not been forwarded to participants. I learnt to be flexible and prepared – always to carry a pack of consent forms, spare tapes, and tape recorder, and to be able to reprioritise questions rapidly when time was limited. I also learnt that these types of sessions, while not ideal in a technical sense, can prove valuable and encourage researchers to look outside the box and use such opportunities creatively and to their best effect. Field notes recorded my researcher experiences and observations (see Appendix 4).

The relational style and insider stance proved beneficial in the interview process. It fostered connectivity and rapport and the use of bodybuilder jargon and terminology enabled participant stories to be conveyed with ease and flow. Participants often asked about my own experiences and about similarities with theirs. During the course of the research process, some re-contacted me with updates of their lives, competitive aspiration, and progress. They expressed interest in the research, were pleased someone was giving the sport some attention, and seemed to enjoy sharing their experiences.

However, there was a constant need to ensure I did not overlook sub-cultural behaviours, observations, and dialogues that were ‘normal’ for a bodybuilder, and thus risk being considered

inconsequential. For example, preliminary small talk concerning training; the presence of competition diets stuck to fridges; the ability to recite daily schedules; and the ease with which activities such as post-competition bingeing were recounted and described. I also discovered that being a bodybuilder did not necessarily mean I had insider status on all occasions and in all settings. As highlighted by Naples (2003, p.49) insiders and outsiders are “not fixed or static positions.... they are shifting and permeable”. I was also a female, white, non-steroid-using bodybuilder interviewing a participant base that included men, people from different social and ethnic backgrounds, and steroid-using bodybuilders. There were also occasions when I felt my insider status was being tested. Informally joining a group of competitive bodybuilders at their posing practice in the absence of a sport crop top, I was asked to participate in my bra. I subsequently did so. An outsider may have refrained on the basis of personal modesty. Later I sensed any initial caution and potential cynicism regarding my presence and work had relaxed to include greater warmth and group acceptance.

### **Photo Elicitation**

Initially, participants were asked to bring photographs of their family, significant events and their favourite bodybuilder. However, this format proved unsuccessful as participants were not bringing photographs to the session. This appeared due to several factors:

- The time and effort involved.
- Relevant photos may not be readily at hand (e.g., their favourite bodybuilders).
- The impracticality of bringing photographs to interview locations (e.g., gyms).
- The hesitation of showing private photos (e.g., family) to an unknown researcher.
- General forgetfulness on the part of the participant..

Procedurally the request was subsequently simplified. Participants were asked to bring a single photograph of themselves as a bodybuilder. Before the interview, a reminder concerning this

request was also sent. These changes enhanced the process. The use of photographs provided a useful focus point for discussion and made the sessions more personalised, reinforcing interest in participant stories, progress, and accomplishments. However, the quality and format of photography varied considerably and this was another unexpected outcome of the process. Participant ‘photographs’ varied from professional, full-coloured, glossy photographs to black and white photocopies of images of themselves extracted from newspaper clippings. Furthermore, their elected form of imagery was not always in the form of a photograph. They included bodybuilding posters, which featured their picture, as well as Digital Video Disk, within which were images I was required to capture as a ‘still’. Some participants brought albums full of personal bodybuilding photographs to the interview while others, despite my best endeavours, brought none. This was due to the following added reasons:

- Some conveyed they did not have a favourite or good photograph of themselves.
- Participants whose interview sessions had been set up indirectly were unaware of the photograph request, and follow-ups after the session to secure photographs often proved elusive.

Whilst securing photographs from all the participants would have been advantageous for consistency reasons, the manner by which the photraghs were ultimately used in the research to highlight themes meant that not having everyones photographs did not compromise the key outcomes.

## **Data Analysis**

The interviews were tape recorded. Additional notes were also taken. These notes document not only the time and place of the interview, but also other observations and personal impressions from the interview. Tapes were transcribed soon after the interview and were member checked

(Seale, 1999). A web site ([www.nzbb.info](http://www.nzbb.info)) was also established to enable participants to follow the research, receive updates, and provide feedback at any stage.

The text was selected and coded, utilising the assistance of HyperRESEARCH, a qualitative data analysis software package that enables text to be coded, organised, and retrieved. This enabled reports to be generated and trends and repetitive words and examples to be grouped, viewed, and emphasised. This was valuable as it enabled a broad listing of participant responses relevant to a particular meaning to be reviewed – and therefore reduced potential researcher bias through being swayed by one or two particularly memorable quotes, which can dominate the findings. It also challenged and tested my views. As a participant myself, it reminded me that not all bodybuilder experiences are similar to my own, and although I may wish to present the activity in a positive light, not all experiences were positive or pleasurable. The use of this software helped keep me honest with data interpretation, reduced bias, and aided self-reflexivity.

The interview data were systematically explored and analysed for content utilising an inductive approach. In other words the patterns, themes and categories emerged from the data, as opposed to being pre-determined before data collection and analysis. This approach is consistent with grounded theory (Bowen, 2008; Seale, 1999). However, as indicated by Bruce (2007), these procedures are not completely inductive as theorising and deductive reasoning occurs during the research and the process is also informed by prior experience.

During the initial coding process each transcript was read and its data were broken into meaningful units. This could reflect a particular experience or event highlighted by the participant. I also found that despite coding these data, I regularly returned to the original transcripts. As conveyed by Rose and Webb (1998), who engaged in a similar technique, this type of process enhances familiarity and combines the rationale with a more intuitive form of comprehension. From my perspective, I came to know my participants well, frequently thinking

and reflecting on what they had said and often seeing new things in their stories and linkages that I had not noticed earlier.

This process generated significant numbers of codes, especially in the initial stages. However, as each transcript was read, coded with new codes being compared with old, before proceeding to the next transcript, reoccurring words and concepts began to emerge. My understanding became more refined and fewer new codes were required. The coding and analysis were therefore undertaken in a systematic and constant comparative manner (Creswell, 1998). At this point, in tandem with the coding process, I began hand-written notes and diagrams that explained how codes could be grouped into categories and broader themes. Although the software package provided an avenue for these types of procedures, it became easier to work manually. This was because of the visual advantage of having diagrams beside the transcript in question, the ability to refer readily to them, and to write or draw with ease. I could follow the flow of the story and use the diagrams for comparison, analysis, and reflection. This proved a more effective, pragmatic process than the electronic tool. Furthermore, following the trail and connecting the dots in this way is also consistent with the constant comparison method advocated by grounded theory, which involves the “interpretation of categories and their properties, noting for example, how properties interact” (Seale, 1999, p.97). As an example, I found that participants often talked about bodybuilding as enhancing not only their physical appearance, but also their confidence, which in their turn led to improvements in other areas of their lives. This process highlighted that participant experiences and meanings as coded were not isolated or self-contained even within categories, but often connected and flowed into others. This was important in order to understand bodybuilding and identity, which required not only identifying meanings within their accounts, but also capturing the holistic ‘big picture’ or essence of what participants were conveying.

As coding continued, the codes were grouped into broader themes. Codes were printed out, and then moved into folders reflecting potential themes. However, many changes were made and the

process became complex because bodybuilder accounts, meanings, and how they connected often varied from person to person – and also because of the array of connectivities, which meant codes and themes could be grouped in a variety of ways. Ultimately, the decisions about themes were not only informed by how the codes predominantly connected and logically made sense from a bigger picture, as opposed to capturing all personal idiosyncrasies, but also by the directive of my research questions – what the study sought to explore and answer. For example, as one of the research questions sought to explore how people become involved in competitive bodybuilding, and also how their bodybuilding identities evolved from a novice participant to being more experienced, one theme linked codes relevant to this topic. Another area of inquiry was about how bodybuilding intersected with other elements of the bodybuilder's identities and life spheres, therefore codes relating to work, family, and motherhood/fatherhood were grouped together, as were those of ethnicity, gender, age and so on (see Appendix 5). These grouping were then further refined – commonalities and differences between stories, experiences, and meanings within them were explored.

### **Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness**

In undertaking this research I was mindful that in order for its findings to be of value, they must be seen as valid and reliable. There are varying perspectives and models concerning what constitutes robust mixed-method and qualitative research (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spicer, 2004; Stiles, 1993). Qualitative researchers who adopt a more interpretative approach often focus on trustworthiness, as opposed to the more conventional, positivistic format of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Seale, 1999). However, according to Stiles (1993), validity and reliability are both broadly about trustworthiness. “Reliability refers to the trustworthiness of observations or data; validity refers to the trustworthiness of interpretation” (Stiles, 1993, p. 601). Within this format concepts such as research credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmation may be considered

appropriate criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rose and Webb (1998) emphasised the importance of ensuring that methods are employed in a rigorous fashion. With respect to the credibility and transferability of my process, I spent considerable time in the field meeting a wide cross-section of participants. I have detailed the nature of my sample, my methods of selection and approach, and provided basic descriptive information concerning them.

Although a questionnaire and the use of in-depth interviews constituted the main forms of data collection, other methods were also included such as informal discussions with competitive bodybuilders, observation at gyms, and attendance at bodybuilding shows. I made field notes, took photographs, and spent time at localities frequented by competitive bodybuilders. The in-depth interviews also entailed the use of photo elicitation. This provided rich data and the ability to compare results, a form of triangulation, for consistencies, variations, and gaps. Statistical differences in the mean scores of respondents on the basis of age that emerged from the quantitative phase, for example, could be compared with the key themes that emerged from interviews with older and younger participants. Integral to the interview process was the need for honest accounts – not superficial “press pass” information (Stiles, 1993) – requiring rapport and trust with participants. My insider status reflected interest, empathy, and connectivity with the participants. Participant stories were rich to the extent of often being highly personal, emotive, frank to the point of using coarse language and acknowledging potentially illegal and unhealthy acts, such as steroid use and bulimia, as well as undesirable feelings, such as being a bad mother. Participants often made contact with me again with additional information, and at bodybuilding competitions approached me to ask about the research. This also reflects confirmation of the relationships and rapport established.

Sample size and what constitutes sufficient data in qualitative research, including grounded theory, is elusive; however, demonstrating decisions concerning saturation is important as an element of quality (Bruce, 2007). In other words, it is not so much about the number of people,

but the notion that new data do not provide any new themes. However, saturation must also be balanced with the practicalities of real world research. Time and resources are limited, and participant idiosyncrasies often mean that when interviewing people something new is discovered. As a researcher, there came a point where it was important to draw the line. The process I adopted was to interview participants in batches, followed by transcribing and coding. This enabled me to evolve ideas and ascertain gaps. I then approached participants in a more targeted fashion geared at specific and significant gaps. At this point, while new dimensions could be added, I found that the main themes had been covered and were often repeated. The law of diminishing returns started to prevail, and the limitations of time and resources increasingly became a factor.

Quality assurance not only occurred during field work, but afterwards. In terms of transferability, I have provided a detailed and transparent description of the research process, its findings, and examples from participants. As a result, readers should have sufficient information “to be able to judge the applicability of findings to other settings which they know” (Seale, 1999, p. 45). Where appropriate and possible, I have tried to summarise findings in diagrams to reflect key themes and processes to help understanding and transferability (Elliott et al., 1999).

I have also made dependability and confirmability explicit in my thesis, detailed the nature of my research topic, why it was chosen, my prior interest, knowledge, and experience as a competitive bodybuilder, the process adopted, my methodology, methods, participant selection, and how I treated my data and analysed it. In terms of confirmability, all phases of this research have been subject to the scrutiny of my supervisors who have valuably pointed out inconsistencies and omissions and offered suggestions which could enhance robustness. The use of mixed methods also proved valuable, as it provided a form of triangulation (Spicer, 2004), whereby statistical trends and differences of the quantitative results could be compared to the qualitative findings. As discussed earlier, these do not equate completely, given that they reflect different perspectives,

there was assurance in the extent of their consistency – and this added to my confidence in the qualitative research. Where there were gaps or superficial treatments (e.g., in terms of the statistical results), the qualitative process often shed light on what lay beneath the numbers.

Having discussed and provided evidence of the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of this research, it is not my intention, however, to claim unassailable proof of these findings. I acknowledge there are limitations associated with my research. For example, it is not representative of all bodybuilders in New Zealand. The results must be contextualised as pertinent to a particular time, place, location, culture – and therefore may not be relevant to bodybuilding in other countries, locations, and eras. Requirements for saturation in terms of data and people and time spent in the field had to be balanced within the constraints of tight schedules and limited budgets. There were significant amounts of data and ultimately how it is interpreted can also be subject to human variation. How data is interpreted is not an exact science – but can be subject to multiple views. There can also be an element of creativity and abstracting attached to the process, and this may be flavoured by personal insight, knowledge, and feel. Interpretations are sometimes “negotiable and open-ended” (Seale, 1999, p. 45). Similarly, Rose and Webb state (1998, p. 561) “I admit that some of this process took place at a creative level that I am not able to translate entirely in terms of concrete language simply because it takes place at a level that is too abstract to be represented concretely”. But what I can confirm is that this research has been carried out to best effect and in good faith, given these limitations, challenges, and admissions, and in accordance with the procedure defined.

Chapter Three has detailed the purpose of the research, its approach, and methods adopted. The following chapters (Four to Eight) present the research findings.

## **4.0 BODYBUILDER DEMOGRAPHICS AND SPORTING PRACTICES**

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Chapters Four to Eight document and discuss the research findings. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, in the absence of a consensual framework for identity, a framework was developed for this research which integrated the identity principles so they could be applied to this research (see Figure 2.1). Components within this framework relate to the chapters which follow. The quantitative findings provide an overview of competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand, as well as initial leads to inform the qualitative phase. Chapter Four displays participant demographics and insights of their sporting practices. Chapter Five documents bodybuilder views relating to a cross-section of issues concerning the sport, including analysis of these findings based on gender and age. The qualitative results, presented in Chapters' Six to Eight, highlight bodybuilder identities, processes and experiences. Chapter Six explores why people take up competitive bodybuilding and what it means to be a participant. Chapter Seven recognises that participants are not only bodybuilders, but have other dimensions to their selves and lives. It examines the interface between competitive bodybuilding and other dimensions of self-identity. Chapter Eight discusses why some people give up competitive bodybuilding, and what happens to their identities post-retirement.

### **WHO ARE THE BODYBUILDERS?**

This chapter utilises findings from the postal questionnaire to provide an overview of competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand, help frame the research, and provide insight to its participants. Although some existing studies have provided demographics concerning bodybuilding (Duff & Hong, 1984; Fisher, 1997; Klein, 1994; Mekolichick, 2003), many reflect an American perspective and have significant limitations. Mekolichick (2003) and Duff and Hong (1984)

involved participants from only one Bodybuilding Association. Duff and Hong (1984) and Fisher's (1997) research only focused on female bodybuilders. Although Klein's (1994) study included both men and women it provided few statistics and participants were from selected gyms. This study provides demographic background and statistical analysis on a country-wide basis. It includes male and female competitive bodybuilders and was supported by both major bodybuilding associations (NABBA and the NZFBB).

A total of 382 completed questionnaires were received from respondents. Sixty-four percent were female respondents and 36% were male. Three-hundred and seventy two (97.4%) of the total responses received stemmed from the Association mail outs, providing a response rate of 26% from the original Association distribution to 1431 members. One hundred and twenty-six respondents (33% of total responses) were from NZFBB members and 246 (64.4%) were from NABBA members. The remaining 10 questionnaires (2.6%) originated from the direct approach to gyms and bodybuilding web sites. Two hundred and three respondents indicated they were interested in being interviewed.

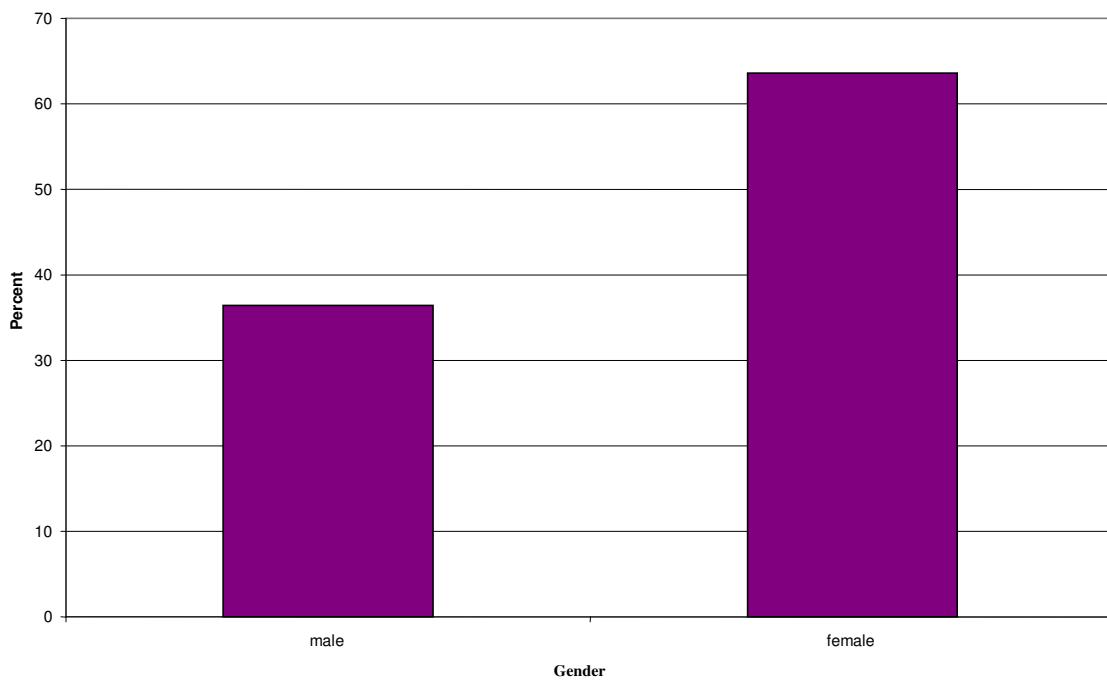
Although the response rate is lower than that of Mekolochick's (2003) 35% response rate, the New Zealand research entailed greater numbers of respondents than the American study (n=190), and participant numbers were also higher than those of Duff and Hong's report (1984), which yielded 205 responses and a response rate of 7%. Valuable comparisons can be made between the New Zealand research and previous research.

#### **4.1 Demographic Findings**

##### **Gender**

Studies have typically portrayed bodybuilding as a predominantly male-dominated activity (Klein, 1993a; D Smith, 2006). Klein (1993a; 1994) stated that his participants were predominantly male and that female involvement in the sport was limited. Mekolichick's (2003) survey of bodybuilders found that 72% of respondents were men. This was not the case with the

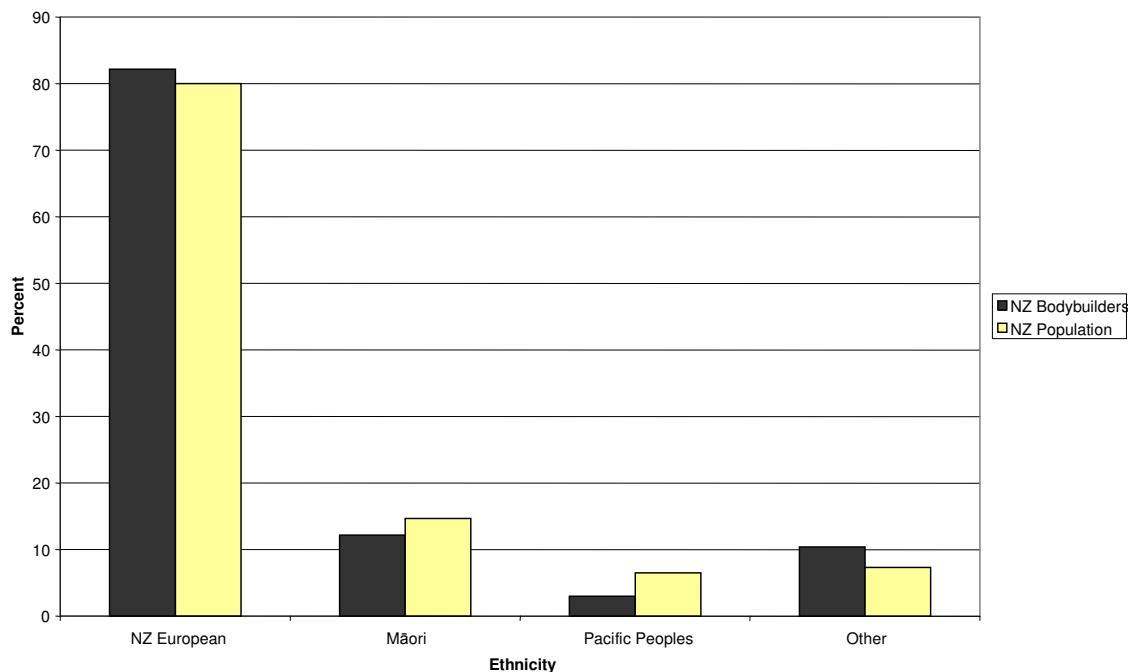
New Zealand research. Survey respondents comprised more female bodybuilders than men. As shown in Figure 4.1, 63.6% of respondents were female and 34.4% were male. Subsequent contact with the Bodybuilding Associations highlighted that female bodybuilders comprised 51.4% of the NZFBB membership base (Secretary NZFBB, pers. comm., September 10, 2005) and an estimated 60% of NABBA (Secretary NABBA, pers. comm., September 10, 2005).



**Figure 4.1:** Analysis of Bodybuilder Respondents by Gender

### Ethnicity

Bodybuilders in the New Zealand survey were found to be predominantly New Zealand European (82.8%). As shown in Figure 4.2, respondents reflected a similar ethnic makeup to New Zealand's population base (Census, 2001).

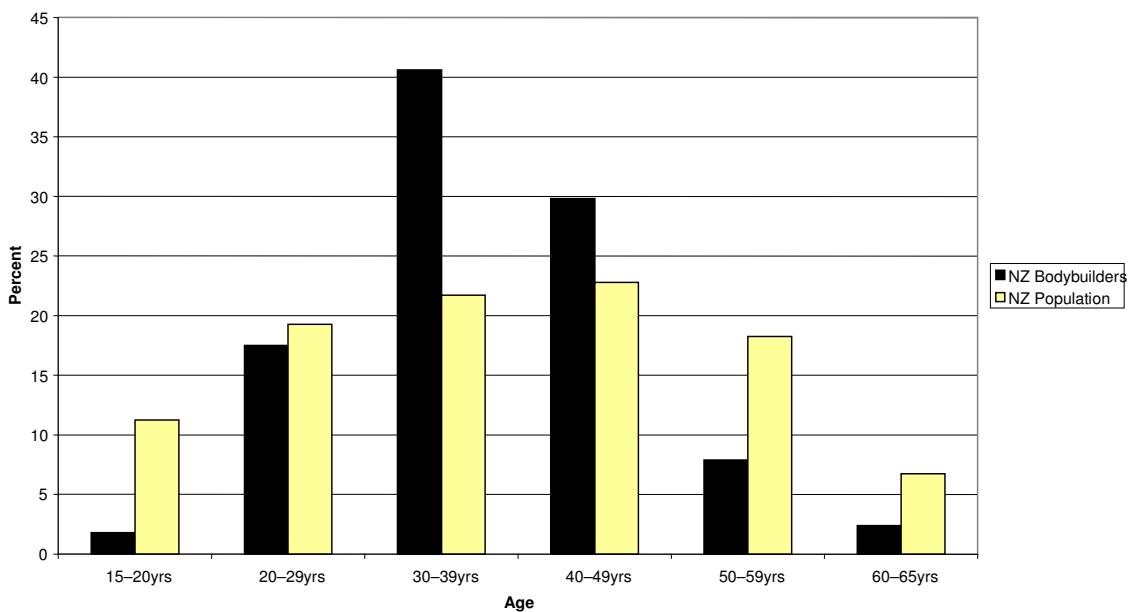


**Figure 4.2:** Ethnicity of Respondents and Comparison with New Zealand's Population Base

The findings reflect Mekolichick's (2003) survey, which also found 82% of respondents were Caucasian. With respect to the remaining respondents in the New Zealand research, Māori comprised 12.2% and 3% were of Pacific Island descent, such as Samoan and Tongan. Ten percent indicated they were affiliated with a range of other ethnic groupings such as British, Dutch and German. Bodybuilding did not appear widely embraced by those of Asian descent, who comprised 1% of respondents. It should be noted that respondents could identify with more than one ethnic group. As mentioned in Chapter Three questionnaires may not necessarily generate a good response rate from some ethnic groups. For example, Pacific Islanders may prefer a more personal style of interface (Teevale, 2001). This appeared to be the case in this research. As will be further discussed in Chapter Seven in the Ethnicity Section, participation by Pacific Island bodybuilders was seemingly higher than these statistical findings suggest.

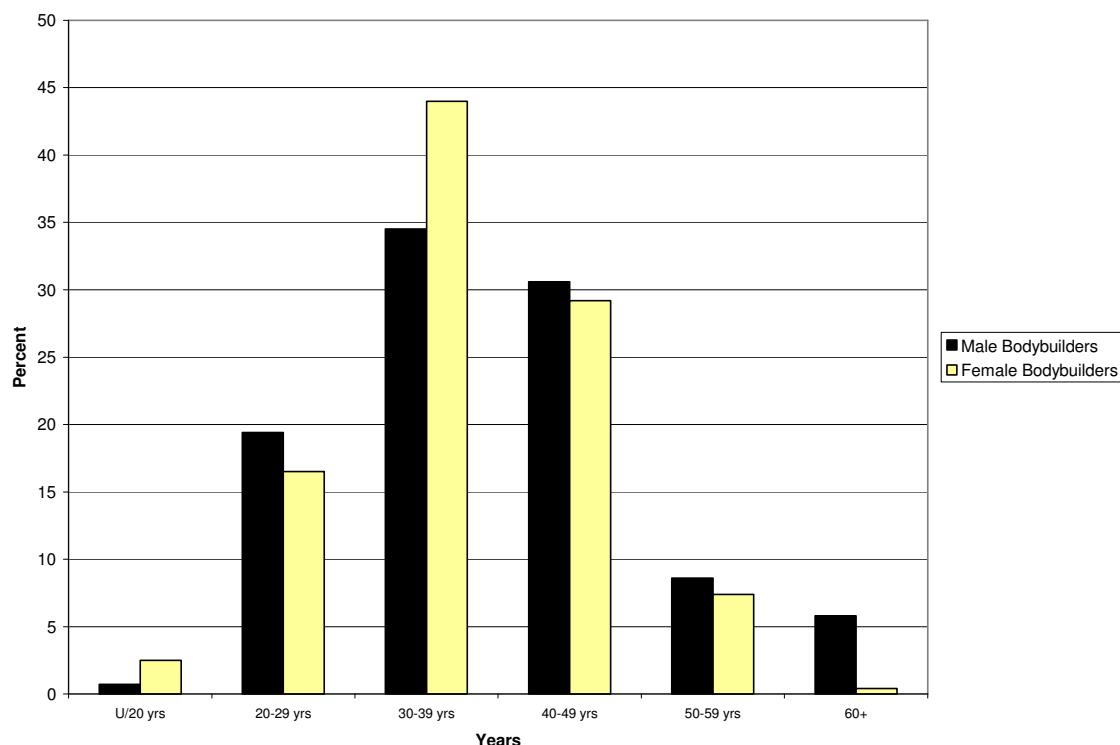
## Age

Studies involving bodybuilders have often included participants in their 20s or 30s (Drummond, 1994a, 1994b; Wiegers, 1998), which suggested, by default, that this was the typical age of many bodybuilders. Duff and Hong (1984) found that two-thirds of their competitive bodybuilders were aged 20–30 years. However, Mekolichick's (2003) more recent study discovered that participants ranged from 17 to 76 years, with an average age of 33.9 years. The New Zealand research found that competitive bodybuilding was particularly attractive to people in their mid-to later years, compared to those in younger age brackets. As shown in Figure 4.3, 70% of respondents were aged between 30 and 50 years; of those 40.6% were aged between 30 and 39 years and 29.8% between 40 and 49 years. Less than 2% of respondents were under 20 years. The popularity of bodybuilding in relation to this age grouping is further emphasised by its comparison with the New Zealand population (Census, 2006) age-demographics, which are also displayed in Figure 4.3.



**Figure 4.3:** Age of Respondents and Comparison with New Zealand's Population Base

An analysis of respondents by age and sex, shown in Figure 4.4, indicated there were more female respondents in the 30–39 year bracket and more men in the 20–29, as well as the 40–49 age grouping. However, despite these differences, no significant statistical difference was detected on the basis of sex concerning age.



**Figure 4.4:** Comparison of Age Profiles of Male versus Female Respondents

### Other demographic findings

The questionnaire findings also discovered that the majority of respondents worked, and were educationally well qualified. This outcome contrasts with Klein's (1994) research, which found that bodybuilding men tended to be unqualified, "blue collar" workers, although the women were often white-collar professionals. Klein (1993a; 1994) also referred to competitive bodybuilders as social loners and uni-dimensional characters whose homes were, in effect, the gym. The New Zealand research identified that the majority of competitive bodybuilders resided in households

with partners (70%), frequently children (42.1%), and/or other family members. Only 7.6% lived alone, and few had family members who were also competitive bodybuilders (25.5%). Instead, many participants in the research referred to non-family connections, such as close friends and personal trainers, who had played a significant role in supporting or encouraging them to take up the sport. Further information concerning the demographics can be found in Probert, Leberman, and Palmer (2007a).

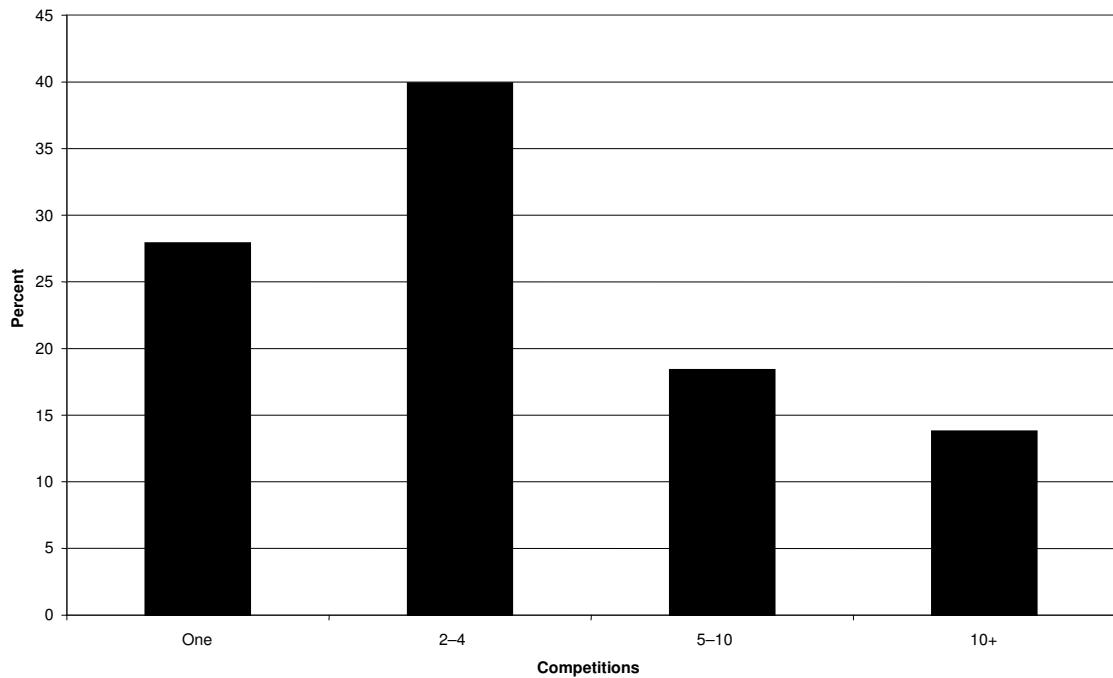
#### **4.2 Bodybuilding Training and Competitive Experience**

This section provides an overview of respondents in relation to their competitive bodybuilding experience and training, and includes information regarding the number, timing, and category of competitions which they have participated in. Details of training and supplement intake, as well as body weight have also been collated. This information provides statistical insights into the regimes utilised by participants to create a competitive physique and highlights the cyclical nature of bodybuilding.

##### **Competitive Bodybuilding Experience**

As shown in Figure 4.5 virtually all respondents (98.4%) had participated in one or more bodybuilding competitions. Of the respondents who had competed, 27.9% had competed once; 39.9% had competed in 2–4 competitions; 18.4% in 5–10 competitions; and 13.8% in 10 or more bodybuilding competitions.

The majority of respondents (52.6%) had competed in a bodybuilding event in the last 12 months. Twenty-nine percent of respondents had not competed for 2 or more years, of which 8.4% had not competed for 5 or more years. In terms of competitive intentions, 42.7% of respondents stated they were definitely aiming to compete again and a further 21.1% possibly aiming to compete. The remainder of respondents were unlikely, or were not intending, to compete.



**Figure 4.5:** Number of Competitions

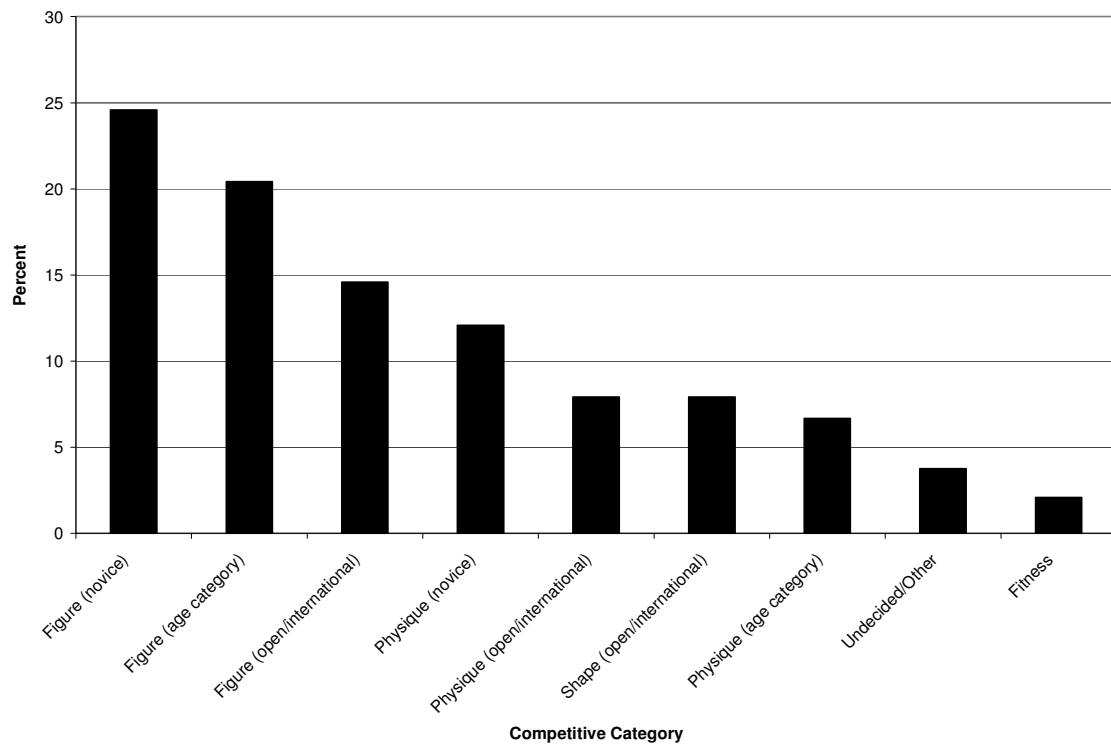
### Competition Categories

Historically, bodybuilding comprised only one competitive category. However, there is now a range of competition categories from which competitors can choose (see Appendix 6): Physique for men and women, which is the more muscular category; and less muscular categories such as Figure, Shape and Fitness (for women), and Athletic (for men). Sub-categories may accommodate competitive status (e.g., novice versus open), age (35 years+, 45 years+), height and/or weight of competitors.

#### *Female*

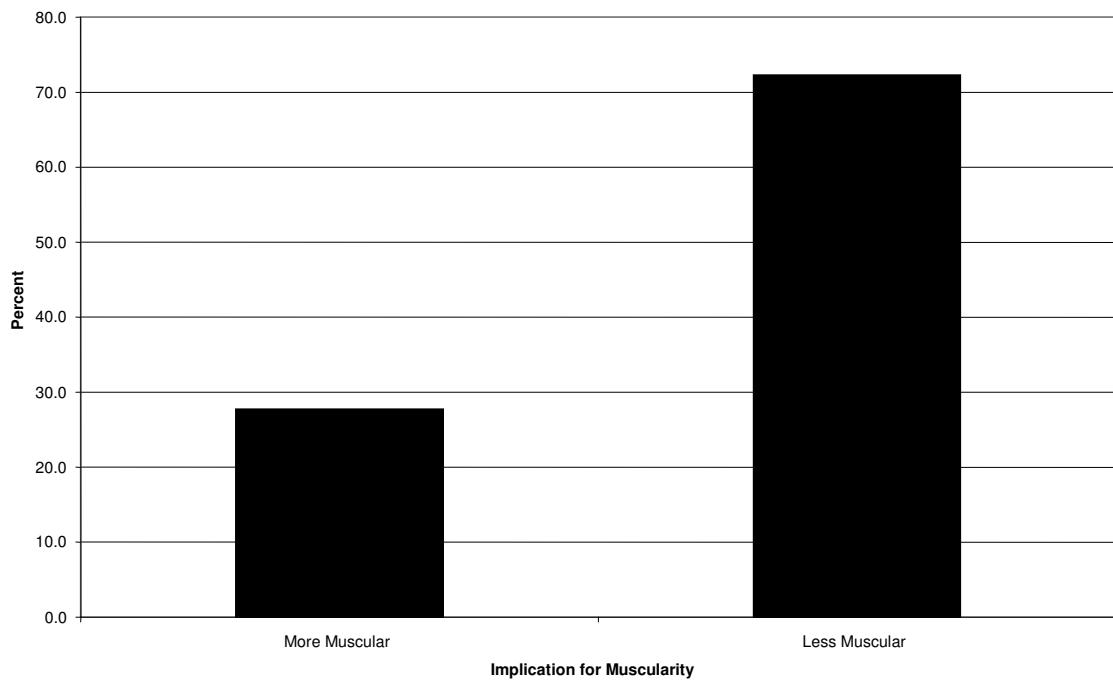
As shown in Figure 4.6, 60% of the female respondents competed in the Figure category, the majority indicating they had competed in Novice (24.6%) or an age sub-category (20.4%). Twenty-seven percent of respondents competed in Physique, either the Novice category (12.1%)

or Open category (7.9%). Shape, which along with Fitness requires the least level of muscular definition, was chosen by 7.9% of female respondents, and at the time of this survey was offered by only one bodybuilding association.



**Figure 4.6:** Competitive Category - Female

A comparison of the Physique categories grouped together (the more muscular competitive category) compared with the combined grouping of the Figure, Shape and Fitness categories (reflecting less muscular categories), highlighted that competitive categories encompassing lower level of muscular mass were more frequently selected by the female bodybuilders than those categories that required greater levels of muscular mass. As shown in Figure 4.7, 72% opted for the less muscular competitive category, while 28% selected the more muscular categories.



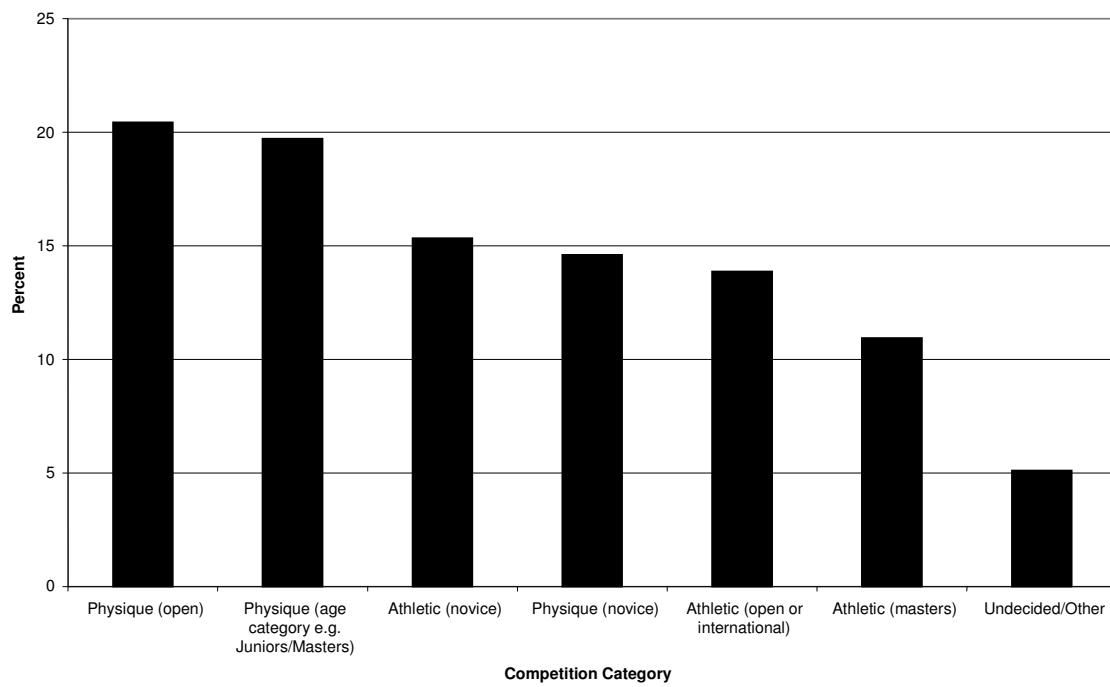
**Figure 4.7:** Female Competition Category Preference by Muscularity

### *Male*

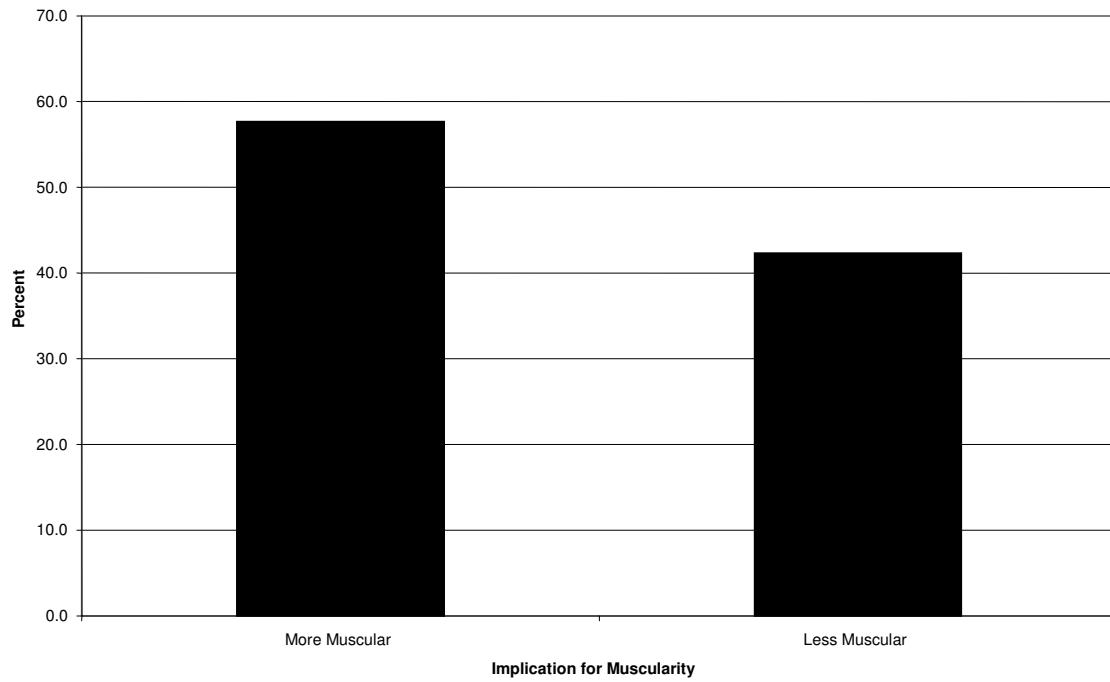
Physique proved the most popular competition category with male respondents: As displayed in Figure 4.8, 29.4% competed in the Open Physique class, 19.7% elected an age category, and 14.6% competed in the Novice Physique. Athletic, which is a less muscular category offered by only one of the Bodybuilding Associations at the time of this survey, was found to be relatively popular. It was selected at a novice level by 15.3% of respondents.

By defining Physique as “more muscular” and Athletic as “less muscular”, while eliminating the undecided responses, an analysis of male competition categories by muscularity highlights that the more muscular option was selected more frequently by male respondents. As illustrated in

Figure 4.9, 58.5% of the men competed in the Physique (more muscular) category, compared with 41.5% who competed in the Athletic (less muscular) category.

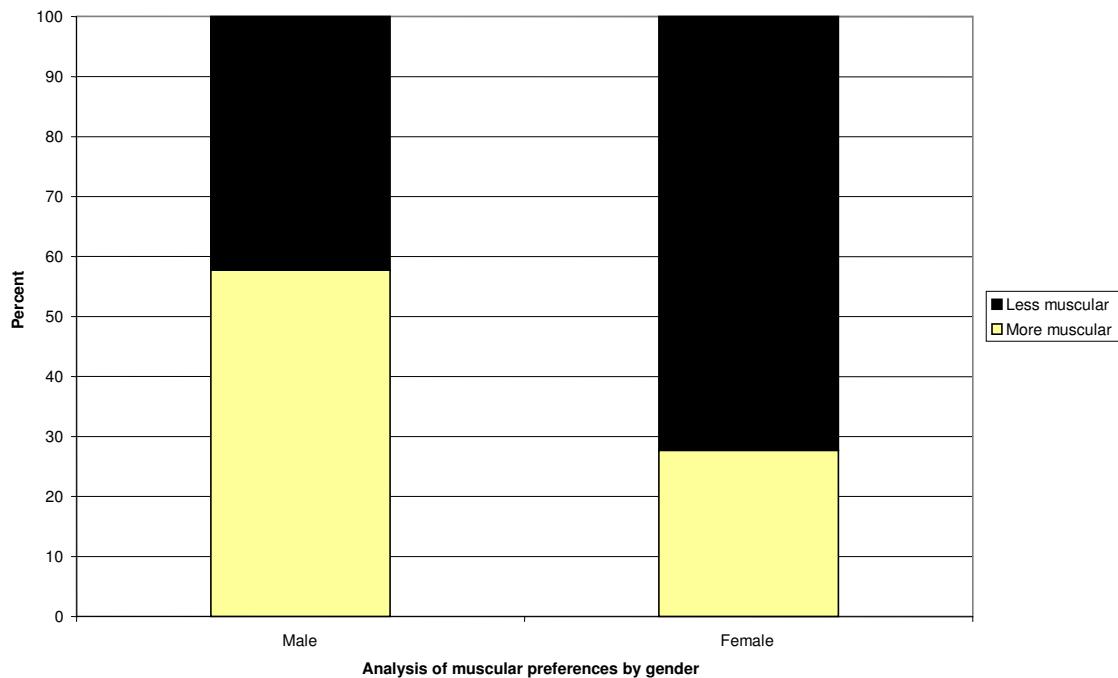


**Figure 4.8:** Competitive Category - Male



**Figure 4.9:** Male Competition Category Preference Defined By Muscularity

Figure 4.10 shows that although the men favoured the more muscular categories, the percentage difference between this choice and their less muscular option (i.e. Athletic), was not as great as it was for women.



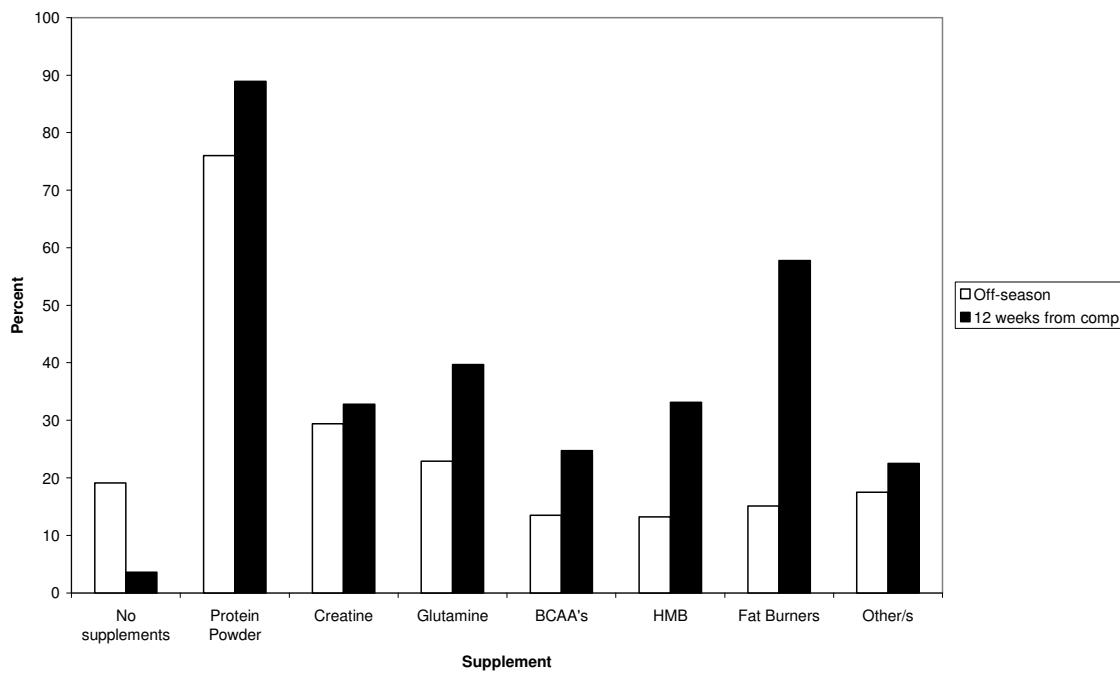
**Figure 4.10:** Category/Muscularity Comparison by Gender

### Training, Weight Changes, and Supplementation

The research investigated the cyclical nature of bodybuilding training such as the differences between the off-season versus the competitive physique of participants (e.g., body weight, supplement use). Although there have been general references to these practices within existing research, there have been few statistical insights that quantify the changes that occur (Klein, 1993a; Roundtree, 2005). Virtually all the New Zealand respondents (97.8%) indicated that their off-season weight was more than their competitive weight. Forty-three percent claimed that their off-season weight was 5–9 kilograms (kg) heavier than their competitive weight; 23.6% said it was 10–14 kg heavier and 23.3% said it was 1–4 kg heavier. The off-season weight difference

was greater for the male bodybuilders than their female counterparts. Quantitative analysis of the survey questionnaire also discovered that the male bodybuilders spent less time on cardiovascular activity per week than female bodybuilders, but more hours per week lifting weights. These findings are consistent with literature that portrays women as being attentive to body fat control through cardio and men having a desire for muscularity (Bordo, 1988; Connell, 2001, 2005).

The questionnaire also investigated the extent of supplement use by competitive bodybuilders to assist their body's sculpting and dietary requirements during the off-season and the pre-competition phase (within 12 weeks of competition). Figure 4.11 shows that during the off-season, bodybuilders used a range of supplements, such as protein powder (76%), creatine (29.4 %), branch chain amino acids (BCAAs) (13.5%), and glutamine (22.9 %). During the pre-competition phase, while protein powder remained the most frequently used supplement (88.9%), the use of fat burners increased significantly (57.8%), as did the muscular recovery agent glutamine (39.7%) and hydroxy-methyl-buterate (HMB) (31.1%), which can help to reduce muscle loss (Schwarzenegger, 1998). These results reflect the cyclical nature of competitive bodybuilding – the off-season muscular growth phase, and the pre-competition cutting phase when body fat reduction is important, but attempts are made to achieve this without compromising muscularity (Roundtree, 2005).



**Figure 4.11:** Use of Supplements – Off-season versus Pre-Competition

Supplementation results were further analysed to ascertain whether differences existed between male and female respondents. During the off-season, with the exception of fat burners, the female bodybuilders tended to use less supplements than their male counterparts. However, it was also found that 19.6% of the women reported using other supplements, such as flaxseed oil during this phase, which may provide a range of health and performance benefits (Ward & Levin, 2007). During the pre-competition phase the female respondents reported a greater propensity to use protein powder and HMB than their male counterparts. Male bodybuilders, however, used greater levels of creatine, glutamine, BCAAs, and fat burners than women.

### Training support and knowledge

The quantitative results also found that the bodybuilding community serves as the prime source of bodybuilding knowledge and information for participants. To learn and advance their knowledge bodybuilders predominantly learn from other bodybuilders (53.2%) and from their personal

trainers (53.2%). The internet, however, was also favoured (32.4%), as were bodybuilding magazines (30.5%).

These results provide a profile of competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand to frame this research, provide insight of its participants, and contribute to the limited demographic information available on a national and international level in relation to this sport (Probert et al., 2007a). The following chapter extends these findings by providing statistical analysis of respondents' views and experiences of competitive bodybuilding from the quantitative phase, and examines differences between responses based on gender and age.

## **5.0 VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF NEW ZEALAND BODYBUILDERS**

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### **5.1 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS**

#### **Levels of support**

Before interviewing participants, results from the questionnaire were analysed to inform the research process. Questions 19–54 comprised a list of statements and respondents were asked to indicate their level of support on a Likert scale (1–4) where one reflected a strong lack of support and four indicated strong support. The five most-supported statements are displayed in Table 5.1, the five least supported statements are shown in Table 5.2, and the mean scores of all statements are shown in Table 5.3.

These results suggest that the bodybuilders perceived themselves as being balanced in health, fitness and lifestyle and that bodybuilding had contributed to their self-discipline and a sense of self-life-control. There appeared to be few regrets about being a bodybuilder. Participants' predominant preference appeared to be to keep their bodies natural (i.e. not to use steroids and/or implants. Many did not believe that bodybuilding had significantly changed their personality. Participants indicated they had friends from a range of social spheres – therefore the notion that the majority of their friends were competitive bodybuilders gained little support, although this may also imply they had few friends. Respondents also indicated they did not fear public ridicule about their involvement in bodybuilding.

**Table 5.1: Most Supported Questionnaire Statements**

Questionnaire Statement	Mean Score (on 1–4 Likert Scale)
I believe I have a balanced outlook on health and fitness	3.54
I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this	3.34
If I wasn't involved in bodybuilding I would still have the same personality	3.26
I consider I have a balanced lifestyle	3.24
When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life	3.21

**Table 5.2: Least Supported Questionnaire Statements**

Questionnaire Statement	Mean score (on 1–4 Likert Scale)
Sometimes I wish I wasn't (or hadn't been) a bodybuilder	1.53
I would consider implants (e.g., pecs, breast, calf) to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape	1.60
If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance	1.72
The majority of my friends are also bodybuilders	1.73
I fear public ridicule when telling people I am involved in bodybuilding	1.85

**Table 5.3: Ratings for Bodybuilding Statements.**

Statement	Mean	SD
I believe I have a balanced outlook on health and fitness	3.54	0.61
I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this	3.34	0.69
If I wasn't involved in bodybuilding, I would still have the same personality	3.25	0.90
I consider I have a balanced lifestyle	3.24	0.68
When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life	3.21	0.79
At bodybuilding events my prime aim is to win	3.08	0.94
My bodybuilding physique makes me feel more sexually attractive	3.06	0.79
I enjoy wearing clothes which display my physique	3.04	0.83
Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle	3.04	0.94
Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior	2.98	0.88
If female bodybuilders become too muscular, they become less feminine	2.95	1.05
I am satisfied with how my body looks	2.85	0.76
I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity	2.76	0.89
When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions	2.68	0.90
Participating in bodybuilding competitions is something which I do now, but isn't something I see myself doing long term	2.68	1.04
I believe some aspects of bodybuilding are unhealthy, but I am willing to do what it takes in order to compete	2.67	0.97
The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity	2.67	0.94
I don't care what other people think about my body	2.65	0.96
If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty	2.62	0.97
I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not	2.59	0.97
If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders	2.51	1.10
My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods	2.49	1.03
I feel "different" from other people because I am a bodybuilder	2.43	1.01
I believe that bodybuilding is a form of vanity and obsession with bodily perfection	2.41	0.97
When I tell people I am involved in bodybuilding, the reaction from women is usually more positive than men	2.40	0.92
I don't restrict my diet post competition	2.35	0.95
I have experienced concern and pressure from family and/or friends that I could become too muscular	2.32	1.12
I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug/steroid-free	2.25	0.88
Bodybuilding has made me less sociable	2.25	0.97
If I could eat junk food all day and still be lean and muscular, I would	2.13	1.11
Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding	2.02	0.96
I fear public ridicule when I tell people I am involved in bodybuilding	1.85	0.94
The majority of my friends are also bodybuilders	1.73	0.85
If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance	1.72	1.08
I would consider implants (e.g., pecs, breast, calf implants) in order to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape	1.60	1.01
Sometimes I wish I wasn't (or hadn't been) a bodybuilder	1.53	0.83

## **Factor analysis**

The mean rankings provided useful insights into respondents' views and experiences in relation to a cross-section of issues. However, as shown in Table 5.3, there were an array of statements and subsequently considerable data were generated. Consistent with a grounded approach, Exploratory Factor Analysis was applied to ascertain whether patterns existed among the responses. This enabled the findings to be reduced to seven key factors and the results from this process are shown in Table 5.4. The use of software enabled these statement groupings to be defined, but ascertaining their commonalities and subsequently assigning headings can prove a subjective process (Miller et al., 2002). With respect to the New Zealand research, the statements with the highest loadings on each factor were used both as leads to identify their common grouping and also as factor headings (Child, 1990). The results were then tested utilising feedback from other scholars/supervisors. The following seven factors were identified:

### ***Self-Life Enhancement (Factor One)***

Within this factor, bodybuilding was predominantly perceived by participants as a positive, life-enhancing experience. It offered pleasures and benefits to the participants that extended physically, mentally and emotionally into their broader life. It enabled participants to feel disciplined and in control of their lives and emotions. Bodybuilding was aligned with a healthy, balanced lifestyle and the activity was perceived as predominantly drug-free. It had not impacted negatively on participants' relationships or other aspects of their life or self.

### ***The Bodybuilder Lifestyle (Factor Two)***

Bodybuilding was considered an integral part of participants' life. It was a long-term and defining component of their self-identity, and participants felt different from non-bodybuilders. The bodybuilder dietary regime reflected their normal eating pattern and their social network predominantly comprised other bodybuilders. They viewed themselves as physically superior to others of similar age and mentally stronger than non-bodybuilding individuals.

**Table 5.4: Factor Analysis Inclusive of all Participants**

<b>FACTOR LISTING</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>VI</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>Factor 1 – Self-Life Enhancement</b>							
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions	0.80						
22. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life	0.65						
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity	0.51						
32. I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this	0.40						
25. I consider I have a balanced lifestyle	0.37						
46. Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding	-0.37						
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods	-0.35						
52. I don't care what other people think about my body	0.32						
36. I have experienced concern and pressure from family and/or friends that I could become too muscular	-0.31						
50. I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug free	0.31						
<b>Factor 2 – Bodybuilder Lifestyle</b>							
21. I feel "different" from other people because I am a bodybuilder		0.69					
20. Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle		0.66					
35. Participating in bodybuilding competitions is something which I do now, but isn't something I see myself doing long term			-0.58				
28. Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior		0.42					
51. The majority of my friends are also bodybuilders		0.40					
45. I don't restrict my diet post competition		-0.40					
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not		0.30					
<b>Factor 3 – Body Manipulation and Masculinity</b>							
47. If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders				0.73			
48. The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity				0.65			
37. If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of			0.53				

them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance						
33. I believe that bodybuilding is a form of vanity and obsession with bodily perfection			-0.35			
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not			0.37			
43. I would consider implants (e.g., pecs, breast, calf implants) in order to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape			0.32			
<b>Factor 4 – Physical Attractiveness Tool</b>						
35. Participating in bodybuilding competitions is something which I do now, but isn't something I see myself doing long term				0.40		
28. Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior				0.38		
30. I enjoy wearing clothes which display my physique				0.71		
39. My bodybuilding physique makes me feel more sexually attractive				0.69		
<b>Factor 5 – Balanced Self-Image</b>						
19. I am satisfied with how my body looks					0.71	
23. I believe I have a balanced outlook on health and fitness					0.69	
25. I consider I have a balanced lifestyle					0.65	
24. If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty					-0.48	
<b>Factor 6 – The Price of Bodybuilding</b>						
54. Bodybuilding has made me less sociable					0.76	
46. Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding					0.64	
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods					0.54	
41. Sometimes I wish I wasn't (or hadn't been) a bodybuilder					0.37	
<b>Factor 7 – Extreme Aesthetic Competitive Pursuit</b>						
37. If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance						0.42
49. At bodybuilding events my prime aim is to win						0.70
29. I believe some aspects of bodybuilding are unhealthy, but I am willing to do what it takes in order to compete						0.49
33. I believe that bodybuilding is a form of vanity and obsession with bodily perfection						0.45
51. The majority of my friends are also bodybuilders						0.36

52. I don't care what other people think about my body							0.32
	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>VI</b>	<b>VII</b>
Eigenvalue values	4.279	3.474	1.819	1.746	1.527	1.426	1.402
Percentage of variance explained	11.886	9.649	5.052	4.850	4.241	3.961	3.895
Cumulative Percentage of variance explained	11.886	21.535	26.587	31.437	35.678	39.639	43.534

### ***Body Manipulation (Factor Three)***

Bodybuilding, in conjunction with steroids and implants were grouped in this factor. This factor reflected deliberate interventions that enabled participants to manipulate their bodily shape and size. However, perceptions underpinning the use of such procedures also appeared influenced by traditionally gendered bodily ideals. For example, the muscularity of bodybuilding was aligned with enhanced masculinity. Furthermore, steroid use was deemed more acceptable for male than female bodybuilders.

### ***Physical Attractiveness Tool (Factor Four)***

Within this factor, bodybuilding served as a tool which enhanced physical attractiveness. Participants perceived themselves as physically superior, bodily confident, sexy, and they enjoyed wearing clothes that displayed their enhanced shape. Bodybuilding was not considered a long-term or integral component of their identity or life, but more a phase from which they derived physical benefits.

### ***Healthy-Balanced Self-Image (Factor Five)***

Bodybuilding was perceived as an extension of the participants' healthy-balanced self-image. They were satisfied with their bodily appearance and considered they had a balanced outlook concerning their health, fitness and life in general. If they missed a workout, they did not feel guilty; suggesting that such participants distanced themselves from notions (or self-views) of bodily obsession and/or extremes.

### ***Price of Bodybuilding (Factor Six)***

This factor reflected the conflicts, negotiations, and struggles participants experienced between their bodybuilder identity and their other identities. It included impacts on their social self, their relationships, and other life spheres.

### ***Extreme Aesthetic Competitive Pursuit (Factor Seven)***

Bodybuilding was considered a competitively driven extreme sport that focused on physical aesthetics. Participant behaviour was reflective of this context, for example, the factor highlighted not only the participant's desire to win, but that the pursuit of such a competitive physique entailed facets of bodily obsession and the possibility of unhealthy practices, including potential use of steroids.

### **Factor Analysis Summary**

The factor analysis provided valuable insights into how participants identified with and/or experienced competitive bodybuilding. The first factor (Self-Life Enhancement), the main factor as it accounts for the most variance, encompasses the diversity of benefits and pleasures acquired through participation. Factor Three focuses on the manipulation of the body – the addition of muscularity, the use of implants and/or chemicals (e.g., steroids). It indicates that decisions may hold implications for gender; it may signify heightened mental toughness and that motivations for bodybuilding are not necessarily aligned to vanity and/or bodily obsessions. Factor Five reveals that participation may generate a sense of healthiness and balance. However, Factor Six indicates participation is also associated with risks and unhealthy, detrimental possibilities. Bodybuilding may be experienced as an extreme sport, as signalled in Factor Seven. Participants may embrace competitive bodybuilding as a lifestyle and be in it for the long term (Factor Two). However, it may also be a short-term experience that leads to bodily and confidence improvements (Factor Four). These factors represent the diverse meanings participants attach to bodybuilding. It is possible that bodybuilding may reflect more than a singular meaning and these factors could reflect the multitude of meanings which individual bodybuilders assign to their activity. Alternatively, bodybuilding may mean different things to different people.

## **5.2 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS BY GENDER**

### **Levels of support - Differences based on gender**

This section provides further analysis of the questionnaire findings based on gender. The responses of the male and female bodybuilders were separated and their mean scores were compared. Over 50% of the statement scores were found to be significantly different ( $p < 0.05$ ) and these findings are summarised in Table 5.5, with full statistical information in Appendix 7a.

Previous research concerning competitive bodybuilding and gender has predominantly focused on muscularity. The New Zealand results, however, suggested the experiences of male and female bodybuilders may differ in a range of ways and there could be additional forms of gender expression, beyond muscularity. A summary of these possibilities follows.

#### *Lifestyle*

The female bodybuilders appeared more likely than their male counterparts to consider their lifestyle as being balanced. They also indicated they were less likely to view bodybuilding as an activity they would be involved in for the long term or one that could change their personality. Conversely, male bodybuilders suggested they were more likely to embrace bodybuilding as a lifestyle, and were more likely to consider bodybuilding as a healthy activity that contributed to their sense of self-discipline.

#### *Competition*

When preparing for bodybuilding competitions male respondents stated they felt more emotionally in control than female respondents claimed. The men also appeared more overtly competitive: they ranked winning at bodybuilding events more highly than did the female respondents.

**Table 5.5: Significant Differences Between Male and Female Questionnaire Statements**

***Females agreed more strongly than males with the following statements:***

I consider I have a balanced lifestyle  
I enjoy wearing clothes which show off my physique  
If I wasn't involved in bodybuilding I would still have the same personality  
Bodybuilding is something which I do now, but isn't something I see myself doing long term  
I have experienced concern and pressure from family and/or friends that I could become too muscular  
I would consider implants (e.g., pecs, breast, calf implants) in order to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape  
I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug/steroid-free

***Males agreed more strongly than female respondents with the following statements:***

Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle  
I feel different from other people because I am a bodybuilder  
When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions  
I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity  
Relative to people of similar age, I consider myself physically superior  
I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this  
If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance  
If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders  
The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity  
At bodybuilding events, my prime aim is to win  
When I tell people I am involved in bodybuilding, the reaction from women is usually more positive than men

### *Interactions and self-views*

Female bodybuilders indicated that they enjoyed wearing clothes to show off their physique – more so than the male bodybuilders. However, the male bodybuilders were more likely to feel physically superior to others of a similar age, and indicated bodybuilding was an activity that made them feel different from others. Men were also more supportive than female respondents of the statement that bodybuilding enhanced masculinity. They also indicated they tended to receive more positive responses from women (as opposed to men) in relation to their involvement in the sport. Compared with the male bodybuilders, the female bodybuilders said they had been subject to greater levels of concern and pressure from family and friends that they could become too muscular.

### *Enhancements*

The female respondents were more likely to view bodybuilding in New Zealand as largely steroid-free. The males, in contrast, were not only more open to the prospect that steroids were being used within bodybuilding, but also that such substances were a legitimate tool to be used to enhance bodily appearance, if used carefully and in a controlled manner. They also believed that steroid use was more acceptable for men than women. Although male bodybuilders ranked support for steroid use higher than female bodybuilders, their overall support for steroid use was still low ( $m = 2.26$  on a 1–4 scale of support). The standard deviation relating to their response was also higher than that of female respondents. This suggested that although their mean score was higher than the women's, there were also greater levels of diversity among the men in levels of support for steroid use.

Regarding the use of implants, results indicated the female bodybuilders were more receptive to the use of this form of bodily enhancement, than the men.

## **Factor Analysis - Gender**

The questionnaire statements were subjected to factor analysis by gender to ascertain whether any trends could be identified in statement responses. This analysis led to the retention of four factors for the men and five for the women. The outcomes from this process are displayed in Table 5.6. Conceptual headings have been attached to each factor. To develop heading names, commonalities among the statement clusters were considered, as well as the statement loadings. The factors will now be discussed.

### *Male Bodybuilders*

#### Extreme Bodybuilder (Factor One)

This was the predominant factor. It has been called extreme bodybuilder as it suggests bodybuilding for men is experienced as a competitive activity in which they push themselves to the limit – which enhances their masculinity. This factor groups together the use of steroids and implants, the willingness of men to engage in unhealthy practices in order to have a competitive physique, and the possibility that their involvement may negatively impact on relationships. For men, their responses indicated they believed their muscular physique was aligned with masculinity and that it was also symbolic of internal, mental strength.

#### Healthy Bodybuilder (Factor Two)

In contrast with Factor One, this factor highlights that men can also align bodybuilding with notions of being healthy and steroid-free. It can contribute to feelings of being in control – not only emotionally, but also in terms of broader life spheres. It also indicates that bodybuilding does not negatively impact upon relationships. However, as with Factor One, it is considered symbolic of internal, mental strength.

**Table 5.6: Factor Analysis by Gender**

MALE	I	II	III	IV
<b>Factor 1 – The Ultimate Man</b>				
47. If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders	0.76			
48. The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity	0.67			
37. If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance	0.66			
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods	0.41			
29. I believe some aspects of bodybuilding are unhealthy, but I am willing to do what it takes in order to compete	0.39			
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not	0.34			
43. I would consider implants (e.g., pecs, breast, calf implants) in order to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape	0.40			
<b>Factor 2 – Fit-Healthy Masculinity</b>				
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods		-0.32		
50. I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug/steroid-free		0.77		
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity		0.73		
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions		0.50		
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not		0.47		
22. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life		0.33		
<b>Factor 3 – The Price of Bodybuilding</b>				
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods			0.34	
29. I believe some aspects of bodybuilding are unhealthy, but I am willing to do what it takes in order to compete			0.33	
54. Bodybuilding has made me less sociable			0.78	
46. Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding			0.75	
24. If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty			0.51	
<b>Factor 4 – Superior Lifestyle Immersion</b>				
20. Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle				0.69
45. I don't restrict my diet post competition				0.62
28. Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior				0.59

35. Participating in bodybuilding competitions is something which I do now, but isn't something I see myself doing long term				-0.54
Eigenvalue values	4.021	3.464	2.182	2.009
Percentage of variance explained	11.169	9.622	6.060	5.580
Cumulative Percentage of variance explained	11.169	20.791	26.851	32.431
Mean				
Standard Deviation				
Internal consistency reliability				

FEMALE	I	II	III	IV	V
<b>Factor 1 – Enhanced Women</b>					
28. Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior	0.67				
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity	0.65				
22. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life	0.64				
39. My bodybuilding physique makes me feel more sexually attractive	0.64				
20. Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle	0.60				
32. I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this	0.57				
30. I enjoy wearing clothes which display my physique	0.57				
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions	0.56				
21. I feel "different" from other people because I am a bodybuilder	0.51				
48. The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity	0.47				
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not	0.44				
<b>Factor 2 – The Price of Bodybuilding</b>					
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions		-0.31			
46. Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding		0.71			
54. Bodybuilding has made me less sociable		0.70			
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods		0.58			
33. I believe that bodybuilding is a form of vanity and obsession with bodily perfection		0.36			
41. Sometimes I wish I wasn't (or hadn't been) a bodybuilder		0.43			

<b>Factor 3 – Balanced Self-Image</b>					
25. I consider I have a balanced lifestyle			0.75		
23. I believe I have a balanced outlook on health and fitness			0.68		
19. I am satisfied with how my body looks			0.63		
24. If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty			-0.53		
52. I don't care what other people think about my body			0.38		
<b>Factor 4 – Gendered Bodily Manipulation</b>					
48. The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity			0.42		
33. I believe that bodybuilding is a form of vanity and obsession with bodily perfection			-0.30		
47. If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders			0.69		
43. I would consider implants (e.g., pecs, breast, calf implants) in order to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape			0.67		
37. If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance			0.54		
<b>Factor 5 – A Phase</b>					
20. Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle			-0.47		
21. I feel "different" from other people because I am a bodybuilder			-0.46		
35. Participating in bodybuilding competitions is something which I do now, but isn't something I see myself doing long term			0.81		
41. Sometimes I wish I wasn't (or hadn't been) a bodybuilder			0.46		
Eigenvalue values	4.809	3.692	2.078	1.711	1.527
Percentage of variance explained	13.360	10.255	5.771	4.753	4.243
Cumulative Percentage of variance explained	13.360	23.615	29.386	34.139	38.381

### The Price of Bodybuilding (Factor Three)

This factor reflects the negatives of being involved in bodybuilding. It includes experiences of being less sociable, the detrimental impact it could have on other areas of their lives, as well as on their relationships, the unhealthy extremes associated with competing; and feelings of guilt if participants miss a workout.

### Superior Lifestyle (Factor Four)

Within this factor, male respondents considered bodybuilding to be an integral part of their lifestyle, and an activity in which they were involved for the long-term. It was connected with eating and dietary practices, and was an activity that enabled them to cultivate and maintain a superior physique relative to others of comparable age.

## *Female Bodybuilders*

### Enhanced Woman (Factor One)

The predominant factor highlighted that bodybuilding for women was experienced as a positive activity. Furthermore, bodybuilding contributed to self-enhancement in a multitude of ways, such as physical (e.g., a superior body compared with others, confidence in terms of displaying their body), mental (internal strength, feelings of discipline), emotional (feeling emotionally in control), sexual (feeling sexually attractive), and health (bodybuilding is a healthy activity). It also contributed to a sense of enhanced personal and life control. Within this factor bodybuilding was considered an integral part of the woman's lifestyle, and participants felt different from others.

### The Price of Bodybuilding (Factor Two)

This factor reflects the negatives female respondents associated with bodybuilding participation. These included the detrimental impact it might have on other areas of their lives and their social

networks and relationships, its emotional impact upon themselves during competitive times, as well as the potential for the activity to become too bodily focused.

#### Balanced Self-Image (Factor Three)

Here, bodybuilding is associated with experiences and self-perceptions of health and having a balanced outlook on life. Female bodybuilders were happy with how their body looked. If they missed a workout, they did not experience guilt. They were not concerned about the views of others in relation to their physique.

#### Gendered Body Manipulation (Factor Four)

Within this factor bodybuilding is a means of constructing an enhanced body. Although interventions such as steroids are an acceptable tool for manipulating bodily appearance, their use is considered more appropriate for men than for women. Muscularity was perceived as a means to enhance masculinity. Implants were also identified as means by which participants could alter their physique beyond natural means. Within this factor, bodybuilding was understood as a form of physical construction and manipulation, and the responses highlighted it was not perceived as an act of vanity or bodily obsession.

#### A Phase (Factor Five)

Finally, competitive bodybuilding was conveyed by women in this grouping as an activity they participated in for a finite period within their lives, not as something they embraced for the long term – it was a phase, an experience. Participants agreed that being a bodybuilder did not make them feel different from other people; however, for some, their experiences led to feelings of regret that they are or had been a bodybuilder.

### ***Factor Analysis Summary***

These results highlight some of the varied ways male and female participants may identify with competitive bodybuilding. For the men, Factor One highlighted that men perceived competitive

bodybuilding as an arena where they pushed themselves to the extreme – physically, mentally and socially. For the women, however, Factor One emphasised an array of pleasures they gained from participation – enhanced self-life control, body confidence, mental and emotional strength, healthiness. Factor Two, for the men, indicated that competitive bodybuilding could be experienced as a natural, healthy activity which was conducive to well-being. Although the women also associated bodybuilding with experiences of health, as indicated in Factor Three, this entailed feeling body confident and balanced in their lives, whereas for men, healthiness was more connected with being steroid-free. Although the women perceived bodybuilding to be an activity where body shape could be deliberately manipulated through the use of steroids, using implants featured more prominently as an option for them (Factor Four). The men, in Factor Three, indicated there could be risks or negative consequences associated with participation, as did the women in Factor Two. In many respects their factor outcomes were similar (e.g., both male and female factors cited the detrimental effects of participation on social lives and relationships). Male bodybuilders, however, emphasised the unhealthy extremes of competition, while female bodybuilders highlighted the potential detrimental effects of participation on emotions and body image. Bodybuilding as a lifestyle and a superior way of life featured in the male factor analysis (Factor Four). Although lifestyle was also an element for the women (reflected as an element within Factor One), they stated that for them, bodybuilding could also be a phase in their lives, as opposed to a long-term sporting engagement (Factor Five).

### **5.3 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENTS BY AGE**

#### **Levels of support - Differences based on age**

With a few exceptions (Freuh, 1999; Monaghan, 2001), minimal attention has been given to the interface between age and bodybuilding. The questionnaire was therefore further analysed for potential differences based on age. Responses to questions 19–54 were split into two groups –

respondents over 40 years (the ‘older’ group) and those less than 40 years (the ‘younger’ group). These groupings were formed on the basis that they were of comparable size, which was considered important for statistical purposes. The mean scores of the two groups were then compared in terms of their rankings of the questionnaire statements. Significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were detected in six statements. These are summarised below in Table 5.7 and full statistical information concerning these findings is provided in Appendix 7b.

**Table 5.7: Significant Differences Pertinent to Bodybuilder Age**

***Participants under 40 years agreed more strongly than participants over 40 years with the following statement:***

If I could eat junk food all day and still be lean and muscular I would

***Participants over 40 years agreed more strongly than participants under 40 years with the following statements:***

Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle

When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life

When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions

I consider bodybuilding to be a healthy activity

Relative to people of similar age I consider myself physically superior

Results indicated that the older participants perceived bodybuilding as more of an integral part of their life than the younger bodybuilders. They also associated bodybuilding more strongly with a sense of feeling in control of their lives. Furthermore, during the competitive preparation phase, the older participants felt more in control of their emotions than the younger bodybuilders. They also supported, to a greater degree, the statement that bodybuilding enabled them to feel physically more superior to others of comparable age. Older bodybuilders aligned participation more closely to notions of health. Younger participants, conversely, were more open to the

possibility that if they could achieve the same lean muscular physique by eating junk food, they would.

### **Factor Analysis – Age**

The statement responses of the two groups ('older' and 'younger' bodybuilders) were also analysed using factor analysis, which led to the retention of four factors for those over 40 years of age, as well as four factors for those under 40 years. The results are presented in full in Table 5.8.

Conceptual labels were attached to each factor and they are summarised below.

#### *Under 40 years*

##### **The Price of Bodybuilding (Factor One)**

The first, and predominant factor for this age grouping, associates bodybuilding with negative impacts and sacrifices. Bodybuilding was considered detrimental to relationships, social lives and broader life spheres. Participants had experienced pressure from their friends and family that they might become too muscular. Competition preparation was considered a difficult time emotionally, and at times they wished they were not bodybuilders.

##### **Pleasures (Factor Two)**

Bodybuilding in this factor was experienced as a positive and self-enhancing experience. It contributed to feelings of control – both emotionally and in terms of general life. Bodybuilding was considered healthy and enabled participants to look good, feel sexually attractive, and gain pleasure from wearing clothes that displayed their good shape.

##### **Enhanced Attractive Physique (Factor Three)**

This factor combined bodybuilding with concepts of gender and notions of enhancement (e.g., masculinity, sexuality, mental strength). Participants did not consider bodybuilding to be

**Table 5.8: Factor Analysis by Age**

<b>UNDER 40 YEARS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>Factor 1 – The Price of Bodybuilding</b>				
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods	0.73			
46. Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding	0.69			
54. Bodybuilding has made me less sociable	0.68			
41. Sometimes I wish I wasn't (or hadn't been) a bodybuilder	0.45			
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions	-0.37			
36. I have experienced concern and pressure from family and/or friends that I could become too muscular	0.34			
<b>Factor 2 – Pleasures</b>				
22. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life		0.76		
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions		0.68		
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity		0.44		
28. Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior		0.43		
30. I enjoy wearing clothes which display my physique		0.41		
39. My bodybuilding physique makes me feel more sexually attractive		0.32		
<b>Factor 3 – Gendered Body Manipulation</b>				
47. If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders			0.75	
48. The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity			0.73	
28. Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior			0.52	
37. If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance			0.43	
39. My bodybuilding physique makes me feel more sexually attractive			0.38	
50. I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug/steroid-free			-0.38	
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not			0.35	
<b>Factor 4 – Balanced Self-Image</b>				
23. I believe I have a balanced outlook on health and fitness				0.78
25. I consider I have a balanced lifestyle				0.72
19. I am satisfied with how my body looks				0.69

24. If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty				-0.45
Eigenvalue values	3.704	3.503	1.899	1.868
Percentage of variance explained	10.288	9.732	5.274	5.190
Cumulative Percentage of variance explained	10.288	20.020	25.294	30.484

<b>OVER 40 YEARS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>Factor 1 – Superior Lifestyle</b>				
28. Relative to people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior	0.76			
20. Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle	0.66			
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not	0.65			
39. My bodybuilding physique makes me feel more sexually attractive	0.64			
21. I feel "different" from other people because I am a bodybuilder	0.64			
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity	0.59			
48. The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity	0.50			
30. I enjoy wearing clothes which display my physique	0.50			
24. If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty	0.42			
53. When I tell people I am involved in bodybuilding, the reaction from women is usually more positive than men	0.38			
32. I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this	0.36			
22. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life	0.41			
51. The majority of my friends are also bodybuilders	0.45			
<b>Factor 2 – Control of Body and Life</b>				
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity		0.39		
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions		0.76		
25. I consider I have a balanced lifestyle		0.76		
32. I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this		0.57		
22. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life		0.47		
23. I believe I have a balanced outlook on health and fitness		0.39		

<b>Factor 3 – Obsessions/Addictions/Pushing Boundaries</b>				
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity			-0.31	
24. If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty			-0.36	
45. I don't restrict my diet post competition			0.76	
50. I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug/steroid-free			-0.63	
37. If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance			0.50	
31. If I wasn't involved in bodybuilding, I would still have the same personality			-0.48	
<b>Factor 4 – The Price of Bodybuilding</b>				
54. Bodybuilding has made me less sociable			0.72	
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods			0.63	
46. Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding			0.62	
23. I believe I have a balanced outlook on health and fitness			-0.34	
Eigenvalue values	5.444	3.694	2.233	1.832
Percentage of variance explained	15.124	10.261	6.204	5.088
Cumulative Percentage of variance explained	15.124	25.385	31.588	36.676

steroid-free. Rather, the use of such tools was viewed as an acceptable means to enhance physique. However, steroids are considered more acceptable for use by men than women. Muscularity was aligned with masculinity. Bodybuilding was aligned with the development of a superior physique and contributed to enhanced sexual attractiveness and a sense of mental strength. Bodybuilding is therefore seen as an aesthetic enhancement, but meanings also extended internally to the mind.

#### Balanced Self Image (Factor Four)

Finally, bodybuilding was experienced and viewed as part of a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Within this factor, if participants missed a workout they did not feel guilty. They were happy with their physical appearance and appeared to distance themselves from any activity extremes.

#### *Over 40 years*

#### Superior Lifestyle (Factor One)

The first and predominant meaning for older participants was that bodybuilding served as a way to look and feel good, especially compared with others of similar age. Participants felt healthy and sexy, and enjoyed their physiques. They felt mentally strong, disciplined, and in control of their lives. The muscularity of the bodybuilder physique enhanced the masculinity of its male participants. Within this factor, participants identified strongly with being bodybuilders – they considered bodybuilding an integral part of their lifestyle. The majority of their friends were bodybuilders. They felt different from others because they were bodybuilders. If they missed a workout, they felt guilty.

#### Control of Body and Life (Factor Two)

Within this factor, bodybuilding provided participants with a sense of discipline and control (both emotionally and also in relation to lives in general). It was considered healthy and part of a balanced outlook to fitness, health and life.

### **Obsessions, Addictions and Pushing Limits (Factor Three)**

This factor aligned bodybuilding with notions of pushing personal and physical boundaries. It grouped dietary restrictions, steroid use, and the guilt attached to missed workouts with a perception that bodybuilding is not perceived as healthy. It indicated that becoming a bodybuilder can lead to a change in personality. This factor suggested that bodybuilding might be linked to unhealthy, almost obsessive, behaviours and self-changes. On occasion, participants alluded to becoming immersed and potentially overly-dedicated to bodybuilding.

### **The Price of Bodybuilding (Factor Four)**

This factor reflected the negatives of bodybuilding for those aged over 40. Participants perceived that bodybuilding has made them less sociable and might impact detrimentally on their relationships and other areas of their lives. They also believed it could lead to a less balanced outlook on health and fitness.

### ***Factor Analysis Summary***

The factor analysis identified potential differences between the age groupings. The dominant factor for the younger bodybuilders focused on the detrimental impacts bodybuilding could have on themselves, others in their lives and on their social lives. The remaining three factors, however, emphasised the benefits of participation – the pleasures (Factor Two), the ability to enhance the physique (Factor Three), and its contribution to a healthy-balanced lifestyle (Factor Four). In comparison, the first two factors for the older bodybuilders promoted the benefits of participation. These included a better way to live (Factor One), and a means to feel in control of yourself, your body, and life (Factor Two). However, the remaining two factors suggested there were also risks and possible dangers that older participants associated with involvement in the sport – the possibility of becoming too immersed in bodybuilding (Factor Three) and potential detrimental impacts on relationships and social lives (Factor Four).

#### **5.4 ETHNICITY**

Several statistical tests were considered and trialled to explore potential differences and similarities in responses based on the ethnicity of respondents. However, due to the differences in respondent numbers between the ethnic groupings (especially New Zealand European relative to other ethnic groups), the multiple-response nature of the ethnicity question and the relatively small size of the non-New Zealand European groups, meaningful and robust statistical analysis appeared limited. In-depth interviews with participants were therefore used as the key basis for exploring ethnicity as it relates to bodybuilding identity.

#### **CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

This chapter has provided insights into competitive bodybuilding from a cross-section of statements in the questionnaire. Differences were also pinpointed between responses, suggesting meanings may differ on the basis of gender and age. These findings make a valuable contribution to the research as they provide insights from a broad range of bodybuilders. The analysis, however, lacks depth and richness. It does not explain what lies beneath the numbers. What do they mean from a ‘real life’ perspective? And how do they relate to identity? The following chapter builds on these quantitative findings by exploring first-hand with participants the reasons why they took up the sport, and what being a bodybuilder means to them.

## **6.0 BECOMING A COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDER AND WHAT IT MEANS**

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This chapter and the following two chapters examine the qualitative findings from the research. Participants describe how they became involved in competitive bodybuilding – what triggered their decisions, their pathways, and their motivations – and the meanings they assigned to involvement. These bodybuilders came from a variety of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities (see Appendix 8). Some were married/had partners and children (at home or left), others had no children and, were single and/or divorced. The majority were in paid employment; a few were retired. As illustrated in their photographs, their physiques varied. Although the participants were predominantly active competitors, some were retired.

Previous research has suggested that people become involved in competitive bodybuilding in response to self-perceived personal insecurities such as poor body image or low self-esteem (Fisher, 1997; Klein, 1993a). Creating a body that looks strong, confident, and powerful to others may compensate for such internal inadequacies. Participation may also reflect the desire to create a perfect body – one that conforms to social and cultural ideals (Marzano-Parisoli, 2001). Conversely muscular bodies may also challenge gendered bodily norms (Holmlund, 1997). The findings presented in this chapter reflect partial support for these observations, but also highlight other reasons that triggered participation. These findings are based on interviews with all participants, illustrated through use of rich accounts, which on occasion emphasise some participants more than others (Meyerson, 2008).

## **6.1 PATHWAYS AND MOTIVATIONS**

### **Starting out – the gym and weight lifting**

Before becoming involved in competitive bodybuilding, all the participants worked out at their local gyms. Initial motivations for joining the gym varied. Reasons included: to improve their general health and fitness; to lose weight; to gain muscle; to stay in shape; to support their involvement in other sports (e.g. enhance strength) or to recuperate from sporting injuries.

The examples below reflect these diversities:

*I started lifting weights when I was 59. I went to the gym just to be fit and healthy (Joan).*

*I had a girlfriend who had dumped me. It was kind of my first love and I was totally wrecked, I didn't know what to do. I guess in my hurt and anger I just said I am going to the gym. (Bob)*

*I had a sporting background from school in netball and I got involved in weight training that way. (Abby)*

*I was sick of being a little skinny weed and I was too scared to go to the gym on my own. A friend joined so I tagged along with him. (Stuart)*

Reasons varied, but despite their various shapes and forms joining the gym was perceived as beneficial to the participants' identities – it could contribute to their athletic self; enhance their health and fitness; retain their identities and/or relationships (e.g., keep boyfriends/girlfriends); serve as a form of compensation (e.g., for rejection); extend existing friendships (e.g. joining the gym with others) and/or to build new friendships; improve their bodies often in ways that reflected social physical ideals; and boost self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986; Reischer & Koo, 2004).

### **Triggers to take up competitive bodybuilding**

Competitive bodybuilding was not usually an activity participants seriously envisaged for themselves until after becoming involved in a gym. Although a few of the male participants had collected muscle magazines when they were young, these did not trigger participation in

competitive bodybuilding. Rather, they encouraged gym participation and dreams of being like a competitive bodybuilder. These magazines could also create misconceptions that served as barriers for taking up the sport. The belief that to participate in bodybuilding you had to be huge like Arnold Schwarzenegger disengaged participants from engaging in bodybuilding because they did not actually see themselves as similar to that body type or identify with it. Competitive bodybuilding was not a sport participants had been socialised into or encouraged to participate in from youth, either by parents or schools. The trigger for participation often came from direct exposure to competitive bodybuilders and the world of competitive bodybuilding.

Many participants were inspired to begin competitive bodybuilding having observed the bodies, transformations, and endeavours of competitive bodybuilders at their gym or through personal association. For example, Donna was inspired by her friend: “I saw her transformation – like, how her body shape changed, how she achieved things, her passion – the whole thing. I wanted to see how well I could do it. I have always wanted to be muscly and strong.” Seeing and meeting amateur competitive bodybuilders made these ambitions real, participants could relate to them and could envisage them as possibilities for themselves. Interventions and recruitment also acted as triggers. For example, Dave became involved through an approach at his gym. He said, “I was asked by another bodybuilder. He was experienced so must have seen some talent in me”. Sharon also referred to the encouragement of others: “I started getting muscly really quickly and people [at the gym] kept coming up to me and asking me when I was competing and why I wasn’t competing.”

However, being asked about competing was not necessarily a reflection of physical potential. For example, Stuart, although approached by others at his gym, initially did not think he was ‘big enough’ to be a bodybuilder. He described himself as this “skinny anorexic thing”. Participants were also motivated by the prospect of improving their body. Conan reported a thought he had

when drinking a beer while sitting next to his competitive bodybuilding friend, looking down at his own soft, flabby stomach: “I looked over to him and made the connection”. He began training with his friend. Fay and Harry, however, described themselves as being in good shape before becoming competitive bodybuilders. They entered ‘best body’ events for fun. Fay said, “I did it for a lark and after that decided to do a proper bodybuilding show”. For Tammy, competitive bodybuilding functioned as an extension of her own bodily pursuits and a goal that provided added purpose: “It was a cumulative thing. They always had the bodybuilding results up at the gym. People would come up to me and ask what was I training for? So I thought maybe I should have some kind of goal – aiming towards a point – as opposed to just training in a general fashion.” Shona was encouraged to take up the sport by other bodybuilders at her gym; she had recently lost her husband, and they thought this would give her a new focus in her life.

Participants also included those who had originally joined the gym for other sporting reasons, but discovered they enjoyed bodybuilding and that the rewards associated with it were greater than their existing sport. Allan explained: “I had only joined the gym for two weeks [as part of my sport] and I was building muscle. People encouraged me to enter a competition. I didn’t train for it but won – I came away with all these trophies – so no more league for me.” In summary, the research found a range of reasons underpinned participation decisions, and although these findings were not dismissive of the literature (Fisher, 1997; Klein, 1993a) they highlighted its limitations. The following section discusses participant experiences of competitive bodybuilding after they had taken up the sport.

## **6.2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BODYBUILDER?**

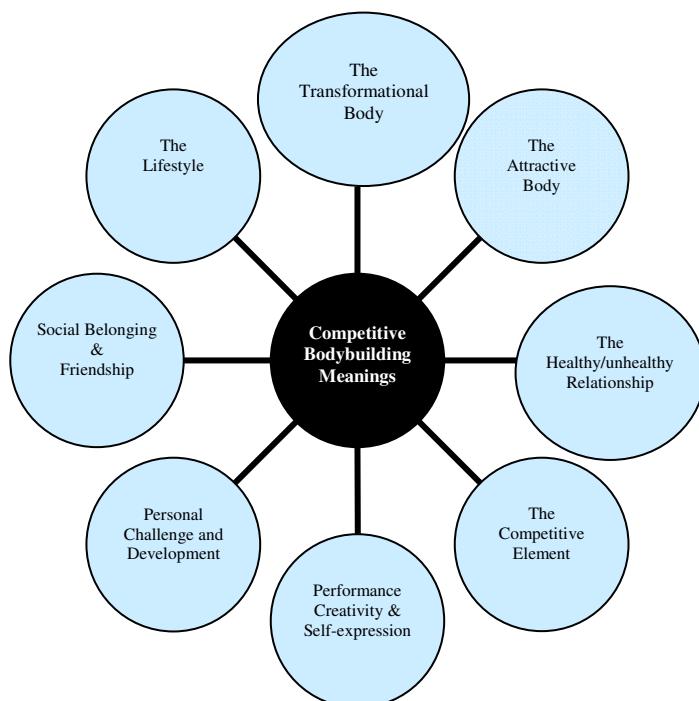
Identity is about ‘meanings’ (Burke, 2001). Although participants may *undertake* competitive bodybuilding – share a common role and participate in similar practices (Vryan et al., 2003) – what this activity *means* to them, how they identify with it and how it connects with their broader

sense of self, may also be subject to individual variation (Burke, 2001; Jenkins, 2004). Identity is therefore a combination of meanings reflective in part of their attachment to a common group, in this case competitive bodybuilding, but also of their individuality - their personal identity.

Investigating bodybuilder 'meanings' (Burke, 2001) was undertaken by:

- a) listening to the life stories and experiences of the participants and extracting key themes from that process; and
- b) directly asking participants, what bodybuilding or being a bodybuilder meant to them.

This strategy was consistent with a grounded theory approach as it did not use preconceived ideas or categories. The bodybuilder meanings that were identified through this process were grouped into key themes, which are displayed in Figure 6.1. As participants' accounts often related to more than one of the themes and the themes were not necessarily self-contained, where appropriate, the relationships between these have been identified. Not all the themes were addressed by all the participants. However, they represent, in totality, the range of issues discussed by the participants.



**Figure 6.1:** Competitive Bodybuilding Meanings

### **a. The Transformational Body**

Bodybuilders, their bodies, and their identities have been described as closely connected (Monaghan, 1997), which was confirmed in this research. Participants frequently referred to their body - what their bodies meant to them, how their bodies made them feel, experiences they had concerning their bodies, and also the reactions of others. Previous literature has often depicted these relationships as homogenous, static, and focused on muscularity, internal inadequacies and/or the pursuit of bodily perfection (Fisher, 1997; Holmlund, 1997; Klein, 1993a; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001). However, this research found these relationship to be more about the transformation of the body, its development potential, and the relationship between past, present and future self.

#### ***Bodybuilding as a vehicle of transformation***

Participants were passionate about competitive bodybuilding because it enabled them to sculpt their bodies through their own endeavours. These were reflected in the following extracts:

*I think bodybuilding is the only sport I know where you can manipulate your body, chisel it to a certain way. (Zara)*

*I love seeing the changes – the changes in everything. (Abby)*

*I liked how to manipulate my body and other people's bodies and how to get into that kind of condition. (Steve)*

Bodybuilding was seen as a vehicle of physical transformation and self-design. It entailed working on physiques, and improving them and/or creating the types of lean, muscular bodies participants desired. Photograph 1 illustrates this concept through the bodybuilder's commentary on his body and his perceptions of the progress he made contextualised within his genetic potential:

*This photo was taken last year – the end of last year – I can't remember exactly what date – but it was probably just after a chest workout. I was happy with that. I have always*

*had good traps. I don't really train them too much now – I did them tonight - but they have always been really good. My tris are coming out a lot and my chest as well – it has come out a lot.*



**Photograph 1:** Bodybuilding as a vehicle of physical transformation

When bodybuilders discussed their bodies they did not view them as fixed, but rather as malleable mediums upon which they worked. Being a bodybuilder was associated with a culture that enabled and supported these activities. It provided a defined structure, process, goals, benchmarking, social support, and a reward system that underpinned their bodily improvement and transformation endeavours. Examples of the diversity of ways that competitive bodybuilding supports these undertakings and also the role of events in motivating participants and providing focus and accountability to their goals are provided below:

*I need to have the competition there as a way of putting in place a goal system to achieve results. I need a deadline to get in and improve my body and to pull out all the stops. It is something I can measure. (Brian)*

*I know how to lose weight but I am lazy but if someone says “here is the date of the competition – you have to lose 8 kilos by that date”....I have a date and I don’t want to look fat on stage, so I do it. (Heidi)*

*Unless you are actually doing competitions you don’t get a lot of that shaping which gives you that chiselled look – the development of the muscles and maturity of the muscles, so to speak. From dieting, competing and going off-season, and building more – that process builds you quickly and enables you to develop that bodybuilder frame. (Bob)*

### ***Different Agendas and Transformational Experiences***

Transformational experiences, however, were not the same for all participants. While there were commonalities, there were also differences in terms of why people chose to transform their bodies, in their preferences, and in the meanings they associated with these experiences.

#### ***Bodies were not a blank canvas***

When people came into bodybuilding, they and their bodies were not a blank canvas. They carried with them memories from their past, matters concerning their current lives and/or future aspirations, their relationships, links with other facets of their identity (e.g., age, gender, background, ethnicity and culture); personal idiosyncrasies, characteristics significant to the self, values (e.g., being healthy, moral, competitive, disciplined), their physical makeup (e.g., size, shape of body, hair and skin colour, genetic makeup), concerns (e.g., fear of ‘fat’), and dreams (e.g., having a body like ‘Arnold’). As a result, the stories, journeys and pathways the bodybuilders attached to their physical transformations differed. Abby, for example, associated her transformation with reclaiming the glory of her former sporting body, which rekindled a sense of what she had lost – that she had ‘let herself go’ – and now her body and self was not only back

on track, but enhanced. She said, “I remember feeling happy given the body back of my athletics days or even better than that”. For Shona the process was significant because her transformation occurred at a later phase in her life – her late 40s/early 50s – and at the time of becoming a widow: “It was meaningful doing it when I did”. For Bertha, bodybuilding was about achieving the strong, muscular body she had desired from an early age but had not considered possible or even acceptable: “I said to my Dad I want to be a weight lifter when I grow up, but that was never an option because girls didn’t do things like that.”

Differences in meanings suggest that although some bodies may externally appear similar, their underlying connections with self-identity may differ considerably. For example, Anthony, Bob and Brian all had large muscular bodies, but the meanings they assigned to them were quite different. Anthony’s transformation was personally significant; it contrasted with his past which was embedded with the lived experiences of fatness, unattractiveness, and a lack of social acceptance:

*I was always the chubby one. My two brothers were skinny and I wondered why am I the unlucky one? Then I went to school and the kids they were so cruel to you. They would say “you fat bastard”...I discovered bodybuilding and I thought that is what I want to do.*

Bob, conversely, had an athletic body growing up. For him transforming his body enabled him to be like a hero:

*My body was nothing unique...[but] it was a dream, to be a hero and the way the media portrayed it. The big guy was always the hero.*

Brian viewed his body as a means to acquire dominance and to create a barrier:

*I really wanted to be bigger than my Dad. I came from a rough background – a bit like Once Were Warriors – and to get any respect, you needed to be big, imposing and all those things. And that is why I engaged in bodybuilding. I didn’t want people to walk all*

*over me and I thought the best way to stop that was to be big. It is a barrier, isn't it?*

*Something that I can put up in front of you and I.*

### ***Body Preferences***

With the exception of gender differences, research has often depicted bodybuilders as a homogenous group who pursue a common physical ideal – often that of excessive muscularity (Gillett & White, 1992; Klein, 1993a). This research found that although there were bodily ideals that were influential to the bodybuilders (e.g., competitive guidelines concerning muscular, lean bodies), participant tastes and preferences were subject to individual variation. Bodybuilders liked different types of bodies, and aligned themselves with different role models, often depicting what was achievable or desirable for their physique. For some transformation was more centred on muscularity; for others it was about leanness. There were varying physique shapes and looks. Conan said, “I want to be big, but I don’t want to be freaky big”. He wanted to evolve a ‘package’ of enough mass not be competitively overlooked, but one that was symmetrical, well conditioned and defined. Stuart aimed for a more athletic, muscular look, which he believed was realistic for his body type and more in keeping with his self-view. Brian strove for size – he wanted to be huge, like the pictures in the international bodybuilding magazines. These differences highlighted that not all competitive bodybuilders were the ‘comic book’ pro-normative muscular identities depicted by Klein (1993a). Rather, within bodybuilding there were a diversity of male muscular agendas (Monaghan, 1999b).

Diversity was also discovered in the bodily agendas of the female bodybuilders. Bertha sought to maximise her muscularity. For her there were no limits to be placed on muscularity and she jokingly referred to this as her ‘mental illness’. Kate also appreciated the visibility of muscularity: “I want to be one of those girls walking along the road and people look twice because you have a bicep. And people do. I mean people come up to me and say “oh my god” – they look at your muscles and I get a kick out of that.” Sharon enjoyed muscularity but for her it was

transformation within muscular boundaries: “I like being muscly [but] there is a cut off line...I like being feminine”. Although diversity in bodily agendas have been noted in male bodybuilders (Monaghan, 1999), the variances amongst female bodybuilders has attracted less attention. Admittedly, there has been discussion of the differing competitive categories, such as Figure and Physique (Choi, 2000), and of the social concerns of excessive muscularity, (Choi, 2003; Dworkin, 2001). These factors, however, focus more on the externalities rather than the heterogeneous nature of female bodybuilders who consider that there are choices concerning bodily design.

#### *Natural bodies, gifts and struggles*

Although bodies were malleable – and bodybuilding provided tools to help such sculpting – physiques were not canvases on which participants could freely self-design – bodies provided opportunities, but they also contained limitations. They could be influenced by genetics, sex, and age. Some bodies lent themselves to bodybuilding but others could struggle to achieve the desired outcomes – as with ballet dancers, bodybuilder bodies could prove hard or easy to mould into the desired shape (Aalten, 2007). For example, Shona lamented her lack of deltoid muscles: “My triceps and biceps are okay. I like my back – my back was my best part but I just don’t have any delts. I see people on TV, tennis players and rowers and they have these bulging delts ...I love them ...but trying to get them....it didn’t matter whether I tried low reps and heavy or high reps and light – I can’t get any”.

#### *Initial and Ongoing Transformation*

Transformation, however, was not only about constructing muscle it was also about becoming lean and defined – ‘cut’ for competition. Although bodily transformations could be realised through ‘normative’ dieting and weightlifting practices, the changes competitive bodybuilders experienced were heightened through their more intensive form of training and dieting. Muscles were developed and then exposed as participants became lean – often to new levels not

previously experienced. Changes were often dramatic – condensed within a defined period. There was a sense of “before” and “after” that was measured, documented, reflected on, and celebrated. This process showed their bodies in a new light, and the inaugural experience of the novice competitor was often one of disbelief. As Gavin explained:

*I couldn't believe the condition that my body could get into. I had biceps and I had abdominals and they were showing and I had these funny separations in my legs and, wow, look at my calf ...I was at the gym and I just wanted to wear a singlet and shorts and it was all about me. So it was really an exciting new time. I guess it is like falling in love with someone for the first time. It is just different and you haven't been there before.*

Transformation and change, however, did not necessarily end there. They became processes viewed by participants as ongoing – a continued exploration of one's bodily potential that might assume an addictive quality. Gavin explained:

*You look at yourself and wonder can I do better? What do you have to do? So it becomes a challenge, more of an obsession – can I better myself? Can I do this? Can I do that?*

Transformation goals were therefore not static, but continually reviewed – goal posts were frequently moved outward, becoming more ambitious on realisation of their own efforts and those of others. Physical transformation was viewed by the participants as an ongoing journey between the self and the body.

### ***Coming to Know their Bodies***

The knowledge acquired from bodybuilding was applied and tested by participants on their bodies. Participants continually evaluated ‘what worked’ and how their bodies responded to various strategies of training, diet, rest, and recovery. They tailored their processes, developed their own recipes (Roundtree, 2005), and ‘came to know’ their bodies. Dave explained:

*The good thing about this sport, especially if you do it regularly like I do, is that you know exactly what your body does, what it needs and what it doesn't need and I have got*

*that down to a fine art. I have gotten to know my body more than anyone else because I have put it through the process so many times.*

### ***Body Projects***

#### *Bodies as Distant and Objective*

As bodybuilders continued to work on their bodies, their bodies often became not just an embodied part of their ‘being’, but a ‘thing’ they were passionate about and interested in. Brian explained: “Some people have hot rods and some people like hot rods. It is what they do. For me, I have this body. It is my thing. Pretty much everything I do is governed around improving this body”. Bodybuilders often talked about their bodies as though they were objects distant and separate from themselves. They objectified them as ‘body projects’ as Shillings (2003) described - they were entities on which participants worked as extensions of their identities in an almost impartial way. The bodybuilders also discussed and viewed their bodies differently from normative social ways. To them, their bodies were not ‘whole’, but composed of muscular parts, particular shapes such as the V-taper (wide shoulders, narrow waist), and measurable compositions such as body fat percentages. Janet explained: “Before, a back was a back but now I see it as different parts, and my body is, like, made up of my back, legs and so on”. Photograph 2 illustrates the female bodybuilder singling out the development of her legs. She states:

*I like the way my legs turned out in this photo. Probably the most cut they have ever been.*

*Someone said they look like French loaves.*

This attitude and form of body talk was part of the socialisation process participants acquired through involvement in the culture. It was the language they used to describe their ‘tool’ of the trade; Klein (1993a) made similar observations.



**Photograph 2:** Body assessments, parts and pleasures

*Bodies as Personal, Connected and Emotional*

However, bodies were not always viewed as distant, objective or controllable entities by the participants. The New Zealand research found that the relationship between bodybuilders and their bodies could also become very interconnected and emotionally entangled with the self. Bodybuilders did not have an ‘absent presence’ (Leder, 2004; Shilling, 2003). On the contrary, they were conscious of their bodies this affected how they felt about themselves. Sometimes this experience was positive and empowering, for example, Donna said, “I feel stronger. I feel a sense of achievement when I am lifting more each time and learning more exercises”. These connections reaffirm the pleasures of bodybuilding already acknowledged in existing research (Monaghan, 2001b). Bodies could, however, also serve as a point of frustration, uncertainty and despondency for participants. Bodybuilders experienced a mix of emotions, including highs and lows. The range and complexity of their experiences with their bodies have rarely been acknowledged or recorded in previous research. Assessments concerning their physique could be

subject to changes, from day-to-day, moment to moment, and situation to situation, as Conan indicated:

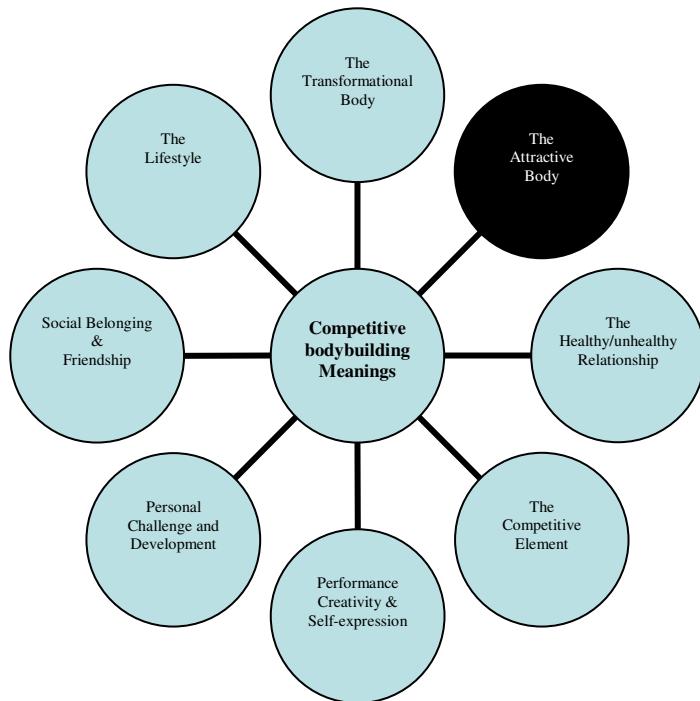
*I am always finding ways to grow that body I have always wanted to have. But then sometimes I ask myself, “Am I ever going to have that body I have always wanted to have?” ’Cos I am always looking in the mirror thinking I am small. But on other days I am in the gym and I look in the mirror and I think I am huge. I will ask (my partner) and she will say she has seen it all before. ’Cos as big as I am now, she will say that I am bigger than Jo Average, but I am always comparing myself to people who are bigger than me. It is never quite enough. I have ups and downs, but I am not depressed. But sometimes I feel not quite happy about how something might be coming along. Like my lats took a while to come out, but now I am happy with how they are coming along...and I have started to feel a lot better...it is a never ending thing.*

Bertha experienced mixed emotions about her body, depending on her mood, perception, and context. She would catch a glimpse of herself in a shop window and “surprises herself with how big she has become” despite viewing herself regularly in the mirrors at the gym. She comments:

*I can’t see it in myself – I still feel as big as I was in 2001. Now and again I forget that I am big. I don’t feel big. It is not until someone sees me who hasn’t seen me for a while says “Oh my god, you have gotten so big since I saw you last year”...you don’t see the changes in yourself.*

Having ‘big days’ and ‘small days’, Bertha could experience her body differently depending on whether she was benchmarking her body relative to her ‘everyday social world’ or ‘competitive bodybuilding world’. She often felt small when thinking of her competitive self, though by normative standards she was a very muscular woman: “I always feel like I am small. Or I need to be bigger for the shows”. Tammy defined her perception of her body similarly: “I felt like a weed. [Yet] I knew that compared to every women at my work I had a lot more muscle on me and a lot less fat”.

Competitive cycles could also influence bodily perceptions and the state of mind. Bertha referred to her body as ‘bloatey’ and ‘smooth’ because at the time she was still dieting towards an important event and was therefore not in peak form. These embodied physical-mental experiences highlight how unfixed bodily perceptions can be in the eyes and minds of bodybuilders – they were not a stable vision, entity or experience, there could be multiple ways they could view their bodies. These experiences also showed that despite their attentiveness to their bodies, participants could experience ‘blind spots’ (Crossley, 2006a), where their bodies could catch them out with the changes that had occurred. The relationship between bodybuilders and their bodies was therefore a complex one.



### b. The Attractive Body

#### *Bodies as attractive and omnipresent*

Existing research has associated bodybuilding with notions of vanity, and the pursuit of getting in shape and conforming to social bodily norms (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1988; Dutton, 1995; Monaghan et al., 1998). This New Zealand research found that competitive bodybuilding appealed to participants because it served as a vehicle they could use to look physically in good

shape. Vanity accounted, in part, for participation and enjoyment of the sport. Fay acknowledged, “I don’t deny it, I like looking good, and part of bodybuilding is about getting the photos and saying ‘Hey, I look good’. Bodybuilding provided goals to motivate people to get into, and/or stay in shape. Heidi said, “I always joke that it is good to do the [bodybuilding] nationals because it gets you skinny for summer. Maybe that is why I do comps each year – to get looking the way I like looking”. However, the physiques the bodybuilders created were not restricted to the competitive or training arena – they were literally and visually attached to their state of being and everyday existence. They were omnipresent, and this generated opportunities they could use advantageously in other settings – work, socialising, public life, even walking down the street.

#### *Feeling sexually attractive*

Monaghan et al. (1998) reported that bodybuilders may feel more sexually attractive as a result of their bodies, and this was supported by the New Zealand research. According to Brian, looking good to others often underpinned bodybuilding motivations: “I think it is for sex – to impress people of the opposite sex...and it is usually to impress other people in some way, and to get huge”. Participants admitted that their muscular, lean bodies made them feel sexy and/or sexually attractive. Anthony spoke of some reactions from women:

*You know that the girls want it. You can tell by the way they look at you. You can see that a lot when they walk down the street. They feel you a bit – like when you see one and she touches you – you know, ‘Hi, how are you?’ and their hand runs down your chest a bit – you know what they are doing.*

Donna, who had previously not considered herself sexually attractive, and had even resisted viewing herself in this light, referred to her new sense of sexual awareness and attractiveness since participating in bodybuilding: “A lot of girls are ‘hot’ when they are skinny and toned, but now I think I could be kinda hot”. While Donna referred to her own enhanced and altered sense of sexual attractiveness, Tammy commented on the changed response from men:

*Sometimes people hit on you, which is rather strange...just because of the physical aspect, I think. They saw you as being presumably in better shape than most people, or would have liked a more muscular women...I don't know...just curiosity I would imagine.*

This suggests that bodybuilding has the capacity to not only enhance sexual attractiveness, but also to change some of the dynamics that underpin it. For women, these included the possibilities of muscular eroticism. For men too there was a potential change in dynamics, according to Anthony: "They [women] do look at you now, more like a piece of meat – like they just want your body".

#### *The pleasures of attractiveness*

The pleasures of looking good related both to the self and/or to how they were experienced in the eyes of others. Fred explained that he liked to look good as a personal pleasure: "I like to look good but for myself. I don't dress in singlets or anything to show off." Stuart, however, said he not only liked looking good, but also enjoyed the sense of displaying his physique to others: "Normally I would be considered a bit of a poser for buying this shirt. But, hey, I don't care. I buy it because I have earned it. I have put in a lot of work and I deserve to show off a little." Stuart felt pride and confidence in his body and considered its display symbolic of the investment he had made in his body to look that good.

#### *The benefits – beyond skin deep*

The bodybuilders admitted that being attractive could also make a positive difference to their lives and self-identity. They emphasised the increased confidence and self-esteem they had acquired from improving their bodies. Donna said, "I am more confident. Not just feeling stronger but feeling that my body image has changed". Participants felt happier within themselves, at peace, enthused, empowered, and excited about life. Their enhanced confidence not only changed their perception of themselves, but also their general engagement with the world. Anthony said he was no longer "the fat bastard" who was teased at school; now the girls

wanted him and guys wanted to have a body like his. Bodybuilding had therefore released them from less desirable identities and the way they were treated by others. Becoming attractive opened doors and had a snowball effect, as Bob explained:

*I have had more opportunities because you are a person that people want...you meet a lot more people so become better known, when people think of someone to do a job or whatever they might think of you ...so it becomes a bit of a cycle...it certainly has changed my life, my personality. Without a doubt it has changed my opportunities - it has changed a lot of things.*

#### *Not being attractive - points of departure*

There were times and places, however, when bodybuilders believed their faces and bodies could look unattractive. Stuart said he was nicknamed Skeletor in the final weeks before competing as he had become so gaunt. “I had a photo of me taken the night before my competition – before I had my face tanned up - and I looked hideous – like death warmed up. My face looked shrunken in and I was dark around my eyes. It was just bad”. Abby also stated that at this time, bodybuilders acquired ‘the fish face look’ – “That is when people started saying “Oh, this girl at my office is bodybuilding and she looks old. She has the body of a 20-year-old and the face of a 60-year-old”.

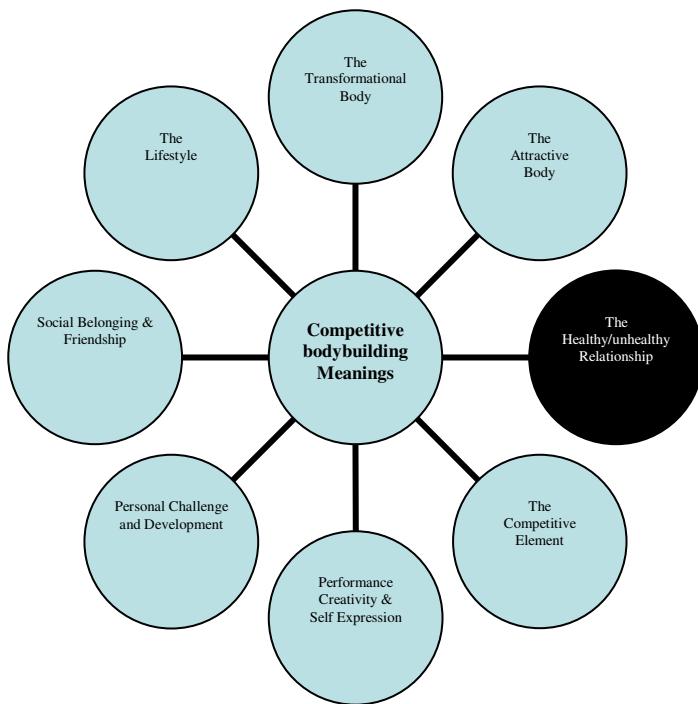
When bodies became too muscular they could be seen as socially unattractive. However, this was only the case with a few participants, whose experiences are discussed more fully in Chapter Seven, under gender implications relating to Multiple Identities. The majority of participants in the New Zealand research perceived their bodies within the social bounds of acceptability – they were not freaky or gross (Klein, 1993a; Wiegers, 1998), but attractive, desirable, hard muscular physiques (Reischer & Koo, 2004). This contrasts with previous research, which has typified competitive bodybuilders as always being excessively muscular (Klein, 1993a).

Given that they focus considerably on their bodies and appearance, bodybuilders have often been conceived as vain, narcissist creatures (Dutton, 1995). However, some of the New Zealand participants did not perceive themselves as being attractive or necessarily enjoy looking at themselves. For example, the bodybuilder in Photograph 3 had difficulty finding a photograph of herself that she liked, and when she did, commented as follows:

*I hate photos of myself. I just do...I don't like looking at myself...I don't think I look that nice.*



**Photograph 3:** Bodybuilders, attractiveness and self-assessments



### c. The Healthy-Unhealthy Relationship

Bodybuilding was not only about looking good – the responses of New Zealand participants showed bodybuilding was also about being and feeling healthy. These perspectives contrast with the previous research, which has predominantly portrayed competitive bodybuilders as extreme, unhealthy persons with a tendency towards steroid use, disordered eating practices, and bodily obsessions (Carman, 2001; Goldfield et al., 1998; Klein, 2001a; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001). Although Monaghan (2001b) has argued that bodybuilders can be considered healthy as they ‘look’ therefore ‘feel’ healthy, this limits the possibilities of health to one of appearance. This current research found that many New Zealand participants viewed bodybuilding as healthy in ways that went further than skin deep. It was a complex relationship, however, as being a bodybuilder also required exposure to unhealthy practices (Probert, Palmer, & Leberman, 2007b).

### ***Bodybuilding as healthy***

Before becoming involved in bodybuilding, some participants referred to their former selves as leading less than healthy lives. Bodybuilding had required them to change these habits – it had led to improvements in diet, exercise and cutting back on drinking. Other participants stated they had always been health-conscious; therefore bodybuilding was considered a complementary extension of this facet of their identity.

### ***Bodybuilders as fit, healthy and vibrant***

Bodybuilding enabled participants to feel energised, fit, healthy, and strong, as well as contributing to their sense of vitality and physical well-being. Heidi stated, “bodybuilding is there to make you fitter, healthier and stronger. I am not just in it for the look or to win”. Kate explained:

*I am strong and I like being strong and being physically fit and I think if you look it you tend to feel it too, but I am. I maintain good fitness. I mean most bodybuilders don't run but I try to run most days ....I can go out for a run, and run for an hour... and I get a real kick about going to the gym and going really hard out – doing all these supersets until we are absolutely knackered but feeling really good and that we are fit as well.*

The bodybuilder dietary regime was considered beneficial to health. Abby explained: “bodybuilding is about eating heaps of fruits and vegetables, eating plenty of good lean protein and exercising every day”.

Bodybuilders felt in tune with their bodies, its dietary requirements, its needs, and how it functioned, as Bob indicated that “bodybuilding has taught me a lot about my own body and what it responds to. It has taught me a lot about how to look after myself and how my body works”. Being active, eating well and extending themselves physically and mentally contributed to healthy functioning. Shelly said, “When I go to sleep it is like ‘boom’ – you’re out. It is that good solid sleep”.

### *Mental-physical benefits*

Participants also acknowledged the mental-physical benefits to bodybuilding. According to Dave, “when you live a healthy lifestyle and you are in great shape your self-esteem is always at a high”. Bodybuilding could contribute to an enhanced sense of life balance and/or a better quality of life. Stuart said, “if I hadn’t joined a gym, work would have driven me batty. It serves as a release at the end of the day and puts me back on an even keel. It is very, very beneficial”.

### *Focused, purposeful, in control*

Being a bodybuilder meant having a regime, and being structured, driven, and goal-oriented. It created a sense of order, control, mental focus, and purpose, and being ‘centred’ in life activities. All these contributed to personal well-being, as Shelly explained: “It sets me for the day”. When participants did not engage in their regular training or eating regime, they referred to themselves as feeling unhealthy, lacking in energy, personal control, and focus, and being out-of-sync with themselves and life.

### *Being drug-free*

Although many participants believed that bodybuilding was healthy, there was a proviso – that it was undertaken without the use of drugs or steroids. Allan commented, “it is a healthy sport as long as you keep natural”. Steroid use was often perceived by the bodybuilders as unhealthy. The natural bodybuilders differentiated themselves from the more ‘extreme’, steroid-taking bodybuilders on the basis they were more into bodybuilding for reasons of health. They believed that their motivations differed. Abby explained, “I think the separation is that those that choose to go to extremes, take drugs, no matter what and it is at about whatever cost to health or pocket and then there are those who do it for a better quality of life”. (See discussions of “extremeness” in section 6.2d Competitive Element and of steroid use in Chapter Seven in section 7.1 Gender).

### *Healthy role models*

Bodybuilders considered themselves and/or were viewed by others, as healthy role models and/or health experts. They were asked for dietary and exercise advice by friends, family, and work colleagues. (As this was emphasised more by Pacific Island and Māori bodybuilders it is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven in section 7.0 Ethnicity).

### ***Bodybuilding as unhealthy***

#### *Cyclical impacts – going to the extreme*

Participant admitted that participation was not always healthy – even for those who engaged in it as a ‘healthy’ activity. Competitive bodybuilding was a cyclical sport and it could be extreme. During their off-season the bodybuilders reported they often felt healthier – they could eat more, they had more vigour, and there was more flexibility in their regimes to accommodate adjustments in response to their energy levels, state-of-mind and lifestyle. However, competition required and rewarded an extreme physique. This meant that in the months preceding the event they engaged in intense dieting and/or cardiovascular activity to decrease their body fat levels and expose their musculature. During this phase participants reported they experienced fatigue from lack of food, and they become tired, hungry, and lacking in physical energy. Mentally, participants often found it hard to think and concentrate, and some experienced mood swings (e.g., became weepy, short-tempered). The intensity of training and dietary restrictions could also prove socially isolating and alienating, even contributing to the break up of relationships and friendships. Further details concerning these practices are discussed in Probert et al. (2007b) in Appendix 9.

#### *Steroid use*

Although the majority of participants elected not to take steroids, three participants were identified as steroid users (two male, one female); two were former users and a further participant

was considering its use. The users acknowledged that there were health risks associated with steroid use and some had experienced them first hand (e.g., 'running hot'). They believed, however, that the medical perspective was often exaggerated and generalised, and that the risks associated with use could also be controlled to a point. This reflects consistencies with previous research entailing steroid using bodybuilders (Grogan et al., 2006; Monaghan, 1999a). However, while the research has often portrayed steroid users as homogeneous, the New Zealand research found they were perceived as varied in their steroid habits, motivations, and perspectives on health. Those interviewed reported having health checks and in this respect could be considered health conscious, but they mentioned others who took significant amounts of steroids, lacked appropriate knowledge, and exposed their health to considerable risk.

Steroid use could also make a positive contribution to participant health and well-being. Brian stated, "the main side effects, from steroid use have been very positive. I feel empowered by them. I have gotten huge". Bertha reported she felt better when she was taking steroids than when she was not: "I feel good. I feel strong. I feel healthy. I say "Sorry, honey, but maybe I should have been born a boy because I only feel normal when I am full of male hormones." The steroid users were also critical of the 'healthy position' adopted by the natural bodybuilders as they believed they were downplaying the risky practices entailed in competitive bodybuilding (e.g. extreme diets, use of diuretics). Simply electing not to take steroids did not necessarily constitute healthy bodybuilding.

#### *Guilt, eating disorders and unhealthy weight control*

Bodybuilders did experience difficulties changing from competitive dieting to healthy, off-season eating patterns. Attempts were made to retain unsustainable weight and dietary regimes and bodybuilders experienced guilt about eating, as perceptions changed to reflect food choices that were seen as 'good' or 'bad'. There was uncontrollable binge eating of 'bad' foods, post-

competition weight ‘blow outs’ and declines in body image. This topic is further discussed in Chapter Seven as it relates to Gender, and thus Multiple Identities.

*Becoming obsessed, unbalanced, very inward looking*

Previous research has referred to participant addictions to bodybuilding (D Smith & Hale, 2004), however the majority of bodybuilders did not view themselves in this light. They acknowledged that some bodybuilders could become obsessed with the sport. Furthermore, in the final weeks before a competition, participants often became very inward looking and self-focused. Becoming immersed in their bodybuilder-self to the exclusion of many other dimensions tended to be a reflection of the increasing intensity of the process and also how the participants coped physically, mentally, and emotionally in the face of declining reserves, as Todd explained:

*I think getting down to a low body fat, you are playing with your mind and your body...bodybuilding is probably okay except for the last 6 or 4 weeks before a competition. You are vulnerable [craving, hungry] for food. You feel quite weak, and in that time frame you are quite self-centred on that competition date, making sure everything is coming together, yeah, ...it can start playing on you.*

Participants, however, considered themselves predominantly balanced in their outlook, although their lives were busy and they had minimal free time. The bodybuilders were driven characters with full schedules. ‘Obsessiveness’ to a point was also considered necessary for their identity, as Fay described:

*I think both the condition and the sport of bodybuilding are obsessive. To be a bodybuilder you have to be obsessive, 'cos you need that drive, you need that discipline and dedication, which are all good things for bodybuilding. You need to have that kind of personality. You can't have a laid back personality...a 'she'll be right' personality 'cos you would never be able to stick at it, so there is definitely an obsessive behaviour*

*there...a prevalence towards that sort of person [but] it can easily flick if you have those tendencies.*

Bodybuilders also mentioned that while they were often admired for their commitment to their bodybuilding goals, some experienced pressures to adopt a more ‘balanced’ life. For example, Janet said she felt obligated to try to fulfil a more “idealized image” in this respect (Caproni, 2004) as this was considered healthy and ‘normal’. She discovered in the process, however, it was not conducive to her well-being. She explained:

*I have tried to be balanced. I have tried to copy other people but it isn’t me. So because it isn’t me, I have failed and I have found it just too much effort. It is just too much hard work. I am just too used to being unbalanced. I don’t think I have ever been balanced ... Like this morning, I got a text at 3 am saying “I can’t sleep let’s go train now”...so I did. And that is just insane.*

#### *Negotiating the unhealthy/healthy relationship*

The participants often engaged in practices that were both healthy and unhealthy in bodybuilding and although these relationships could prove contradictory, especially if self-identity was strongly associated with health, they often resolved them through negotiation, which rendered them consistent and/or acceptable. Bodybuilders downplayed their participation in unhealthy practices as temporary and necessary for competition. In this way they distinguished their extreme self from their off-season ‘main’ identity, which was considered healthy. These views are conveyed in the following extracts:

*In the next couple of weeks it probably isn’t that healthy – but the rest is okay. (Fred)*

*They [the pre-contest practices] are necessary to achieve the [competitive] look. What bodybuilders look like on the day – it is short lived. (Abby)*

Bodybuilders could portray and consider themselves healthy (or less aligned with unhealthy, risky practices) on the basis that they knew what they were doing – they were knowledgeable, skilled, and in tune with their bodies, as demonstrated by Fred's comment:

*There are not a lot of risks if you are doing bodybuilding properly – if you are listening to your body and taking rest time. Recovery is important. You have to realise you are not a machine. It can be a good side to improving your life.*

Although some unhealthy practices might be seen as necessary for competitive success, they were not necessarily standardised and bodybuilders made variations and choices in their application. In this way they constructed identities that could depict a particular stance, for example, favouring health over risk or fanaticism, as reflected by Heidi:

*I know some bodybuilders who diet the healthy way and some people end up in hospital, basically. So it is as healthy as you want it to be. Some people just want the look. They don't care what they do to their bodies in the long term.*

Health was seen as a relative, not absolute term. Bodybuilders could be healthy or unhealthy depending on the criteria and how they viewed themselves relative to others – the comparable people and/or groups they selected. These notions are depicted in the following examples:

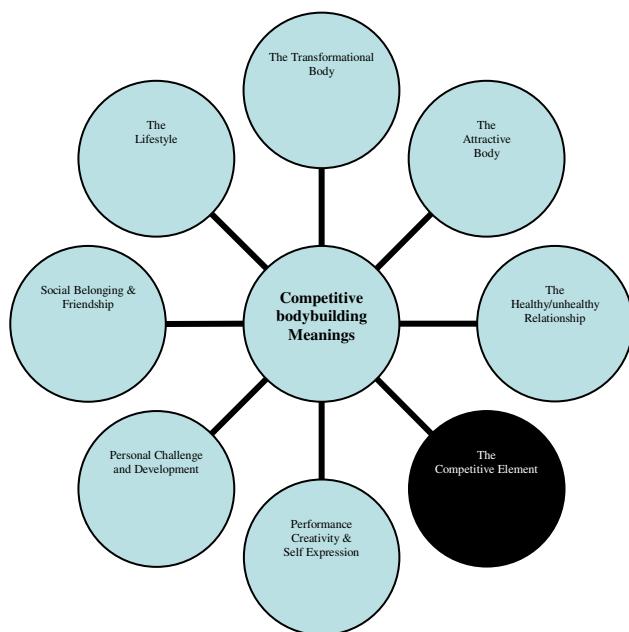
*The drugs certainly don't make it healthy. But then again, what is healthy these days? If I wasn't a bodybuilder, I wonder would I be a piss head and obese from eating takeaways? So I guess it depends what you measure it against. (Brian)*

*People say it [competitive bodybuilding] is unhealthy and unnatural. Sure, it is. But rugby is unhealthy and unnatural. You are going to get broken bones; you are going to break something or other. I would rather spend my time and money on gym membership and supplements and go along and improve myself. And then they would say "Oh, the diet is bad for you" – and maybe over a long period of time it is but over a short period*

*of time it is a great kick start for your body. The overall results for it certainly outweighed the bad points associated with it, anyway. (Stuart)*

Bodybuilders also challenged the normative ‘popular’ notions of health. Steve questioned whether intense dieting and the competitive leanness of bodybuilders made them unhealthy, arguing, “just because the person looks lean and the person looks like a survivor from the Second World War it doesn’t mean they are unhealthy – it just means they are really lean”.

The extremeness of competitive bodybuilding was cognitively reframed as an extension of a participant’s inner toughness, commitment and discipline. For example, Abby defined the experiences of overcoming dizziness from extreme dieting as a reflection of inner strength and personal resolve: “I am inspired by anyone who will get up there and have the balls to finish that journey ’cos so many people start it and say (sigh) I had to pull out...I was low in carbs...I was dizzy...so many excuses”. Bodybuilders turned the meanings associated with unhealthy possibilities to a healthy, positive and internal strengthening, reasoning that their short-term exposure to unhealthiness contributed to personal betterment and well-being. These notions are further discussed in this chapter in section 6.2f on Personal Challenge and Development.



#### **d. The Competitive Element**

Whether competitive bodybuilding constitutes a sport and bodybuilders can be viewed as athletes has been debated in the literature (Klein, 1993a; Thirer & Greer, 1978). Coakley (2007), however, has pointed out that these types of positions can not be reduced to assessments relative to standard criteria, but should accommodate the culture and context within which the activity takes place and how it is perceived and experienced by the participants themselves. This research discovered that New Zealand bodybuilders viewed themselves as athletes, competitors and that bodybuilding was a sport.

##### *Bodybuilding as an extreme sport*

Competitive bodybuilding entails taking the body and self to the extreme. It was described by participants not just as a sport, but an extreme sport. It was therefore viewed as risky. These concepts are reflected in the following extracts:

*Bodybuilding is an extreme sport and it can be easy to go to the extreme. (Brian)*

*Bodybuilding is an extreme sport, especially competing. Any athlete that goes into an extreme sport is going to take a risk. (Steve)*

*Overall, bodybuilding has been a good thing but I can equally see how detrimental it could be. It is a pretty fine line and actually I think it is quite a dangerous sport. (Janet)*

##### *Competitive identities*

###### *Being competitive*

Many participants described themselves as competitive. However, the significance of these aspirations varied, and distinctions were sometimes made. Some bodybuilders competed frequently whereas others competed periodically. Some participants strove for international competitiveness; others were nationally and/or regionally focused. There were also differences in terms of the importance bodybuilders attached to winning, what it meant to them, and how they

viewed others in this respect. Insights of competitive diversities are reflected in the following responses:

*My goal each time is the Nationals and bettering myself – coming in leaner, coming in dryer, coming in harder, coming in better. (Gavin)*

*I am not there to win. I am there to look better than last time, so I am competing against myself, not the other people. But it is always nice to get a trophy, if you have a chance to get one. (Heidi)*

*Well, I want to win. I have spoken to other girls who are doing it for their own reasons, and good on them, but I just can't equate to that...it is too much hard work, so why would you?. (Janet)*

Competitive ambitions could also change. Having learnt the process as a novice, been exposed to other participants, benchmarked themselves, and understood the competitive hierarchy, ambitions could be accorded greater priority, as Abby explained:

*The first one [competition] was nice – not having any aspirations, and then [after that one] I decided to give it a little more and be a little more competitive ...The following year I was determined I was going to win the regionals in my class.*

However, bodybuilders who had previously been very competitive also stated that the significance they attached to winning could decline. Fred was an example:

*It was really important for the first one [to win] and for the couple of years I competed after that, but this year I don't even seem to care. It is more about how much better I can be personally. I have no idea why it has changed. I probably still want to win but it isn't my main reason for competing anymore.*

### *Being extreme*

Competitors were also differentiated in terms of how extreme they were. Some were considered more extreme than others. These were individuals bodybuilders considered to be highly

competitive, more risk-oriented and uni-dimensional in their focus. Heidi explained: “You have to be extreme to be a winner, basically. You have to be. A lot of people do it for different reasons and the ones at the top are the extreme ones.” Extreme and/or elite bodybuilders also tended to be more associated with steroid use. As Fay commented: “I think there are probably 10% of bodybuilders who do it [take steroids] – usually the top 10%. It is always the people who are winning...not in the novice ranks but at the top ranks”.

Extremeness also reflected how people incorporated bodybuilding in their life – whether this was undertaken in a balanced way, the amount they spent, and the sacrifices they made. However, what constituted ‘extreme’ was also found to be a relative, not absolute term and could prove to be a subjective assessment. Some participants were competitively ambitious among the bodybuilding elite and also took steroids but they did not necessarily view themselves or their lifestyle as extreme. Bertha, Bob, and Brian all considered their use of steroids as necessary to be successful at their competitive level. Bertha said: “there is definitely that line where you ask ‘Am I going to be the best in New Zealand or am I going to take it this step further’? Brian acknowledged that bodybuilding had now become so important to him that other things often took second place. He referred to his life as unbalanced but observed that “the ones who seem to be the best, seem to be the ones who also sacrifice the most. The ones who spend the most time, give it the most priority, tend to be the most successful”.

Bodybuilding filled Bob’s life, limiting other things he could do. But unlike Brian, Bob believed he was relatively balanced, arguing, “you can’t just say ‘I am going to be the most successful bodybuilder’ and go all out and breathe bodybuilding to the limit because you will burn out...when you balance it out, you will achieve better when you come to do it”. Bertha, conversely, did not consider herself as extreme or unbalanced in her life. In fact, she believed her outlook was very relaxed: “training is only 4 hours a week – unless it is pre-contest – and then that only lasts for 8 weeks. Competing does not take a lot of time”. She distinguished herself from

other bodybuilders, who she believed were much more extreme, stating, “there are people that I have travelled with and they are, like, ‘God, I have spent x amount of thousands of dollars on this show or that show. I am on my credit card overdraft. People, my family, are cutting me off because they can’t handle my mood’. But I don’t do any of that. I think it is the way I do it”.

### ***The Subjective, Uncertain and Personal Nature of Competition***

#### *Subjective judging*

Participants considered the competitive arena of bodybuilding different from many sports, as the criterion for winning was a subjective process. Although there were rules and criteria, judgment in bodybuilding was not an exact science. Harry explained: “it is not like you are running a 100-metre race and it is clear that person has won. I mean, in bodybuilding it is up to the judges.” As in sports such as figure skating and gymnastics, factors such as differing interpretations, ideologies, politics, and personal preferences were perceived by participants as influencing judgment (J. Ryan, 1996). As a result, the process could lead to participant disenchantment, as Abby highlighted:

*You can be in your best physical shape and be on stage but still not win – it is completely out of your control. When you have done everything you can and believe you are the best and it doesn’t go your way, it is very hard. You’re, like, ‘What do they want – do they want me bigger, leaner, rounder?’ It is quite confusing.*

Competition was therefore unpredictable. Furthermore, bodies were also an unpredictable competitive medium for the participants when preparing for competition. Despite their attentiveness to diet and conditioning, bodies could hold water and lose definition. There was a lack of certainty how they would ultimately look on the day. Despite coming in well conditioned at a particular show, bodybuilders could compete a few weeks later and their bodies may look significantly different. Nothing was safe or guaranteed, even for the competitively elite. Bodies could deteriorate and/or new and upcoming physiques could peak brilliantly on the day

overshadowing all others. Due to the unpredictability of their bodies, performance improvement in bodybuilding did not necessarily translate into competitive improvement or success. This difference from many other sports was emphasised by Abby:

*When I was doing athletics, if someone beat me 1 week I had 2 or 3 weeks to go away and work on that and I then when I came back, if I ran a certain time or jumped a certain height then I knew I had a pretty good shot at beating them. But I found it was different in bodybuilding.*

#### *Reconciling the objective and personal body*

The uncertain, subjective nature of competition, coupled with the interwoven way bodybuilders present their bodies for judgment, meant that the personal (emotional) and athletic identities were often entangled. It could be hard to objectify sporting performance when what was performed was also inextricably part of the self. While bodybuilders might work on their bodies in quite an objective manner – separate from the self – the body and self could also become united in competition and become very personal. To retain a positive sense of self, especially when competitive judgment was not favourable, the bodybuilder could strive to distinguish the body and self again – to objectify the process; in other words – to detach their body and its performance from their body as self and personal. As indicated by Vivian, this is sometimes easier said than done:

*They are judging you on your body so it incredibly difficult not to take that personally. You have to learn to be incredibly thick skinned, so that is something you have got to really, really work at.*

#### *The athlete experience*

Despite scholarly debates that have questioned the bodybuilders' rights to be classified as such (Klein, 1993a), the research found that New Zealand participants often referred to themselves as athletes. The following section provides insight of these experiences.

### *Back-stage competitive interplay*

Bodybuilders frequently researched their potential competition. Bodily benchmarking was undertaken in gym settings, bodybuilding web sites were checked, and recent competition photos assessed. On event day, during pumping up before going on stage, participants continued to benchmark their physiques. Shelly said:

*By the pictures on the web site I was thinking, ‘She is looking good but I think I am going to be okay’. But at weigh-in, she was actually lighter than me. So I looked at her and thought, ‘Far out – she is certainly going to give me a run for my money’. She looked fantastic. I just thought, ‘You know, that will teach me to think that I am okay’, because you just never know what competition is going to be before you. I went back to my room and said to my husband, “She looks good – I am going to really have to try my best”. I thought it was just going to be the two of us, so I thought, ‘Okay – worst scenario, I am going to get second’, but when we went to the pump room I saw the little blonde girl and she looked really good too. So I thought, ‘Wow – there is three of us’. So I just thought, ‘I have no idea what the outcome was going to be, I have just have to get out there and do my best’ – not that I wasn’t going to.*

Psychological game-playing could also occur as a ploy to throw the confidence of other competitors. Kate commented, “she [a competitor] walked up to me and effectively told me she was going to beat me in my class. That was before we even competed. So I just kinda smiled and said, “That’s good. Go for it”. ....you fuckin’ bitch. They are just trying to psyche you out”.

For those competing for the first time, the back stage arena could prove a daunting place – an alien environment and an arena where values were sometimes challenged. Tammy explained:

*It was quite weird...I mean, there were all these nude people and I am not that great doing nude...I was thinking, ‘Oh, my god’, I wasn’t sure how I felt being nude in front of*

*all these people...I meant you weren't nude, nude...but you know ... unclothed in front of all these people...you felt a bit lost.*

Novice bodybuilders often felt nervous, experienced self-doubts and sometimes very much on their own, as Simon observed:

*My trainer wasn't going to come out there and hold my hand. The mirror wasn't going to be in front of me so I could see if I struck the pose right. All that was going to be with me were those competitors I had been with all morning who for some reason looked twice the size of you because the amount of doubt in yourself...all you could see is their muscles.*

Novice competitors often prepared and coped in this setting by watching and imitating other bodybuilders, but with time and experience they knew what to expect and do. Vivian stated:

*It is like driving a car. You have to think about everything you are doing when you first learn how to drive a car, like to push the clutch in and then change the gear. But then suddenly you are driving without even thinking about those things anymore. You are not even thinking about putting on your indicator anymore, you just do it. I guess that is what it is like when you are preparing for a competition.*

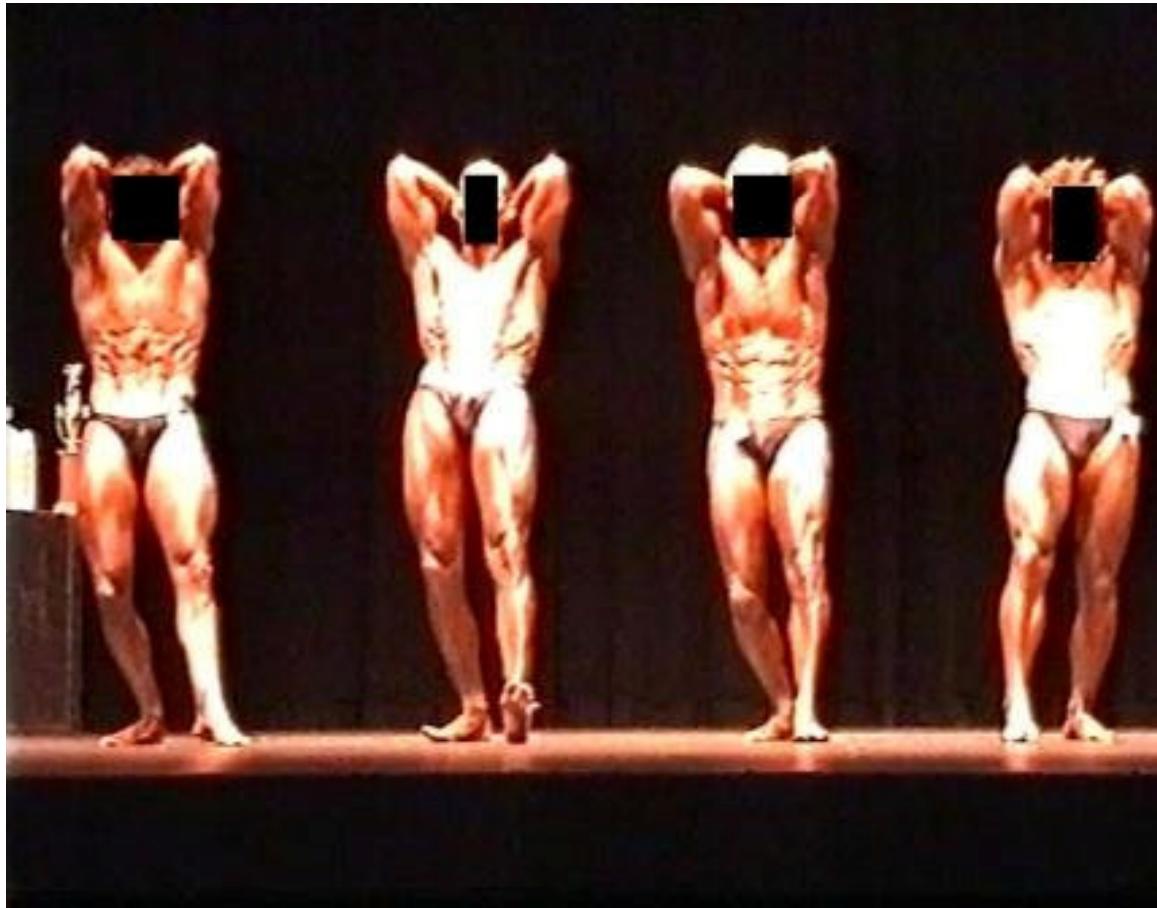
#### *On Stage – mandatory posing*

The mandatory posing session was often intense and focused. Although they were in a line up, participants frequently functioned in their own little world – concentrating on their poses, being attentive to the judge call-outs, listening for their trainer's voices, often blocking out and/or oblivious to the wider crowd and competitors standing next to them. Stuart said:

*People would say to me, "Didn't you notice the guy next to you, he seemed bigger than you" or whatever, but the thing is that you don't. I mean you know there is someone there but you don't see them. I was that involved in what I was doing and thinking about getting into the right positions that I don't even notice the rest of the people.*

The accounts of the female participants were very similar. Shelly stated, “I was trying to remember to tighten everything and it was important that I wasn’t leaning too far back or too far forward, so that it was showing the right muscles off and striking the poses correctly, so it was showing off the most I had to show off”. The mandatory competitive posing, benchmarking, is illustrated by the participant on the far left in Photographs 4a & 4b:

*This is the Front Abdominal Thigh shot – there was twelve of us lined up – I was, like, out of breath, as you are [see 4a]; and my other favourite one [see 4b] is my Back Double Bicep – I like that shot – I didn’t realise how wide my back was.*



**Photograph 4a:** The Mandatory Posing Line up. a) Front abdominal thigh



**Photograph 4b:** The Mandatory Posing Line up. b) Back Double Bicep

The inward focus and intense concentration of the bodybuilder on stage as he/she physically and mentally engages in posing could be viewed as a form of flow when there is a synthesising of mind–body–task in the course of sporting engagement (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The intensity of the mandatory posing, however, often differed from the more free-flowing routine section. During this phase of the event the pressure in terms of judgment was off, and this provided opportunities for the bodybuilders to take the stage individually, display their bodies to music in self-styled ways, and express themselves more freely. This created greater avenues for being performative and creative. The implications for participant identity in this area are discussed separately from their competitive and athletic experiences (see section 6.2e on Performance, Creativity and Self-Expression).

### ***Presenting the Self – The Importance of Confidence***

To maximise competitive success, muscular poses needed to be mastered and displayed with confidence. This meant assuming a stance that was big, wide, firmly positioned, and looked strong. Competitive bodybuilding was not an arena to be modest in terms of physique or of bodily conduct – to act ‘small’ or assume a hunched posture. As Shelly said, “on stage I am trying to look like I am confident and knowing what I am doing and holding my whole stance. You know, really be confident in my poses”. Gavin agreed, “on stage we have to portray it [vanity]. We have to look good. We have to look confident. We have to look bigger. It is a look of confidence”. Bob explained:

*You almost have to have an attitude of – not arrogance – but a certain amount of belief in yourself that creates a confidence that could be misled as arrogant, because if you don’t, then you are letting the competition get to you and that sense that you are self-doubting.*

*As soon as you start to self-doubt, not only in your mind do you doubt but you don’t even strike the poses properly.*

While vanity and narcissism has been traditionally viewed as an affliction (Carroll, 1989; Rubinstein, 2003), the research found that within the New Zealand competitive bodybuilding context it was an asset, a learned behaviour, and an important facet of athletic identity necessary for competitive success.

### ***The effect of competitive outcomes***

The bodybuilders experienced pleasure, a sense of personal reward, and feel-good sensations when they experienced favourable competitive outcomes. This is illustrated by the participant in Photograph 5:

*This is a photo of the first comp I won. It was at the nationals. It was my first place trophy ever after years of competing. So it meant a lot to me. I had actually won something. I couldn’t believe it. It felt almost better than winning the world cup one. I*

*just wanted to win something...anything....after 4 years of competing. So when I look at that photo I feel that feeling.*



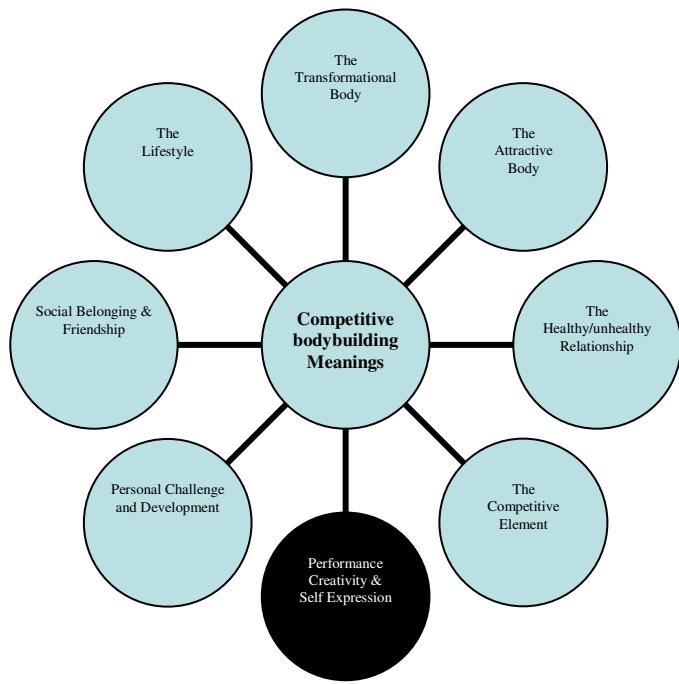
**Photograph 5:** Winning and emotion

However, bodybuilders also had to cope with competitive loss, and this could have emotional and identity consequences. As Anthony stated:

*If you come away with a win you think, ‘Sweet, I’ve got the potential and I’m number one’ but if you come away with a second – and I have only done that once because I was out of condition...but I was still a bit hit by it. I thought ‘God...man’. I haven’t been to a comp really shredded and come second yet. But when that happens I could definitely imagine being really pissed off and going, ‘Shit – am I good enough to compete or am I just not good enough?’.*

Competitive loss could lead to a loss of face, a decline in pleasure, and the questioning of self-worth, sporting ability, and the value of continuation. However, participants could also vary in their interpretations of its significance and their coping styles. Dave said, “I see bodybuilders who

really want to win a show, and when they don't, then you never see them again...then you see those who don't take it to heart if they come second or third...but you're bound to see them at the next bodybuilding comp".



#### e. Performance, Creativity and Self-Expression

Klein (1993) believed that what bodybuilders did on stage was not sport, but art and/or exhibitionism. Orejuela (2005) has also highlighted the artistry and performative components of competitive bodybuilding. This section provides additional insight to this literature and discusses that while some participants perceived bodybuilding as a creative, artistic and/or performative experience, not all of them did.

##### *Bodybuilding as Artistic and Creative*

For some participants, bodybuilding was an artistic and creative experience. However, this did not only occur on the stage but also in the gym and through their broader experiences of the activity. Conan explained he felt like an artist when he worked his body: "like a carver who carves wood – that is how I sort of see it – sculpting our bodies – like our bodies are a canvas and our tools are our food and our training. We see something that we want to shape and we work at

it. We make a masterpiece". By sculpting their physiques, bodybuilders engaged in a process of body (self) design. They were artists applying their craft – using specialist tools and knowledge of the trade to manipulate their bodily size, shape, muscular components, and fat levels.

### ***The Art of Posing***

Artistry was attached to posing the muscular body. Fred believed there was art in displaying the body attractively and to its best effect: "when I pose [on stage] I know exactly what will make me look good. I see other bodybuilders and I think, 'Why are you posing that way? You looked better doing it the other way?' It is always about trying to create an X-shape – making your waist look as small as possible and your shoulders as wide as possible and doing poses that suit it". This is illustrated by the participant in Photograph 6, a comparatively small framed individual, who explained, "posing is about creating illusions – making yourself look big, even though you may be quite small". The photograph reflects his artistic mastery in making himself look big.



**Photograph 6:** Posing as Artistic

### ***Posing and Routines – Creative Distinctions and Preferences***

Bodybuilding was creative and performative – especially the free flowing routine. These experiences often differed from those of the more defined competitive posing element of the event. Zara stated she felt more able to express herself when doing a bodybuilding routine: “I used to dance. When I do the routine, I really enjoy listening to the music. I feel I can really express myself on stage. I wouldn’t do public speaking but through music and body movement I can”. Harry explained how the choice of music that accompanied the routine was important: “I like rock but it is no use having a rock song if you can’t hold your poses to it. You have to go with the music – with the beat. And the next beat usually means it is your next pose. [If the beat is too fast] no one will be able to see what you are doing”.

Bodybuilders choose music with a consciousness of its performative suitability and its ability to connect with the audience – something they can recognise, enjoy, could move and clap to. The choice of music could also reflect other identity dimensions. Donna chose Christian music to perform her routine to, explaining, “I wanted to show people that Christianity is still the first thing in my life. It would be seen as part of me as well...being a Christian. So I wanted to bring that into bodybuilding and I don’t enjoy other pop music”. Being on stage and performing their routine was an opportunity to provide insights of their personality.

Bodybuilders could make a personal statement, as illustrated by the participant<sup>4</sup> in Photograph 7.

He stated:

*Someone said that I look camp in this photo [laughs], but I like it. To me it says that getting up on stage isn’t all serious. It is also about having fun and being entertaining as well.*

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<sup>4</sup> The participant provided permission for his facial expression to be displayed and also for the accompanying quote.



**Photograph 7:** The stage as an arena for personality and entertainment

The routine section of the event was not always favoured by bodybuilders – some understood they did not have a flare for movement and sometimes they simply enjoyed the comparative benchmarking of the set poses. These views and distinctions are reflected below:

*My routine is my biggest scare because I am not really a good, free-flowing mover and to do it to music – well, I don't dance. So I do a routine that is real easy. (Michael)*

*I definitely like just doing the standard mandatory poses a lot more than doing the routine because you are actually comparing ....like, it is not like you are dancing, so that makes it harder, but with the compulsories I loved doing that because you are comparing the muscle group exactly with someone else's – you are in a line up – comparing and you can't hide anything. (Anthony)*

### **Creative or practiced body techniques**

Although participants referred to the advantages of being a natural mover and having creative flair, posing and routines were also learned and practiced (Crossley, 2007; Mauss, 1973). In others words, whilst the bodybuilding routines might appear ‘creative and free flowing’, they were also shaped by appropriate movements, behaviour, and even the emotions the bodybuilders adopted (Duquin, 2000; Thoits, 1989; Zapf & Holz, 2006). Photograph 8 highlights the art of posing, but also how it is culturally mediated and mastered. The participant states:

*I like that photograph because it actually shows that with everything he ever taught me with this particular pose, I hit it [the pose] right. So I like it and I gave him a copy and had it signed and professionally done for him. You could tell from the look on his face that I had finally cracked it.*



**Photograph 8:** Displaying the triceps: Learning and mastering posing

Although routines provided avenues for creativity, movement, and individualism, they often consisted of combinations of these practised manoeuvres strung together in free flowing styles. Furthermore, although some bodybuilders developed their own routines, others engaged experts to help them formulate their ‘creative’ performances – Conan did this:

*My friend gave me a whole script of movement – like using your fingers – creating a picture – a visual image. Sort of looking at it as an art form. I mean, you have a 12-week lead-up to a comp but you only get 60 seconds on stage – so you might as well make the most of those 60 seconds to show your personality as well as give off your best poses and capture the audience with these little things – and these were little things which I would never have thought of.*

#### ***Pleasures– fame, recognition, appreciation, connection and exhibitionism***

Being on stage provided an opportunity for participants to show-case their endeavours before others, and although this element of the contest did not count towards their evaluation, some participants went to a lot of effort. Such an opportunity provided recognition and reward before an audience appreciative of their achievements and there could be pleasures associated with these experiences. Insights of the staged experiences are reflected in the commentary of the participant in Photograph 9:

*This photo was taken at the end of my routine....I did it too fast and finished early. I thought, ‘Fuck, what am I going to do?’ as the music was still playing, so I did this pose...Your routine goes by really quickly [and despite being on a stage] you can’t see the crowd...you see an outline - but you don’t know who the hell is out there...there could be bloody anybody. I did my routine to Tom Jones, called “Kiss” ...as soon as it started the crowd started clapping and it felt good. ...I won my class ....Later in the evening the compère introduced me to the crowd and everyone started clapping and, man, they didn’t even know me.*



**Photograph 9:** Identity, stage and crowd

Some bodybuilders enjoyed the stage because they liked to show off, to be in the limelight.

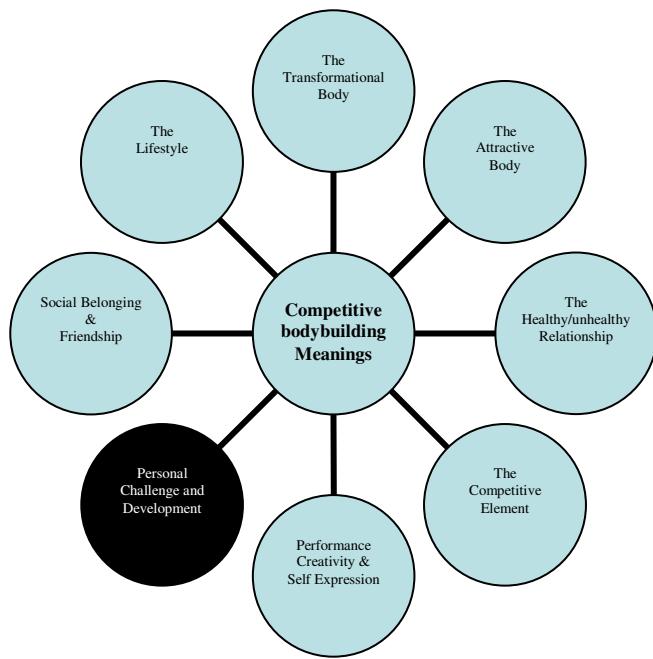
Performing appealed to the exhibitionist in them. As Brian stated:

*What springs to mind is getting out on stage in front of all those people, thinking that I will be petrified but actually loving it. Just getting out on stage and the response – loving it and not wanting to leave. On stage I discovered the performing side of things and I found I had a great affinity for that – relating to the crowd, the crowd response, putting together a great posing routine and showing off what I had – I enjoyed the showman side of things.*

Although exhibitionism has been clinically associated with deviant behaviour it has also been identified as a motive and pleasure that athletes may attach to their sport (Recours, Souville, & Griffet, 2004). Sport is not only a place for athletic encounter but also an arena where participants can be seen, impress others, and engage with their audience. This notion is captured in Anthony's commentary:

*I think you are either a person who goes out and really loves it or a person who goes out and is really nervous and thinking ‘Shit what am I doing here?’ I was one of those people who went out and really loved it. I just liked the stage. It was for me, and the crowd definitely makes a huge difference. It was a good crowd and they were clapping at every pose. If they are one of those quiet crowds it is not really that fun. If they are not clapping you kinda think, ‘What is wrong with my physique?’ So, yeah, the stage is awesome. It is exciting.*

But this perspective was not shared by all bodybuilders. Joan acknowledged she felt awkward on stage, was not an exhibitionist and felt uncomfortable being the centre of attention. She deliberately developed humorous performances to cover her self-perceived lack of skill and affinity with the performative dimension of the sport, explaining, “I do something stupid every time because I am not a dancey person or a posey person...so if I do something silly and I make a mistake it doesn’t matter”. However, Joan’s strategy ironically drew attention to her performance and presence. She became known in bodybuilding circles for her performances and people came to watch her perform. While this conflicted with her self-view and comfort as a performer, it contributed positively to her sense of belonging as a bodybuilder. (These connectivities are further discussed in Section 6.2g on Social Belonging and Friendships).



#### **f. The Personal Challenge and Development**

Although previous research has predominantly promoted bodybuilding as an external, aesthetic pursuit (Fisher, 1997; Holmlund, 1997), the research found that New Zealand participants did not necessarily, or solely, compete in bodybuilding because they had a physique that suited the sport and/or for the competitive rewards. Bodybuilding was also very internally experienced and viewed as a personal challenge. Preparing and competing in a bodybuilding event was perceived as a goal-oriented activity, with a structure, outcome, and sense of accomplishment that was meaningful for the bodybuilder.

##### ***Reasons for challenging the self***

Meanings and motivations aligned with the challenge often varied. For some participants, the underlying challenge could be physically focused. For Donna bodybuilding was about building muscle and “proving to myself and others that I have a great body”. For others, it was a means through which they could extend themselves – not only physically but mentally. Fred said, “I would have done weight training and been happy but bodybuilding gives me goals. And it has

given me a steely determination to achieve". Competing provided focus, achievement and outcomes for his endeavours – an internal drive. It may not only be about the task itself, but also to demonstrate its completion, as explained by Tammy: "it is about the fulfilling of the goal – the completion of it – saying that you have set this goal and have followed it through." Bodybuilding was about an inward, private sense of accomplishment. For Shona, competing meant, "Striving for something – wanting to achieve the result – whether you place or not, as you've done that challenge and done it for yourself".

Participants used bodybuilding as a means to deliberately explore their comfort zones. Bodybuilding provided an avenue to challenge their self-assessments, to do something new, discover and test new dimensions of the self and/or to redefine themselves. This was often the case with novice bodybuilders, as Stuart said, "my whole goal, well part of it, was to step outside my comfort zone, go on stage wearing basically nothing but simply a pair of underwear, plastered in some fake brown stuff and have people judge you on something you haven't done before. So that was a challenge". For participants, bodybuilding was a way of proving to themselves they could over come the odds. Some had experienced difficulties in their lives in terms of health or personal set-backs, and competing in bodybuilding was a form of self-validation, strengthening and/or a means to move forward. Bodybuilding could be symbolic. For example, Jake decided to compete in memory of his brother: "my brother was playing rugby and all that and all of a sudden he had a car accident and he passed away. But he was talking about [competing in] bodybuilding. So I decided to continue that desire for my younger brother."

### ***The nature of the challenge***

#### ***Having the desire***

To compete in a bodybuilding competition was not an easy goal. Transformation into competitive shape – even for those with naturally muscular bodies – required strict training and dieting over

several months. There had to be a real willingness – a passion for the goal and its accomplishment. According to Fay, “you need to want to do this 100% to complete the process. You need to want it more than anything, and for those people who want it more than anything else it is easy. But for the people who don’t really, it is a struggle”. Bodybuilding required high levels of dedication, a willingness to make sacrifices, and a sense of inner toughness. Dave said, “the thing with bodybuilding is that you need a lot of commitment, a lot of dedication. If you don’t give it 110% then it won’t work”.

### *The importance of the mind*

While the outcomes of bodybuilding showed visually on the body, it was the mind that was crucial in the transformation process. Bob explained:

*The mind is the most powerful force you have in this sport. It will determine whether you will complete this set or not. If you train your mind, you can train your body further. To be able to train your mind, you have to be able to understand yourself and understand a lot about limitations and stuff.*

The mind had to be focused on the goal. Allan observed “you have got to have your whole mind 100% focused on it, otherwise you can’t do it”. To succeed required unwavering focus, discipline, and commitment. Bodybuilding was therefore not an external aesthetic pursuit, but one that participants viewed as reflective of, and highly connected to, the internal character and drive of the person. These connections are illustrated by the participant in Photographs 10a and 10b, who commented, “*the separation and definition of muscle is important [in bodybuilding] – it shows you have put the work in. That’s why I like these photos. It shows you are committed – have a commitment to win the show*”.



**Photograph 10a & 10b:** The mental-physical connection

Fay also explained: “bodybuilding is not a physical test. What you see on stage is the end result.

Bodybuilding is a very internal thing”. Bodybuilders were often reflective beings. In the course of working on their bodies, they appeared to think a lot about themselves, their lives, and the lives of others. They could also be very philosophical creatures. This is illustrated by the participant in the Photograph 11, who commented:

*I like this photograph because it is, like, complete. I am just happy. It is not a training or posing photo. It is very much me. I am a thinking bodybuilder. It is like one of those moments when you stop to smell the roses...it is kind of like that. I do actually think about the sport as much as I train. I do stop and do consider where I am at and consider what is next. That is why I like this one.*



**Photograph 11:** Bodybuilding as not only outward but internal

*The need for organisation, structure and a regime*

Bodybuilding required a structured plan and good time management. Participants evolved step-by-step plans towards goal accomplishment – measuring and monitoring progress along the way. They became regimented creatures who could recite their routines. Stuart provided insights into his regimen:

*On an average day nearer the competition I would get up in the morning and have two glasses of water, a black coffee, down some fat burners, buzz off to the gym, walk on the treadmill for up to an hour. Walking along there...watching TV – the religious programmes first thing in the morning. You then stumble off at the end of it, thinking, 'Great, it has finished. I can now have a protein shake – a low carb protein shake'. I*

*would then go to work. I would have a measured amount of untoasted muesli and some extra egg whites that I had microwaved.*

Activities such as eating, resting, and training occurred, not with a sense of freedom or choice, but in carefully timed patterns and with precision. These were necessary in order to evolve their competitive physiques. Donna described the changes required in her dietary regime when she first took up bodybuilding:

*Before I could choose my food; I always used to have protein powder but with milk, and it tasted nice, but now I have to have it with water – I am fine now, but when I first started it was gross. Before – I just had meals when I wanted to – now it is more structured – this time I am having this, and at that time I am having that – exactly 6 meals during the day. It is planned.*

### ***Learning***

Bodybuilders used personal trainers, nutritionists and/or existing bodybuilders to help them evolve a regime. For the novice, the process was complex and there was a lot to remember. Some taught themselves through trial and error, books, and videos. They imitated the experienced bodybuilders. The initial weeks were often positive for the novice. There were reassuring physical changes (e.g., the sight of becoming leaner and/or more muscular) and they felt enthusiasm for their newly embarked-upon challenge. As the process intensified, however, they began to lack energy, and experience hunger and temptation to depart from their regimes. It became tough. Pre-conceptions and initial enthusiasms could be challenged, as Kate explained: “no one really prepares you for the emotions you are going to go through, and the diet, no one says ‘Once you cut out the carbs in your diet you are going to turn into an emotional wreck and making the bed will become a real chore’”.

When significant discomfort occurs, the normal response of people is to ease up, to make adjustments, and to remain within an acceptable realm of comfort. But the bodybuilders discovered they were expected to tolerate and accept discomfort. As Abby commented:

*When you first do it [the pre-competition phase] you are trying not to believe that is all you can eat. You are trying to find other ways – trying to make things up. But each time you do it, you have more acceptance of what is involved.*

Experienced bodybuilders played an important role in educating the new bodybuilders on this ‘acceptance’ process. Mary received the following guidance:

*If you said, “It is getting too tough” or “This is just an awful thing”, then people would say, “It is not going to last forever”...and, you know, “Just work through it and you’ll get over it” – so then you just figured, ‘Okay, I’ll just work through it then’.*

Progressively participants came accept the norms of competitive bodybuilding. The discomforts (e.g., hunger, tiredness, and social sacrifices) were often necessary in order to create their competitive physique. These experiences also defined them – symbolised their inner strength and commitment. Those who made it onto the stage were celebrated, and their identities were confirmed. Those who ‘gave up’ were considered weak and lacking in the necessary qualities of a competitive bodybuilder.

This did not mean that it became easier. Dieting, training and maintaining regimes remained challenging, and continued to affect bodybuilders’ energy levels, health, and moods. Even experienced participants struggled at times to continue and were tempted to give up, as Darren acknowledged:

*Some days I feel like crap. I get up and wonder why am I doing this? Why am I out on the road at 5 am? Why aren't I asleep? It is pouring down with rain and I am still walking. I am by myself. So those are the moments that are hard. No one is with me and I have to push myself.*

Regimes impacted on bodybuilders' lives, their family, their work, and their social lives (see to Chapter Seven for more details on Multiple Identities). Over time however, they refined their schedules and developed their personal recipes for success. Furthermore, with a record of success and consistency, they gained credibility within their social group. They had mastered the process and were increasingly viewed as role models – identity ideals that inspired and influenced others. Once established, however, the bodybuilder identity could not be taken for granted – it still had to be maintained. Competing was necessary, at least on occasion, to demonstrate the participant still had the commitment, qualities, and skills to face the challenge of the competitive process. Kate explained: "you still have to do what you did the previous year and it is still just as hard. It is about following on through and maybe about showing yourself and maybe everyone else that you can [still] do this".

### ***Maintaining Commitment --accountability and coping strategies***

This research discovered that New Zealand participants developed strategies to help them remain committed and successful. Some utilised public accountability. Janet said: "if I am going to do something then I will tell everyone because then I can not give up. It just ensures I follow through. So I sort of have to do it then". Participants also enlisted the help of training partners, friends, husbands, and wives to keep them on track – to watch what they ate, to ensure they turned up for training, to ensure they did not act on temptations. Bodybuilders maintained journals, documenting their training, eating, progress assessments; and they often disclosed those to others. They looked to other bodybuilders for inspiration and motivation, frequented bodybuilding web sites to read the accounts of other bodybuilders, to make contact and to support each other.

While these strategies helped, there was no easy path for goal achievement. Allan commented, "there aren't any magic pills", and Abby added, "the secret is that there are no secrets". Kate said:

“I say to myself I am tired, I am stressed. But then you realise they are all just excuses. You either want it or you don’t”. Bodybuilding ultimately came back to the individuals and their commitment to the challenge. These were processes that could not be delegated and the results showed visually on bodybuilders’ bodies at the bodybuilding contest. These difficulties, however, were often forgotten – overshadowed in the glow of achievement. As Mary said, “you think to yourself ‘I am not going to do that again’ but then you do the competition and once it is all over you forget about all that. It is quite funny really”.

### ***The value of challenging the self***

Succeeding translated into experiences of achievement and accomplishment. It enabled participants to prove to themselves that if they want something enough, it could be achieved with self-determination and self-belief. The sense of faith in oneself and the determination to achieve despite the obstacles is illustrated in the following story related by the participant in Photograph 12:

*I am the one in the middle. That was taken when we went to Vegas. That is muscle beach. They are all from here. I had just arrived 2 days before the competition. I wasn't selected to go to that competition. I didn't make the team because I didn't win my class, so I paid my own air fare so I could go over and compete because I wasn't happy with the decision over here when they selected the team. So I wanted to prove my point, so I paid my air fares and I went over there and I won the whole thing. But on the day I was supposed to fly out at 4 pm and my visa, it didn't come through until 12. I was panicking as I had already booked and paid for my airfare and I was waiting at the American Embassy. My visa finally came through, so I picked it up and went straight to the airport and I arrived over there, went straight to the hotel dropped off my bags and I went down to the beach and they were just taking photos, so I just jumped in and there we were. And I won my Class and the overall. So this photo reminds of what I went through to get there.*



**Photograph 12:** Personal challenges and achievements

Participants found the challenge self-defining. It tested their character, inner strength, and resolve.

According to Heidi:

*A lot of people, when things get hard they just give up. Just the fact they have a goal weight to get to and you stick to it, even if you are killing yourself over the last couple of weeks just to get down to it to achieve your goal weight – it is a good test of character.*

Competitive bodybuilding extended them beyond their ‘normal’ comfort zones and in the process they often discovered inner strengths not previously realised. This made them feel ‘tough’. Fay explained, “it was a real test...in fact I look back and wonder how I even did it...I feel like I must be pretty tough to be able to do that, which is something most people couldn’t do. I feel proud of that fact. It tests the quality of what you are made of”.

Participants believed that although anyone could do competitive bodybuilding not everybody ‘had what it took’ to do it or complete it, as Kate explained, “when people say to you ‘Oh, I don’t know how you can do this, it is hard,’”, and you realise, yes it is, and in fact most people couldn’t do it”. Heidi said, “a lot of people would like to do it but they give up before they even start. They just say, ‘Oh, I just can’t do the diet’. When things get hard, they just give up”. Bodybuilders experienced not only validation of their own mental toughness and goal commitment but a sense of superiority compared with others in this respect.

### ***Contributions to Personal Development***

The experiences described above were often transferable to broader life spheres and contributed to personal growth and self-improvement. These findings contrast with previous research which has suggested that competitive bodybuilding is detrimental to personal identity and development (Marzano-Parisoli, 2001).

#### ***Knowing the self***

During the process of competitive bodybuilding, participants often reflected on themselves; they learnt from their experiences, and as a result they came to know themselves better. Bob explained:

*Bodybuilding tends to burn your life to a point where it is a purifying process – where you come out the other end better than when you went in because of that test... You learn a lot about yourself in this sport, for some reason. It tests your personality, it tests everything. Your lifestyle, your attitude – everything is tested. So because of that, in a short amount of time you certainly understand who you are and what your limitations are. Having that knowledge allows you to be quite educated about taking risks in the future, about what is going to happen, the outcomes. You know what you can handle and what you can’t handle. And so you make better decisions.*

### *Self-esteem and confidence*

Participants believed that competitive bodybuilding had often enhanced self-esteem and confidence. The physical–mental benefits they acquired sometimes transformed them, not only outwardly, but also internally – in terms of their outlook on life, how they perceived themselves, viewed others, interacted with the world, and in turn, how others perceived and responded to them. Stuart observed:

*It [bodybuilding] has certainly brought me out of my shell. I used to be quiet to people on the phone. I was also very, very choosey about what I would say. At the moment, when I talk on the phone I am very relaxed and possibly say things I shouldn't say. I seem to be getting better feedback when I am at work and when I talk to the people that I network, and I think I have a better rapport with them.*

### *Taking on other challenges*

Participants reported they also felt more able to take on other challenges in life. According to Gavin, “I think if you can handle bodybuilding and handle everything going on around you and you handle a strict regime, then you can put that into life. You can do anything. You can accomplish anything you put your mind to. You can”. Dave explained, “bodybuilding has made me more stronger – both physically and mentally. I have just got that confidence that I can handle any situation. Before, I would just buckle and turn away but now I will take any challenge head on. That is what it has done to me”. There was a realisation that they were capable of more than they had initially thought of themselves – participants discovered a latent depth to the self and developed it through bodybuilding. Participants learnt skills through bodybuilding that could be transferred to wider life situations, for example, planning and time management. Bodybuilders knew how to support their goals, stay on track, make hard, sacrificial decisions, and achieve the outcomes they desired.

### *Becoming positive and future-focused*

Bodybuilding helped participants change their attitudes in relation to the self. The ideologies and achievements of bodybuilding encouraged bodybuilders to review their lives, set goals, and achieve their dreams; it also helped them reject and change elements of their past identity. Fay explained:

*I had come from a negative thinking background....and I found to get through bodybuilding you had to change your thinking. You won't get through it unless you think that you are getting better every day. You have to say that to yourself - in your head as you do your cardio and stuff - to get you through. I think it then goes into other areas, as I have learnt to become really positive – for real...not just fake – if you fake it long enough it becomes real.*

### *Exposing afflictions and self-therapy*

Bodybuilding could serve as a form of self-therapy. Janet believed bodybuilding made her confront facets of her life and self that she had previously found unpleasant and disturbing. She explained:

I was forced either by my own realisations or the questioning of others to face things about myself that I had successfully pushed into the background and either minimised or completely forgotten. By bringing them out again I was then forced to act in some manner and I decided it was time to stop denying and to use these to develop.

Janet had harboured issues concerning her body image – she had a fear of weight gain and had bulimia. She also had deep-seated guilt concerning motherhood: “I didn’t like motherhood and I felt my son was an unwanted responsibility”. Janet was competitive and wanted to succeed at bodybuilding – but to develop her body and muscularity she had to eat more, weigh more, and become stronger. She had to consider develop a regime and this required examining her life

priorities. As Janet worked upon these elements of her bodybuilding goals, her unresolved internal issues were exposed:

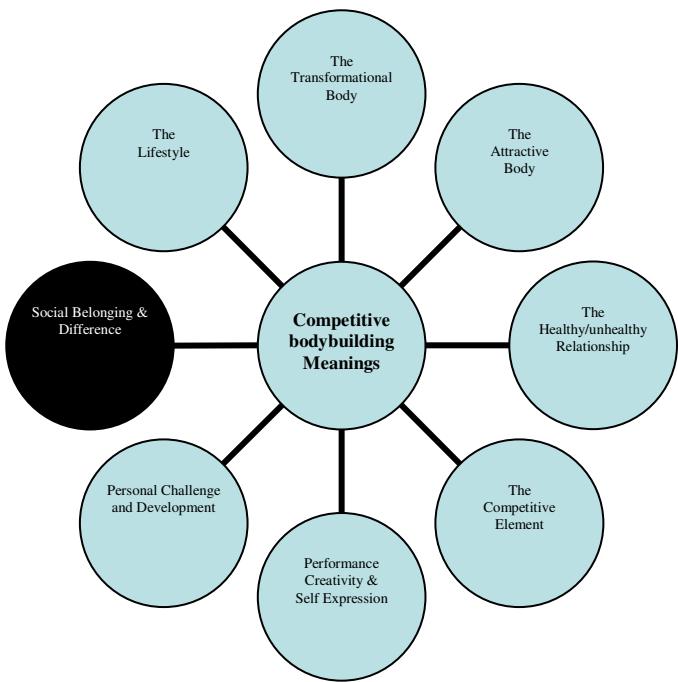
*When it was suggested that these emotions were a direct response to my weight gain I fought it as I interpreted this as being told I was shallow and was not as committed to my training as I stated. I argued and sulked and used the only methods I knew to try and disprove this rather than facing the facts and dealing with them.*

She discussed her reflections on motherhood:

*As my training requirements intensified, so did this feeling of failure regarding [my son]. I felt that he [my son] was undeservedly taking a back seat in my life and this in turn made me feel very guilty... I still carry a lot of guilt as to my true feelings towards him. In his early years I didn't like motherhood and equally the only thing I felt for [my son] was an unwanted responsibility... This issue is still very much at the surface and every day I think about it in some manner or form. I am now trying very hard to look back at my own life to see what I can learn from events or things that happened, along with the actions of my parents and the impact on me of these actions.*

Working upon herself through bodybuilding, Janet was also confronting herself as a person and her unresolved issues. Although she associated bodybuilding with a multiplicity of meanings, its connection with self-reflexivity and self-therapy was what she valued most. When asked what bodybuilding meant to her, she said:

*On the surface there were all the "fluffy" reasons, like watching my strength grow, hearing the admiration in other people's voices when they exclaimed about my discipline and determination, and eventually watching my body change in ways that I was really starting to like. [But] below the surface, I have embarked on something that I have known for a long time needed to be done, and am stumbling through the fallout in what-ever way I can. This, more than anything, is the prize.*



### **g. Social Belonging and Difference**

Participants valued bodybuilding for its friendships, group bonds, and formal and informal connections. These notions contrast with previous research that has typified bodybuilders as unsociable creatures (Klein, 1993a). New Zealand bodybuilders also felt socially different from non-bodybuilders. This section discusses both dimensions. As bodybuilding participation increased, this led to increasing affiliations with bodybuilding and a sense of difference from others who were not part of this social group. These notions relate to intra-group similarity and inter-group difference (Jenkins, 2004).

#### ***Social Belonging and Friendship***

##### *Friendships*

Participants valued the camaraderie and sociability of bodybuilding. These social aspects were particularly meaningful for Joan, an older woman in her 60s who lived alone. She was a veteran

on the competing circuit – having completed over 60 competitions. Participation for her provided the opportunity to travel to events with other bodybuilders and to meet people. Joan commented:

*If I had the choice of going up on stage or staying back to do the training, I would probably pick the training. But I enjoy going away and meeting the people. I don't go away very often and I really, really enjoy going away and meeting new people. There are some great people and I have made some really good friends through bodybuilding.*

Heidi also highlighted the social connections which occur through bodybuilding, explaining, “you can meet so many wonderful people through bodybuilding and through networking. It is just so great. You go to shows and you catch up with people. It is awesome, it really is. I have made so many good friends through bodybuilding”.

#### *Training sessions*

Tania referred to the collective training sessions that took place among competitive bodybuilders at her gym, and that she found them supportive and motivational:

*There is a group who has got together who are focused on competing next year and they are doing a group training session on Saturday mornings – so that is good and I am going to be joining that, this weekend. I am looking forward to that as I think that will be more dynamic. It gives you something to feed off, it keeps your motivation going, and you can learn a whole lot of stuff as well.*

Get-togethers enabled bodybuilders to support and motivate each other, to maintain commitment and enthusiasm for their goals.

#### *Intersecting routines*

Friendships happened, not only through formal sessions, but simply through intersecting routines. By being at the gym at the same time on a regular basis friendships were forged – sometimes these did not have to entail knowing the person in depth, but could be generated from their

regular presence and shared workout habits. Anthony explained, “even though we just see each other at the gym you feel like there is this close personal relationship”.

### *Group bonds*

There were solidarities among group members that not only enabled them to feel connected to each other but to feel aligned to the broader picture of bodybuilding that they mutually appreciated, understood and valued. Conan reflects these sensations:

*I was about ninth in the line [walking onto the stage] and it just felt so awesome to be walking, just being part of an elite group of men who were ripped and big. I can't explain how I feel but those are the instances that you remember. I remember it like it was yesterday – it was just a feeling that I wished that other people could feel. You are at a point where the journey that you have made to get to that point, not everyone is going to get to be part of that – I mean there may be other things in life that are similar – but in terms of being in a line of elite, muscly men – it is like, awesome. And I knew I wasn't going to win but it just felt good to be a part of that – that group, at that time.*

### *Changes in time*

When participants first begin competing, the social arena is unfamiliar, and may therefore not be experienced as friendly. Participants do not have a history of shared experiences with others and friendships may not even be their initial priority – their focus is on learning and trying to master the processes. As Fay reported,

*When I started out as a novice, people seemed quite intimidating to me so I thought they weren't friendly. But I think that was just my perception at the time. Now I have got to know people, like at the competitions, I have found them to be really nice people – especially the ones that come back year after year.*

In time and with exposure to the social group, priorities and perceptions may change. Social bonds and friendships often increased as bodybuilders competed more, got to know each other,

and became more involved in bodybuilding circles. Adopting new habits, interests, and lifestyles could also mean changes in social spheres and commonalities with others. Bodybuilders reported that over time they came to feel different from others who were not part of this social world. Donna explained: “I have gained new friends – friends who know what you are going through and friends who don’t think you are strange.” Coinciding with this process, bodybuilders sometimes amended elements of their existing life and their social networks to reflect their new interests and bodybuilder ways. As Abby described:

*I used to be a real party animal ...I found it [bodybuilding] hard as a lot of my friends were party animals and there were only one or two who were into the gym thing ...the rest of them were just crazy ... so I had to separate myself from that.*

This reflected not only their own response to changing relationships and interests, but how others (existing groups and friends) progressively perceived them. The priorities and commonalities they had once held now differed, as explained by Dave:

*There were the ones that I used to go out with all the time, but then all that stopped and then they saw me as a different person. And it is usually the people that have never been down this road before...bodybuilding...so I just have to accept that, and I have, but whether they have? Well, I guess they do because they know what I do and now they leave me alone. So instead of asking me to go out with them all the time, they now say “I guess you are off the gym now”.*

### ***Social Difference***

#### ***Feeling different***

Participants admitted they often felt different from others - people who were not competitive bodybuilders. The bodybuilders commented on how they came to live and eat differently, and talk a different language from others – and how it was hard for others to understand why they did what they did. These non-group members were sometimes called the ‘normal people’ as they

reflected the social majority, whereas the bodybuilders were a minority group whose norms deviated from the generally accepted social practices. Bob highlighted in his account the sense of difference bodybuilders feel in terms of the freedoms and experiences associated with the pleasures in life:

*You are living a life that is not normal, that no one else does. You certainly don't have time for the same treats in life that everyone else does. To me, going to the movies and feeding my face with pop corn and stuff like that is a treat, but for some people it is a way of life...so you have changed your life from the norm and because you are not normal.*

Conan emphasised the lack of shared understanding about bodybuilder activities and differences due to behaviours and language:

*People just don't understand what you are doing. They think you are crazy sometimes – some of the things that you do, what you eat, and how you eat. I am surprised when I talk to people they don't know what a tricep is. I am like – Jesus! – sometimes you feel like you are in your own world with people who know all these things.*

Bodybuilders reported that they were often subject to public comment about their differences and were viewed as social oddities. Their differences were often noted and remarked on by others, as Vivian explained:

*Because I change shape during the year, I go up and down a bit. When I start getting closer to a competition, people start to notice. You become a bit of public property. Everybody has a comment to make. If I was 80 kg, if I was incredibly overweight, no body would make a comment to me about what I was eating or what I was drinking or anything like that. But when you are a bodybuilder and you're lean, suddenly everybody has a comment – but they make comments to your face. I mean they may as well roll down the window and shout out "What are you having for dinner tonight – essence of sock?"*

### *Being stereotyped*

The bodybuilders also viewed themselves as part of a social group which was stereotyped, often negatively, by others. They believed bodybuilders were generally seen by outsiders as freaks, steroid users, narcissistic individuals, ego-oriented, unhealthy and/or extreme personas. Sometimes these comments related to how they believed bodybuilders were conceptually viewed; however, some participants reported experiences of such labelling first hand. Bob mentioned: “I have walked past groups of guys and they are like, ‘You take steroids,’ and then they walk on.” However, participants believed the negative labels could be changing: the bodybuilders referred to a growing public understanding of the sport as more people were lifting weights and becoming exposed to the activity. Drug testing was also helping to change beliefs that all bodybuilders took steroids. Bodybuilder dietary regimes, once perceived as extreme and unhealthy, were being adapted to reflect the new style of healthy eating. These more contemporary developments challenge the deviant stereotyping that has predominantly been reflected in previous research (Klein, 2001a; Wiegers, 1998). Although differences and negative labelling remains, these findings suggest that competitive bodybuilders could increasingly be viewed as more ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ within social spheres.

### *Coping strategies*

Being socially different can lead to experiences of discomfort, awkwardness, and self-consciousness for competitive bodybuilders. The New Zealand research found bodybuilders sometimes used a variety of coping strategies and responses to maintain commitment and a positive sense of self. Being a bodybuilder required having a thick skin. Bob (muscular beyond normative standards) stated, “if you have size, mass – you have to grow a thick skin to handle all the comments”. Thick skin and an external portrayal of indifference, however, did not necessarily mean that negative public comments were not internally felt. Bertha commented: “even though you know why people are doing it, you know, you say to yourself, ‘Don’t worry about it’, it still

hurts". Integral to a thick skin was the need for internal dialogue through which negative comments from other people were reconstructed to assume different meanings. Sometimes comments were perceived, not as a diminishment of the self, but as a reflection of jealousy and inadequacy on the part of the other. Anthony explained:

*Guys look at you and say, "Man, look at that fuckin' dick". But you just laugh at it because you know why they are saying it. I mean, every guy wants to have a good physique-- so I think a lot of people are just jealous.*

Other strategies included indifference; public comments are acknowledged, but the people themselves are rendered unimportant, or their comments are not considered valid as they do not understand, and are uninformed on the process.

Bodybuilders also avoided negative comments by covering up and/or minimising public outings if difference was visible. This was a strategy employed by very muscular bodybuilders, as Bob described: "you tend to cover up sometimes, like when you just want a night out but you noticed as soon as you show a little bit of skin". Bertha agreed, "I do have to stop and think, 'Now, what am I going to wear? And how am I going to cover up?' and things like that...When I go out, I choose my times ...and I don't go places if I haven't got the right clothes or feel I can cover up. I hate going to the mall". Bertha shopped at night when few people were around, and minimised social occasions.

If differences were behavioural, bodybuilders could behave normally to get through difficult situations. Stuart explained he would eat normally at his parent's home to fit in and appease them. However, later he would engage in compensatory behaviour to deal with this transgression:

*I might splash out and have a small smear of jam – so I can say I am eating toast and a little bit of jam...but no, no, no butter, just a little bit of jam !! Then I would go and have a walk after that to make sure I had burnt it all off.*

Bodybuilders may try to hide differences, for example, Janet reported that her dietary regime made her feel self-conscious at work as it differed from normal social eating patterns. She tried to hide these differences but this became impracticable. Ultimately she displayed her differences openly before others – suffered the public consequences and then found that life moved on as others came to accept her oddities as part of social fabric of the work environment:

*At first I felt like a real fruit. I felt weird and stupid and I used to make up reasons for going for walks and doing it [eating while on her walk] but in the end with my work demands it just got impossible so I just started to do it. And at first I felt really stupid and people would make cracks about it but eventually I just got over it. So, yeah, it was hard and I felt really weird.*

By forewarning others of their differences, bodybuilders could minimise the surprise others feel at the time of interaction. This strategy reduced awkwardness and could enhance the possibility of positive acceptance. Bertha, a muscular female bodybuilder, recalled:

*Recently my husband had a work do and he said, “Come on, it will be a really nice family day out,” and I said, “Oh – well have you told everybody at work that I am a bodybuilder?” and he is, like, “No,” and I am, like, “Well, you have to, ‘cos if you don’t people are just going to ...you know”. So he had to do the ground work, so to speak. So that if there are that couple that don’t know what I am, they are not, like, “Who the fuck is that – a man or women?” Then someone else can say, “Oh no, she is so-and-so’s wife – she is a bodybuilder”.*

Bodybuilders also had a repertoire of responses ready for comment on their differences, as Vivian explained:

*I was in the fish and chip shop. I wasn’t there to eat them myself but to get them for my boys. I knew as soon as I walked in someone was going to say something. And someone did. Someone said: “I hope you’re not going to eat fish and chips”, and I had already*

*prepared a come-back because I knew someone was going to say something. I said, “Oh no, I eat lots of fat. I have to live off fat and everything is deep fried – didn’t you know?”*

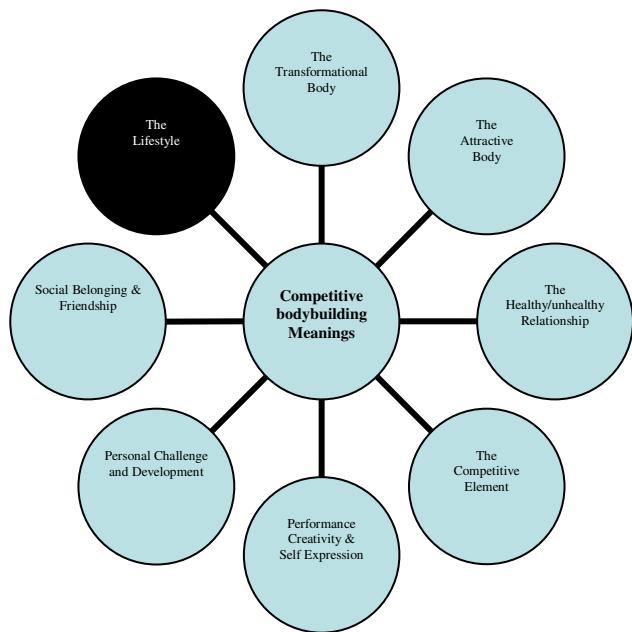
### *Desires for normality*

Some bodybuilders acknowledged there were times when they wished they were not different but ‘normal’. Kate highlighted:

*A lot of my [non-bodybuilder] friends don’t give a shit about diet and, you know, they just go out to dinner, and they can just sit in front of TV and eat chocolate or popcorn or whatever it is...Sometime I think it must be nice not to have to worry about it. Instead, I am spending a lot of time thinking about what I am eating, what exercises I have done, you know...where am I at? And “Oh my god, I have another 5 kg to lose”.*

### *The pleasures and benefits of difference*

The majority of participants, however, expressed considerable pride in being a bodybuilder and viewed their differences as positive. They considered their practices were non-conforming but in ways which were superior to normative social ways. Their dietary and training methods were advanced; they were in better shape than many others in society; and they were more knowledgeable and disciplined on matters such as body sculpting and nutrition than non-bodybuilders. Bodybuilders also felt unique, special, and that their differences enabled them to stand out from others and to excel in positive, distinctive ways. Donna observed, “I like doing something which is uncommon, which a lot of people can’t do. I can do fire dancing, fire breathing and bodybuilding...I feel special.” Allan stated, “when I grew up I knew a lot of people who excelled at rugby, boxing and all those kinds of sports. But for me I wanted to be different, which in terms of taking up a different sport is one reason that I turned to bodybuilding”. Finally, although their differences could produce negative comments from outsiders, they also fostered positive feedback, as Bob commented, “some people come up from no where and just want to shake my hand. They say, ‘Man, you are amazing’”.



#### **h. Bodybuilding as a Lifestyle**

##### ***It is a lifestyle***

Bodybuilding was described by participants as a lifestyle. Dave explained:

*The bodybuilding show is just a bonus you tack onto your lifestyle ...something in your lifestyle...a lifestyle is what I live for, not the bodybuilding show. That is just a bonus which is tacked in at different times during the year. Once the show is over, I just carry on and train again. I don't stop. Not like some others who might stop for a year or so. I just carry on. After the show, I am back into the gym, back into doing my cardio again...that is just the way it is. It is my lifestyle.*

Bodybuilding was not solely about, or limited to a sporting and competitive engagement – it was just one element of it. Bodybuilding involved routines, behaviours, norms that were not restricted to a particular part of the bodybuilder's self or the point in the competitive cycle. Rather it was a more multi-layered way of functioning in the world. This was not a short-term involvement – a phase in life – but life participation. To Dave, being a bodybuilder – living it – was an important way through which he expressed his commitment as a bodybuilder, defined himself as a person,

and conveyed his purpose in life. Allan similarly perceived bodybuilding to be a lifestyle, and it also constituted a healthier way to live: “it is my life, my lifestyle. I enjoy what I do now. I enjoy bodybuilding. People think bodybuilding is boring but they don’t realise that if you do it the right way, if you do it properly, it is a healthy way to live”. For Allan, doing bodybuilding the ‘right way’ meant without the use of steroids.

### ***Bodybuilding is my life***

Bob and Brian used steroids, but also viewed bodybuilding as a lifestyle. Brian was passionate about bodybuilding and invested heavily in it – time, effort, and financial resources. It was a dominant part of his life. He enjoyed it but he was also serious about it. Brian believed that those who embraced bodybuilding as a lifestyle were more likely to remain with the activity, continue to develop their bodies, and be successful in the sport: “It is a lifestyle choice. One of my sayings is that if you want to be in it, you have to be in it for the long haul.” Bob also aligned competitive success with the need to embrace bodybuilding as a lifestyle. It was about immersing oneself in the activity – physically, mentally and also in relation to daily routines. “I think it is so intense — the sport — that you just about live it”, he said. Joan also believed bodybuilding filled her life: “I am one of those types of people who are gym, eat, work, sleep...that is more or less my life, I guess you could say”. She prioritised bodybuilding. It was a major feature of her life and she selected jobs (where, when she would work) to accommodate her bodybuilding commitments: “I fit everything around the gym, as opposed to fitting gym around work”. However, unlike Bob and Brian, Joan’s motivations were not underpinned by the desire to be competitively elite. She prioritised and dedicated herself to bodybuilding as it gave her pleasure and social connectivity. These accounts highlight the significance of bodybuilding as a lifestyle, but also suggest that beneath this meaning there can be variations in meanings and differences in motivations.

### ***Bodybuilding as a phase within a life***

For some participants competitive bodybuilding was not a lifestyle or life-long experience but something they viewed as a distinct project within their life. Todd explained, “I wanted to go out there, do it once, give myself a tick and say, ‘I have done it’”. Competing for these participants was a goal, a learning curve, and another experience they sought to add to their portfolio of life adventures. Tania also saw bodybuilding as a distinct project and hard work: “It is cold, dark and bleak and I have been soaked several times going to training...I am glad this is a project because it isn’t much of a life”. Asked whether she would continue after that competition she said she would see how things went with her competition – and would review her involvement again at this point. Trying out bodybuilding as a project can serve as stepping stones for a more enduring form of involvement. Heidi was such an example. She began with a single competition, but as she observed, “it evolved into a passion”.

## **CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

This Chapter has embraced the principle that identity is about meanings (Burke, 2001) and has therefore discussed what bodybuilding meant to the New Zealand participants. Bodybuilding was seen as physical transformation, as assisting attractiveness, being artistic, creative, competitive, and performative. It reflected a challenge and contributed to personal growth and development. Bodybuilding provided friendships, but also created social distancing from others. These meanings, their significance, combination and relevance to self-identity varied between participants. For example, when the participant in Photograph 13 was asked what it meant to her to be a competitive bodybuilder, she responded:

*It is my number one focus, really, so it rules my training, my eating, it is just a huge part of my life plus a lot of my friends are bodybuilders, I socialise with them, I go away with them, I spend a lot of time emailing bodybuilders and talking about bodybuilding.*

Bodybuilding was to her a lifestyle, a vehicle that provided purpose, friendships, bonds, and tools that influenced her body and daily habits.



**Photograph 13:** Bodybuilding, identity and meaning

## **7.0 BODYBUILDING AS ONE OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

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Recent developments in identity theory recognise that identities, such as competitive bodybuilding, do not exist in isolation but reside as one of many within the self (Thoits, 2003). With the exception of gender, however, there has been minimal consideration of the bodybuilder identity and how it is experienced by participants as one of multiple identities. The research in this chapter recognises these broader intersections and documents findings for New Zealand participants. Identity interfaces include:

- Gender (including sexuality and family life)
- Age
- Race and ethnicity
- National identity
- Class
- Broader Life spheres (including work, hobbies, religion and socialising)

### **7.1 GENDER**

#### **The body**

##### *Muscularity*

Although gender has received considerable attention in relation to bodybuilder identity, this attention has predominantly focused on the body – in particular the capacity of muscularity to enhance masculinity and to challenge and/or collude with femininity (Choi, 2003; Guthrie & Castelnuovo, 1992; Holmlund, 1997; Klein, 1993b). Consistencies with these notions were identified in the New Zealand research. For example, as Heidi (female) explained: “I love the look of the fitness models. Sort of lean and well toned. Not overly muscly... I just love the look.

..I mean not women who look like men but just the lean, muscular fit look." A consciousness of connectivities between muscularity and femininity was frequently referred to by the female bodybuilders during their interviews. The association men may have with muscularity and size is illustrated in Photograph 14. The participant commented:

*This is one of my favourite poses... I just look at it and think that I have the overall package – 'cos I have a good back and it makes me look quite big.*



**Photograph 14:** Male bodybuilders, bodies and muscular descriptions

Unlike the women, the men did not reflect concerns that their muscularity could compromise gender; rather, it appeared to validate and enhance it. The New Zealand research, however, revealed new insights and the remainder of this section will focus on these outcomes.

### **Women, muscle and new insights**

Previous research has frequently portrayed female bodybuilders as though they were a homogenous group. The New Zealand research found this was not the case – there was diversity in their muscular agendas and motivations. Some participants strove for muscular bodies, others sought a more athletic-toned look. Others took up bodybuilding to celebrate their muscularity and/or to feel comfortable in their bodies as it had a propensity to grow muscle. Kate stated, “bodybuilding has helped me to be comfortable with my body. I am never going to be a skinny girl and I don’t want to be skinny. This year I have had to move into size 16 shirts. Most people would be devastated, but I am thinking, ‘Yahoo – my back has grown’”. Yet despite their views and some muscular ‘concerns’ (Choi, 2003), none of the female bodybuilders were found to be personally “holding back” on their own muscular development (Dworkin, 2001). On the contrary, all the women discussed continuing to build muscle, and this did not appear at odds with their self-perception of femininity. Their muscular ideals did not appear static, but subject to ongoing renegotiation. As they became more involved in bodybuilding, the female bodybuilders became more appreciative of muscularity, as well as curious and ambitious about their own body and its potential in this respect. In other words, their muscular ceilings shifted upwards (Dworkin, 2001). Although this possibility has been identified in previous research (Roussel & Griffet, 2000), it has not been widely discussed; however, I believe acknowledging this attitude is significant in order to fully appreciate the relationship female bodybuilders have with their muscular bodies. Tammy explained:

*Before you are in there doing it [bodybuilding], you may look at the American women doing it and think why do they want to get like that? They are huge. But once you are in there doing it and your goals change, you think, ‘I wonder if I could get like that’.*

Whilst their muscular goals increased, the findings suggest that these goals did not conflict with their femininity as their feminine body ideals appeared to move in tandem with these shifting body aspirations. For example, the participant in Photographs 15a & 15b stated:

*I like that one [photo] because I like my legs in that one (b) and I like my arms in that one (a). At the time I thought I looked the best but now I look at them and think I was a skinny broad.*



**Photograph 15a & 15b:** Assessments and changing perceptions about the body due to time and participation in competitive bodybuilding

The New Zealand research also found that the assessments the female bodybuilders made concerning muscularity and femininity were based on more than simply muscle size. Muscle could be ‘carried’ in ways which looked hard (manly) or graceful (feminine) and in this way the muscular female body could challenge and/or reaffirm gender ideologies (Weiten, 1992). This was illustrated by Kate’s comments:

*I think that Lenda Murray has the ultimate shape – good symmetry and I think her shape is very beautiful. She is very feminine – well, I think so – I mean lots of people would*

*probably think she is not, but I think she is. I think she carries herself very well. She is very gracious. I don't like Iris Kyle. I think she looks hard. Very manly.*

### ***Men, muscle and new insights***

As with the women, the links between men and their muscularity extended beyond mass. The New Zealand research found that masculinity could be reflected in how muscularity was packaged and also what it represented in terms of psychological traits, values and ideals. Muscle could be hard or tough and ‘carried’ in a way that depicted a particular work/life ethic and/or masculine persona (Weiten, 1992). Notions of this are reflected in the following extracts from male participants concerning their favourite male bodybuilders:

*I like Dorian Yates. He is a pretty hard-out man. No one compares to him. That granite-stone look. When you look at him when he is doing poses it looks like you could just throw an axe at it and it would chip away like stone. (Anthony)*

*I aspire to be like Jay Cutler – he is the more complete bodybuilder to me - complete in lifestyle and complete in physique. He is a genuine bodybuilder in that he seems to admit his weaknesses as much as his strengths. He knows his competition and does what he can to meet that face to face. (Bob)*

In the course of interviews none of the New Zealand male bodybuilders directly used the term “masculinity” at any time. Given the extensive references within the literature between masculinity, muscularity and bodybuilding (Drummond, 2002; Klein, 1993a; Wiegers, 1998), this was an intriguing and conspicuous absence. It also contrasted with the accounts of the female bodybuilders, who used the word “femininity” openly, often, and without prompting. This finding reflected the potential invisibility masculinity may hold for men in relation to their muscularity, if these connectivities are experienced as consistent and/or normative. In other words, just as whiteness may prove invisible when it constitutes the taken-for-granted culture within a society

(King, 2005; Long & Hylton, 2002), so may the connectivity amongst men concerning masculinity, muscularity and bodybuilding. Femininity, conversely, is made visible through its transgression of norms (Holmlund, 1997).

### ***Steroid use and differences between the men and women***

Steroid use has been claimed to be widespread among competitive male bodybuilders (Klein, 1993a, 1995). Although some steroid use was identified amongst the New Zealand male bodybuilders, it was not found to be a normative practice. The majority of participants stated they did not use steroids as they made their health, lifestyle and/or morals of major importance. Many believed that it was possible to compete successfully without steroids; others were willing to ‘risk’ competitive success by not taking them. These findings differ from Klein (1993a), who believed that male bodybuilders considered the rewards of steroid use (masculinity, muscularity, competitive success) outweighed their risks (e.g., to health). The New Zealand research also found that decisions by the male bodybuilders not to take steroids were not viewed by them as compromising their masculinity. Rather, they considered they were portraying an alternative form of masculinity, such as a natural physique and a personal stance of health, balance (less extreme) and/or morality (Probert et al., 2007b). For example, Stuart stated:

*Personally, I view taking drugs as cheating. I would rather get as far as I can naturally. I appreciate that there is a possibility that I may be up against guys who have taken drugs but at the end of the day if they win, at least I know that I haven’t taken anything.*

Decisions to take steroids did not appear to be impulsively made by the men. Those who elected to take steroids often described them as a step they came on in the process of their competitive evolution - one that sometimes entailed reassessment of personal values. Brian explained:

*When I first competed I didn’t think you would need those things and that those people were cheats but as time went on and I competed I realised that you have to be in it. I*

*guess I thought in the early days that if I trained and worked out and ate nutritiously that one day I would look like those guys in the magazines but I soon learned that it was a drug-enhanced state. After experimenting with anabolic steroids I realised that you really needed to be in it 100% to achieve that amount of development.*

Brian also renegotiated his definition of a ‘drug cheat’. He now considers steroid use as competitively acceptable if participation is undertaken in tested events where “others also have these advantages”.

Although previous research has suggested that steroid use among competitive female bodybuilders is becoming widespread (Klein, 1994), this was not supported by the New Zealand research. Steroid use was rarely raised by the female participants. It felt an uncomfortable topic – almost alien to many of them. Only one participant confirmed she used steroids. Her account reflected consistencies with Grogan et al. (2006), as she indicated greater levels of concern about the effects of the drugs on her visual markers of femininity, than its possible risks to her health. She felt very much on her own as a woman using steroids in New Zealand:

*The only other [female] bodybuilders I know of, I do not know well enough that I would hook up with them and say, “Could you advise me on drugs and what do you do with your facial hair and how big is your clitoris?” So there is nobody – just the guys....there is one women and she used a bit of gear but not for as long as I have and she did not have a lot of the side effects that I have. So, yeah – you really just have to deal with it yourself.*

### ***Being too muscular – differences between the male and female bodybuilders***

Previous research has referred to the social transgressions of bodybuilders who become too muscular (Choi, 2003; Johnstone, 1996; Klein, 1993a). Much has focused on female experiences, and insights are rarely acquired into potential diversities in gender experiences. Both Bertha and

Bob were New Zealand participants who said they had reached the point of social transgression in terms of muscularity. While they stated they were often subject to public comment as a result of their muscularity, their accounts depict differing gender ramifications. Bertha said, “not a day goes by when I don’t get about 5–10 shout outs per day of ‘Faggot, want to be a fuckin’ man, think you’re fuckin’ hard’”. Life was difficult for Bertha as her muscularity was a social transgression that made her not only unattractive, but also manly. As a result, her sex and sexuality were questioned very openly by the public. Although admired within bodybuilding circles, her muscularity made her ostracized in broader life spheres. She stated: “I am fine amongst my own” but “not amongst the people out there”. The omnipresent body, while socially advantageous for the majority of bodybuilders as it was in keeping with their social attractiveness proved a hindrance for Bertha who transgressed this boundary. She explained: “I like my body but sometimes I wish I could take my body off and hang it up...[just] go and do my shopping, come home and put it back on again”.

Bob, conversely, indicated he received both positive and negative comments about his appearance. Although his body was not always considered attractive or normative, his gender, sex and/or sexuality were never questioned as they were with Bertha. Indeed, some people found his body intriguing. He said that the moment he stepped out of the door “people always looked”, but this was also due to its ‘freaky’ appeal. Furthermore, unlike Bertha, Bob’s body was capable of wider, more favourable symbolic meanings. It could reflect his inner strength and commitment, and he had acquired work as a model. It therefore translated more readily into cultural and economic capital. Instead of simply restraining a male bodybuilder’s social standing and gendered identity, excessive muscularity could also enhance it. Bob could also more readily displace the negative comments from other people as attributable to their personal taste, masculine inadequacies, jealousy and so on, than could Bertha. In this respect, he could retain a more positive self-view, unlike Bertha, who frequently found the comments hurtful.

## **Leanness**

Bodybuilding and gender were not only about muscularity. They were also about experiences of leanness – a dimension that has frequently been overlooked in the bodybuilding literature.

### ***Female bodybuilders and experiences of leanness***

To New Zealand female bodybuilders the leanness of their competitive physique was often found to closely reflect their social ideal. They enjoyed being ‘slim’. They felt in shape, feminine, and attractive (Reischer & Koo, 2004). Bodybuilding was a tool the women often used to manage their body fat and/or address particular areas of fat concern, such as thighs and bottoms. The participant in Photograph 16 commented:

*I was quite happy with how I looked [in this photograph]. There is no cellulite. I carry my fat in my butt and my upper thighs, and to me my legs look great in that one. I like the definition in my legs. And I don't look like a man either. I just look fit, not boney or skinny. My muscles are hard and you can see the definition.*



**Photograph 16:** Female Bodybuilder highlighting the muscular, lean and feminine dimensions of the body

The female participant in Photograph 17 also reflected similarities in her description:

*I was way more toned in this photo and I had lost the weight from my bum. To me, I don't like my hair but that's my body in my best form. I had lost the fat and I really didn't like my backside in my early one – in this one it was way better, so I was really rapt about that. It is really hard for me to lose weight from my butt. Everything else can be lean but not my butt – it is a family thing.*



**Photograph 17:** Female Bodybuilding: Leanness and concerns of the ‘bum’

#### *Breasts and implants*

When female bodybuilders become lean, they often lose breast size. Previous research has suggested that breast implants among female bodybuilders have become commonplace as a means of regaining this visual signifier of their femininity, especially in the face of their muscular

transgression (Choi, 2000; Ndalianis, 1995). However, the New Zealand research discovered that although some participants had breast implants, the practice did not appear widespread. There was also diversity in views and motivations concerning their use. Some female bodybuilders stated that although they had lost breast size as a result of fat reduction, they welcomed this development. Having smaller breasts provided a sense of freedom. The women reported they could move, enjoy their other identities (e.g., their athletic self), and be active without the cumbersome presence of their (former) large breasts. As Kate explained:

*Before I was a bodybuilder I was probably a size C Cup in the breasts and now I am lucky to fit a B and I like that. I like not having a big bust because it means running is much easier – it is not bouncing. When I used to run, I was running in the most heavy duty sports bra that I could with a crop top on top. Now I wear a sports bra and nothing special and I feel better for it actually. I feel fine.*

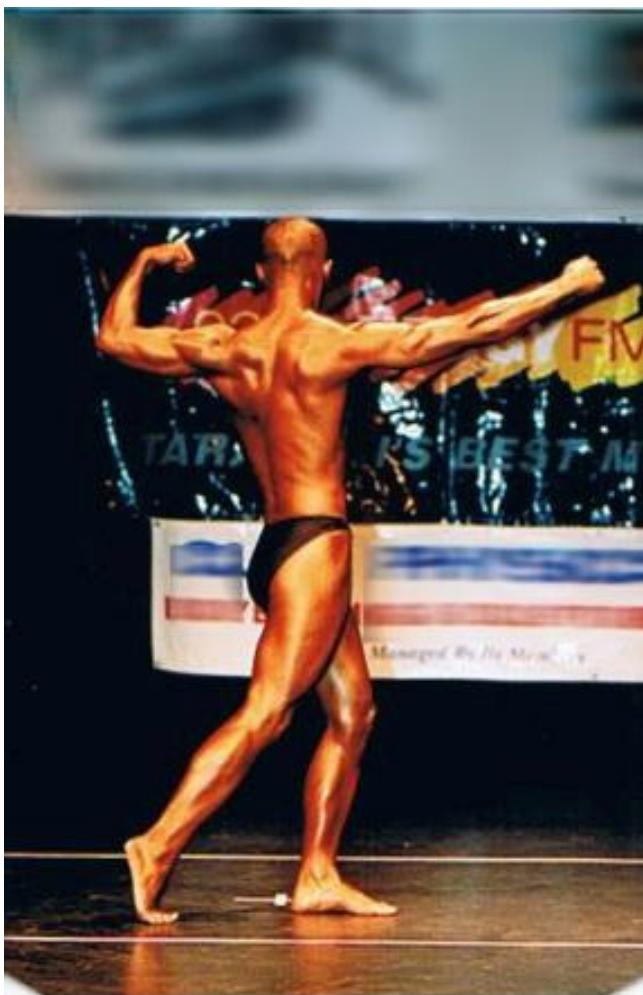
Vivian, conversely, had breast implants. She stated, however, that the decision for surgery was really due to many factors – reclaiming her former breast size after changes in them due to child birth, and also being able to maximise the positive physical developments she had already achieved as a result of bodybuilding.

*It was more a reconstruction thing after child bearing and losing breast tissue from dieting and I swear they were there one minute and gone the next. But I didn't spend all that money on breast implants just because I was doing a competition. It is not like going and buying a pair of shoes or a bikini. It was just timely. It is getting back to where you were before... I really did feel I was in such good shape and I had worked so hard and I felt good when I was dressed but when I was undressed I just felt really sad that it had happened. I just felt devoid really.*

### ***The bodybuilding men and experiences of leanness***

What leanness meant to the bodybuilding men differed from their female counterparts. When they reduced body fat to competitive levels – in contrast with the women who often felt they looked attractive – men often considered this level of leanness was too small and skinny for a social ideal. This is illustrated by the participant in Photograph 18:

*I am happy with this photo. I was lean as I could just about be, but the only thing that I didn't like about it was that I was really skinny – I looked little - but then it didn't matter – I had abs.*



**Photograph 18:** Men, masculinities and leanness: feeling ‘small and skinny’

Furthermore, male sensitivities about fat appeared more attuned to other body parts such as their ‘beer gut’. Leanness, although important for appearance, was also more strongly linked to expressions of their inner character. As Bob explained, “you have a body which says I am a committed and confident person”. Men who were not in shape were deemed weak and ‘lacking’. Being lean and in shape therefore functioned as social benchmarking among men. Bob referred to his experiences of walking past men in the street who were less in shape than himself, stating, “you are a constant reminder that this is what can be achieved and they may feel like they are a little less, ’cos they haven’t achieved that level”. However, fine lines also existed between men and the extent they could show off their physiques in social settings without compromising their masculinity and/or status. The New Zealand research revealed that to be masculine was also about being not too ‘into yourself’ or your appearance (R. Gill et al., 2005). Anthony elaborated:

*When you wear a tight top or a tank top or whatever, people will look at you like you are an arrogant prick or you are a poser or something but I is, like, man I have put so much hard work into this so I want to show this off. And every now and again you do.*

### ***Cyclical Weight Impacts and Risks – Gender comparison***

For the women, bodybuilding contributed to their feelings of discipline, and being in control of their body, weight, and body fat. However, it could also contribute to experiences of losing control of their body and its leanness. This was especially the case post-competition, when after dieting for their event they started to eat greater levels of food and their weight subsequently increased, as Zara highlighted:

*I think post-comp for me was more mentally [with my weight gain] that I struggled. I mean, my body weight isn’t that big anyway but I think it was a bit freaky because I was big and then you get really lean and then you go back to normal ...It was more that my weight was going up and I was freaking out about it. I probably thought I was getting fat again.*

Although their competitive bodies were not supposed to be considered a sustainable ideal, some women still struggled with their cyclical weight gain. Post-competition they ‘felt fat’ and this impacted on their body and self-image. It contributed to risks and vulnerabilities, such as to bulimia. Although the possibility of eating disorders has been mentioned in the literature (Goldfield et al., 1998). The New Zealand research has provided first-hand insights of these experiences (Probert et al., 2007b). Whilst the men could also experience sensitivities with cyclical weight gain, these did not appear to carry the same ramifications and vulnerabilities as they did for the women. Gavin explained:

*Guys can never be big enough and girls can never be lean enough and it is more the case that women have more problems being lean afterwards. ...you tell them, you looked great on the day but now eat food. But they [the women] say “Oh – but I have to keep dieting”.*

### **Beyond the Body**

Previous research has focused on the body and muscularity in relation to gender (Klein, 1993a, 1993b; Moore, 1997b), the New Zealand findings suggest participants expressed gender in a variety of ways.

#### ***Packaging gender— looks and styles***

Gender was depicted in the packaging of images which combined factors such as body, looks, clothing, demeanour, and other forms of expression. For example, some female bodybuilders referred to themselves as “real girly girls”. They embraced many elements of traditional female care such as use of face creams, makeup, and very feminine clothes (Bartky, 1988). Others viewed themselves as more sporty-feminine types. Kate described herself as “incredibly feminine”, but more a “wash and go” type of girl, although she enjoyed spending a lot of money on her hair. ‘Putting on’ femininity was something female bodybuilders did ‘when they had time’ as mentioned by Heidi: “I am not a glamour puss or anything like that ...but I don’t see myself as

a butch type of person. Not at all. I like dressing up when I have the chance to do it. I like looking nice and I like looking feminine". Bodybuilding men also had various looks and ways through which they used to package their masculine image. Bob explained, "you have your hard core trainers who wear beanies and cover up all the time and then if you want to go elaborate, the ones who hardly wear anything. They are more the show ponies".

#### *Competitive category selection*

Gender was expressed through competitive category selection. This was especially the case with the women, who often portrayed femininities through their choice of Physique or Figure. Figure, for example, allowed for the use of props, and some participants used makeup and sequined bikinis to emphasise glamour and feminine appeal; others less so. Fay (who competed in Shape and Figure) stated, "I am a total girl and I like putting on the false eye lashes, the makeup and making myself all sparkly...doing that...the day of the competition...it is great". Heidi, conversely, who competed in Physique, indicated:

*I am not a girly-type of person. I just couldn't image myself in a sequin bikini and I couldn't walk in those high heels. I don't have the right type of body for Figure. I am straight up and down – no waist – you need a tiny little waist and a really nice shape.*

Some women also considered that the excessive use of props undermined their identity as serious athletes. Kate, a Physique competitor, said, "some women are suited to Figure, but I am just glad that I am not. I don't want to compete in a glittery bikini. I want to compete as a bodybuilder".

For the men, category selection appeared predominantly influenced by competitive fit, although decisions carried implications for masculine hierarchies. Whilst Athletic was a competitive choice, the crowd came to see the more muscular Physique category men (Obel & Probert, 2008). Self-perception, however, could still influence their decisions as reflected by Stuart:

*The reason I do Athletic is that it is a more attainable class for my body shape and fairer as I don't have to compete against the big guys. Some of the athletic guys have great physiques and having a class like this provides a way that they can participate in the sport and show it. I also like the look. I think it is more in proportion and it is more me.*

### ***Bodily Preparations***

The pre-competition bodily practices entailed in bodybuilding (e.g., waxing, shaving) have been considered as feminising (Bartky, 1988; Obel, 1996). However, this was not necessarily supported by the New Zealand research. The accounts from male bodybuilders indicated that engaging in such acts did not compromise their masculinity as they adopted a functional approach to their application. They considered them competitively necessary and priority was accorded to the easiest, cheapest, most effective way to undertake them. As Todd said, “it is all part of the preparation”. The research also found that some of the male bodybuilders had continued to use these practices beyond competition to enhance their masculine attractiveness. However, when used in this broader social context, although there was a functional dimension to its continual use (i.e. an extension of the sport), there was also a greater consciousness of the potential risk of it being associated with acts of femininity. Bob’s account highlights both the functional connection and also the adoption of an almost apologetic or defensive explanation to ongoing use:

*Well, I shave every two weeks. I have done that ever since I have been doing bodybuilding. I sort of see just see it as part of the sport and it doesn't seem feminine to me. Believe it or not, the gel I actually use is a ladies version because it is softer on the skin when you are shaving the body. Yeah – I guess you feel a little bit...I mean, when I grab it off the shelf I feel a bit like, “Jeepers, I hope no one saw me take that,” so you are aware it can be quite feminine some of the things you are doing but I don't know ...the girls kind of like it in a way...so because of that I felt more comfortable. If you are going*

*to go to all the effort then why not go all the way, have it shaved and have it tanned as well like it is supposed to be in the sport?*

These findings suggest that it is not the bodily practices in themselves that are gendered, but rather the meanings assigned to them and also demonstrates the importance of context in the creation of these meanings.

Although the findings suggest that the New Zealand women viewed these practices more closely aligned with experiences of femininity than the men, this did not necessarily mean they were normative female practices. For some women, hair removal to this extent was considered abnormal and/or processes they resisted. For example, Janet refused to have a Brazilian wax as she “did not see the need”, and Tammy said that until this point she did not realise she had to remove body hair in order to be considered “attractive”.

### ***Back stage and the competitive environment***

Gender was expressed in backstage competitive interactions. Men referred to the camaraderie and competitiveness of the changing and pump-up rooms – and this was a combination they saw as acceptable and unproblematic. Conversely, female bodybuilders often emphasised the back-stage friendliness (or lack of) they encountered with other women – especially the novices. Furthermore, unless prompted in the interviews, the female bodybuilders rarely discussed competitiveness. It did not appear to factor highly in their consciousness. Consistent with the literature, dynamics among the women reflected a less competitive style and greater levels of cooperation than among the men (Klein, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Recours et al., 2004). Yet inconsistencies with this position were later detected within the New Zealand research. When the female bodybuilders were questioned about their competitive engagements they were sometimes surprised to discover they were more competitive than they had originally thought, as Shelly reflected in her account:

*I am just happy to do what I am doing now, and of course I am hoping to get placed but it won't break my heart if I don't. I mean, I will be fairly disappointed and that is what keeps me on track and motivated – so maybe it is more important that I think it is.*

The findings also suggest that their experiences and styles of competitive engagement may differ from the men. The female bodybuilders often referred to specific instances and actual people against whom they had competed. For example, Tammy said: “this other woman who was in my class, I had never really felt I got along with her so I was very pleased that I beat her”. This contrasts with the men, who, when asked about competitive engagements, did not appear to personalise them to the same extent. This possibility was mentioned by Tania:

*When the women compete, they tend to be more in a bitchy frame of mind. I remember being behind the scenes one time at a show and a group of female competitors had just come off the stage and I heard one of them say in a loud voice in the dressing room “I can't believe I have lost to someone with so much cellulite on her legs”, so I think their competition gets into the more bitchy stuff but I don't think it is as overtly competitive or as assertively competitive as the men tend to be on stage.*

However, bodybuilding women may also become more overtly competitive and assertive and, akin to the men, may de-personalise these encounters as they become more experienced in the sport. Kate, an experienced competitor, stated, “in the overalls, we showed people that competitively we were good mates, but when it came to posing then we weren't going to let each other have it either”.

### ***Expressing Gender on Stage***

Research has questioned whether posing the body on stage at bodybuilding events objectifies it and compromises the masculinity of men and sexualises women (Patton, 2001). The New Zealand research discovered that female bodybuilders did not feel sexualised on stage as they felt

they were being assessed through subcultural eyes – reflecting a different way of looking and appreciating their physique. Shelly explained:

*You don't really look at someone and think, "Oh, they are really sexy" – you are looking at them and thinking, "Wow, they have big muscle mass". You know, it is sort of a different perspective on the human body.*

When men and women displayed their bodies on stage, they adopted a stance to make them look 'big' and portray their muscularity to its best effect. The women did not indicate that their femininity was compromised as a result of these displays of 'taking up space' (Heywood, 1998b). Furthermore, when the men discussed their posing, their accounts did not indicate they felt feminised or that these acts had served to question their masculinity (Klein, 1990, 1993a). On the contrary, they were framed as competitive, aggressive and assertive – in keeping with masculinity (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Weiten, 1992). This is highlighted by Harry:

*We all stood there trying to do a front double bicep and I had an elbow dance with the guy next to me....you know you have to do what you can not to be pushed back...to keep in front, and that is the competitive thing.*

The routine section of bodybuilding events encompasses 'dance', and Patton (2001) has indicated that this component may be construed as feminising. This was not, supported by the New Zealand research, indicating that not only did many bodybuilding men enjoy these 'dance' components, but that some went to considerable effort to develop creative formats. Instead of compromising their masculinity, 'dance' provided an outlet through which they could express themselves as men and bodybuilders. They could showcase their body work. In so doing they were expressing a feminine side, but in a manner that did not compromise their masculinity. This is illustrated by the participant in Photograph 19 (the picture was taken of him while he was performing a routine):

*I like this photo because of its elegance – how I hold myself. I probably wouldn't pick it for condition – I would pick another one – but this one isn't just one of those standard bodybuilder poses – I am not just posing like a bodybuilder – I am holding myself elegantly.*



**Photograph 19:** Combining ‘dance’ and bodybuilding: Male bodybuilders could be ‘elegant’

Although some female participants used these dance routines as an avenue for self-expression, not all the female bodybuilder enjoyed them as they did not necessarily view themselves as graceful dancers or natural movers. Instead of feeling feminine in these ‘dance’ routines they referred to experiences of being awkward and self-conscious.

## **Social networks and bodybuilder interactions**

*Women-- not just social but individual*

Gender was also expressed through social connectivities and friendships. Getting together to train and compete was a collective space where female bodybuilders could engage in female talk and escapism from their other roles/responsibilities, such as mothers and/or carers. They could spend time on themselves and with other women. These notions were expressed by the participant in Photograph 20:

*This is one of my favourite photographs. It was a great weekend. We went into it with no expectations but just for the experience and I was the only one in our group that came away with a trophy. It not only brings back happy memories of a fun weekend, but I was pretty stoked with my achievement and the girls looked great also .... there is a group of [us] girls that goes down to those competitions so there is the fun of that weekend. It is awesome and we have a lot of fun. It is the bonding and enjoyment of it all.*



**Photograph 20:** Bodybuilding, women, friendships and the 'girls weekend away'

This reflects consistencies with previous research on women, sport and leisure (Granskog, 1992; Henderson, 2003; Klein, 1994). However, whilst the social dynamic of women in sport and bodybuilding has been emphasised (Granskog, 1992; Klein, 1994), the pleasures women acquire from individualism has received less attention. The New Zealand research discovered that bodybuilding women also enjoyed the sport for its individuality. For example, Tammy stated, “the part that appealed to me was that bodybuilding was something that you did by yourself, for yourself [but] with support from some people”. Some women enjoyed training on their own, as Donna explained:

*I train on my own and I like it. It is easier as I can go to my own schedule. It is a lot quicker. If I am training with someone else then I have to train with what they are doing as well or they have to do what I am doing as well and it doesn't work. I trained with someone else once but it took a lot longer and we just started chatting sometimes and it just took a lot longer, so I just prefer to train myself.*

Abby mentioned that when she was competing she enjoyed training more with men than women as they had a more aggressive, functional style of working out. But now that she is no longer competing, she prefers solitude for training and having a quiet space for herself:

*I always worked out with a training partner for my competitions, a male training partner, and I like training with a man because there is none of that “Whose got the best legs, who has got the best ass”...and so on. You get in there and go hard. But now that I am not competing, I just like to do it by myself because I am all day with everybody. I don't want to speak to people while I am training. It's my thinking time.*

Working out individually for women was about having personal space – it provided freedom from always considering ‘others’. It was also about being functional in their workout approach and sometimes this entailed distancing themselves from other women and distractions of female ‘chatter’.

### *Men – not just individual but social*

Conversely, bodybuilding men have been portrayed in the literature predominantly as loners not as social creatures (Klein, 1993a). The New Zealand research found consistencies with this perspective. Some men liked working out alone as this provided a sense of independence, freedom, and self-reliance and this can be viewed as in keeping with masculine values (Weiten, 1992). Dave explained:

*I am not reliant on anyone. If I don't get that weight up then I only have myself to blame. The other thing about having a partner is that you always have a reliance on the other person....they have to be there when you need them and visa versa...but if you train yourself, then you don't have that responsibility. You don't have to wait around and stuff.*

However, the findings also suggest that bodybuilding men enjoyed the social dynamics of competitive bodybuilding. They formed networks and valued bonds, and this has not been highlighted previously. How these interactions functioned, however, and the benefits men acquired from them, differed from those acquired by women. Their dynamics appeared more functional - male talk was more training-centred and often flavoured by a more competitive style of support than that of the women. For example, Conan had a workout partner and they decided to compete against each other at the same competition as a form of motivation. Conan commented: “we can push each other... We monitor progress by mirrors and checking each other out”. Brian also liked having a partner. He enjoyed the motivation and the audience it provided – and the sharing of ‘pain’:

*I train my best and hardest when there is an audience. I need a training partner. I don't train on my own unless I am doing something extra. I certainly will not train legs on my own. I will drive to the gym and if no one is there I will drive home and find someone, 'cos I am not training legs on my own. Hell, no. Some one else can experience this pain too.*

These findings are similar to Granskog's (1992) study of male and female triathletes, where respective styles of sociability reinforced broader gendered tendencies and values (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Weiten, 1992). Key differences, however, were noted in the New Zealand research. The male bodybuilders stated these social networks provided them with the freedom to talk openly among themselves about their bodies. In the broader social arena men did not usually talk about their bodies as this might label them effeminate or even 'gay', as Anthony explained:

*Guys [non-bodybuilder men] aren't like that. They think, 'He might think I am gay if I say that' or something. They just don't like to say that kind of thing. Well, some do but some guys don't. So you have to realise that... that not everyone is going to say how you are looking apart from your mates or the gym guys. So I always feel bigger and better at the gym. And I think that is what most bodybuilders feel. You feel like you have a good physique and you get a lot more comments at the gym. You get a lot more support there and everyone understands the same thing.*

This research found that bodybuilding and the gym environment in New Zealand could therefore prove a liberating space, both for women, and for men. Bodybuilding provided feedback for the male bodybuilders about their bodies in ways that did not compromise their masculinity, and for women there was female escapism and independence.

### **Family Relationships**

Gender was expressed by participants through their relationships between bodybuilding and roles such as motherhood, fatherhood, being a partner, son and/or daughter. These dimensions appear predominantly ignored in previous research.

### *Partners*

Many New Zealand bodybuilders were involved in relationships, and bodybuilding took place within the context of this broader social setting. Michael explained there were role expectations and considerations to be made of others:

*I was getting up at 5.15 every morning, going for a walk, doing an hour and half every Saturday, so basically your life revolved around doing cardio, eating, working out – that was all you do. I am also married. So trying to blend all those things in so everyone gets their time, it is pretty hard to juggle and time gets pretty precious.*

Although prioritising leisure has often been portrayed as ‘easier’ and less problematic for men than women (Roberts, 1999), both the male and female bodybuilders referred to trying to accommodate both. Many rose very early in the morning, and daily activities were meticulously planned. Bodybuilders allocated time for activities, including their families, as Brian highlighted:

*I have an itinerary now that I try to stick to, like picking up the boys and going for a bush walk, Wednesday nights is boys’ night – mum goes to hip hop so we go to MacDonald’s. I will eat first and then I will take the kids to MacDonald’s...I make a point to sort of include them, spend time with them, do homework.*

They identified avenues where both needs could be met, and/or not compromised. Heidi indicated:

*Now in weekends, I don’t train – we might go for a run together or go swimming together or things like that. I might train early in the morning. They like slopping around in their pyjamas and have a lazy morning, so it is not like cutting into my morning with them or anything.*

Participants also separated their family schedules so they did not impose bodybuilding on the lives of those around them. Conan explained: “usually our meals are similar – but sometimes I might not have something that they are having. Or I will cook something separate for me”. Kate stated she would cook meals for her husband in bulk then freeze them so he could eat them while

she was training. It made her feel as though she was still fulfilling her gendered expectation of looking after her husband despite focusing on her own regime and bodybuilding priorities. Brian would ‘take time’ for bodybuilding and then make up for it with his wife later: “I would say [to my wife], ‘This is just how it has to be until after the competition – just give me till then and then I will make it up to you – just give me some time’.”

The New Zealand research also found that although women have typically been portrayed as prioritising their family and the ethic of care (Henderson, 2003), both men and women sometimes sacrificed time with their family to ensure their bodybuilding regimes remained on track (Probert et al., 2007b). Heidi (female) stated, “when I look back, I could have spent more time with my girls. When I first took up bodybuilding they would say “Mum, you’re not going to the gym again are you?” ’Cos they would want me to spend more time with them”. Brian (male) mentioned that when he is in the middle of competitive preparation he is not always able to spend quality time with his children: “when you compete for 3 or 4 months of the year – during that time you tend to neglect your fatherhood responsibilities [but] you still try to do the best you can”.

Bodybuilding had the capacity to affect family time together, eating times, what was eaten, schedules, energies, and freedoms to participate in activities together. Michael explained: “it is not just me who has changed. I have changed the life of my wife”. It was not, however, only the bodybuilder who made adjustments – partners amended their lifestyles and habits to reduce conflict and enhance family fit. Dave observed:

*When my wife and I met I wasn’t into bodybuilding then and she wasn’t either ...and after I took it up it was hard for a while ... but now she is into the sport and it makes it easier as we are on the same thinking path, the same training path. So when I walk out the door to the gym she can walk out the door with me.*

The support of a partner was crucial for bodybuilding participation – the partner had to be willing to accommodate bodybuilder regimes, to be understanding and to help in a practical and emotional sense. This was mentioned by both men and women.

But there could also be tensions. Brian said, “lately, my wife has been saying that I place more emphasis on bodybuilding than us. And she is right. I do at times”. Heidi discussed the lack of support of her former husband and how it contributed, in part, to their marriage break up:

*He just seemed to go out of his way to make things difficult for me. He used to complain about having to mind the girls while I trained, so I would have to try to get up early and train before they woke up or put them to bed at night and go and train after 7.30pm when they were in bed asleep – so it wasn’t putting him out because he didn’t want to go out of his way to help me with my training...The first year he came up to watch me at the nationals. He saw me on stage, but he wouldn’t watch the rest of the show. He wanted us to go. I would say, “I want to stay and watch the rest of my friends” but he would say, “No, that’s it – let’s go”.*

Focusing on bodybuilding requirements, could impact on participants’ energies and also detract from their ability to support their partner’s needs. Kate (whose husband was a farmer) said, “it is unfortunate that the dieting phase is right over the spring so it coincides with the farming calving side. My husband has long hours and he is tired. The weather is crap and he needs his wife at home cooking for him and I’m not there”.

Competitive bodybuilding impacted on their sex lives. Despite looking in good shape when they were in the middle of competition training and dieting, the bodybuilders mentioned they were often too tired for sex. Abby discussed the public misconceptions and their private realities:

*People think you both look hot and they probably think you are shagging all day...but we are looking at each other thinking, “Oh my god, the moment we hit the mattress we are zzzzzzz...Our day was up at 4 am...we would have to crawl off the mattress ...be out on*

*the road at 4.30 am to do cardio, start work at 6 am to finish at 4 pm in the afternoon to do weight training, to do my clients....yes, we were knackered.*

### *Impacts on Children*

The impacts of bodybuilding on the lives of participant children has received minimal attention in the literature, and what is available often presents a negative perspective (LiveNews, 2008). The New Zealand research found that participants believed that exposure to the sport impacted on their children in both negative and positive ways. In relation to the negatives, the sport was extreme, sometimes unhealthy, risked over-emphasising appearance and body image, and was not necessarily the type of sport they wished for their children. Brian indicated:

*I do get upset when people bag bodybuilding and portray it in a bad light. It is what it is.*

*But then again, if you asked me if I would want my children to be bodybuilders, and I would say “No”. I would rather they play something else – because of everything I have experienced with it and I guess that is the testament. I thought about this the other day.*

*Smokers will defend their right to smoke, but would they want their kids to take up the same habit? I bet the answer is no.*

Tammy stated:

*If I did again I would worry about the impact of it on my daughter ...the whole impact of how you look and what you are eating on my daughter...that she might absorb unnecessary stress on her appearance. There is this female at the gym, she has a girl and a boy...and .I heard that the daughter of this bodybuilder said she was just sick of her mum looking at herself all the time and that she didn't understand why she was torturing herself like this.*

The positives however, included role-modelling of physical activity, attention to diet, and taking personal ownership and responsibility for health and well-being. Bodybuilding also promoted goal-setting, discipline, self-determination, and achievement. Participation showcased a non-

traditional activity for daughters, and presented an alternative, non-mainstream activity for boys. There were also opportunities for children to share in the sport along with their parents. These perspectives are reflected in the following extracts:

*The flip of the coin is that I would be showing my daughter that there are things outside the general feminine sphere she can aspire to and achieve with herself. If she sees me doing physical things then she isn't doing to be afraid to do them herself...that she will realise that you get out what you put in physically, and that you can't just sit on your ass and eat crap. (Tammy)*

*It is good for my son because it has taught him how important exercise is and the diet and how you need to set yourself some goals and be disciplined and stick to what your word is and what you are saying. I think he has learnt those aspects from us. I see him around the house in the mirror posing because also my husband is always checking out his posing and practicing and we practice our routines. (Shelly)*

For bodybuilders with older children, the notion of their mums and dads being a bodybuilder generated a multitude of responses – often one of pride. Mothers may be older, but they were considered modern, non-traditional, and in good shape, as Cathy explained:

*My eldest daughter, she's 21, she thought it was fantastic. The next daughter down – she is 20 – she wasn't too sure – should mum be getting up there? And the other two – yeah, they are supportive. The one at home – she is 17 – she is quite proud of it. She has just started going to the gym herself.*

Sons' believed the 'old man', who did bodybuilding still had 'it' – the body of manhood or youth. Todd stated: "the youngest one – he is 15. He was quite impressed. He used to quite often bring his mates around and say, "Dad, lift up your shirt and show them your abs".

### *Family verses Solo*

Families created demands, distractions and the ‘risk’ of temptation and as a result the perception that life as a bodybuilder could sometimes be simpler without their presence. Heidi mentioned:

*It would be so much easier for people who are single and without families, because you have to cater for your kids and cook for them and then get a meal of your own, which is bland and tasteless and boring.*

However, bodybuilders also emphasised that having family and children served as a positive reminder that their lives should consist of more than simply bodybuilding. Having these roles reduced the risk of becoming uni-dimensional. This was reflected in Brian’s comment, “I have two young boys – aged 6 and 4 – they are great for me and you learn pretty fast there is more to life than just yourself. Bodybuilding can be a very selfish sport”. Those who were single sometimes felt that they missed out on the stimulation and support these families provided. This was indicated by Tania, who was single and living on her own:

*You think, “Why am I wasting my time”...you are sort of eating, sleeping, living it [bodybuilding]. And that part can sometimes overwhelm you at times. Sometimes you just want to talk about something else and go home and listen to someone else’s story of the day or something other than work and bodybuilding.*

### *Parents*

In contrast to previous research, which emphasises parents’ encouragement in sport participation, the bodybuilders experienced ‘concern’ from their parents in relation to their chosen sport (Coakley, 2007). This was the case for both the male and female bodybuilders, although differences between their accounts were also noted. Parental concern in relation to the male bodybuilders was often associated with whether they were healthy, eating properly, and maintaining an appropriate body weight, as illustrated below:

*I remember going home lean and my own mother not opening the door for me because she thought I was this crazy, skinny sick little boy who needed a feed quite badly. (Brian)*

*Dad was quite disgusted with the way I looked as I was so gaunt – he said to mum on the way home I am not a good look. (Todd)*

Sons also became ‘different people’ and disconnected from the identities their mothers and fathers had once known. This is reflected in Bob’s commentary:

*I am no longer the son she remembered. She feels she lost something in the sport. I guess when they see me on stage it is quite freaky. You don’t look human...well, that is what mum says, but at the same time they are pretty proud that I have achieved a certain level in a sport and they look at it for what it is. But sometimes she says, “I miss my skinny young boy I used to have. In a way you are still there, you are just there in a different form.*

Female bodybuilders highlighted not only the concern, but also the shocked response of parents when they discovered their daughters’ involvement in competitive bodybuilding. As with the sons, the women’s parents were concerned about the health of their daughters – whether they were eating properly, looking well and maintaining an appropriate weight. However, they also expressed concern that the gendered identity of their daughters could be threatened as a result of participation. They were fearful their daughters would become excessively muscular, masculine, and/or involved in steroids. Furthermore, competitive bodybuilding did not appear gender-appropriate. These notions are conveyed in the following extracts:

*My mother was horrified. You would think I had done something horribly wrong...she was absolutely disgusted because she had visions of me turning into one of those steroid freaks...one that looked like a man...getting a deep voice and growing a beard...she was absolutely horrified. But then I went to visit her a couple of weeks before my first*

*competition and she burst into tears and said, “I don’t like to see you look so thin.*  
*(Heidi)*

*My mum does not like me doing it. She thinks I don’t eat properly and of course there is always the drug involvement but she has just got to trust me there. They were so shocked – it was not what their little [daughter] would do. (Cathy)*

Janet, however, mentioned the support of her mother: “Mum is very intrigued by it – from two angles – watching the changes in me but also the whole diet and nutrition as she has always had a weight problem – so she is fascinated by the whole thing”. The association of competitive bodybuilding with dieting and weight control rendered it a female-relevant experience (Bartky, 1988) and therefore one that could be shared by mother and daughter.

### **Social Interactions**

When interfacing in wider social arenas, the male and female bodybuilders reported support from their friends, although the women indicated that people could struggle to understand why they were doing competitive bodybuilding. There were concerns for their muscularity and they found there was need to reassure people that they would not “turn into men”, as a result of bodybuilding (Choi, 2003; Heywood, 1998b; Ndalianis, 1995). The female bodybuilders also indicated that ‘other women’ could prove their greatest critics and they sometimes struggled to socially connect with them. Kate explained:

*The women get a bit edgy...or some of them do. I mean some women find it really interesting and ask how it is going but many women, they just don’t find it nice or they will tell you that they think that it is unnatural or it is not feminine and I get those comments all the time from women, but not from men. All of our circle of friends, all of the women, they think that I should give up and have babies and I don’t know if it is*

*because we live in a small town or for some other reason. They don't see the importance of what I am doing but there is an importance to me.*

This experience could extend to women, who worked-out at the gym. Tammy shared her frustration:

*Women often play down what they do at the gym and they say, "Oh, I don't want to get too big" and I say, "What is the problem here?" and "You're not going to get too big" and "What is wrong with working out really hard?" and "You're not going to get big unless you diet hard and work your ass off anyway" – but people don't understand this. And men go to the gym and say, "I am going to work out really hard and lift the side of a house", and stuff like that.*

These comments suggested women are not encouraged to put 100% effort into their physical exertions, and as a result bodybuilding women who often do push themselves, their bodies, and muscularity to their limits, may feel different from other women.

### ***Section Summary***

Although the bodybuilding literature has promoted female bodybuilders as challenging femininity (Johnstone, 1996; Ndalianis, 1995), this research found female bodybuilders did not consider themselves any less feminine for being a bodybuilder. Indeed it often enhanced their femininity. Bodybuilding also reinforced and enhanced the masculinity of men. This section has showcased men and women within the sport and the various ways gender may be expressed. It has, however, emphasised a heterosexual portrayal. The experiences of a homosexual participant proved different, and these will now be discussed.

## **Sexuality and homophobia**

### *Bodybuilding and being gay*

Klein (1993a) has described male bodybuilders as homophobic and believes they actively distance themselves from potential alignments with associations of being gay. He considered some practices of competitive bodybuilding (e.g., posing) could infer bodybuilders were somehow less than real men. The commentary of New Zealand male bodybuilders, such as Anthony on page 266 is to a degree consistent with Klein (1993a), suggesting that engaging in conduct that is seen as less masculine was described as risking alignment with femininity and/or gayness. But does this infer that bodybuilding is a culture that is unwelcoming to homosexual men? Stuart's account, as a competitive bodybuilder who is also gay, is therefore significant. Within the competitive bodybuilding scene in New Zealand, Stuart did not believe there were many participants who were gay:

*It seems largely a heterosexual sport....and the ones who could be possibly more gay [in an effeminate manner] seem to be the ones more involved in other types of exercise and are using weight training with something else or are not strictly into weight training.*

Stuart had not promoted his homosexuality within bodybuilding; however, he had not hidden it either. He simply considered it irrelevant. Currently in a relationship, his partner was very supportive of his bodybuilding endeavours. During the course of pre-competition preparation Stuart mentioned to his bodybuilding training partners, that he was gay and commented on their response:

*The thing was [after they found out I was gay] there was no change in their attitude towards me. No reservedness. It was like, 'Hey, he is gay but I know who he is and he is taking his bodybuilding seriously'.*

This was significant for Stuart as he viewed them as experienced male bodybuilders, who were 'macho' and "the sort of guys who wouldn't give me the time of day if I had not been into bodybuilding". Not only did bodybuilding enable Stuart to make friends within these social

networks, but with ‘elite men’ who they were accepting of him. They were also comfortable helping Stuart prepare his body for competition – this included nudity and touching. Stuart explained:

*My bodybuilder friend was plastering tanning lotion on me – and this is kind of cool and it probably won’t sound right – but he knew I was gay and he was quite comfortable with tanning me and there was no tension, no sexual connotations anywhere and it was really brilliant. And I was thinking, ‘It is amazing the people you meet through this. The things you end up doing is just bizarre’. After we had done the tan up we did a practice run at one of the local gyms and I couldn’t help but think...wow.*

Bodybuilding therefore served as an arena where body talk, touching, and gazing at male bodies could take place without sexuality becoming an issue or something to be afraid of or disapprove of (i.e. homophobia) as within the culture, these actions and intentions assumed different meanings – they were those of sporting colleagues, not hetero/homosexual males. Stuart acknowledged, however, there will always be “a little uncertain prejudice”, and the possibility that men wonder whether he is “hitting on them” or whether “he is checking them out in the showers”, but he added: “the fact they [his bodybuilder friends] actually knew who I was made them not judge me on the fact I was gay”. In other words, they knew him as a bodybuilder, an individual, and an identity they could personalise – as opposed to a stereotype potentially stigmatised.

#### *Locker room attractiveness*

Stuart stated he was often asked by his non-bodybuilder friends about being gay and whether being around other men with great physiques was sexually advantageous and/or pleasurable to him.

*They ask – “You know, you’re out the back with all those hot guys tanning up and stuff, don’t you feel a little ...you know?” Well, no – I just have an appreciation for all the*

*hard work I have put in and that is the last thing on my mind. They ask, “But wouldn’t you be in heaven? I mean, you have all these great bodies – the best bodies in New Zealand that you are standing next to out the back there – isn’t that kind of like wink, wink, nudge, nudge?” Well, no – I just chat to these people so I can appreciate what they have done and where they have come from.*

Stuart’s commentary highlights how outsiders may perceive the gay-bodybuilding interface – and how it can actually be experienced by a bodybuilder who is gay. Although he may have multiple identities, within the changing room and sporting context, his bodybuilder identity was at the forefront.

### *Changing times*

Klein’s (1993) literature concerning homophobia reflected the social and sporting beliefs of the time (1970s/1980s), and these can change as Stuart mentioned:

*Society has changed a lot. It is a whole lot less homophobic, a whole lot more accepting and a whole lot more diverse. Everyone [at bodybuilding events] is professional. It is as simple as that. Everyone has put in the hard work to get on stage and have their moment, and everyone is right behind them. Red, blue or green, everyone is just doing their best and it is a really supportive environment.*

In summary, research has often emphasised the negative experiences of gay athletes (Eng, 2003; Pronger, 2000); however Stuart’s story highlighted that sport participation, including competitive bodybuilding, can prove positive, empowering and may provide forms of acceptance not readily available in broader social contexts.

## **7.2 AGE**

Limited reference has been made in the bodybuilding literature to age and its scant content focuses predominantly on ‘old’ age (Frueh, 1999; Monaghan, 2001b). This section provides

insight not only from older but also from younger bodybuilders and shows that age can make a difference to participant experiences.

### **Being Older and Doing Competitive Bodybuilding**

#### *Consciousness of ageing and bodybuilding as a response*

Older New Zealand bodybuilders (those over 40 years) were conscious of the ageing process. They referred to visible markers such as middle-age spread, physical decline, and flabby bodies (Tiggemann, 2004). They also believed, however, that to a point these were controllable – within their sphere of control to ‘fight’. Bodybuilding provided the systems, knowledge, and goals to help them with this and accounted, in part, for its popularity with older participants. These notions are illustrated in the following extracts:

*I think that the older you get the easier it is for your body to bulk up for all sorts of different reasons and I didn't want to be a fat middle-aged lady. I might be middle-aged but I don't want to be a fat middle-aged lady. So I want to use this [bodybuilding] as a vehicle to keep myself physically trim, slim and healthy. (Tania)*

*When you get up to the 30s, you end up losing a lot of the shape that you had and a lot of people in that 30–50 group start to think, “Hang on, I am starting to lose a bit here”, you know, a lot of women have had babies and lose shape and blokes are getting a beer pot and middle-age spread and they are thinking, “Shit hello, I need to pull it back into line”. So, yeah, I think it is the 30–50 age group – that is where it [bodybuilding] is all happening. (Todd)*

#### *Feeling young and different from others their age*

By working on their bodies, being active, and paying attention to their diet, the older bodybuilders claimed they felt and looked younger than their chronological age, as well as looking younger than many of their non-bodybuilding peers. Heidi explained:

*A lot of people don't believe that I am 41. I think if you do a bit of exercise, watch your diet, and look after yourself that it turns back the clock a bit...I have seen people and they are the same age as me and I think, "Oh god, I hope I don't look that old". I don't believe I look the age that I am. To tell you the truth, I feel about 26. I think I am in pretty good shape compared to people my age.*

However, these differences were not simply physical, but also extended to behaviour, outlook and states-of-being concerned with age. Joan, in her 60s, said she felt sad for people in her peer group. She compared herself with her best friend [a non-bodybuilder] and in the process emphasised their identity differences: "She is a little old lady", and when talking about people of her age, stated: "they just let themselves rot in front of TV with a blanket over their knees". Being young was also an extension of their psychological outlook, mental fitness, healthiness and vibrancy. Bodybuilding contributed to youthfulness by providing a better quality of life. Jay, in his 40s, said, "I feel physically and mentally stronger than when I was in my prime. You are able to keep up with your children, your grandchildren. You are living a longer, better life".

Participants believed that 'others' their age had 'let themselves go', and this extended to the body. Todd commented, "personally, when I see others in my age group who are fat, I hate it. I feel like going up to them and saying, "you are a fat pig and you are disgusting"...it is just a weakness on their behalf...that is what I reckon". Todd's comments not only relate to age ('letting go'), but also reflect a masculine perspective that fatness (including middle-age spread) is something within a man's control. Older men who have become fat are therefore seen as having lapsed in discipline and inner strength and have become 'weak'. His perspective mirrors Tania's earlier comments about her desire to remain slim and trim. Both these comments highlight the belief that bodybuilding and youth are also about retaining the gendered ideals of body attractiveness.

### *Positive sense of self*

Older bodybuilders were often positive and proud of their bodybuilding accomplishments – made all the more meaningful because of their age. Their activities and body work had been undertaken at a time in life when their bodies were not as strong, resilient, and youthful as they once were. Becoming muscular and lean therefore provided added pleasure and satisfaction and participants emphasised how good they felt about themselves and their achievements. They were often proud of their age and the fact that they were conceived as role models, as illustrated by the participant in Photographs 21a & b:

*I was 58 years. They were of stage photos. The Shop blew these photos up and put them on the wall and said that people who see them would have no idea I was 58 and they were an inspiration...I always liked to show my back ...I am able to say, "Hey, that's me". There wouldn't be too many 58-year-old women who looked like that.*



**Photographs 21a & b:** Pride and positiveness at an older age

### *Being physically valued, advantaged, and admired*

Within bodybuilding circles, older bodybuilders were admired and celebrated, and age, with experience was also considered an asset for bodily construction and competition. Heidi explained, “because you have mature muscle, it gets denser, and that’s a good thing. You are never too old to do bodybuilding”. Kate, in her 30s, described another bodybuilder, in her late 40s who she hoped to emulate physically:

*To get the sort of muscle that she’s got – she’s been training for 12 years or competing for longer – no wonder she has got mature muscle. It is old. It is dense. And in 12 years I hope to be like that as well.*

Older bodybuilders were regarded by younger bodybuilders as identities they could aspire to. Age was not necessarily unwelcome, and they embodied a more positive vision of their ‘aged’ identity – a future role-model identity.

### *Outsider responses – Admiration/Shock/Questioning*

Responses from non-bodybuilding people to participation in competitive bodybuilding could vary. Although there was admiration, there could also be shock, surprise, and uncertainty about the appropriateness of bodybuilding. Competitive bodybuilding is not a mainstream sport in New Zealand, so participation is generally met by outsider surprise.

*Some people – when you say you’re a bodybuilder – look at you like they are quite shocked. I don’t know why probably me 10 years ago, I would have felt the same – I mean, why do they get up on stage and do that for?*

However, Shona (in her 50s) referred to how impressed her son-in-law was with her activities: “the mother-in-law in a g-string was a bit much...but I think he was quite impressed. When I was in London, some people said he had showed them my photos – so he must have showed his mates. So I think he is proud.”

### *Context and Audience*

The context may also affect the meanings and appropriateness of the older identity, for example, being seen in a bikini. Joan said she felt comfortable and proud in her bikini when she before her sporting peers, but felt uncomfortable conducting her body in that manner in a different social setting and/or before an audience of family. In the same context, the grandmother identity conflicted with her bodybuilding identity:

*They [my grandchildren] know I compete but I don't ever let them know when the shows are on. I don't want them being there. Grandkids – oh, my goodness – they don't need to be there while I am up with hardly anything on.*

### *Sociability*

The friendships within bodybuilding were meaningful for some of the older participants – in particular the women. Studies have indicated that older women often value the social bonds established through sport and/or exercise participation (Poole, 2001). Joan was older, lived alone, and had historically had a socially restricted life. Bodybuilding functioned as a social outlet through which she could now make friends, see the world, and experience opportunities that she had missed out on when young. Shona was a widow and the loss of her husband had changed her friendship base. The gym, competing, and becoming involved in the sport institutionally had become a key social outlet:

*It is really funny when you become a widow as all your friends disappear, and I have had other people say this as well. I don't know if it is because other women think you are going to run off with their husbands – apparently if you separate or divorce it is worse...I just didn't exist anymore – so my life pretty much became the gym.*

### *Family Life Cycle and Stage of Life*

Age, stage of life, and bodybuilding could intersect, leading to differing meanings and experiences. The research found that bodybuilding was an activity more appealing in New Zealand to those in an older age brackets as their children (if they had any) were often older and therefore required less support and attention. Participants could ‘be selfish’ and dedicate time to bodybuilding. These notions are reflected in the following participant extracts:

*I only have two kids at home now – I wouldn’t have done it [competitive bodybuilding] if I had had 4 kids at home and when they were younger...I would not have been able to devote the time required – physically and mentally. (Cathy)*

*My children are all grown up. They have left home and I have this time for myself – which is so important in this sport – so I don’t have to run back and look after the kids. I probably couldn’t do this now if I had young kids. (Dave)*

*The people I know with children who are involved in the sport tend to be people who have children that are just that little bit older. Because one of the surprising things that I have noticed is the number of people competing in the Senior Categories and I think a lot of that is that they have got some time, some life back to themselves, and their children aren’t so dependent that they need to be tied to their home and things. And often I think at that stage in the marriage couples have also got their own interests as well as mutual interests. (Tania)*

### *Feeling Old and Denying Age*

However, not all participants felt that bodybuilding contributed to experiences of youthfulness. Sharon, in her 40s, said, “I saw the young girls in their bikinis at bodybuilding competitions and I wondered what I was doing there? Am I too old to get up on stage in a bikini? Am I clutching at straws? Is this some middle age crisis? I just felt old”. Although Heidi felt younger as a result of

her bodybuilding participation, she mentioned that she avoided competing in the Masters section, because this categorising reminded her of her chronological age, which differed from the age she felt or wanted to associate herself with: “competing in Masters is like admitting I am old. Just the fact that I don’t feel like the age that I am. When you are in Masters, it is like admitting it....you know... that you are getting a bit past it”. Participation in bodybuilding can therefore also emphasise age-related insecurities, lead to self-questioning (e.g., am I experiencing a middle-age crisis?) and highlight, through aesthetics and sport categorisation, discrepancies that may exist between older and younger identities.

### **Being Young and Doing Competitive Bodybuilding**

Experiences of young bodybuilders appear scarce, almost non-existent, in the bodybuilding literature. Anthony’s account as a teenage participant is therefore of value.

#### *Benefits and Pleasures*

For Anthony (19), becoming involved in bodybuilding was a means to gain a more attractive body both for him and in the eyes of others (including being sexually attractive to girls), as well as gain greater levels of peer acceptance. He discussed the cruelty of peer pressure at this phase of life when people do not measure up to bodily ideals, and the difficulties of finding support to become more attractive and get in shape:

*They [the kids at school] were really cruel. They would call you that fat bastard... I remember wanting to look real good but no one would give you a hand. So it was sort of, like, I remember saying when I was young, “I want to go to the gym, I am too fat”, and I was told, “Nah – it is just puppy fat,” and then you get older and no one would help you out.*

However, his life improved, when he enhanced his physique:

*I am just so happy now compared to how I was back then – it is so funny seeing those people now, the one's who were around when I first started – they are, like, “Wow”. I remember seeing this guy who I saw when I first started training and when he saw me again he just couldn't believe it. He was just buzzing. He was stoked. He couldn't believe the amount of progress I had made. The amount of muscle I had put on.*

He explained peers interaction in relation to his body – the response of males to muscular signifiers such as biceps, and women to his muscular attractiveness and appeal:

*At parties a lot of guys and some females ...definitely the ones you know, they may come up and touch you. With girls, it is, like, “Show us your arms”. So, yeah, it is, like, bang and then you see their reaction, and then for the rest of the night when you talk past they will always grab your arm or your chest. The guys – they are, like, “Give us a biceps shot, man”, “Have you got tennis balls under there?”, and I get that “Check this out, man”.*

### *Differences and Challenges*

Anthony's account, however, also emphasised the sense of difference he felt compared with non-bodybuilding peers in his age group. Bodybuilding also presented particular challenges: the discipline and dedication as a bodybuilder made him feel different from the culture of freedom often experienced by youths of similar age. He felt older than his peers; bodybuilding could prove alienating:

*You definitely feel different. I don't really have many young friends any more. And sometimes you want to go out and sometimes you do but you don't want to drink. You don't really interact with the young people anymore and when you do you talk so much more maturely because you are used to hanging out with older people, like the older guys you workout with – so it is a lot different socially.*

Being a competitive bodybuilder at an early age impacted on relationships. Anthony said it was hard getting a girlfriend as his bodybuilding life style was not viewed as desirable by girls, and his interests, values, and priorities in life also differed from theirs:

*You notice that with the girls – they are just not up to the same mental outlook – like, they don't think about life as much as I do. I mean, I think about the future and what I want to do. They think about how they want to party and to dance. So I find that with a lot of girls – like, I can't get a girl friend. I am stuck in this area when I talk to older ladies and they are so much easier to talk to than girls are your own age.*

Anthony envisaged travelling, going overseas, and doing other things with his life. His dedication to bodybuilding, however, placed limits on his plans:

*Lately I have been thinking about travelling – can I travel and be a bodybuilder? I want to do an OE but I have to train and eat – so can I do it? You can't do that really. Just say I wanted to travel to Italy to see my brother...I mean, I think, I just can't do that – I mean, getting over there – I can't get my meals on the plane, you can't over there just go to a supermarket and buy your chicken breast and rump steak, you can't just do that. So that is on my mind – I can't just do that.*

### ***Section summary***

This section has highlighted those differences that may be experienced by bodybuilders as a result of their age. Being older and/or younger can make a difference, and this may foster particular pleasures and/or challenges for participants.

### **7.3 RACE, ETHNICITY AND CULTURE**

Although existing literature has referred to links between bodybuilding and ethnicity, these references have been minimal and predominantly presented from a non-phenomenological perspective. Commentary has often focused on what they perceive as being the stereotypical

views of black (African-American) ‘naturally powerful and advantaged’ bodies in sport and/or the dominant race ideologies associated with Carla Dunlop’s win in Pumping Iron II as a black woman (Balsamo, 1997; Heywood, 1998b). This New Zealand research provides insights from competitive bodybuilders of differing ethnicities and first-hand perspectives of their experiences of such relationships and bodybuilding.

## **Māori and Pacific Island Bodybuilders**

### *Genetically Gifted Bodies*

Māori and Pacific Island bodybuilders often viewed their bodies as genetically more muscular and therefore well-suited to competitive bodybuilding. While perceptions of ‘black bodies’ have been regarded as stereotypical within the existing literature (Heywood, 1998b), the research found that those with darker skin (e.g., Pacific Island/ Māori) really did feel ‘gifted’ in this way.

These perspectives are observed in the following comments:

*You do have to choose the right genetics – the right parents. At a show I can remember I had the compère read out, “Thanks to mum and dad. Dad for my genetics and mum for my good looks. (Brian – whose father was Māori)*

*Genetically my father is part Māori, so we have got that stocky build anyway, and I grew big shoulders as a kid and a big back and I have always had strong legs from running so it wasn’t hard for me to get the right shape for bodybuilding. (Kate)*

*Luckily I’ve got the great Island genes in me and so I haven’t really had to work too hard to get some good muscle mass and that is all from the Samoan heritage. I just pump a few weights, whereas some girls pump and pump and pump and eat and eat and eat and still can’t build the muscles. So I am grateful that I have that. (Shelly)*

Participants, particularly men who identified with these ethnic groups, appeared to hold greater expectations of inheriting a muscular build. Conan and Fred both referred to being Māori and lamented they did not have the muscular bodies they observed on others in their family. Fred referred to his uncle: “he is a big boy and quite strong and has excellent genetics. I got the other side. I didn’t get the good genetics. He has amazing genetics but as a result he doesn’t have to work at it at all.” Conan noted, “Dad and my uncles – they are all really big. I was in the next generation and I didn’t really get that – those genetics”. Whereas New Zealand European (white) men may feel blessed to have inherited more muscular genes, these findings suggested that the Māori/Pacific Island bodybuilding men held a greater expectation of inheriting these types of genes and therefore when this was perceived not to have occurred they experienced a greater sense of loss – a perception they had “missed out”.

Despite the perceived genetic advantages associated in Māori and/or Pacific Island participants, these could prove to be a double-edged sword – both from their perspective and also in terms of how they were perceived by others. For example, Allan, a successful Pacific Island bodybuilder, was frustrated with what he viewed as the stereotypical ethnic-genetic assumptions. He believed they overshadowed the work he had dedicated to creating his physique and the achievements he earned: “people say to me ‘Oh, you are lucky – you have the genetics to compete’. But for me, it isn’t so much genetics. I didn’t have that much because I worked so hard for my success”. His comments are consistent with those of Hokowhitu (2004 p. 212), who believed that in the case of New Zealand Māori there were perceptions that as sportspeople they are “handed rewards on a genetic plate”, which by default implies a lack of work ethic or commitment.

Conan [Māori] mentioned in his commentary, “a lot of Māori in general, they have the body – the physique – but they like their food too much and they are too lazy”. Conan’s comments concerning laziness highlight that Māori themselves can also generalise and reflect criticalness of their own race in this regard - a possibility that is not denied by Hokowhitu (2004).

Brian admitted that there could be risks attached to genetic gifts. He believed participants who had inherited favourable bodies could rely on their perceived natural attributes (as opposed to training) and as a result did not realise their full bodybuilding potential:

*Genetics are important, absolutely. But then again, you often find that those with the best genetics are often the ones who sort of allow it to rest on those genetics and those who have less tend to really work a lot harder. The ones who come in the hardest are often the ones who have a less genetic package, say a blockier waist or just not balanced – they will come in the most ripped, because it is a strength – it is a facet of bodybuilding that they can improve on or nail to get more competitive. Then you have people like me who have great shape and mass and lose out even though they have the best genetics, because they've allowed themselves to rest on that.*

In muscular terms, a genetic hierarchy was touted – Pacific Island people were perceived to have the greatest natural muscular advantage, followed by Māori, and then NZ European people. However, culturally, there could also be disadvantages within this hierarchy. These rankings were detailed by Conan:

*Samoans and the Tongans – they naturally have the genetics – and so we [Māori] have to work a bit harder – and especially the European. Because in terms of my physique, it doesn't take much to get a favourable build – so there is an advantage. But a lot of the Samoan and the Tongan boys – they can't get that conditioning right – like the food and the diet. They have the bulk but they find it really hard to cut down and bring their body fat down.*

In other words, Conan as Māori perceived he was more genetically advantaged in muscular terms than the NZ European, but less so than the Pacific Island bodybuilders. However, he believed that he was more advantaged than Pacific Island participants in terms of acquiring the necessary leanness because of the food, diet, and culture of Samoan/Tongans.

Genetics influenced other factors within bodybuilding, such as body hair. Māori bodybuilders tended to have minimal bodily hair. This, participants conveyed, was fortunate in competitive bodybuilding circles as it minimised the need for shaving and waxing in bodily preparation. As Michael commented, “I am Māori so we aren’t hairy people, so it isn’t too bad”.

#### *Bodybuilding is more than just genetics*

However, bodybuilders also emphasised that successful bodybuilding was more than simply a function of the physical and genetic dimension. It also required a passion for the sport, commitment, the right mind set, discipline, focus, the ability to structure your lifestyle to support your sport, and the backing of significant others. Allan (Pacific Islander) explained:

*Some people, they do have awesome genetics but you have to have the heart to go with it.*

*Without that you will never be a success because it is about not just physically but also mentally – you have to put yourself through that extreme in order to get that success, especially in bodybuilding, which is a 24/7 sport. With rugby you just play and then go and chill out. But with bodybuilding it 24/7 because everything counts – your sleep, your training, your food...everything counts. So that’s why it is more than genetics. It is about all how hard you worked to get yourself there.*

#### *Displaying the physique*

Ethnicity influenced experiences of displaying the physique. Conan commented:

*I am probably the only one in our Kapa Haka<sup>5</sup> group with a decent body in terms of muscle, definition and size. And I feel really good about that. I used to be shy to take my T-shirt off. But some people think I am really up myself because I think I have a better body, and I leave my shirt on. Then on other times when we perform I just feel really good about how I look [and I take it off].*

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<sup>5</sup> Traditional Māori performing arts group

Conan's experiences as a Māori were potentially tempered with cultural sensitivities of himself and the setting. In Māoridom for instance, some iwi believe individuals should be humble and 'whakaiti' (to make oneself small). They should not be (a show off or too proud) – whakahiihii (Metge, 1986). By openly displaying his physique, Conan's actions might be considered showing off. However, by working upon his physique and openly displaying his body Conan also associated this act with one of pride, mana,<sup>6</sup> and traditional Māori authenticity. When he went on stage at bodybuilding competitions he therefore felt "like a warrior<sup>7</sup> going to war":

*I have got the mentality that if we want to portray ourselves as a warrior then we need to look like a warrior. Like on the war field or the battlefield, would you go for the fattest guy or the skinniest – 'cos they would probably be the weakest – or would you go after the guy who is big and looks like he can take care of himself?*

Bodybuilding was about taking care of the body and creating a physique that was consistent with Māori masculinity. As a result he was able to: "Chuck on a piupiu<sup>8</sup> and just portray what you are doing – being able to move and able to be strong. It is not necessarily about being the fittest but definitely having a presence".

#### *Diet, food and health*

Food was culturally significant for Pacific bodybuilders. Eating freely, together, and in abundance was an important part of personal, family, and community life. Therefore bodybuilding regimes often conflicted with their cultural expectations, as Jay explained:

*Being Samoan, I love my food. As a Pacific Islander, we tend to have a lot of family gatherings in the weekend and so for me personally, it has been a challenge because others that are around me who have encouraged me to do this haven't changed their habits.*

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<sup>6</sup> Spiritual power and authority, pride, respect

<sup>7</sup> In historic tribal wars the Māori was a ferocious warrior

<sup>8</sup> Māori flax skirt

Conan mentioned that the food he was required to eat as a bodybuilder also transgressed what Māori often ate: “being Māori, they [other Māori] would see me sitting around eating egg whites and vegetables – they would say to me, ‘What are you eating that stuff for?’” Although these conflicts were cited as cultural challenges, the bodybuilders also claimed that the dieting regimes of bodybuilding were helping their communities by questioning their traditional practices and introducing healthier dietary regimes. These developments are reflected below:

*We used to have big feeds at night and pudding [at our Kapa Haka sessions]. It wasn't just a matter of saying we need to change our diet because we have to – there was just a slow introduction of food, and after a while they started to enjoy it. A lot of them have lost weight.* (Conan)

*We love our food, but within the Polynesian community there is very high blood pressure and diabetes. Bodybuilding is teaching them; try to exercise and not to eat the wrong food all the time. Rich Samoan foods should be used as treats, not as everyday meals.*  
(Jake)

Ethnicity also interacted with health, community, and religion, and in so doing highlighted how bodybuilding is experienced as a more holistic form of self-care:

*It is about being a role model to the wider community – my Samoan family and friends, and especially the ones in our Church who are overweight. Being a Christian, they think it is all about your heart but it is also about your appearance and how you look after yourself. You want to live a long life. It is not just about being good all the time. It is the whole thing. It is about taking everything into consideration - your spiritual and physical.*  
(Jay)

### *Belonging, Pride, Role Models and Representation*

Bodybuilding also provided avenues for ethnic promotion, awareness, pride, and a sense of belonging. Although bodybuilding was an individualistic activity, Pacific Island participants reported they often created teams, especially when they competed overseas. They travelled together, wore promotional t-shirts and supported not only their bodybuilding endeavours but those of their cultural heritage – bodybuilding presented opportunities to celebrate and promote their sense of collective identity as Pacific Islanders. Furthermore, being successful within the sport provided avenues not only for personal recognition but also pride for their family and culture. This was highlighted by Allan:

*My family are really proud of me. They are very happy with what I do and they are supportive of the whole thing. Everyone knows. Samoa is not a big country so not only my family but the whole country knows what I do. In the past few years, all these competitions, I have travelled for Samoa, not for New Zealand. I have represented Samoa everywhere in the world. I am really happy to do something for my country. I get recognised not only by my family but the country.*

As successful sporting identities they also provided positive, inspiring role-models that could be influential within their communities. Jay explained, “you look at our Pacific Island community, a lot of them look up to their rugby stars and league stars and they look after themselves but bodybuilding it is the same thing. These guys they are training hard too”.

### **Minority Identities and Cultures**

Bodybuilders from cultures other than Pacific Island and Māori discussed bodybuilding and how their experiences interacted with their ethnic or cultural identity. Bob (part German) saw his heritage as conducive to his bodybuilder regime:

*I suppose German's are known for being very methodical and precise, and they are very good at keeping a regime. There is another bodybuilder who trains at our gym, he eats*

*clean all the time and keeps a rigid, rigid diet. I found out the other day he was Dutch and I thought, ‘Yeah that would be right’. I think there is a little bit of ethnic background into your habits as a bodybuilder. Germans may find it easier to be more methodical due to their nature. Their lifestyle, their way, already supports a bodybuilder mentality as you have to be relatively strict on yourself; whereas for the Islanders who are generally more easy-going – it may not.*

His account emphasises how his beliefs regarding cultural patterns, way-of-life and values associated with German identity reflect consistency with those of bodybuilding. Therefore being or becoming a bodybuilder may prove potentially easier given these shared meanings (Burke, 2001).

Zara (Asian) also felt she was suited to bodybuilding because her lifestyle, background, and upbringing embraced one of discipline: “I have always wanted to excel at a sport and bodybuilding was one which even though genetically I wasn’t big but I knew I could be disciplined enough to do all the things that I needed to do”. Her account highlighted that although she perceived her Asian body to be physically at a disadvantage her mental outlook and mind-set was consistent, therefore she was advantaged. Zara and Sam, both from Asian backgrounds, referred to their love of muscle, but how their bodily aspirations conflicted with their cultural norms. Competitive bodybuilding was a means for Asians to challenge their cultural bodily ideals and stereotypes. Muscles in these cultures were less common and not considered desirable – being small and slim was a more favoured look for female Asians. Bodybuilding therefore enabled the female Asian participants to experience a different form of physical shape and attractiveness. Donna, a Chinese, international student based in New Zealand, explained:

*In NZ more girls go to the gyms and do weight lifting. They are trying to get toned, whereas in Hong Kong, like Asian countries, they are just trying to look skinny, really thin and fragile, rather than toned and athletic. It is quite different. In Hong Kong not*

*many women want to get big and muscly; they like to be feminine and wear the smallest size they can...most of my friends find it quite amusing that I try to look more muscular.*

However, Donna's account was not only about challenging norms. For her bodybuilding was also about finding 'fit'. Although she was small relative to New Zealand white ideals, she was large for an Asian – becoming a bodybuilder while challenging bodily norms also provided a form of social (physical) belonging: "I have wide shoulders and I am a little bit fat... I wear extra-large in Hong Kong, and my friends wear extra small and small. I am quite big, so to speak". Zara expressed similar feelings:

*In New Zealand, I am small framed but in Malaysia I am quite big compared to the Malaysians – in terms of bone structure – like size. So if I was going to buy clothes in Malaysia I would buy medium or large, but in New Zealand I am a size 8.*

Bodybuilding could provide a sense of difference and/or superiority as well as opportunities for acceptance and fit, as Donna mentioned:

*As an Asian, competitive bodybuilding is something which will not come across many people's lives and I just feel really lucky and special. When I went home [to China] I really wanted to show my friends what I do. I want to be better than the other girls in the gym [in New Zealand]; stronger and more capable of doing sports and being an international student I want to do better than Kiwis.*

Asian bodybuilders also experienced cultural challenges in relation to participation. To excel in bodybuilding required time and commitment and this could negatively impact on their efforts and energies in work and study. Career, advancement, and achievement were considered important in Asian culture according to participants. As a result, Zara downplayed her bodybuilding involvement to her parents:

*Doing well academically is important in a Chinese family, so I didn't tell my parents that I was going to compete. I told them I was dieting but I didn't tell them about the competition or ask them to come.*

Although experiences of explicit racism have been raised by athletes in other sports, it received little mention from participants in the New Zealand research. Zara, however, said she felt it was an issue and barrier for her:

*I also felt that when I competed, the Federation was a little bit racist. I don't think NABBA is as racist as the Federation. I think that in the Federation to win you have to be blonde not Asian; and I think you have to have boobs ...but I think in NABBA it is more about your physique.*

Zara's comments concerning racism within bodybuilding also connect with those of gender. She perceived there were barriers to her competitive success, not only because of her Asian status, but also because of her appearance – there was a preference for the western, white feminine blonde, toned but curvaceous ideal, over the dark, slim non-curvaceous physique of Asian women.

### **National identity – Being “Kiwi”<sup>9</sup>**

The research revealed that Kiwi culture was made visible to bodybuilders who had competed overseas. In other words, national identity often formed a taken-for-granted dimension of identity when it was experienced within the country and therefore it went unchallenged, but once outside New Zealand boundaries, differences in treatment and culture were experienced.

### *The Tall Poppy Syndrome*

Participants referred to the Tall Poppy Syndrome and how being different in a way that placed someone (or a group) ahead of the pack in New Zealand was not always celebrated. Bob believed that the culture in New Zealand was less tolerant towards bodybuilders as they signified difference that could be aligned with self-perceptions of elitism:

*We do have an element of Tall Poppy Syndrome in New Zealand. If you see a big guy here, it is not America where it is seen as a bit cool. In New Zealand they want to bring*

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<sup>9</sup> New Zealanders are often referred to as ‘Kiwis’

*you down a little bit. In Spain, the kids loved it, they wanted your autographs. They thought you were some international guy from another country. Here you would never be asked for an autograph in your life.*

#### *Acceptance of difference*

Participants questioned whether in New Zealand being too different was less acceptable – it was looked down on and seen in a negative light. Bertha (very muscular) found that internationally she was treated differently. People were interested in her muscular body overseas, and instead of being viewed as a freak or transgression of gender (as she was in New Zealand), they were more curious and open to positive associations. She explained:

*They are more accepting overseas. They are more inclined to come up to me and say, “Oh my god, you’re massive – what do you do? Are you a mountain climber? Are you a sprinter?” They kind of realise you’re some kind of athlete... [in New Zealand] you walk through the mall and someone’s like, “shhhhhh”. People are so obvious. They are whispering to the person serving you about how you look. Yeah – I mean people are arseholes.*

#### *Kiwi Political Correctness (PC)*

Bob also believed that Kiwi culture and values negatively impacted on those who chose to take steroids or learn more about them. He explained it was not only about the values surrounding drug use, but also the lack of openness – the “PC” nature of the New Zealand culture – that made discussions about these undesirable topics taboo:

*New Zealand is very GE-free, very environmentally friendly and we do tend to sit a bit on the nice green grass and look at everything like we are squeaky clean, and I know for a fact the Germans – they don’t care. What are they protecting? What are we protecting, at end of the day? What we are masking is already something which is already there*

*[steroid use] and I think New Zealand becomes a bit too good for its own shoes in the sense...it is almost like when something is bad for you, then not telling someone what it does is bad isn't as bad for their health as if they had that information and then let them decide for themselves ...overseas they don't have that problem, so to speak, it is more open.*

### *Representing Culture, Society*

Participants who had competed overseas discussed feeling proud to be a New Zealander and representing their country. Michael was an example:

*I have always wanted to be the best at what I do and to represent New Zealand at what I do. I think being picked to go overseas – that came out of the blue for me – and then going over there and winning that – I just wanted to keep on going and do more, and represent New Zealand overseas – 'cos it is just an unbelievable feeling.*

But diversity in experiences was also noted. Bertha referred to winning a world title and coming back to New Zealand to minimal publicity. She felt let down by her country – a sense that New Zealand did not embrace competitive bodybuilding or celebrate participant success.

## **7.4 CLASS**

Previous research concerning class and bodybuilding appears scarce and paints a somewhat contradictory picture (Bourdieu, 1978; Klein, 1994; Boyle, 2005). The New Zealand research adds depth and new insight to these elements.

### *Class differences*

Participants perceived bodybuilders as stemming from a range of social backgrounds. They described their group membership as comprising people from ‘all walks of life’, but sharing a common bond of bodybuilding, and this created kinship across (their perceived) class and

lifestyle boundaries. These differences contributed to their enjoyment of the sport, as conveyed by Cathy:

*There is a huge range of people. That is one of the things I like about it. You see some of them (bodybuilders) up there with their tattoos. They are really hard and rough and then there are the soft, pretty ones. There are just all sorts from all sorts of backgrounds and I think that is just part of it that makes it so interesting – because you have all got that common bond. It doesn't matter what your background is, once you get there you are all bodybuilders – there is a connection there.*

#### *Calibre of person*

To be a bodybuilder also implied a certain level of intelligence, character and/or calibre of person, and this carried class connotations. There was a lot to learn within bodybuilding and the process could be complex. Bodybuilding also involved a lot of mental thought, personal drive and inner strength. Fay stated, “bodybuilders are not stupid people. You have to be very intelligent to know what you are doing – very strong. So I find that there is a really high quality of person who does bodybuilding”.

#### *Financial Requirements*

Participants did not have to be financially wealthy, but it was acknowledged that competitive bodybuilding could be expensive. Money was required for food, supplements, trainers, travel, and clothes. Mary commented:

*I remember thinking it was quite expensive – like a really expensive hobby. I guess you buy the stuff – the paint stuff is quite expensive, you have your gym membership, then you have to pay to get to the competition, accommodation, and the special food you have to buy.*

Investment levels, however, varied. Some people spent a lot on bodybuilding; others did not – they minimised costs, electing not to spend as much on supplements or expensive costumes. Cathy discussed the varying levels of financial investments that participants made, and her own choice in this respect:

*Cost is not so much a barrier. I mean, you could put heaps of money into that, but I just don't see the value. You still have to train hard and I think nutrition is a big part. But I think if you are really at a top level then you have to really push yourself with supplements. If I were a top bodybuilder I would look at how I could get that edge but at the moment I am not too worried.*

#### *Perceptions of the sport and participants*

Class was influenced by perceptions of the sport and its participants, especially among the women. Bodybuilding could be viewed as very glamorous, but it could also be ‘hard’, and this held class ramifications. Sharon explained:

*There are different sorts [in bodybuilding]. Some of them are your hard sorts – if that is the word for them – but there are all sorts of classes and categories. There are like really attractive ladies – like models, and then there are the hard ones.*

Class was also about perceptions. Sometimes bodybuilding could be seen by others as a very low-class activity. Tania explained that her mother conceived competitive bodybuilding in this way:

*My mother thinks it is a very unladylike thing to do, and I think there is the perception of the sport, I guess you could call it a quite low key element to it. She is just a conservative elderly Catholic lady who would find that sort of activity quite anathema and unpleasant and would be disappointed that a daughter would be up on stage in a bikini and be in a gym lifting weights like some butcheress.*

### *Bodybuilding as enhancing class*

Bodybuilding also provided opportunities for people to advance their class standings. This occurred through success in the sport, opportunities to travel to events and therefore see the world and broaden their social horizons and opportunities indirectly. This was particularly pertinent for bodybuilders who stemmed from backgrounds where opportunities were perceived as limited. Bodies were also physical assets that could lead to cultural, social, and economic gains. Bob explained: “you make no money in bodybuilding, but I have made a lot of money because of bodybuilding”. It opened doors, enhanced relationships and social linkages, and changed the way people were viewed and treated in society. This could improve lifestyle and professional prospects.

## **7.5 BROADER LIFE SPHERES**

Bodybuilding intersected with role-identities such as work and religion. These dimensions are of interest, as not only have such intersections received minimal attention in the literature, but they generate additional valuable identity dynamics to this research and out understanding of identities within sporting contexts.

### **Work**

#### *Maintaining regimes*

The majority of bodybuilders worked, often full time. Maintaining commitment to their training and eating schedules – particularly during the pre-competition phase – as well as to their work requirements placed pressures on the bodybuilders. Participants often had to consider sport–work priorities. Sometimes these decisions favoured work, but bodybuilders frequently strove to maintain their schedules, prioritising them as their contest dates approached. Shelly explained:

*My work has suffered a little bit. I mean, before I would stay another hour to catch up with some work but now it is not my priority now. I do what I have to do but I would*

*rather be walking home if I happen to have missed my cardio. Or if I hadn't been to the gym, I would be at the gym spending an hour working out. So I guess the boss is a bit disappointed but he still gets good value out of me.*

Bodybuilders took their own food to work and ate where possible, in accordance with their bodybuilding regime (e.g., every 2–3 hours). Sometimes this did not conform to normal work-meal timetables or social eating patterns, therefore they had to be managed and/or negotiated with minimal disruption to people and systems. Conan stated:

*I take a chilly bin to work. I chuck everything in there. Easy stuff – usually a container of rice, couple of cans of tuna, fruit and rice cakes. I make sure I eat every 3 hours. I find out when I am going to be in a meeting for an amount of time, so I will have some snacks.*

Bodybuilding could detrimentally impact on energy, stress levels, and working relationships, especially during the competitive phase. Tammy commented, “I did well with the customers at work but I think my relationship with my work colleagues suffered. You were just so wound up about this stuff – this goal you were aiming for”. Bodybuilders tried to manage their pressure points. They took holidays from work during their competitive phase, and prepared others of upcoming demands, as mentioned by Kate:

*What I do is explain to my staff [at work], “This is what is happening, and this is when I am going to be at my worst and I need you guys to step up and realise that I don't mean to be shitty and if I am kind of short with you, then tell me”.*

#### *Favourable work environments*

Being self-employed, not having to work, having work flexibility, glide time, and a predictable work timetable were cited as advantageous by participants, as they enabled them to maintain their bodybuilder regimes. Work also served as an important support structure for the bodybuilders. This was reflected in Bob's account: “it has got to the point where they [at work] are quite excited about the whole deal. Everyone there knows I body build and they are forever asking questions”.

### *The advantages of being a bodybuilder in their working lives*

Being a bodybuilder could be advantageous for participants' working lives and their places of work. It fostered client interest, challenged some stereotypes concerning their identities with clients and colleagues, showed another facet beyond the professional face, and opened doors to additional work opportunities. Zara, an accountant, had photographs of her competitive bodybuilding successes in her work reception area. She stated:

*I am an accountant so it [competitive bodybuilding] is something interesting to do other than numbers or whatever. It creates interest with my clients. When they come in they may think, "Oh, not just a boring accountant", but I have done some other things and that makes me a bit different. It gives me a different image to what people stereotype me to be.*

It provided a means to promote other facets of the self within the work environment as highlighted by Bob:

*It has benefited work from the point of having a life in the workplace beyond work. There is actually more that just what we are doing, than just a job. People have realised that there are 'people' there – we are more than just people that turn up on Monday and go on Friday. We are people who have a life outside.*

The added confidence participants gained through their participation in bodybuilding was also transferred to the workplace, which helped their dealings with clients, customers, and work colleagues.

### **Religion**

With the exception of historic references, such as muscular Christianity (Wiegers, 1998), there has been minimal exploration of religion and bodybuilding. Connection between religion and bodybuilding emerged as meaningful for some participants, and it could be experienced as a complementary and/or challenging interface.

### *Bodybuilding–Religion conflicts*

Religion could prove a powerful and significant influence in some bodybuilder lives. For example, at the time of her interview, Sharon had stopped competing due to her religious values and explained she came from a very religious family who strongly disapproved of her involvement in the sport:

*I honestly don't know whether this is from brain washing my whole life but I still don't know if bodybuilding is a good thing to do. I am a Christian. I believe in God and I don't know if God would like me up on stage in a bikini or not. I just don't know. It is a very time-consuming thing and you spend a lot of time on yourself. I don't know if that is right for me. I don't know if that is my calling or not or whether I should be doing something else which is more worthy or more helping of other people than spending all my time trying to make my body look good.*

Working on the body could be construed as an act of self-absorption, selfishness, or a superficial (aesthetic) act. It was not a worthy use of time. Religious values were, conversely, about giving, contributing and helping others. There were also sins, as Anthony explained:

*I am a Christian and that is so hard with the steroids thing. I mean, it is a sin. It is illegal and you are doing something that you shouldn't. But every sin is as bad as each other and obviously I am trying to justify it, and you shouldn't. But that is one of those things – you have to decide to do it or not.*

### *Bodybuilding–Religion as complementary identities*

Perspectives concerning bodybuilding and religion, however, differed among the bodybuilders. Bertha used steroids, but regularly attended Church. To her religion was predominantly about the hearts and souls of people, your community and family interface. Bodybuilding was consistent with religious values if participant motives were honourable, their family supportive of their activities, and bodybuilders provided for their families and did not neglect important life spheres:

*They [the Church] are really good. I guess if my Church thought that I had an unhealthy balance of what I do with my sport and family, then they would probably not be as supportive. But I have managed to keep a balance going. There is always someone to drop my kids off and pick them up from school and stuff. There is always someone to have dinner with them ...It is not a sport that has taken me away from my family a lot.*

Churches were described as progressive by participants – more ‘accepting’ of differing life styles and interests. They could also serve as important support structures for the bodybuilder. Anthony commented:

*When I was at Church after the nationals, they asked to me to come up on stage and take my shirt off. So that was quite cool. Someone said, “Fifty years ago you wouldn’t be doing that”. So it is quite cool how far the church has come with accepting that sort of stuff. Some churches will have different views on that, of course.*

Bodybuilders believed that by taking care of themselves, they were also respecting the body that God had given them. This was particularly the case with Pacific Island bodybuilders, who referred to the key elements of Pacific Island culture as “Food, Church and Sleep”. By looking after themselves they felt better able to contribute to others, and the Church often served as a vehicle through which this often occurred. These bodybuilding–church interfaces therefore differed from Sharon’s (European, white) view of Christianity (discussed above) where her body work was conceived as a selfish, superficial, appearance-oriented act that detracted from ‘more worthy activities’ such as helping others.

#### *Combining religion and bodybuilding*

Bodybuilding could be combined with religion and these activities could be mutually promoted. Bodybuilding routines could encompass religious music, and the gym was another arena where religion could be shared and promoted, as Donna explained, “I have met so many Christians there

[at the gym] and I think that no matter where I am I can reach out to people. Doing bodybuilding doesn't mean I am not doing something for God or just doing something for myself".

### *Bodybuilding as akin to religion*

Although bodybuilding was not, of itself, a religion, it could also be viewed as akin to religion as it had the capacity to make a difference in people's lives. Bob stated: "it [bodybuilding] is almost like a religion in a way. This 'god' will make a difference in your life – this bodybuilding, this god – will make a difference. Without a doubt you will be a better person".

### **Hobbies and leisure**

Bodybuilders were involved in other social and sporting activities. During the competitive bodybuilding season these were often reduced to enable time and energies to be dedicated to bodybuilding, but rekindled in the off-season. Bodybuilders also simplified their lives. They ended hobbies (e.g., other sports), and shed social linkages, to reduce pressure points and identity conflicts. Priorities, however, could change and competitive bodybuilders sometimes elected to give up the sport in the face of identity conflicts and waning commitment. The following Chapter discusses these reasons for leaving in more detail, and their subsequent impact on identity.

## 8.0 COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDERS AND RETIREMENT

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An increasing number of sporting studies have investigated the reasons why people give up a particular sport, and the impact of this on identity (Allison & Meyer, 1993; Coakley, 2007; Dacyshyn, 1999; McPherson, 1993; E. Rosenberg, 1993; Webb et al., 1998). However, references to bodybuilding appear scarce. This research revealed that there were a range of reasons why participants gave up competing.

### Retirement reasons

#### *Motherhood*

Kate acknowledged during her interview she had considered leaving. She was newly married, wanted to spend time with her husband, had just turned thirty, and was aware of the ‘biological clock’:

*[My husband and I] have an agreement that I will stop competing for a while, we will have children and I will be there for him. But I think we both know that I will never give it [bodybuilding] up. I will always be on stage...but maybe not every year.*

Tammy stopped competing when she became pregnant. Since giving birth and also having another child she had not returned to the sport citing a range of reasons, as she explained:

*I looked quite incredible and then I got pregnant and that sort of threw it all out the window. I had my children both within 2 years 9 months, so cranked out babies and they were both caesarean so I don't think I will go back to competing because of the whole caesarean scar, and just I wouldn't feel happy on stage anymore. I have lost all the progress I have made. I would have to work incredibly hard – let's face it, as you get*

*older it makes it harder to make it do things...so it would take a lot longer to get back to where I was.*

### *Fatherhood*

Some male bodybuilders discussed giving up competing if their wives became pregnant as family life would be prioritised. They wanted to be there to support their wives and enjoy fatherhood, and they believed it would be hard to dedicate themselves fully to both fatherhood and competitive bodybuilding. Competitive bodybuilding constituted something they could return to at a later phase in their lives (as with Kate's motherhood perspective). Michael explained:

*I don't mind stopping for 2 years and competing again after that, but you have to get your family life right first and then go on from there.*

Gavin gave up competing when his wife became pregnant. This enabled him to free up his time, enjoy life, and focus on his fatherhood role. He enjoyed retiring and it provided an opportunity to reconnect with his wife as well as have a less extreme, more sociable life:

*[After I left] it was like we were in love all over again and it was nice. There was no more competing, no more dieting, no more stress and aggravation. There was just us and it has been fantastic.*

### *Work, Hobbies, Projects, Life Experiences*

Zara left to focus on work priorities. She had found it difficult to excel in both competitive bodybuilding and her working life: "I found it difficult to dedicate myself to doing more than one thing well." She therefore felt compelled to decide which identity she was going to 'do well' and chose work over competing. Other bodybuilders gave up competing simply to free up time so they could pursue other hobbies, dreams and life ambitions. Competitive bodybuilding could prove restrictive and time consuming. Participants such as Todd viewed a competition as a

distinct project and having completed it had no intention of continuing: "I said, 'This is it' ...it is all over for me. This was my goal. I set myself out to do it and I have accomplished it".

#### *Competitive goals achieved (or not)*

Some people gave up competitive bodybuilding either because they were not as competitively successful as they had initially anticipated, or they retired once competitive aspirations had been achieved. The drive and passion was no longer present. Fay retired because she had achieved her goals and this coincided with a shift in her life priorities:

*I had really achieved everything. I lost the passion for it after that because I had done it – proved it to myself that I could – more than many bodybuilders ever reach. Now there are other things that are becoming important in my life. I want to have children, and you learn that if you can't fit in those jeans your life isn't going to fall apart.*

#### *Drugs, disenchantment and extremes*

Perceptions of drug use influenced decisions. It made bodybuilding a competitively less attractive arena for (drug-free) participants to be involved in. Disenchantment with the sport also extended to drug users. Steve, a former steroid user, gave up competing as he wanted to enjoy sports in a competitive way, but at varying social levels and without the need for drugs, which he believed went hand-in-hand with competitive bodybuilding. He also became increasingly cynical of the sport, its politics, and the extremeness and explained:

*Right now I can play competitive squash rather than go back into the whole drug thing. Competing in bodybuilding – it is too hard. I would rather compete at a lower level, but in bodybuilding you can only compete at one level and that is full out. But with squash you can compete at different levels. You can take it easier and you don't have to train as hard. That whole regime, that whole lifestyle of training hard, eating right and keeping focused, then taking drugs to compete, the political arena....I am not keen, not interested.*

Abby stopped competing as she became disenchanted with what she saw as a subjective judgement process: “I got fed up with bodybuilding because I guess at the end of the day I didn’t care what those people thought and I wanted to do it for me.”

#### *Bodybuilding is not for me*

Other bodybuilders left because they discovered the sport was not consistent with their personalities – it lacked ‘fit’. For example, Mary felt she did not fit in and she found bodybuilders to be unfriendly. She considered them neurotic, disagreed with the values of the sport, and its focus on aesthetics and participation had also detrimentally affected her health:

*It became a real chore for me. I didn’t enjoy the diet. I also got quite unwell because I went into ketosis and my skin, my dermatitis played up and my hair started splitting...I didn’t really enjoy the prep for the show, and then of course you can’t eat... I have always played sport, even as a child I always played netball, softball and it was quite bizarre because there was no collegiality between people... it goes against everything I believe in.*

### **Moving Forward**

Participants gave up competitive bodybuilding for varying reasons and with differing emotions. Some were disenchanted, others left with positive meanings and memories. Some participants still remain involved in the sport: Fay trains other bodybuilders; Gavin eats and trains like a bodybuilder and helps to organise bodybuilding shows; Abby runs a gym and also trains competitive bodybuilders. Although she has eliminated the competitive component of bodybuilding she has retained the positive elements she enjoyed – the lifestyle, work outs, the style of eating, and its social connectivities. Steve, Zara and Todd have little to do with the competitive bodybuilding scene and Mary has taken up marathon running.

## **Identity Retention**

Despite these transitions, facets of their bodybuilding identities remain. Mary discussed her eating habits, her commitment to exercise, and how she ‘knows’ her body:

*I still stick to a low GI eating plan. You know, that was one of the things in bodybuilding – the oats and rice. I am a grazer now... I am addicted to exercise. The discipline from bodybuilding makes it easy to do that. If you don't do something in the morning you actually feel quite sluggish and I think, too, the other thing I have really learnt from bodybuilding is to be in tune with your body.*

Todd’s bodybuilding photographs remained openly displayed in his home; his bodybuilding dietary schedule was still stuck to his fridge door; his supplements remained in his kitchen; and he retained his bodybuilding journal. He referred to its dietary practices as a valuable lifestyle tool that he still uses. Abby emphasised that the ideologies and experiences of bodybuilding continue to influence her view of life and her interactions with others:

*I think it [being a bodybuilder] has made me ruthless in that I won't put up with any bull shit. You only have this much time to do this and this and this, and if these are the choices you make you are going to get there, and if you don't make those choices then don't come to me to complain about having difficulties with your ass or a fat tummy...so it has made me more ruthless.*

However, Tammy discussed how her bodybuilding habits remained ingrained and formed an unwelcome presence:

*My mid-wife kept saying, “You have got to eat more, the baby is not growing enough”. And even after I had her I was still trying to return to that bodybuilding diet because it gets into your brain, and a number of women I have talked to who have decided not to compete again have said the same thing...it is like anorexia...it just gets you.*

## **Identity Reflections**

Bodybuilders looked back on their competitive identities with varying emotions – including pride and disbelief about their achievements. Fay noted, “I look back and I wonder how I even did it...getting up and doing that 6 days a week....cardio for an hour and then weights”. Participants looked back with a different perspective than when they were in the midst of it, and sometimes saw things in a new light. Whereas Steve had once viewed himself as one of the ‘big boys’ and affiliated with the steroid users, he now distanced himself from them:

*[Bodybuilding] is full of meat heads, and I have noticed that bodybuilders are very egocentric ...I also became a bit cynical about why people did it. So when I look back at bodybuilding, the whole thing, the drugs and everyone is an expert, and I think, “No I don’t want to be involved in that”.*

Tammy, conversely, mourns for the identity she once had:

*These days I just feel a shadow of myself and it is terrible. So I want to get back to the gym. I regret now that I haven’t been able to train. I was healthy, I was fit-- even though I couldn’t run to save my life, I was in shape physically. I wouldn’t get sick. It really did improve my life, I had more energy, I felt capable and my mind was clear.*

Fay looked back with regret that she did not enjoy herself and her body more at the time:

*I wished that I had enjoyed it more. You know – maybe worn clothes to show it off my body as I was always quite modest. I never wore little crop tops – not to flaunt it but worn a few more daring things when I looked good. Appreciated it a bit more.*

## **Time out and comebacks**

Although bodybuilders could retire, they also came back to the sport. For example, when Shona was first interviewed, she had not competed for several years. Her initial comment was, “I thought bugger this, I’m in my 50s and it is time to have a life....I just gave it away”. But during the course of the research Shona returned to competition, and contact was therefore renewed to

discover why this had happened. She stated it was to support a friend who was competing for the first time. Retirement does not necessarily spell the end of competing. There can be ‘time outs’ and ‘comebacks’, and these notions appear overlooked in studies of retirement in sport.

## **9.0 IDENTITY IMPLICATIONS**

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This section considers the research findings (Chapters 4–8) in relation to bodybuilding, sport and identity theory. It first reviews the **New Zealand bodybuilding context** with respect to the bodybuilding literature. This is followed by examinations of **identity triggers and motivations**, as well as of the process of **identity construction**. The **meanings** participants associated with bodybuilding are discussed in their relation to sport, identity, and broader studies. **Intersections between bodybuilding and broader dimensions** – such as gender, ethnicity, age and life spheres – are explored, providing insights of how bodybuilding is experienced and managed as one of multiple identities within the self. This leads to discussions of and strategies relating to **commitment** as participants manage bodybuilding in the context of real world pressures and competing demands. The chapter finally examines decisions that underpin **retirement** from competitive bodybuilding and documents lessons and insights for sport and identity theory.

### **9.1 THE NEW ZEALAND COMPETITIVE BODYBUILDING CONTEXT**

Previous bodybuilding research has been predominantly influenced by British and/or American perspectives, as well as the work of Klein (1990; 1993a; 1993b; 1994; Klein, 1995; 2001a; 2007), whose research was undertaken in Southern California during the 1970s and 1980s, yet remains extensively cited today. These studies imply their findings reflect the global context and/or contemporary competitive bodybuilding. The New Zealand findings highlighted that this was not necessarily the case and found that changes had occurred in the sport since Klein's (1993a) original study or perhaps they were never reflective of the New Zealand context at all. New Zealand bodybuilders argued that New Zealand culture can influence experiences. The Tall Poppy syndrome, the country's treatment of particular sports, their attitudes toward difference, having a ‘clean, green image’, national ethnic composition, perspectives on homosexuality, leadership ideals, the image of the Kiwi bloke, country history, values, beliefs, and patterns of

living all permeated bodybuilder identities, making the New Zealand context different from those in other countries.

The quantitative findings also challenged previous findings and many stereotypical perceptions about the composition and culture of competitive bodybuilding (Klein, 1993a; D Smith, 2006). They revealed that competitive bodybuilders came from a range of backgrounds – they were not solely blue-collar workers as suggested by Klein (1993a). The sport was not male-dominated (Klein, 1993a) – at least 50% of participants were female. Furthermore, despite assumptions, by default, in the literature that competitive bodybuilders are mostly in their 20s and 30s (e.g. Drummond, 2002), the New Zealand research found most were in the mid- to older age bracket (30–50 years). In fact, bodybuilding was a sport that held tremendous appeal for older people. The ethnic composition in New Zealand bodybuilding also differed from international studies (e.g. Māori, Pacific Island).

Not all participants were hyper-muscular, as has often been characterised in the literature (Klein, 1993a), but rather comprised diverse physical types. Since the 1970s and '80s, competitive bodybuilding has become much more inclusive of a range of body types and this has been reflected in the greater level of competitive category options. Finally, contrary to the belief that steroid use is widespread – although it must be admitted some New Zealand bodybuilders took steroids – it was not found to be a normative practice as many participants competed without using them. As highlighted by Donnelly and Young (1998), subcultural investigations should not be studied in isolation of place, time, structural and social moorings, and this was found to be the case in this study

## **9.2 IDENTITY TRIGGERS AND MOTIVATIONS**

The literature has suggested that people take up competitive bodybuilding as compensation for their perceived internal inadequacies (Klein, 1993a). By constructing a powerful exterior they

create an illusion of strength and confidence, although internally bodybuilders are believed to remain insecure and feel ‘lacking’ (Klein, 1993a; Fisher, 1997). The New Zealand findings indicate that people were motivated by a range of reasons to take up the sport. Not all were premised on this ‘inadequacy’ theory – rather, their motivations were similar in principle to those of many people taking up a new identity - because they believed there was value and benefit in doing so. Although these reasons were undoubtedly underpinned by varying psychological process, for example, a desire for uniqueness, distinctiveness, a continuity of self-identity, and a need for self-worth or social value (Breakwell, 1986), people became involved in competitive bodybuilding because they envisaged an end state that was desirable to them.

Participation decisions, however, were not influenced solely by inner drivers. Identity and sporting studies have referred to the influential role played by social factors (Burke, 2004; Coakley, 2007; Donnelly & Coakley, 1999), and this was also found to be the case with the bodybuilders. Social stimuli (e.g., being inspired by bodybuilder), interventions (e.g., group recruitment by existing members) and the availability of practical pathways (e.g. being in the gym and amongst bodybuilder trainers) played important roles in triggering and encouraging participation. Knowing and meeting competitive bodybuilders made being a bodybuilder appear a ‘possible self’ - it created an image or self-concept to which individuals could relate and it formed a prototype of what they hoped to become (Harrison et al., 1999; Knox, Funk, Elliot, & Bush, 2000). Possible selves created a bridge between participants current and future selves and the changes necessary to make the transition (Knox et al., 2000). In the case of the bodybuilders, therefore, not only did they perceive benefits in becoming a bodybuilder, they were also in a social environment that provided opportunities, prototypes and a practical pathway to make that a reality.

### **9.3 IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND EVOLUTION**

Becoming a competitive bodybuilder did not happen overnight. Participants had to make the transition from non-competitive to competitive bodybuilder. They had to learn group norms, practices and ideologies, language, demeanour, conduct and emotion. Social identity theory also refers to the need to learn, adopt and comply with group norms in order to become a group member (Hogg, 2003), and studies of rock climbers and rugby players have shown in a practical sense how identity construction may occur (Donnelly & Coakley, 1999; Donnelly & Young, 1988, 1999). The novice bodybuilders reflected similarities to the participants in Donnelly and Young's study (1998; 1999). Like them, they predominantly learnt group norms via instruction, watching, imitating and following other group members. When participants first began competitive bodybuilding everything was new and unusual and behaviours had to be consciously considered. Although they had some ideas about the identity and what was to be expected, they had to learn the 'realities' first hand and, as also found by Donnelly and Young (1998; 1999), these sometimes differed from what they had initially envisaged.

In the case of bodybuilding these included the experiences of discomforts (hunger, tiredness, mood changes), and sacrifices (e.g., in terms of eating and social activities) that often occurred in the course of creating their competitive physiques. They found that bodybuilding was not necessarily enjoyable, and commitments could be questioned. Crossley (2006a) also noted in his investigation of gym participants' experiences, that discomforts can be re-interpreted in the minds of participants to assume different meanings, which enable them to become 'pleasures'. This was also the case with the bodybuilders. Within the subculture, they were taught how physical-mental-emotional discomforts could be reframed as mind-body battles that tested their inner strength, discipline and toughness – and that there was pleasure in their achievement. Becoming a bodybuilder, therefore, was not simply about adopting surface behaviours and techniques, it was about embracing norms and ideologies that also required new ways of thinking, seeing and

experiencing their world, and this, as highlighted by Hogg (2003), can prove a multi-layered experience.

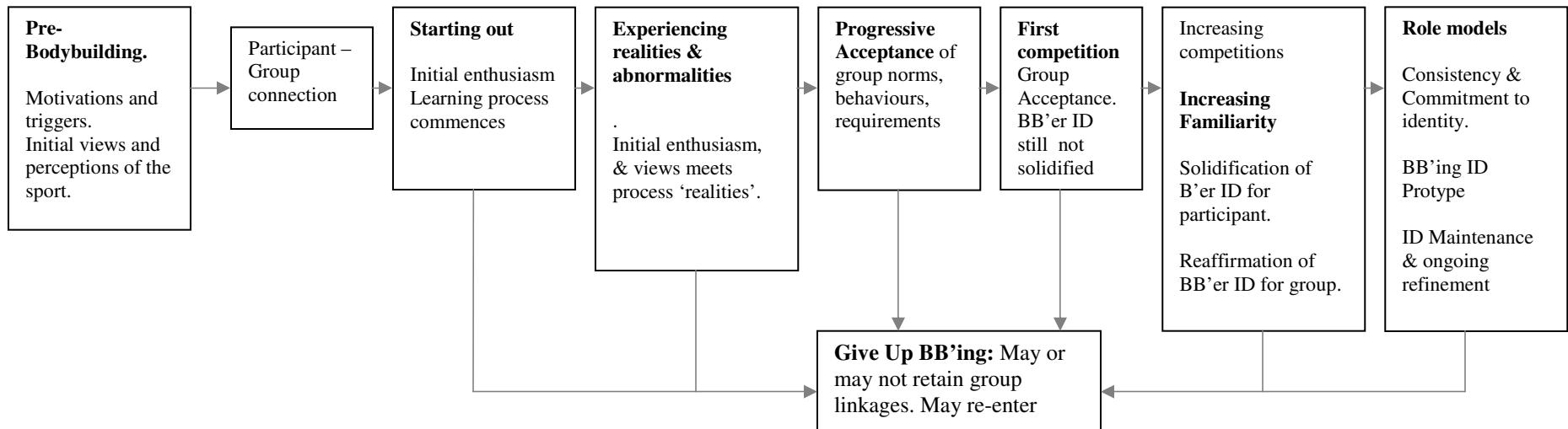
According to Donnelly and Young (1999), identity confirmation is the point in the identity construction process when the participant is considered by group members to have evolved a reliable reputation as someone who has accepted and mastered the practices and conforms to group norms. For the competitive bodybuilder, this usually occurred when they made it to the stage and therefore indicated they had successfully completed the pre-competitive preparation phase and presented their bodies in a competitive bodybuilding event. Bodybuilding events were therefore, not only competitive arenas, but also group rituals and truth ceremonies where participants placed themselves in front of their peers for scrutiny, group confirmation, and acceptance. Although similarities can be noted with the processes described by Donnelly and Young (1999; 1988; 1999), there were also differences. The New Zealand research found that when the novice bodybuilders made it onto the stage, many were still very unsure of their identities after their first competition, despite group acceptance. It was often a very bewildering experience where they lacked confidence in the necessary processes. Some participants admitted they continued to compete in order to become more familiar with group processes and norms. This suggested that despite acceptance from the group at this stage, identities were not solidified for the novice participant. In comparison, Donnelly and Young (1998; 1999) found that the opposite occurred – novice rock climbers often believed they had mastered the identity requirements and processes at a point in the process before group members believed such mastery had occurred.

With time and involvement in the sport, the bodybuilders came to know what to do and expect. The group norms and processes became habits, part of their daily routines. Those who remained in the sport became more confident and often more committed. They dedicated time and

resources to advance their bodybuilder knowledge, refine their techniques, and participate in group activities. These actions reflect what Stebbins (2003) has observed in serious leisure participants, including those involved in amateur sports, that they often went through a process of strengthening commitment and increasing immersion with respect to their activity. Steps included “beginning” (where interest took root), “development” (where participation became more routine), “establishment” (when the basics had been learnt), and “maintenance” (when involvement is in full bloom) and this may eventually be followed by decline or “exit”. Figure 9.1 summarises the identity construction process of the New Zealand bodybuilders and Figure 9.2 illustrates their potential linkages with the steps described by Stebbins (2003) and Donnelly and Young (1998; 1999).

As also highlighted in Figure 9.1, with an increasingly successful competitive track record and/or credibility within the group, some bodybuilders moved up the formal and/or informal group hierarchy. They could become role models, reflecting what Hogg (2003) has termed the ‘prototypes’ or ideals of what the competitive bodybuilder identity should be. The bodybuilders in these positions were conscious they influenced and perpetuated the identity construction process of others. In other words, they felt they were no longer representing themselves, but also their group.

Accompanying the transition towards bodybuilding, participant lives tended to become more structured around the sport, developing friendships with other competitive bodybuilders and bonds with this community. They also developed an affiliation with the group because of the commonalities they now shared, and this was often accompanied by a sense of difference towards those who were not group members. As explained by Jenkins (2004), the identity is relational, defined through group similarity and inter-group difference. Coinciding with this transition, the research found bodybuilders continued to reconstruct their identities. This entailed adjustment



→ INCREASING GROUP EXPOSURE AND COMPETITIVE EXPERIENCE →

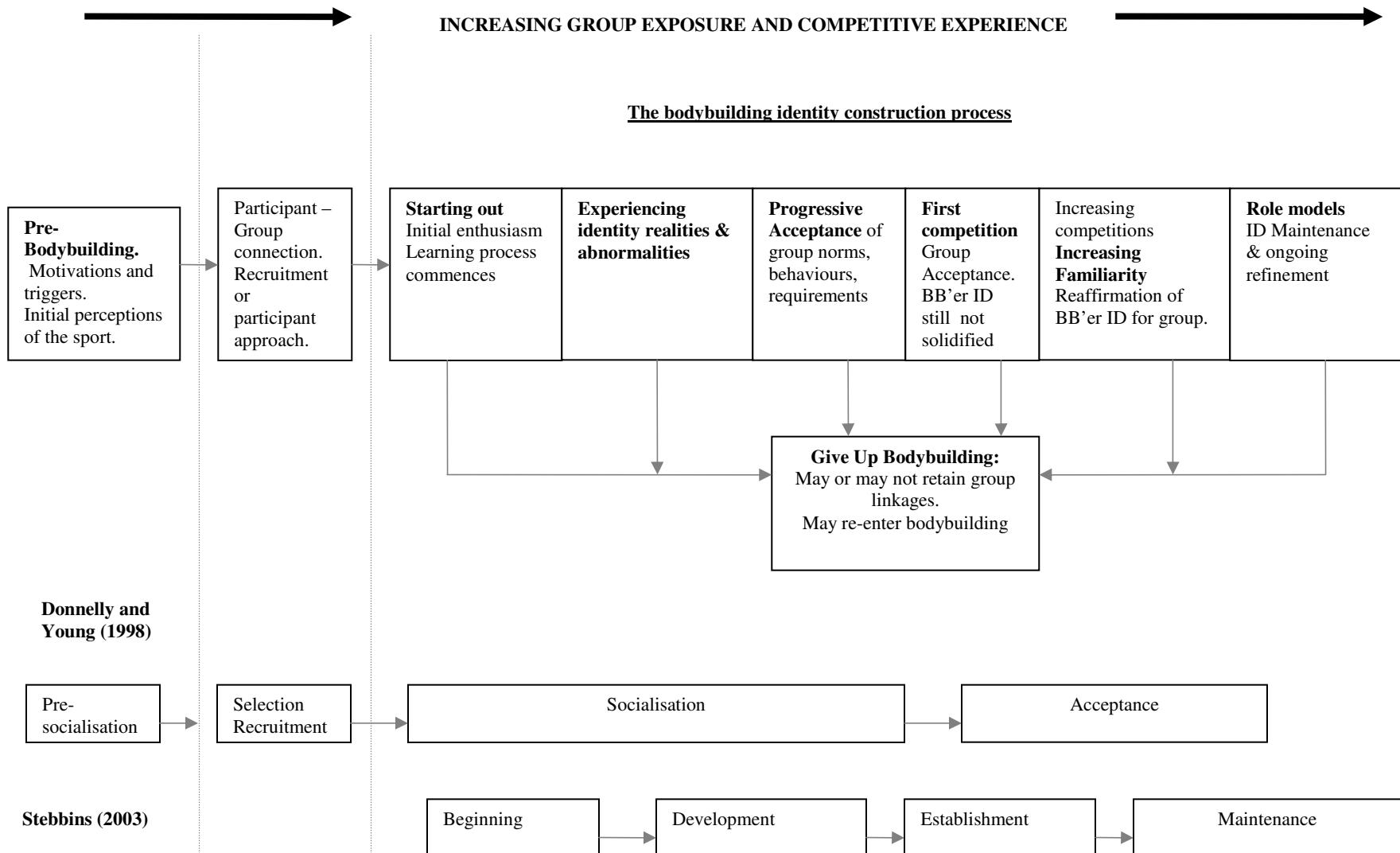
#### Implications

- for group norms
- for body
- for sociability
- for similarity & difference
- for lifestyle
- for BB ID meanings

#### Outcomes

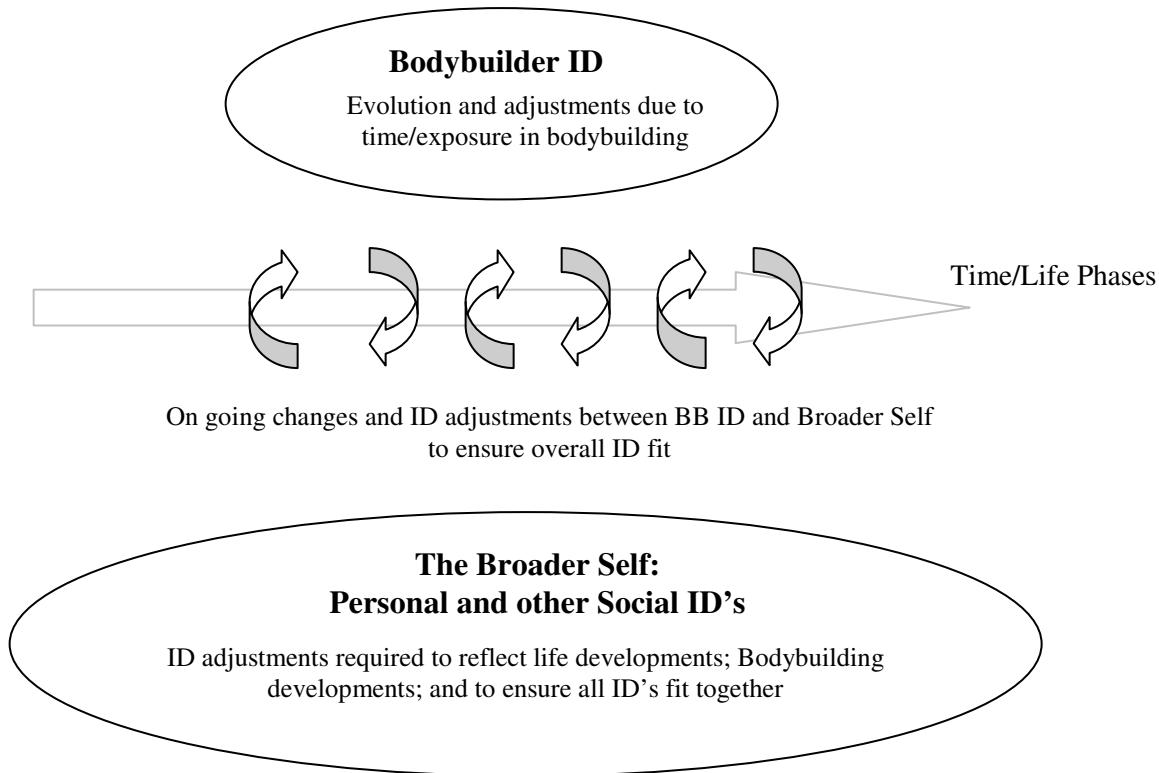
- Increasingly normalised/conformity
- Come to 'know' the body. Increasing refinement of BB'er processes and tailoring
- Increasing group bonds and affiliation
- Feel like a competitive bodybuilder, Feel different from others.
- BB'ing embraced as a lifestyle or way of life.
- Meanings and commitments may change with experience and exposure

Figure 9.1: Bodybuilder Identity Construction Process



**Figure 9.2:** Identity Construction Process - Comparison of models

such as the shedding of social identities which did not fit their bodybuilding identity. To provide more time, energy and/or resources for bodybuilding, they lost touch with friends who were not part of their new bodybuilding interests or they gave up activities, such as drinking and partying that conflicted with the lifestyle and/or hobbies. These processes are consistent with recent developments in identity theory. As explained by Burke (2006, p. 93), when new identities are assumed there is often a need for broader changes to the self as “each of these identities ultimately must fit in” with other identities within the self. In other words, becoming a competitive bodybuilder was not simply about adding a new identity to an existing portfolio of identities or making changes to fit in with social group norms, as per the model seemingly portrayed by Donnelly and Young (1998; 1999). It also entailed making changes to the broader self. This was not a simple process about ensuring an identity fitted in with the others, but as is emphasised by Burke (2006) ensuring that all the identities “fit together so as to bring shared meanings to a common level” (p. 94). This process is depicted conceptually in Figure 9.3.



**Figure 9.3:** Bodybuilder-Broader Identity ‘Fit’

This implies that the process of identity evolution and continual adjustment does not end. When participants became competitive bodybuilders, there were on going changes with time and experience in the sub culture. However, this also requires continual readjustments of the self to accommodate these changes. Needless to say, the process also works the other way – bodybuilders will also experience changes in their lives, and these developments in the broader self will often impact on the meanings and evolution of their bodybuilder identity.

#### **9.4 IDENTITY MEANINGS**

This research adopted a contemporary perspective that perceives identity as a set of “meanings” people may associate with themselves (Burke, 2006). However, this is a notion that has been more conceptually discussed than extensively applied in research. Empirical studies appear limited. The New Zealand research discovered that despite the participants sharing commonalities on the basis that they were all competitive bodybuilders, the meanings they attached to these identities could prove quite different. This is because they were not only influenced by group processes but their personal identities which were unique (Jenkins, 2004). Participants did not bring a blank slate when they commenced bodybuilding but their background, other identities, values and personality, and these factors also affected their meanings. Having said that, as illustrated in Figure 9.4 a series of common themes were identified – some of them were more significant to some participants than others; but in totality they comprised the meanings participants attached to competitive bodybuilding. Although the quantitative and qualitative processes adopted different tacks, as displayed in Figure 9.4, there were many similarities in their findings. ‘The body’, which in the literature has been signalled as integral to bodybuilding identity (Klein, 1993a) was often associated with these meanings, however these linkages have often only been limited to the physicality of the body, its muscularity and its ‘final product’. The New Zealand research revealed the diversity of ways that ‘the body’ can be experienced within the context of bodybuilding meanings as shown in Figure 9.4

Connecting Themes	Quantitative Themes	Qualitative Themes
<b>Body-Self-</b>	Body manipulation	Body transformation
<i>Physical change and presentation</i>		Creative/artistic/performative
		Sport/athletic/competitive
<b>Body and Balance</b>	Balanced self image	Healthy-unhealthy relationships
	The Price	
<b>Body – Self – Others</b>	Physical attractiveness	Physical attractiveness
	tool kit	
<b>Body - Lifestyle</b>	Lifestyle	Lifestyle or project (a phase within a life)
		Social belonging and friendship
<b>Body-Holistic Self -</b>	Self-life enhancement	Personal development
<i>Self Definition and/or Improvement</i>		The challenge

**Figure 9.4:** Bodybuilder meanings and connecting themes

For some participants being a competitive bodybuilder was largely about the transformation and manipulation of the body – the process and experience of physical change. It was a journey of the self and the body, not just an end product or one of pursuing a mutual externally held view of common ideals of physical perfection. Participants had varying muscular agendas, and bodybuilding was about creating the bodies and identities they wanted. Sculpting the body could also be experienced as a creative process – one of self-design. Bodybuilders could also be

competitive, performative, and/or expressive, especially at events and on stage. Bodybuilding was also about physical attractiveness. Not only did their bodies serve a competitive purpose, but as permanent ‘fixtures’ they could be used in other settings for social benefit, and the bodybuilders enjoyed this. Bodybuilding could be perceived as a lifestyle, an integral part of their total identity. Being a competitive bodybuilder reaffirmed for some participants their values as a health-conscious or health-oriented person. This, however, was more than simply a healthy look, it was a belief that they took care of their bodies, and were attentive to their diets and wellbeing in a holistic way. However, there were complications. There were times, places and occasions when the bodybuilders did not feel healthy or attractive and their bodybuilder identities were not enjoyable. This often occurred in the throes of intense competition preparation. Bodybuilding was regarded as an extreme sport where participants could push the boundaries and capabilities of the self.

Bodybuilder meanings were not always about the externalities of aesthetics, but were also about the mind and the internal workings of the self. When bodybuilders prepared for competition it was often challenging, and participants felt tested on many levels. It was through these processes that participants came to know themselves and their bodies much better. They discovered they could make sacrifices, be disciplined, focused, and committed, and take themselves to the edge physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially. These short-term exposures to unhealthy, risky practices were defined as healthy, positive, and constructive experiences as they enabled participants to develop inner toughness. Bodybuilding was associated with experiences of personal development as participants experienced self-discovery and self-enhancement from these processes. The skills and ideologies they learnt in bodybuilding were also transferable to broader life spheres. However, bodybuilders also admitted that while bodybuilding could be meaningful in a positive, constructive way, it could also harbour a dark side. There was a fine line where by

exposing themselves to these experiences they were also exposing themselves to greater vulnerabilities (Probert et al., 2007b).

### **Implications for bodybuilding literature and identity**

Although the body is important to competitive bodybuilders, the previous literature has narrowly depicted this relationship as the pursuit of excessively muscular bodies, physical perfectionism, conforming and/or challenging bodily ideals (Fisher, 1997; Klein, 1993a; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001; Shea, 2001). This emphasises the physical body, its muscularity and the end product. The findings of the New Zealand research revealed that this is a limited perspective that fails to appreciate not only the diversity of bodies that are now celebrated in contemporary competitive bodybuilding, but also the changing nature of the sport and the complexity of relationships that exist between the bodybuilder, their body, their self, and others.

Working on their bodies, participants experienced good days and bad days, emotional highs and lows, and multiple ways of seeing their physiques due to differing contexts and varying identity perspectives. These different states-of-being affected the lens through which the bodybuilders experienced their bodies. The literature tends to view the body as stable and consistent – although multiple bodies have been recognised in sport (e.g., Cox & Thompson, 2000). Bodybuilders who were assessing their body within a bodybuilding context may view themselves as small – they were conscious of their competitive counterparts and their future goals to build more mass. Yet to outsiders, and even to bodybuilders themselves, in normative social settings they can understand they may also be large. These different ways of looking may help clinicians better understand what they have tended to view as an affliction - a perception of smallness despite being muscularly large, which they have labelled muscular dysmorphia (Chung, 2001; Grieve, 2007; Lantz et al., 2002). Sometimes, however, bodybuilders lose touch with this external perspective, especially when they are in their competitive mode. During this phase, they become fixated on

their goals – they become uni-dimensional as energy levels decrease and competitive preparations intensify. They cannot see outside the box of their bodybuilder identity and during this phase may become focused on themselves, their needs, and their bodily progress, including flaws. Their dissatisfaction with their body reflects the work they still have to do. This does not necessarily mean bodybuilders are unhappy with their bodies at a broader level. In deed many are very proud of their bodies. Bodily dissatisfaction can be understood both as normative bodybuilder talk, especially during the competitive phase, as well as an extension of their drive in terms of bodily goals. Unfortunately, such subcultural ways have been presented as tendencies towards bodily obsessions and fixations, which arguably ignore the complexities of the lived experiences of competitive bodybuilders in bodybuilding literature, for example, Fisher (1997) and Marzano-Parisoli (2001).

### *Attractiveness*

Bodybuilders referred to participation as a means to become more socially attractive – to get in shape – and this reflects consistencies with the bodybuilding literature (Bordo, 1988), as well as with the belief that lean, toned, muscular bodies are often considered physically and symbolically attractive, and culturally valued (Reischer & Koo, 2004). Scholars have often referred to people who work on the body through diet and exercise to enhance their physical attractiveness as being caught in the grip of conforming to social bodily ideals – they are viewed as cultural dopes or docile bodies (Bordo, 1988; Klein, 1993a). However, these perspectives ignore the lived experiences of the bodybuilders who transform their bodies - the benefits and pleasures bodybuilders realise from identity changes that enable them to become more attractive. The New Zealand research found that looking good was not simply an aesthetic outcome, but one that often changed participants internally and how they perceived and experienced themselves. They felt confident and heightened levels of self-esteem and self-worth. These physical improvements released them from undesirable former identities (e.g., a history of being fat), opened new doors

in their lives, provided introduction and acceptance in new social networks, and changed the way they engaged in the world. These improvements are consistent with studies of participants who have engaged in plastic surgery. For example, Davis (1995; 2002) found that although these physical changes enhanced participant aesthetics, identity changes also occurred beyond the surface, and the people involved believed they had become, in many ways, ‘different people’.

### *Health*

Bodybuilders are often depicted as unhealthy people (Carman, 2001; Klein, 2001a), but the New Zealand research suggests that many bodybuilders viewed themselves as health-conscious individuals and perceived bodybuilding to be consistent with these values. The connections they made between bodybuilding and health, however, were more than the aesthetic dynamic reflected by Monaghan (2001b). The bodybuilders felt healthy in more holistic ways. They felt good about themselves, vibrant, and mentally alive. Healthiness was an extension of their behaviours (e.g., their attentiveness to diet and physical activity) and because bodybuilders believed they had come to ‘know’ their bodies. They felt in touch with their body as a system, ‘listening’ to their bodies, responding to its needs and therefore their health. In so doing, they were active agents taking control and assuming responsibility for their well-being. These connectivities between bodybuilding and health reflect consistency with broader studies. For example, Mullen (1993) has shown that people associate health with being fit, active, eating the ‘right foods’, and looking healthy. Biddle et al. (2000) have documented the positive psychological spin-offs participants may gain from physical activity, such as improvements to self-esteem, self-image, self-worth, and state of mind. Bodybuilders’ accounts reflect consistency with models of self-care (Ziguras, 2004), healthism (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989), and those that relate to the adoption of healthy lifestyles (Cockerham, 2005).

Bodybuilders also stated that their adherence to a structured eating and training regime contributed to their sense of focus, purpose, and therefore well being. These phenomenological ‘pleasures’ of well-being associated with control and discipline contrast with the more critical and pathological perspectives where, in the bodybuilding literature, these types of behaviours have been associated with addiction, dependency, bodily obsessions, and (negative) perfectionist tendencies (Fisher, 1997; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001; Smith & Hale, 2004). References to studies outside the spheres of bodybuilding, however, have found people with structured daily regimes experience greater levels of well-being, purpose, and self-esteem, and tend to have more positive future-focused attitudes (Bond & Feather, 1988; Burns, Dittmann, Nguyen, & Mitchelson, 2000). These perspectives, combined with the New Zealand findings, provide new, more positive interpretations on this issue.

### *Competitive cycles*

The New Zealand research highlighted the complexities of bodybuilding competition preparation, cyclical patterns, and its implications for relationships such experiences of healthiness-unhealthiness. These dynamics are frequently ignored in critical and/or clinical accounts of bodybuilders. For example, Carman’s (2001) assessment of competitive bodybuilder eating practice concluded bodybuilders were unhealthy and potentially disordered, but the study was undertaken during the competitive phase and failed to contextualise the timing of its analysis and also the subcultural rationale for such practices. The New Zealand research found that bodybuilders often felt healthier and ate more during the off-season. Furthermore, as conveyed by Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo (1992), food and dietary practices can also be viewed as culturally influenced. In this respect, just as countries, tribes, and other social groups (e.g., vegetarians), may have their own dietary formats and belief systems, so can bodybuilders. Because how and what they eat, and how they treat the body may differ, does not prove their lives are necessarily disordered – they simply differ.

### *The value of risk and unhealthy practices*

Previous research has by-passed how practices that may appear to researchers as disordered, illogical, discomforting and unhealthy (Carman, 2001; Klein, 2001a), may also be experienced as rewarding and even ‘healthy’ by participants. As argued by Russell (2005), sporting risks can be valuable to the athlete as they enable them to test boundaries and capabilities, contribute to personal growth, and may foster a sense of ‘self-affirmation’. The accounts of New Zealand bodybuilders were consistent with this perspective. By ‘risking’ themselves physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally they tested their boundaries and in the process ‘felt tough’. Mental toughness is an emerging area of research in sport research (Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks, 2005; Connaughton, Wadey, Hanton, & Jones, 2008; Golby & Sheard, 2004; Jones, 2002; Nicholls, Polman, Levy, & Backhouse, 2008; Thelwell & Weston, 2005) and the bodybuilder experiences therefore contribute to knowledge in this area. Akin to these athletes, the bodybuilders also referred to experiences of ‘tough thinking’; feeling mentally strong; the importance of maintaining focus; and the need to be hardy and to overcome self-doubts. They also discussed the importance of needing inner drive and self-motivation – to want to achieve their goals despite such effort being ‘hard work’. As with the findings in these studies (Bull et al., 2005; Golby & Sheard, 2004; Jones, 2002), the bodybuilders, too, had to push back the boundaries of physical and emotional pain to stay on track despite life distractions, and by doing this they experienced mental toughness.

### *Sport, art, exhibitionism*

While the literature has debated the application of sport, art and exhibitionism to competitive bodybuilding (Klein, 1993a; Thirer & Greer, 1978), the New Zealand research collapsed these distinctions, and in doing so added weight to a more contemporary picture of sport that considers these aspects to be interwoven (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). The research showed that skill, creativity and art are attached to posing the body on stage and in the gym. Furthermore, through these visual

spectacles, bodybuilding performance was often subculturally influenced. Participants learned and practised body techniques, just like rugby players learn to pass a ruby ball (Crossley, 2004, 2007; Mauss, 1973). Bodybuilders also learned how to hold the body with pride, confidence, and arrogance. Vanity and narcissism, for the bodybuilder, served a competitive and functional need. This alternative way of viewing vanity and narcissism challenges the negative connotations that often appear to be assumed both in bodybuilding literature (Carroll, 1989; Klein, 1990; Rubinstein, 2003) and in clinical studies generally (Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008). They also contribute to a recent research focus in which narcissism has been considered as a potential contributor to the competitive repertoire in sport, such as American football, where it increases confidence and aggression during the game (Elman & McKelvie, 2003).

Although the appropriateness of bodybuilders being referred to as sporting people has been debated (Klein, 1993a; Thirer & Greer, 1978), there appear minimal insights into participant experiences as athletes in bodybuilding, for example into their strategies, behaviour, and emotions as competitive sporting identities. The New Zealand findings suggest that participants could be competitive and winning highly prioritised. Participants trained hard, competed with a seriousness and intensity in the competitive arena, and could experience ‘flow’ – the gelling of task-mind-performance (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). To win or lose in the bodybuilding competitive arena could also prove an emotional, meaningful, and very personal experience. However, judging the body was often also inextricably linked with judgments of the self, which made competition all the more complex in a sporting framework potentially influenced by subjective assessment. These experiences not only contribute to insights about emotion in sport (Duquin, 2000), but highlight the possibilities of comparing the competitive experiences of bodybuilders with those of rhythmic gymnastics and figure skaters, whose competitive assessment is also influenced in part, by the human factor (J. Ryan, 1996).

### *Belonging and friendships*

Competition training was often a period when bodybuilders turned to each other for support, to share understandings, seek inspiration, motivation, and kinship. Despite being portrayed as social loners (Klein, 1993a), friendships and social connections were found to be important and valued by the bodybuilder. As highlighted by Walseth (2006), sociability can take a number of forms and this was noted in the New Zealand research. There was the connectivity of being part of a common group with shared interests; even though the bodybuilders did not always know each other personally, they felt a bond and sense of relatedness, which is consistent with social identity theory (Jenkins, 2004). There were also the friendships, intersecting regimes, and training networks the bodybuilders formed, which have also been noted with runners and triathletes (Granskog, 1992; Hockey, 2004, 2005). Technological changes means that the internet and online avenues create means by which bodybuilders share visuals of their bodily progress, exchange diaries, compare goals, and stay motivated, and these avenues are only becoming more recently noted in bodybuilding literature (Ploderer, Howard, Thomas, & Reitberger, 2008).

### *Lifestyle*

Many bodybuilders referred to competitive bodybuilding as a lifestyle. While ‘lifestyle sports’ have become a topic of recent interest (Roberts, 1999; Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton, & Gilchrist, 2005; Wheaton, 2000a, 2004), bodybuilding has not featured, although it does reflect consistencies. According to Wheaton (2004), participants who view their sport as a lifestyle connect with it on a broader level – it is not just a sport, it is an ideology that defines and shapes their life. For bodybuilders too, bodybuilding was not simply a sport, but was a way of living, a pattern of behaviours and beliefs that influenced their everyday existence. It gave their life focus and purpose, and many other identity spheres revolved around their bodybuilder needs.

### *Personal development*

The New Zealand research highlighted that the broader gains and connections between bodybuilding and personal development, although discussed in literature, have only been explored to a limited extent. For example, studies of female bodybuilders have referred to experiences of empowerment and how bodybuilding may help to address victimisation (Heywood, 1998b; Lowe, 1998). In broader sports studies, Bell (2002) found that through physical activity, participants can ‘feel differently’ – female athletes can become strong and more confident. Cox and Thompson (2000) have also suggested that the experiences of strength and empowerment participants may acquire in sport may also help their confidence and leadership skills. These studies, however, relate only to female participants. The New Zealand research found that both male and female participants associated competitive bodybuilding with personal development.

Bodybuilding contributed to enhanced confidence and fostered greater levels of understanding about the self and a sense of self-discovery. Participants reported that it enabled them to redefine themselves and sometimes to construct more desirable future selves. They admitted they could be surprised by their achievements in bodybuilding, suggesting there were latent depths within their identities of which they were previously unaware; through these, experienced participants gained wisdom from ‘knowing themselves’ better. This implies people do not always know their identities as well as they think they do. The bodybuilders also said there were skills and ideologies acquired through bodybuilding that were applicable in broader life settings, including, goal setting, planning, and time management. In studies of rock climbers, Robinson (1992) reported that participants’ experiences of sport were transferable to work and broader social arenas and, like bodybuilders, these included the benefits of self-determination, commitment, and perseverance. Bodybuilders believed the strength, attitude and ‘knowing’ they gained from

bodybuilding enabled them to take on challenges that, in their former pre-bodybuilding identity, they might not have attempted.

This relationship links with Klein's (1993a) foundation work, which argues that when people become involved in bodybuilding it is often in response to perceived personal shortcomings and low self-esteem on the part of the participant. The New Zealand research found that these 'shortcomings' are not necessarily consciously identified or willingly acknowledged at initial involvement, but are often something participants identified in hindsight, as they reflected on their former pre-bodybuilding identities relative to their current selves. In other words, 'shortcomings' were not necessarily a motivator which underpinned participation, but certainly a realisation after the fact.

### *The body*

The New Zealand research found that appreciating the lived experiences of participants is integral to understanding their bodybuilding identities, yet despite extensive focus on the body existing sociological and bodybuilding literature have arguably done little to really explore 'bodies' and 'embodiment'. As claimed by Witz (2000), although 'the body' has been acknowledged as a central component in sociological studies, its relationship to identity is still frequently viewed as residing beneath an umbrella of social powers – in other words, something that is controlled, disciplined, and/or exploited. Furthermore, Howson (2001) believes that whereas sociology has often done much to illuminate the "Körper" (the structural objectified body), it has yet to really come to grips with the "Lieb" (its living, feeling, sensual dimension). This research has tried to shed further light on both the "Körper" and "Lieb" components of the bodybuilding identity – not only what it means, but also what it *feels like* to be a bodybuilder, acknowledging however, that there is still more work that can, and should be done.

## **9.5 MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

Bodybuilder meanings and identities were also found in the research to have been influenced by broader dimensions of the self, and this reflects consistency with contemporary identity theory. In recent years, identity theory has increasingly appreciated the self as being comprised of multiple identities (Thoits, 2003) and believes this can also influence identity experiences. Identities are not conceptualised as self-contained elements of the self, but rather that evoking one identity (e.g., bodybuilding) may also evoke another (e.g., age) and this can lead to complementary and/or conflicting experiences (Burke, 2001; Thoits, 2003). With the exception of gender, bodybuilding and sporting studies generally have given scant attention to these broader identity relationships, yet this research suggest they are important to fully appreciating the athletic identity. The New Zealand research identified a range of identity intersections that influenced participant experiences - gender and sexuality, age, race and ethnicity, national culture, class, and other life spheres such as religion, work, family and social lives.

### *Gender and sexuality*

Gender studies have dominated bodybuilding, tending to focus on the muscular body and its capacity to challenge and/or reaffirm participant masculinities and femininities (Balsamo, 1994; Boyle, 2005; Choi, 2003; Fisher, 1997; Gillett & White, 1992; Guthrie & Castelnuovo, 1992; Klein, 1993a; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Wiegers, 1998). While many of these notions were reaffirmed in the New Zealand research, they lacked appreciation of diversities and subtleties as the varying muscular agendas and shifting bodily ideals. They also overlook the gendered influenced experiences of leanness. Female bodybuilders reported that they often felt attractive – at their physical best – when they were competitively lean, and this association with slimness is consistent with feminine social ideals (Reischer & Koo, 2004). For male bodybuilders, a low level of body fat was sometimes seen as too skinny (and small) for an every-day look; an attitude that reflected similarities with the skiers in Loland's (1999) study, which identified that male

skiers felt their competitive leanness was not the same as their social ideal – they too would have preferred to be less skinny and small. However, bodybuilding men did not experience, to the same extent, the body image struggles women had when their weight and body fat rebounded after competitions. Female bodybuilders were more prone to feeling ‘fat’ off-season and these findings are consistent with Chapman’s (1997) investigation of female rowers and their cyclical weight experiences. The New Zealand study also challenged previous research. For example, when the female bodybuilders lost breast size, they did not necessarily feel an urge to recuperate this ‘loss to their femininity’ by having breast implants (Choi, 2000; Ndalianis, 1995).

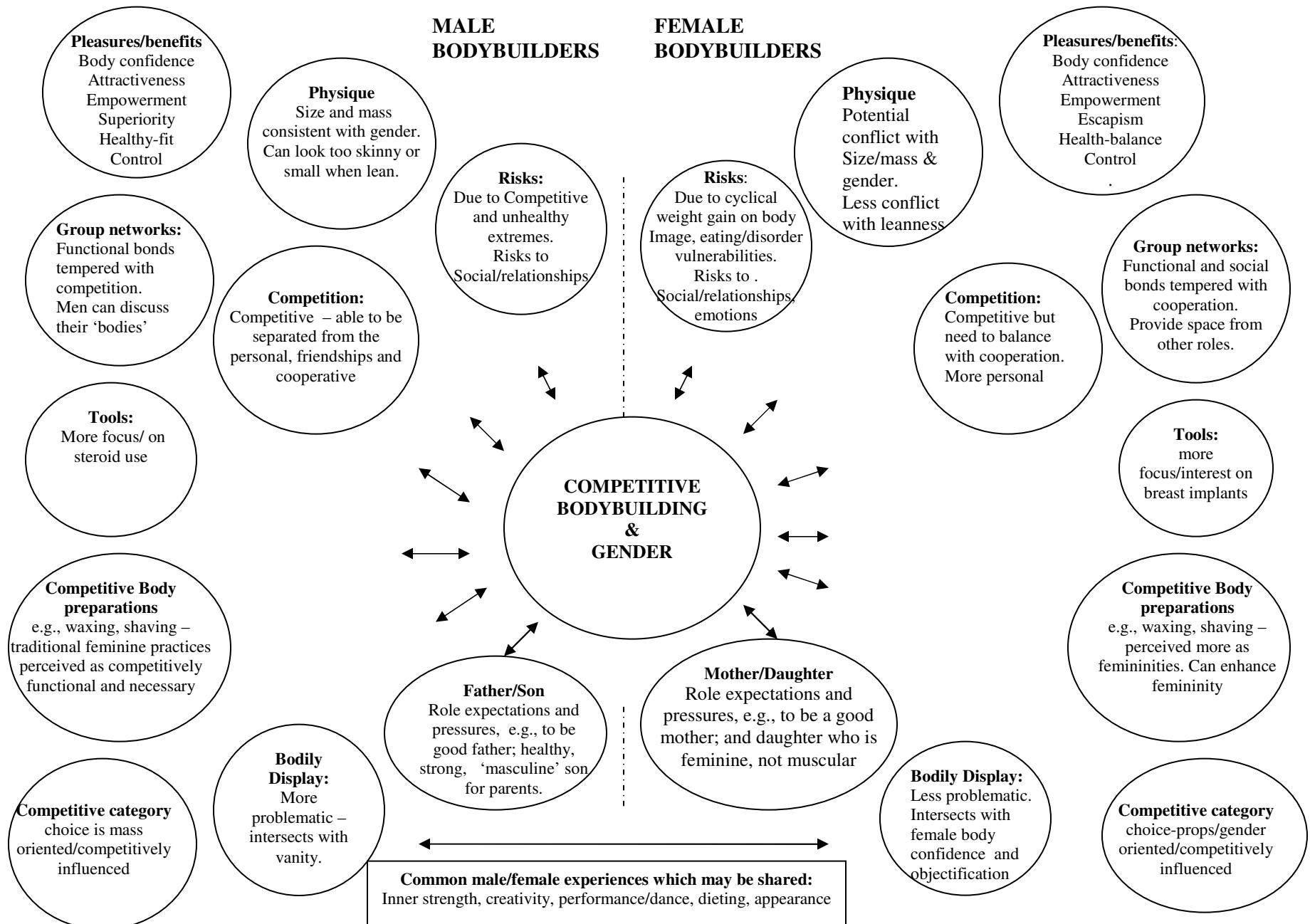
Female bodybuilders enjoyed feeling confident in their bodies and displaying it - for them this was a pleasure and non-problematic. It was consistent with femininity and that women and their bodies are frequently socially judged and subjected to the gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Reischer & Koo, 2004). For men, although they liked to show off their good physique, this had to be managed despite innuendos of vanity – inferences with the capacity to compromise their portrayals of masculinity. These differences between the male and female bodybuilders were identified in the quantitative analysis, but explained through the qualitative process highlighting the benefit of a mixed method approach. They also reflect consistencies with broader studies of men, masculinities, and gym participation (R. Gill et al., 2005), which have suggested the conflicts men may experience in relation to vanity and body work.

However gender, in bodybuilding was not only expressed in relation to the body and this appears largely overlooked in literature. The New Zealand research found that gender was portrayed by participants in an array of ways and these can be found in broader studies concerning gender (Bartky, 1988; S. Brown, 2001; L. Davis, 1990; Koivula, 2001; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Weiten, 1992; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender could be expressed during competition, through competitive category choice, the use of props such as makeup, their sex lives, experiences of

sexual attractiveness, and their roles, for example combining bodybuilding with being parent, partner, son and/or daughter, as illustrated in Figure 9.5.

Although pre-contest bodily processes (e.g., tanning, waxing and hair removal) have been construed in literature as normative feminine practices (Bartky, 1988) they were experienced differently by the male and female bodybuilders, and also differently amongst the women (e.g. they could be resisted and/or considered new abnormal and unnatural). This indicates that practices themselves are not necessarily gendered but the meanings that participants attach to them are. It also showcased the importance of context to meanings. In broader social arenas, for men, they became more akin to (feminine) appearance-oriented practices and therefore they became more conscious of the risks their overt use could imply of their masculinity. Although it is suggested that metro-sexuality is becoming increasingly acceptable for the sporting male (Harris & Clayton, 2007), it still presents challenges and careful negotiation for the ‘Kiwi bloke’ (Law, Campbell, & Schick, 1999) and athlete.

The bodybuilding men initially appeared more overtly competitive than women and these findings are consistent with existing research (Coakley, 2007; Klein, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Recours et al., 2004). The more cooperative style of interaction was noted among the women, which was also consistent with (feminine) expectations aligned with gender and sporting studies (Granskog, 1992; Koivula, 2001; Weiten, 1992). The New Zealand research discovered, however, that when further questioned about competitiveness, female bodybuilders were sometimes found to be more competitive than they had initially acknowledged, or had perceived themselves. Wheaton (2000b) has made similar observations in windsurfing men – despite perceiving themselves as non-competitive, having listened to their accounts and observing them



**Figure 9.5:** Competitive Bodybuilding and Gendered Experiences/Meanings

in action, she concluded they were highly competitive. The New Zealand research also found that the female bodybuilders could engage in a style of competitive interaction that differed from the men – one which was more personal and arguably, ‘bitchy’ in nature. The research therefore identified potential inconsistencies and additional subtleties that could challenge bodybuilding and sporting research and also contribute to greater insights of sport, gender and competitive experiences generally (Coakley, 2007; Klein, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Recours et al., 2004).

The research provided insights of the networking styles of the male and female bodybuilders, highlighting how gender can shape these experiences and also influence social pleasures and challenges. The findings reinforced the bodybuilding and sporting literature (Granskog, 1992; Klein, 1994; Poole, 2001) but also provided new perspectives. For example, bodybuilding could be a space where women seek to escape from other women and where they may prefer to be with men who hold a more functional focus towards their sport. These insights have not been reflected in bodybuilding or, it appears, widely considered in sporting literature.

Bodybuilding also interfaced with family roles, shaping participant experiences. The findings reinforced previous research concerning the constraints of leisure (Henderson, 2003; Roberts, 1999), but also challenged them. Female participants proved they could be selfish – placing bodybuilding ahead of their family, or seeking ways to juggle these interfaces, and the bodybuilding men (like women) experienced an ‘ethic of care’. The support of the spouse was found to play an important moderating dimension in bodybuilder enjoyment and continued participation. A lack of spousal support could lead to conflicts and the end of relationships and/or bodybuilding and this reflects consistencies with studies of serious sport and leisure participation (Gillespie, Leffler, & Lerner, 2002; Goff et al., 1997; Granskog, 1992, 2003). However, the New Zealand research also found that partners could also amend their identities in order to reduce conflict and enhance identity harmony within the family. Gendered concerns were reflected in

bodybuilders' relationships with their parents and these contrast with sporting studies, which had tended to emphasise the socialisation effect and encouragement of parents in relation to their children and sporting endeavours (Coakley, 2007; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006).

Bodybuilding also impacted on sexual attractiveness, sex lives and sexualities. The lean, muscular bodies of participants enabled them to feel more sexually attractive – a finding consistent with Monaghan, Bloor, Dobash, and Dobash (1998), however the New Zealand research also showcased the 'reality' of sex lives for athletes – despite having 'hot bodies', in the midst of hard training, they are not necessarily wanting 'hot sex'. The findings also suggest that some male participants felt they could be viewed as sexual objects, and some of the female bodybuilders wondered whether men were interested in them for their muscular, erotic curiosity and appeal, rather than for who they were as a person or because they were ideally 'feminine'. In so doing, bodybuilding had the capacity to change dynamics such as the assumption that it was often women, not men, who were normally treated as the sexual object (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), reaffirming a sexual dimension that has emerged from women becoming more muscular (Heywood, 1998a).

New insights were also found in relation to gay bodybuilders. Mainstream bodybuilding could prove a positive and empowering activity for gay identities – thus contradicting existing research that has emphasised a homophobic culture within competitive bodybuilding (Klein, 1993a). The New Zealand research, undertaken in 2005-2008, indicated that values and perceptions concerning homosexuality may have changed since Klein's (1993a) study, and that there are now greater levels of acceptability of gay athletes. For identities who often experience stigmatisation (Krane et al., 2002), being able to engage with other sporting men were meaningful and contributed to enhancements in confidence, self-image and self-esteem. Pronger (2000) believes there are few, if any references to welcoming, positive homosexual experiences in sports where

gay athletes can ‘be themselves’ unless a ‘gay sporting environment’ is provided. The New Zealand research provided such a case study, and in so doing has contributed not just to bodybuilding, but to the sport identity literature.

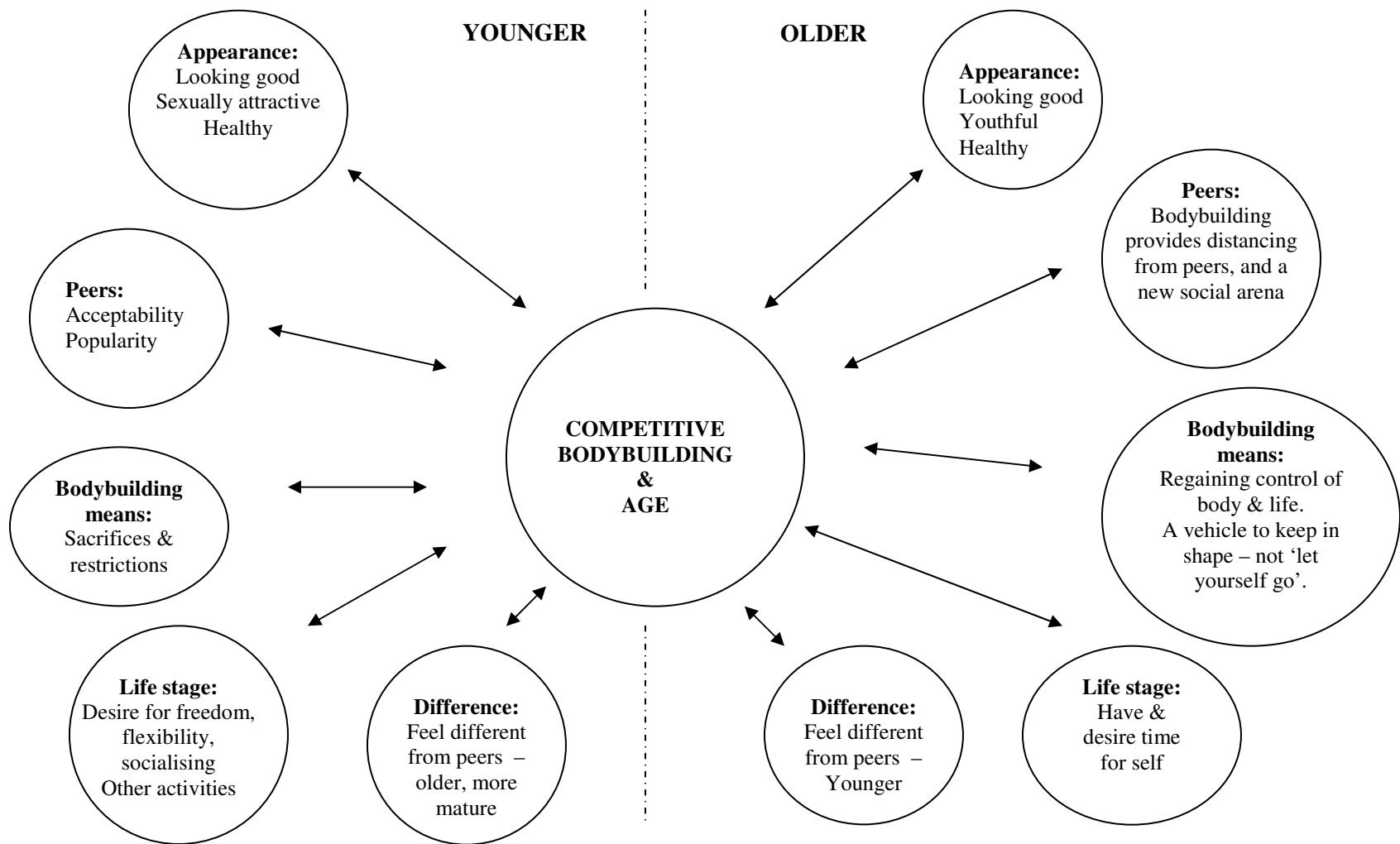
Bodybuilding was also found to be a liberating culture within which men could engage in body talk, judgment and body improvement strategies in ways that did not compromise their heterosexual masculinity. Although in society women tend to be more closely identified with and ‘judged’ on their bodies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Reischer & Koo, 2004), it is also more acceptable for women to discuss the body. This was not the case with men, and a lesson for literature (sport, gender and the body) is that this is not only a benefit, but a hindrance. Bodybuilding is therefore pleasurable because it enables such gendered barriers to be reduced, and enables men to experience other ‘femininities’. For example, men can be creative, artistic, and engage in movement and dance, as well as discuss dieting and taking care of their appearance. Within the context of competitive bodybuilding they are able to engage in these feminine practices (Bartky, 1988) in ways that did not conflict with their masculinity. Similarly, women in bodybuilding could experience mental toughness and independence without conflicts to their femininity. These crossovers or sharing of gendered experiences do not mean, however, that the female bodybuilders were becoming more like men or that the male bodybuilders were becoming more like women – rather, the relationship between gender and sex and how it is experienced by participants is arguably more fluid than has been traditionally conceived in bodybuilding literature (Klein, 1993a) and this is a concept that is becoming increasingly recognised in studies of sport (Thorpe, 2007).

### *Age*

According to Mutran and Burke (1979), age identity is not simply an extension of chronological age, but may encompass dimensions such as a participant’s state of mind, health, body, social

dynamics, and stage of life. Findings from the New Zealand research, summarised in Figure 9.6, reflect this perspective. The quantitative and qualitative findings within the research conveyed similar messages – that the pleasures and challenges younger participants may attach to competitive bodybuilding can differ from those of older bodybuilders. For older participants, bodybuilding was a means to help them feel and/or look younger. It reaffirmed that being in shape, lean and muscular is often aligned with youthful identities (Shilling, 2003; Tiggemann, 2004). However, participants experienced this, not only through reference to themselves, but also as a result of peer benchmarking. Compared with non-bodybuilders of comparable age, they perceived themselves as in better physical shape, looking younger, and more ‘in control’ as they had not ‘let themselves go’, that is succumbed to ‘old age’.

Bodybuilding was found to be a subculture that enabled older participants to depart from normative Western white stereotypes, where the ageing identity was perceived as undesirable and unattractive, and where people were expected to be inactive and in a state of decline. In other words, participants did not view themselves as aligned the normative patterns of this phase of life (Kroger, 2007). Similar findings have been discovered in research of older runners (Tulle, 2007). The older bodybuilders also had time for bodybuilding. Their children (if they had any) were more independent. Many were therefore able to take their sport seriously. A review of the sporting literature has found a dearth of studies of the older, serious committed and competitive athlete, with the exception of Tulle (2007), who suggested that older runners could also be very dedicated and serious about their sport. The quantitative analysis within the New Zealand research found that the older bodybuilders (over 40 years) were just as competitive, as those less than 40 years of age. Older bodybuilders valued the social linkages associated with the sport. This was a reflection, in part, of their commitment to the sport which is consistent with sporting studies (Stebbins, 2003). These friendships and bonds were particularly meaningful for those living on their own (e.g., widows) and also in the face of family changes (e.g., no longer having



**Figure 9.6:** Competitive Bodybuilding and Age-Related Experiences/Meanings

children at home), as newly acquired independence provided an avenue for new social linkages. Similar outcomes have been found in other sporting studies (Hardcastle & Taylor, 2005; Poole, 2001).

For younger participants, although bodybuilding could also be aligned with health, well-being and fitness, it was found to be more strongly affiliated with looking good and feeling sexually attractive to others. These findings are consistent with the literature on identity and youth, which has emphasised the pressures youth may feel, particularly towards their bodies, and the importance of looking good in order to be popular and accepted with their peers (Frost, 2003). However, the research also pinpointed identity conflicts between youth and bodybuilding. At their stage of life, young people also value their freedoms, having time to engage in a range of activities and the opportunity to socialise with their friends (Kroger, 2007). The requirements for discipline, sacrifice, and social restrictions entailed in competitive bodybuilding make the sport less attractive to them. Participation can therefore make young participants feel different from their peers – older and more mature. This sense of difference, occurred because they became part of a subculture where responsibility, commitment, structure, and discipline were norms that were typically aligned with an older age identity (Kroner, 2007). In summary, previous bodybuilding literature has seemingly paid scant attention to the dynamics of age, yet as the New Zealand highlighted, age can significantly affect meanings and experiences. The research also found that within New Zealand competitive bodybuilding is proving highly attractive to older participants.

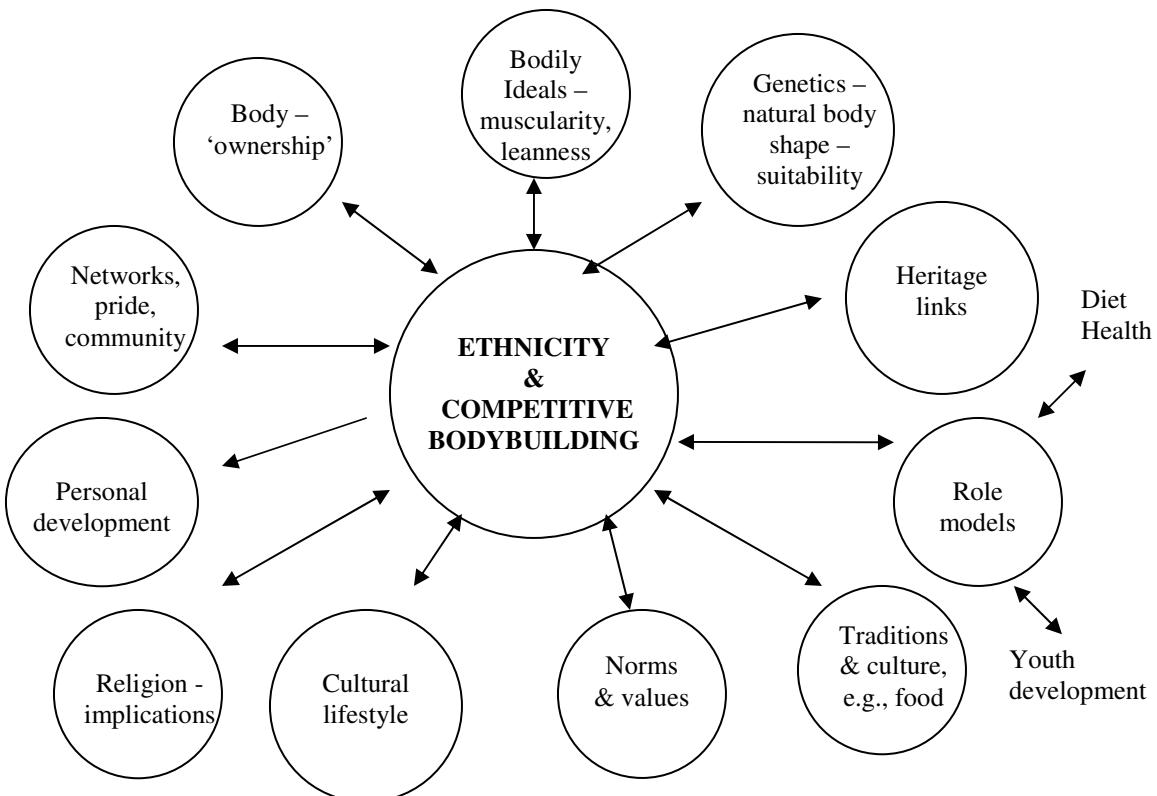
### *Race and Ethnicity*

Although race (similar biological connections) and ethnicity (shared customs, language and views) can be viewed as distinct from each other (Coakley, 2007), both are important aspects of identity and often closely related (Henderson, Ainsworth, Stolarczyk, Hootman, & Levin, 1999; Scranton et al., 2005). A benefit of the New Zealand research was that it involved bodybuilders of

different races and ethnicities. The demographic analysis suggested the majority of participants were New Zealand European; however, they also included Māori, Pacific Island, Asian, and German. The qualitative phase provided insights into how race/ethnicity interfaced with bodybuilding in ways that could prove complementary, even advantageous, for participants, but could also lead to identity challenges. The key findings of the research were the diversity of ways race and ethnicity can affect bodybuilding meanings and how these experiences can vary for participants of differing race and ethnic groups. As indicated in Figure 9.7, these dimensions included cultural body ideals; perceptions concerning genetic and natural body shapes; traditions such as food, diet and way of life, values (e.g., the importance of career advancement); links with health, religion, sociability (e.g., individualism, collective, family); racial history (e.g., links to oppression; tribal wars); as well as contemporary issues being experienced within their ethnic communities (e.g., concerns for obesity, crime, education) and perceptions and ideals related to role models.

The findings suggest, for example, that the perceptions of Pacific Island and Māori competitors were that their bodies were genetically suited to competitive bodybuilding, due to their ‘natural’ muscularity and it was a way to celebrate and be rewarded for their attributes. For Asians, however, muscle was less prevalent in their genetic logic and culture and competitive bodybuilding therefore challenged their bodily ideals.

Relationship with their bodies, self, and others could also vary. For the Pacific Island bodybuilders, their successes with their bodies were not just a reflection on themselves, but also of their families and communities. In other words, their bodies did not appear to be ‘owned’ by them, but ‘shared’ with others. This cultural attitude is similar to Fijian culture where the body is also perceived as “community property, not a product of the embodied self, but rather an artifact of social connectedness” (Reischer & Koo, 2004 p. 306).



**Figure 9.7** Competitive Bodybuilding and experiences/meanings related to race/ethnicity

Ethnic ideologies and lifestyles could also affect experiences. For example, Asian and German bodybuilders saw their values as promoting discipline, and these were consistent with bodybuilding. They were identities that shared meanings (Burke, 2006) and therefore their identity interfaces and transitions in order to become a bodybuilder were perceived as relatively harmonious in this respect and less-problematic compared with other ethnic groups.

Woodward (2002) believes that identity can encompass “roots and routes”. In other words, people’s background in racial and ethnic terms as well as their journeys, in a literal and metaphorical sense, can influence experiences. This perspective was also noted in the bodybuilder research. For example, creating a muscular, lean body enabled Māori participants to portray their bodies as warriors – physically fit, strong, powerful identities who fought in their historic tribal wars. The research also found that for Asian bodybuilders, now living in New Zealand, participation in bodybuilding provided means of experiencing individualism – doing something

different and proving oneself in a foreign country; it was also a means to socially fit and connect, and could therefore be experienced in a multitude of ways.

Race and ethnicity could also influence health, how it was defined and therefore how it related to bodybuilding. For example, Māori and Pacific Island understandings of health were often found in the New Zealand research to differ from those of white, western culture. They extended beyond focusing on fitness and health, and even its psychological dimensions, to encompass spirituality, religious, cultural, community, and family perspectives. These connectivities are consistent with broader understanding of health noted in studies of Pacific Island and Māori communities (Agnew, Pulotu-Endemann, Robinson, Suaalii-Sauni, Warren, Wheeler, Erick, Hingano, & Schmidt-Sopoaga, 2004; Durie, 1997; G. Robinson, Warren, Samu, Wheeler, Matangi-Karsten, & Agnew, 2006). There was a heightened consciousness of health, especially among Pacific Island bodybuilders, because of the significant health issues that currently exist within their communities (e.g., obesity, diabetes). As conveyed by Mennell et al. (1992), country and culture can influence food and dietary patterns, and the Māori and Pacific Island bodybuilders said they experienced significant challenges as bodybuilders in the face of their ethnic traditions where food plays an important role in social engagements. The restrictive bodybuilder diet could therefore conflict with these beliefs and lifestyles. Conversely, for ethnicities such as Asian, dieting appeared less problematic. However, these types of identity conflicts also created avenues for Pacific Island and Māori bodybuilders to challenge unhealthy practices associated with their ethnicity by introducing new dietary practices and therefore helping their communities with their health concerns. There were also practices and values within bodybuilding, such as goal setting and achievement, which could benefit youth within their communities, as other perceived social difficulties included crime and below average levels of education. The Church was often an important avenue through which Pacific Island bodybuilders worked within their communities – tailoring their bodybuilding skills to assist others in this

regard. Bodybuilding enabled race and ethnic identity to be promoted and provided avenues for expressions of social belonging and pride. For example, Pacific Island bodybuilders created teams and journeyed to international bodybuilding events together, reflecting similarities with the West Indian soccer team in Walter and Brown (1991), who also combined ethnic-oriented practices with their team endeavours to promote ethnic identity.

Experiences of racism appeared minimal in New Zealand bodybuilding, and this contrasted with experiences of athletes of ethnic minority in other sports and countries (Lawrence, 2005). However, the perceptions and generalisations participants made of their own race in the New Zealand research supported the notion that racial stereotypes could also be internalised by the participants themselves. Fleming (2007) observed these possibilities in South Asian males and their remarks concerning Asians and sporting preferences.

As the New Zealand research involved participants from a range of race and ethnic backgrounds, it showcased how the meanings and experiences of the same sport can differ for these participants (Y. Smith, 1992) and the extent to which race and ethnicity affects sporting experiences and identity. Previous research has often focused on narrow, limited dimensions, such as racism or oppression. However, the New Zealand research found that within these groups, although race and ethnic links were important and meaningful in bodybuilding to some participants, they appeared weak or non-consequential associations to others. The conclusion, therefore, is with a cautionary note – not to over generalise these diversities.

#### *A comment on Whiteness*

Studies of whiteness is a recent area of research, highlighting how ‘ethnicity’ has traditionally been narrowly assigned to ‘others’ (Woodward, 2002). As people who are white often comprise the major part of a country’s population base this can become the norm and therefore what is

‘normal’ becomes invisible (Long & Hylton, 2002; Woodward, 2002). This also appeared to be the case in the New Zealand research where the majority of New Zealand’s population base are ‘white’ New Zealand European or Pākehā (Census, 2006). While bodybuilders from minority race and ethnic groups emphasised linkages between bodybuilding and race and ethnicity, these types of associations were not identified by their New Zealand Pākehā/European counterparts.

Contemporary debates have questioned, however, not only whether whiteness is an identity, but if so, how it is represented and how it can be studied (Woodward, 2002). Although ‘whiteness’ was not specifically raised by the bodybuilders, the New Zealand research found that the bodybuilders admitted they often felt different from “the normal people” of society. They referred to transgressing normative social dietary regimes; lacking appropriate levels of modesty (e.g., demeanour and bodily display) and they were sometimes considered by others as too bodily confident, too extreme, and obsessed or unbalanced in the lifestyles. Although no specific linkages were made to New Zealand European race and ethnicity per se, these possibilities were considered in this research. They were dismissed, however, on the basis that they could be seen as assuming too much. In particular, the experiences of difference by the bodybuilders were not necessarily those of ‘whiteness’ but could be reflective of many groups. Furthermore, these may not even be restricted to ‘country’. Bodybuilders could experience these ‘differences’ in other countries as well. As ultimately concluded by Woodward (2002), whiteness is a troublesome identity. This note, however, has been included to document the consideration of whiteness within this research, and also to contribute to discussions now evolving on this topic.

#### *National Culture*

National identity can relate to country and state formation (Brubaker et al., 2004) and Green and Power (2006) have also referred to it as encompassing combinations of myth, invention, and conceptual ideals. New Zealand’s national identity – and what constitutes being ‘Kiwi’ –

although lacking a census framework, can be linked to the history of Māori and Pākehā, national teams and unique talents (e.g., The All Blacks), symbols (the Silver Fern) and rituals (The Haka<sup>10</sup>), as well as an ethos underpinned by hard work, modesty, practicalities and ingenuity, and a detestation of formalities as well as people who are ‘too big for their boots’ (Cosgrove, 2005; Green & Power, 2006; Law et al., 1999; Schaer, 2006).

National identity may also assume part of everyday life, which makes it less visible at home, but more visible when people are overseas, as has been found in studies of New Zealanders who have relocated or travelled abroad (Green & Power, 2006; Jenkins, 2004). This was also found to be the case with the New Zealand bodybuilders. The bodybuilders who had competed in bodybuilding events overseas, often commented on the differences they had experienced in terms of how they were viewed and treated, and because of this national identity was rendered visible. The bodybuilders believed they were judged more harshly in New Zealand because of their differences – not only on the basis of their physique (muscularity), but also differences potentially aligned with eliteness. The bodybuilders believed they were perceived by others as arrogant and/or superior; ‘getting above yourself’ – which was not embraced in New Zealand. Some referred to the “Tall Poppy Syndrome”, where people in this country who stood out from others (e.g., through difference, achievement, and/or elitism) could be ‘cut down’ and brought in line with others. Bodybuilders who had travelled mentioned that overseas their differences and achievements were more readily embraced. They referred to other countries where they had competed (e.g., Australia, America and Spain), as more accepting of their differences – that people were curious and even celebratory of them. Conversely, in New Zealand the bodybuilders felt more heavily judged and subjected to greater levels of negative comment. These perceptions reflect the perspectives described by Schaer (2006), Cosgrove (2005) and Green and Power

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<sup>10</sup> A vigorous dance, with actions, accompanied by a song or chant. In Māori culture the Haka is used to achieve preparedness and unity of purpose. There are various forms of Haka but often it is a war dance.

(2006). Schaer (2006) has reported that Tall Poppies are not welcomed in New Zealand, and Cosgrove (2005) believes that ideally Kiwis should reflect modesty and humility and conduct themselves in unpretentious ways. Green and Power (2006), in their studies of New Zealanders living in Australia, found that they felt Australians were less critical and judgmental.

The bodybuilders also said, however, that being overseas could also heighten feelings of national pride. They felt they were representing their country, and in the process felt honoured and a sense of emotional attachment towards New Zealand. Green and Power (2006) similarly found that when New Zealanders went overseas they also experienced greater levels of loyalty. These experiences highlight how national identity can often be taken for granted at home, but is made visible and can form a central part of identity when athletes travel overseas for events. During these occasions the bodybuilders were placed in a differing culture, one where they found they were a minority and were therefore more able to reflect upon identity similarities and differences.

### *Class*

Class can be viewed as a nebulous term that can be discussed and applied in a range of ways (Bottero, 2004; Bourdieu, 1978; Scheerder & Vanreusel, 2002; Wacquant, 1995; Wilson, 2002). Traditionally, it has been associated with the categorising of people based on dimensions such as income, occupation, and social position. However, class is now increasingly being viewed in the literature, and real world observations, as something shaped and portrayed not only through economic, but also social and cultural practices. Class is therefore assuming a more implicit, less visible form of association that can be individualised, yet still function by way of relational comparisons (Bottero, 2004; Bottero & Irwin, 2003).

The existing literature on bodybuilding and class appears limited. Klein (1994) referred to the sport as predominantly comprised of blue-collar male workers, who gained social standing as a

result of their muscular bodies. His analysis therefore reflects the more traditional interpretation of class that is associated with work and income. The demographic analysis of the New Zealand bodybuilders, however, found that participants were not predominantly blue-collar workers, but were mainly educationally well-qualified people. In other words, the findings provided a different 'class' composition to that of Klein (1994). However, the New Zealand research also discovered that when bodybuilders described their social group membership they perceived it as comprising people who came from a broad range of social-class backgrounds. They did not view the sport as linked to a particular social class stratum, but one that was inclusive of many, believing this diversity contributed to their enjoyment of the sport, viewing it as one where people of varying backgrounds were held together by their shared interest and passion for the sport. Participants believed, however, that bodybuilders had to be intelligent and self-motivated, and this therefore reflected a certain calibre of people. They viewed the sport as complex, and one that entailed a lot of learning and a need for personal drive.

Sport and class may be interwoven through the costs of participation (Rinehart, 2000). Although there were costs entailed in bodybuilding participation, finance was not perceived as a major barrier. Some bodybuilders spent more, others less on the sport. It was viewed as a matter of preference, priority, and spending power. However, class could also be something portrayed and assessed by bodybuilders through appearance, behaviour and demeanour. For example, participants referred to group members who looked 'like models' and those who 'had tattoos'. Distinctions were made among the female bodybuilders concerning members who conducted themselves with dignity, grace, and glamour, seen as higher class, as opposed to those who were 'hard' and therefore deemed of lower class. These assessments reaffirm both Bottero's (2004) belief that class can be imbedded in social and cultural practices, and Boyle (2005), who found that bodybuilders in her research made similar assessments about female bodybuilders. The New Zealand research also identified that external assessments of bodybuilding could perceive it as a sport of low-class standing as it entailed women (and men) parading themselves before others, in

conditions where they were looked at, judged, and wore minimal clothing. Bodybuilding was perceived here as an activity that lacked taste and decorum and these types of connections are consistent with the assessment of American skater Tonya Harding, who was also perceived as lacking in refinement, due to her conduct and image (Foote, 2003).

The research also found that being in good shape had the capacity to enhance social standing for participants – it opened doors to broader arenas and could change, for the better, the way bodybuilders were treated and perceived by others in society. It boosted their popularity and their social value (Reischer & Koo, 2004). Although few participants made money directly from competitive bodybuilding, some had gained work as personal trainers and models due to their successes and physiques. Other benefits were less direct – for example, being in shape opened social doors and this was conducive to relationship building, which in turn meant greater exposure to economic opportunities and therefore improved lifestyles. The potential for upward mobility also flowed from broadening horizons and bodybuilding exposure to other countries through event attendance; it also encouraged goal setting and achievement, skills that contributed to advancements in life and careers.

Contemporary writings also imply that people define class through relational comparisons with various social groups. These are implicit rather than explicit modes of self-identification (Bottero, 2004; Bottero & Irwin, 2003). If these interpretations are stretched to include comparisons that highlight feelings of superiority and distinction that can be equate to a form of social standing, then these assessments were also noted in the New Zealand study. For example, having a better body and retaining youthfulness may therefore help older bodybuilders to retain social standing in a world where becoming old contributes to a loss of social status. Younger bodybuilders acquired social standing through peer popularity and sex appeal of their physique. Bodybuilding men could

feel socially superior to non-bodybuilding men, due to their more attractive physiques and what these symbolised – being strong, disciplined, not ‘weak’ (Reischer & Koo, 2004).

In conclusion, literature concerning bodybuilding and class is limited. The New Zealand research has adopted a more contemporary view of class, one that incorporates not only economic classifications but also how class may be experienced and portrayed in more implicit ways – through social and cultural processes – leading to comparisons and positioning, a sense of inequality, and definitions of ‘us and them’ (Bottero, 2004; Bottero & Irwin, 2003). In so doing, these findings have contributed to broader discussions on class and its relationship with sport (Beamon & Bell, 2002; Bourdieu, 1978, 2007; Lawrence, 2005; Ogden & Hilt, 2003; Rinehart, 2000).

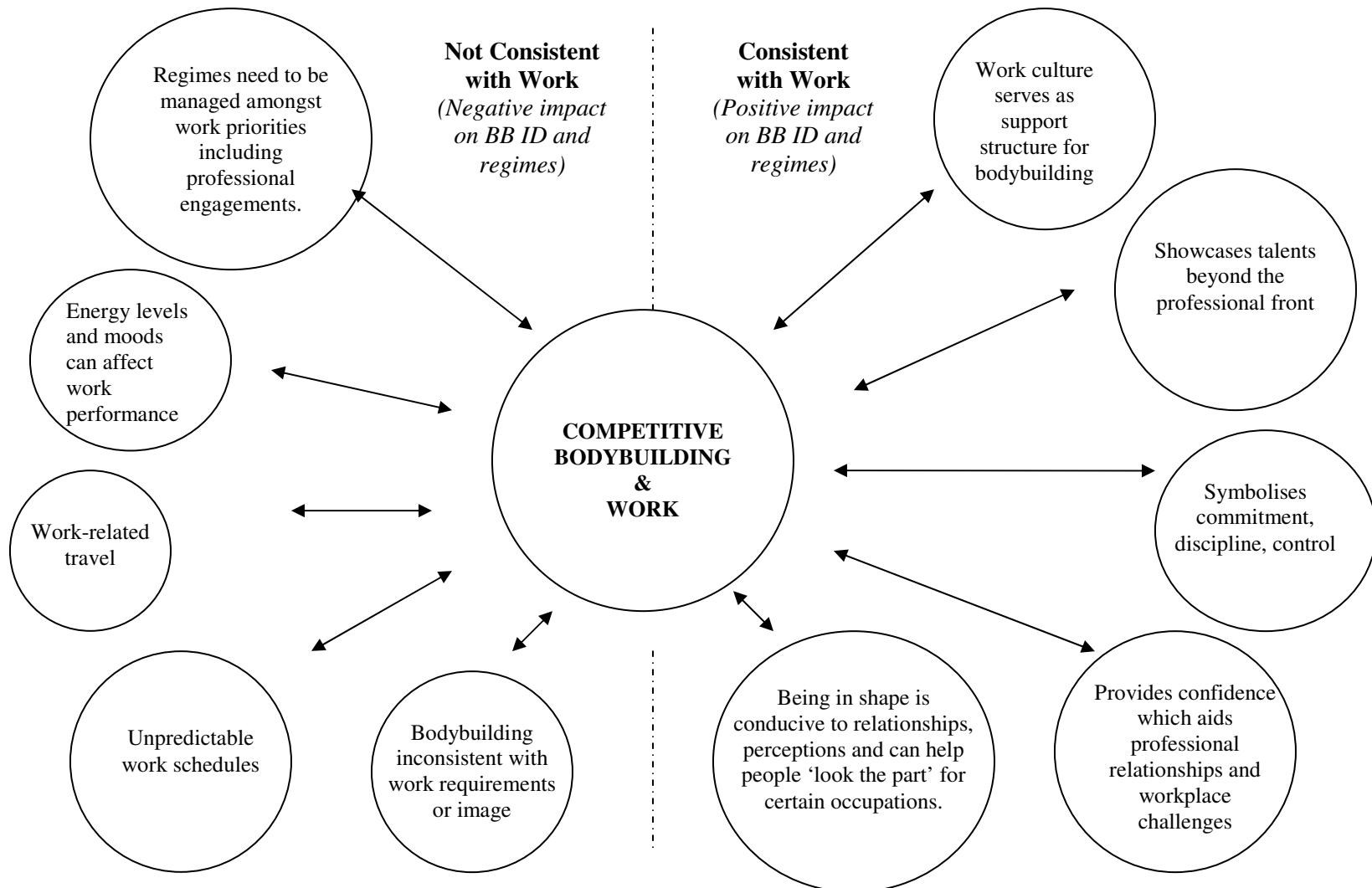
### ***Other Life Spheres***

The research highlighted how bodybuilder identities infiltrated daily lives and other social spheres. For example, bodybuilders were involved in leisure activities (e.g., they were members of wine groups, bike clubs, and rugby teams), and that participants tended to see these group attachments in a cyclical light – they could be reduced during the bodybuilding competition phase, but reinitiated during the off-season. These shifting, flexible priorities reflect consistency with identity theories. For example, Stryker and Burke (2000) conceptualised identities not as being equal, but hierarchical in nature, with some identities perceived by people as more important than others, and Thoits (2003) believes that some identities can offer greater levels of flexibility in terms of participation choices than others. The bodybuilders highlighted that some hobbies can reflect flexible social identities and, depending on the status of their bodybuilding demands, could be moved more readily up or down their identity hierarchy.

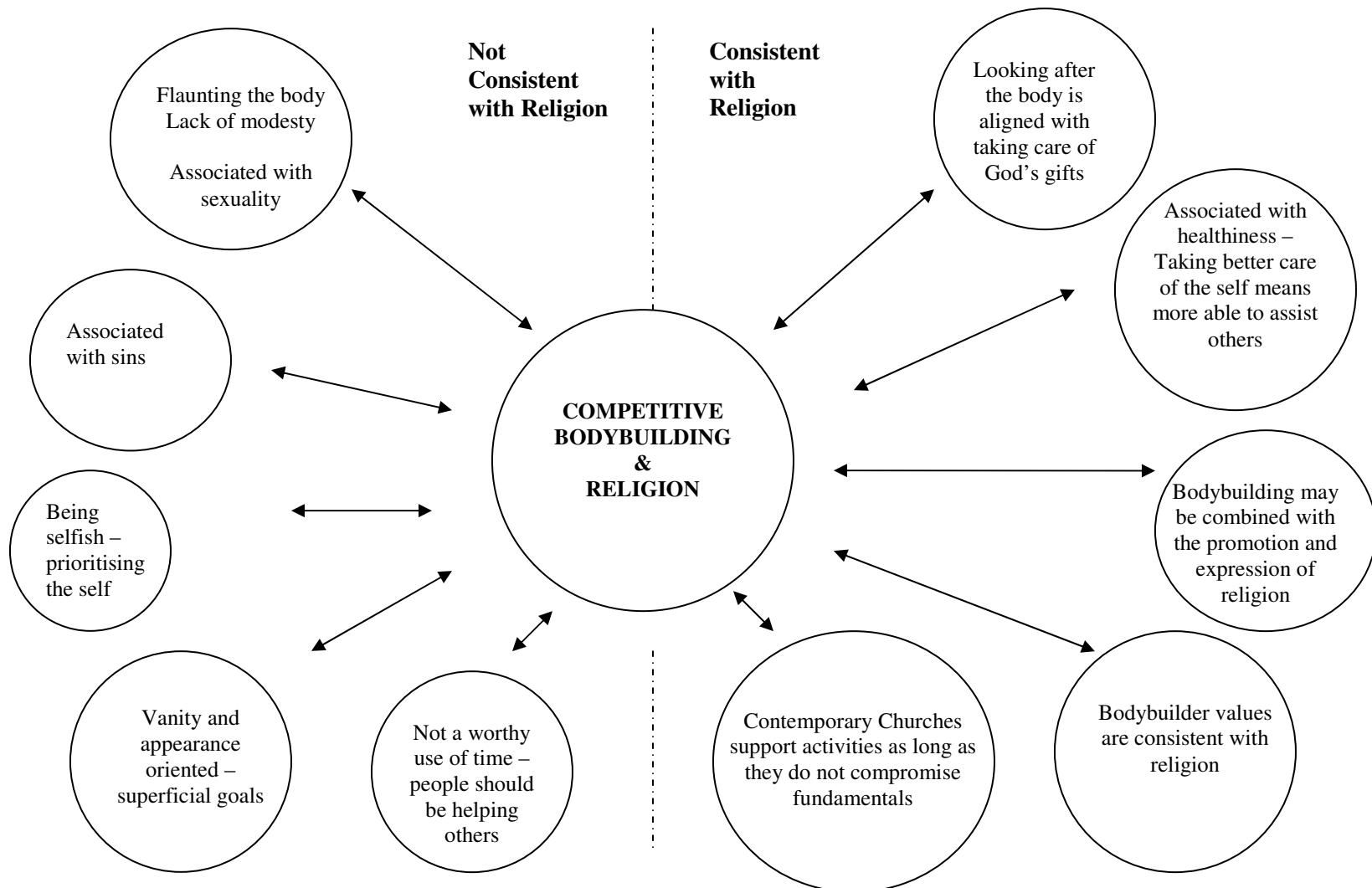
Work, unlike hobbies, was often less flexible (e.g., reduced or exited) at the whim of the participant (Thoits, 2003). The New Zealand research found that bodybuilders had to fit in with work requirements and there was also a need to maintain a professional front. Work identities often entailed emotional labour – the need to be pleasant and professional to customers, and to demonstrate managerial leadership (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The bodybuilders had to be conscious of their conduct, and, depending on its structure and organisational culture, work could prove complementary to bodybuilding and/or present barriers to participation and enjoyment. It found that in order to maintain their bodybuilding identities, participants often strategised ways to maintain adherence to diets and workout regimes and minimise impacts of declining energies and impacts of moods – in so doing reflecting how these identities can also prove entangled. A summary of bodybuilding-work identity intersections is highlighted in Figure 9.8.

Identity interfaces between bodybuilding and religion appear largely ignored in research, yet, according to Coakley (2007), religion can affect sporting experiences because it can prove to be a powerful identity which is underpinned by strong beliefs. This was also found to be the case in the New Zealand research. For some bodybuilders who were religious, the connection was complementary and non-problematic, while for others there were tensions and inner struggles between these respective identities. The varying ways competitive bodybuilding and religion may conflict, collude and/or be combined are summarised in Figure 9.9.

The findings contribute to the limited literature on sport and religion, especially in relation to experiences in a contemporary world of sport. The New Zealand research is consistent with some of these studies. For example, Leonard (1993, p. 403) has stated that sport can be perceived as a “functional equivalent” of religion and Coakley (2007) has mentioned that discipline, hard work, looking after or perfecting the body can be construed as consistent with religion. Literature also suggests that combining religion with sport tends to be more problematic when its activities



**Figure 9.8:** Competitive Bodybuilding and Experiences/Meanings Related To Work



**Figure 9.9:** Competitive Bodybuilding and Experiences/Meanings Related to Religion

include aggressive body contact (e.g., boxing), drinking, and/or a form of competition that is aligned with acts of superiority (Coakley, 2007; Kelley & Hoffman, 1990). However, as bodybuilding did not involve violence and was not experienced as a culture that entailed drinking, it could be framed as a healthy sport. Furthermore, competition could be viewed as an extension of self-care, personal goals and enjoyment. This allowed bodybuilding to exist reasonably (or at least, not in conflict) with these types of religious values. However, the bodybuilding research also found discovered additional considerations: bodywork may constitute a form of vanity and superficial act; sporting attire may be viewed as lacking in modesty; and drug use can be a sin. In this contemporary world of sport that not only emphasises performance, but also image, fashion, drugs, and supplementation, interfaces between sport, religion and athlete experiences are worthy of more research. The New Zealand research has, if anything, contributed to an increased consciousness of these additional contemporary identity dynamics.

## **9.6 COMMITMENT**

Identity theory has referred to commitment as a necessary ingredient in order for a particular identity to be activated (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). In other words, to be a bodybuilder a person has to have commitment. Commitment levels, however, can vary, and identity theory has also envisaged identities as being arranged in a hierarchical manner within the self, with those at the top of the hierarchy reflecting identities to which participants attach greater levels of commitment or importance than others (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker & Burke, 2000). These identities also tend to be activated more frequently and/or will be elected in preference to others in times of choice or conflict (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Emotions may also play a role in commitment. Identities that enable participants to feel ‘good’ or generate pleasurable responses tend to be preferred more over those associated with negative emotions and experiences (Stets, 2005; Thoits, 1989).

Within sport, highly committed athletes are often associated with participants who are very competitive, willing to take risks, make sacrifices, and push themselves beyond the norm (Coakley, 2007) and can relate to the extent of involvement in an activity (Stebbins, 2003). Commitment has also been depicted as an extension of sporting enjoyment; the preference of the participant to engage in that particular sport as opposed to other activities, something that can be affected by social constraints and support (Scanlan et al., 2003).

The New Zealand research found that commitment was important to the bodybuilders. Participants agreed that being committed was considered an integral part of bodybuilder identity and was also necessary if they were to achieve their goals. Bodybuilders perceived their bodies as symbolic of their commitment to the sport, and the outcomes of their commitments (e.g., adherence to training and dietary regimes) could be seen visibly on their bodies (e.g., as muscularity and leanness) and therefore assessed by themselves and by others. Bodybuilding not only required commitment, it also ‘tested’ it. The bodybuilders referred to the need for passion and an inner drive for the sport as an important ingredient for commitment. Without the ‘desire’ for the outcome (to do a competition), participants were likely to struggle with commitment. Contrary to the belief that has aligned commitment to sport ‘enjoyment’ (Scanlan et al., 2003) or pleasant emotions (Stets, 2005; Thoits, 1989), the bodybuilders admitted that being a bodybuilder was not always pleasurable. The process of creating a competitive physique was hard work. ‘Enjoyment’ was therefore not as closely attached with the process of bodybuilding, but more the realisation of its achievement (Scanlan et al., 2003). The bodybuilder experiences therefore appear more akin to those of Gould, Moore, McGuire, and Stebbins (2008, p. 50), whose description of serious leisure participation stated that at times it could be “no fun at all” – it required “perseverance”, and that its rewards might be “not necessarily immediate but routinely delayed”.

Furthermore, although some bodybuilders could be highly competitive, take risks, and dedicate time and resources to their sport – commitment was not always expressed in this way. Commitment could be aligned to the achievement of personal or social goals, such competing despite having a disability such as arthritis, or the need to lose considerable weight. Furthermore, decisions not to take risks, or not to prioritise winning above all else were not necessarily a reflection of their lack of commitment, but a desire to showcase their commitment as a moral or natural athlete. Commitments could also be expressed in differing ways depending on the stage of bodybuilding involvement. For example, for the novice bodybuilder, commitments were expressed more in their desire to learn norms and become a group member. With experience, commitments were often expressed as a participant's desire for continual improvement within bodybuilding – their mastery and evolution of knowledge. Competitiveness could also play a more important part in expressing commitment during this phase. With continuing involvement in bodybuilding, commitment was often expressed by way of group bonds or their responsibilities as a role model. In other words, commitment could take different forms, influenced by a participant's stage of group involvement. These beliefs are consistent with Andes' (1998) study of punk rockers, which found that commitment in the initial stages of group involvement was more centred on the visual aspects of identity, but in the later phases was expressed more through less visual commitments such as group ideologies. The windsurfers in Wheaton's (2003) research also emphasised that their 'culture of commitment' was expressed mainly through their lifestyle and the ways group ideologies were embraced. These, like bodybuilding, highlight alternative ways commitment can be expressed and also its capacity to form a dynamic and evolutionary component of identity. Therefore, in contrast to sporting literature, which has often depicted a particular type of sporting identity as one who is more committed than others – such as the more competitive persona (Brewer et al., 1993; Coakley, 2007) – the New Zealand findings suggest that commitment can be a more varied proposition.

The other important dimension to commitment, which quantitative analysis or objective measurements of commitment seemingly fail to appreciate, but was highlighted in the New Zealand research, was an appreciation of ‘total experience’ of commitment, including its subjective dimensions. For example, the commitments experienced and portrayed by bodybuilders with children, may differ from commitment experiences of those who live on their own. The New Zealand research found that potential threats to commitments often reflected one of three types:

- a. Risks and/or potential declines in motivation, drive and focus
- b. Competing or conflicting identity and role expectations
- c. Difficulties and negative experiences associated with managing social differences

Furthermore, bodybuilders often strategised ways to remain motivated and also, in the face of threats, enable them to cope and retain a positive sense of face (see Table 9.1).

Although some strategies, such as coverage, have been noted in the bodybuilding literature (Choi, 2000, 2003; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993), an appreciation of the diversity of ways in which bodybuilders had to manage their identities and retain commitment to their identities in the context of real life, has remained unexplored and arguably unappreciated in the literature. Strategies used by the bodybuilders, such as negotiation and compromise and the scheduling of activities, have been noted in research concerning runners (Barrell et al., 1989; Yair, 1992). Furthermore, the bodybuilders’ experiences of having to remain committed in a world where they can be perceived as ‘oddities’ are consistent with Gillespie et al. (2002) and their study of ‘serious dog’ enthusiasts. On a broader note, the coping strategies engaged by the bodybuilders in the face of social threats, depict similarities to those identified by Breakwell (1986) who mentioned the use of anticipatory techniques, redefinitions of the situation and compartmentalisation in her analysis of strategies adopted by ‘threatened identities’, such as people who find themselves, for example, no longer employed.

**Table 9.1: Bodybuilder Commitment and Identity Management Strategies**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Identity “boosts”</b> – Strategies to help them stay inspired (e.g., checking web sites of other bodybuilders); gain support, including use of internal dialogues to retain goal focus.</li><li>• <b>Identity slippage ‘barriers’</b> – Accountability mechanisms (e.g., diet and training journals); making competing intentions public (to create a loss of face if they were not achieved); and enlisting partners or personal trainers to act as ‘watch dogs’ (i.e. ensure they did not cheat on their diets and to ensure they went to the gym).</li><li>• <b>Compromise</b> – For example, committing to eat with the family at breakfast (fulfilling parent role) but at night being at the gym (prioritising bodybuilder role).</li><li>• <b>Compensation</b> – For example, dedicating time to bodybuilding during the competition season but being extra attentive to the family or work performance in the off-season.</li><li>• <b>Integration</b> – For example, scheduling time for the family needs and for gym; getting up early to train before the family gets up.</li><li>• <b>Avoidance</b> – For example, eliminating social engagements during the competition preparation time.</li><li>• <b>Cycling</b> – For example, reducing hobbies during the competitive session, but recuperating them off-season.</li><li>• <b>Compartmentalisation</b> – For example, eating separate meals; having separate routines from the family; emphasising their competitive persona when competing but when not competing adopting a more easy-going stance.</li><li>• <b>Shelving</b> – For example, pretending to eat ‘normally’ when visiting people but making up for it later (e.g., going for run or cutting back on diet)</li><li>• <b>Isolation or avoidance</b> – For example, not going out in public to avoid public stares due to muscularity, wearing clothing to cover the body.</li><li>• <b>Reframing</b> – These include cognitive processes that reinterpret negative comments to enable them to be viewed as positive or non-consequential. For example, discomforts such as hunger or exhaustion may be re-understood as personal tests of discipline and inner strength. Negative external comments concerning the body may be reframed as jealousy or lack of understanding on the part of the other.</li><li>• <b>Anticipatory techniques</b> – For example, having ‘come back lines’ in readiness of negative comments.</li><li>• <b>Denial or indifference</b> – For example, negative comments are viewed as irrelevant as the people who have made them are not considered important.</li></ul> |
|---|

The New Zealand research shows that commitment can be expressed in a range of ways and indicates that there is more scope in bodybuilding and sport research to fully appreciate the lived experience of athlete commitment. The research also highlights that just because participants are committed to a particular identity, does not necessarily imply they do not experience participation constraints or challenges – a finding reiterated by McQuarrie and Jackson's (1996) study of amateur skaters. Finally, this research argues that although finding some merit with the bodybuilding research, identity theory and its conceptualisation of commitment as hierarchically arranged appears to lack a real-life appreciation of the range and complexity of strategies of which participants may avail themselves in terms of identity negotiation, as well as the fluidity that often resides between identities. Being a bodybuilder was not experienced as a delineated experience or one that was restricted to certain spheres of the day. It could not always be moved ‘up or down the hierarchy’ and it did not appear to be envisaged in that light by the bodybuilders. Rather, commitment was perceived as a ‘24/7’ relationship – where their bodies were omnipresent and bodybuilder identities were experienced as flowing into their other identities, such as via their energy levels, sensations (e.g., hunger) and emotions (highs and lows). These identity intersections could emerge in impulsive, fickle ways, for example, bodybuilders could smell food cooking at work, while in the middle of competitive dieting. Bodybuilders could feel self-conscious – a sense of difference among others in every day life. There was an unpredictability, complexity and fluidity to identity and how intersections can occur – the essence of which may not have been captured by the conceptual, theoretical propositions of identity, and these experiences all required management in the context of maintaining identity commitment.

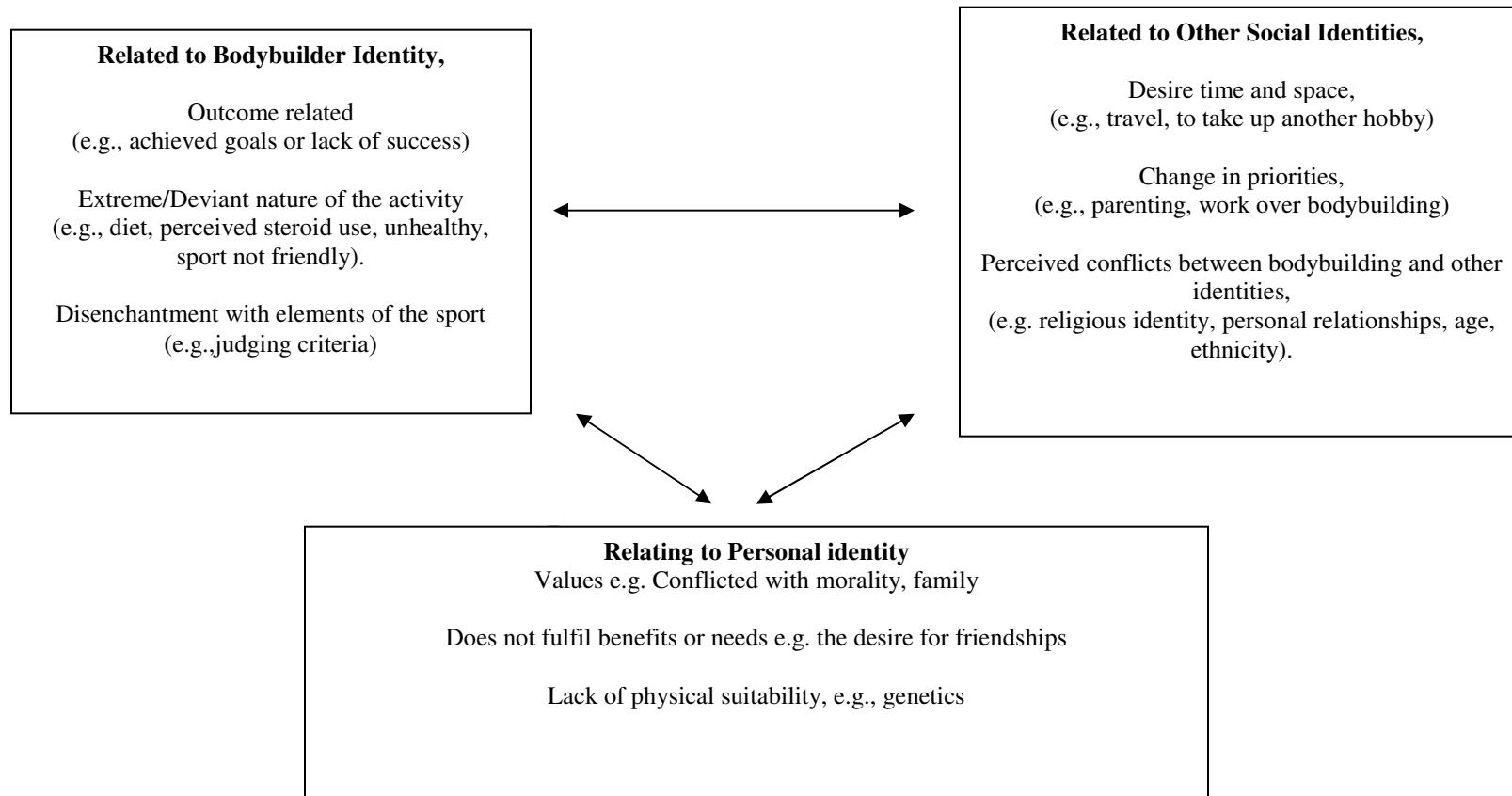
## **9.7 RETIREMENT**

There were a range of reasons why participants stopped competing, such as meeting competitive aspirations, the desire to seek a less extreme form of sporting participation, perceptions of unfriendliness in the sport, family priorities or to free up time for other interests. As displayed in

Figure 9.10, these reasons can be categorised as a combination of one or several factors – a decline in commitment towards the sport itself; a change in commitment relative to other identities; and/or influences stemming from personal identity (e.g., values, personality). It highlights, not only the multitude of reasons why a participant may retire from competitive sport, but also how these connections may be associated with varying dimensions of identity.

A growing field of sporting research has investigated reasons why people give up a particular sport and its impact on identity (Allison & Meyer, 1993; Coakley, 2007; Dacyshyn, 1999; McPherson, 1993; E. Rosenberg, 1993; Webb et al., 1998). Often these studies have focused on the retirement of professional athletes (e.g. McPherson, 1993) and/or team sports (Curtis & Ennis, 1993), and as a result implications for identity have often centred on the financial impacts of retirement and/or the psychological effects of being cut from the team.

These aspects were found to be less applicable as competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand is an individual and predominantly amateur sport. However, its outcomes reflected consistency with sporting studies (Dacyshyn, 1999; McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996), including studies of subjectively judged sports that have mentioned competitive disillusionment and the possibility of politics (J. Ryan, 1996). The findings show how the sport commitment model advocated by Scanlan et al. (2003) could be used in reverse – that is, to explain reasons not only for commitment, but to explain declines in commitment, potentially leading to decisions to leave the sport. Applied in this manner, the model predicts that a decline in sport enjoyment and/or increasing perceptions that other activities are more attractive, could contribute to retirement reasons. The bodybuilding research confirmed that these reasons account for some, but not explanations – personal values and perceptions of a lack of identity ‘fit’ can also play a role.



**Figure 9.10:** Reasons for retirement and links to identity

The existing literature has also referred to the positive and negatives experiences associated with retirement. Elements of these were observed in the New Zealand research. For example, some bodybuilders retired to focus on new roles such as fatherhood or different forms of sport – a form of rebirth that frees up time for new directions in life (Coakley, 2007). Some participants mourned their glory days – the physiques and mindsets they once had. Retirement can therefore also be construed as a type of social death as it may be associated with a sense of loss and emptiness (E. Rosenberg, 1993). Curtis and Ennis (1993) however, believe that these models of retirement are restrictive and there needs to be greater recognition of how participation can continue in the face of retirement. A challenge which differentiated bodybuilder experiences of retirement from many other sports, such as running, hockey or squash (Curtis & Ennis, 1993), was a lack of opportunities to retain a social or semi-committed level of competitive involvement. The research found that some bodybuilders reconfigured their identities by becoming judges, trainers and event organisers. They also redefined themselves as ‘seriously’ committed non-competitive bodybuilders. Others no longer viewed bodybuilding as an identity they wished to, or could, retain. Some took time out from competing but later returned to the sport. These variances of ‘retirement’ highlight how participants can modify their meanings and commitments they align with the sport, yet often still retained involvement with this social group. A key finding of the research was that bodybuilder identities did not end with retirement. They continued to feed into their ongoing template of identity – their personal identity – and this occurred in ways that were both welcome and unwelcome - in so doing this ongoing evolution of identity reaffirming that who you are is also often the summation of who you once were (Breakwell, 1986).

The next and final Chapter will provide a summary of the overall research – its conclusions, lessons and implications.

## **10.0 CONCLUSIONS**

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Competitive bodybuilders are participants in an aesthetically oriented sport where their physiques are assessed at competitive events in relation to their muscularity, definition, and symmetry (Roundtree, 2005). Their identities have therefore been closely aligned with their bodies (Monaghan, 1997). This research was initiated because, having competed in several bodybuilding events, I wanted to explore the experiences and identities of other participants. I questioned the limitations of the existing research. Capitalising on my social group linkages, an insider stance was adopted, and this was combined with phenomenology and grounded theory in a pluralistic approach. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised including photo elicitation.

The study confirmed there were gaps within research on competitive bodybuilding concerning identity and has addressed many of those by investigating:

- how and why people become competitive bodybuilders
- what it means to be a competitive bodybuilder
- whether bodybuilder identities evolve over time
- whether their bodybuilder identities reinforce and/or challenge other identities within the self
- why participants retire from competitive bodybuilding and what happens to their identities post-bodybuilding.

In the absence of a consensual framework within the literature to define identity, the evolution of understandings and key debates (i.e. modernism – postmodernism) which underpin identity were displayed (refer to Table 2.1). Similarly, figure 2.1 depicted how previously fragmented dimensions of identity relate to each other.

The research adopted a contemporary perspective of identity where “meanings” define people (Burke, 2003) and encompass both the individuality of the person as well as their membership of social groups (Burke, 2003; Hogg, 2003). Identities were considered evolutionary (Jenkins, 2004) but also influenced by internal and external factors including social and psychological factors (Breakwell, 1986; Woodward, 2002). Whilst social aspects were important, the significance of biological dimensions and innate possibilities were also acknowledged. The complexities of social interactions meant that identities were not singular or isolated, but experienced in real life as dynamic and one of many (Thoits, 2003). This framework could be applied to other sporting contexts. Figure 10.1 depicts a life journey where an individual takes up a sport. The diagram highlights the interface of the athletic identity with personal, social and group identities, the evolution of the identity and potential retirement. Considering identity from this multi-dimensional perspective encompassing various levels (e.g. social, self and internal), relationships (e.g. other identities) and processes (e.g. identity changes over time) appears uncommon and potentially unique in sporting literature.

When reviewing competitive bodybuilding within this framework, the existing research reflected a narrow and limited view of identity. The process exposed that bodybuilders were often portrayed as a homogenous group of individuals whose identities were essentially about the body and/or gender (Fisher, 1997; Holmlund, 1997; Klein, 1993a; Marzano-Parisoli, 2001). The meanings and motivations that bodybuilders attached to their involvement, how and why they became involved, their sporting experiences, the diversities amongst and between group members and their relationships between bodybuilding and their broader lives had not been extensively investigated.

Whilst postmodernism has been criticised for being overly abstract (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008), a key outcome of this research has been the discovery of how fluidity, ambiguity and pluralism

exist amongst the everyday practices and identities of competitive bodybuilders. Whilst the bodybuilders shared commonalities, there were heterogeneities in the meanings they associated with the sport. For some, being a competitive bodybuilder was about physical transformation; for others it was about the competitive element or the personal challenge. Bodybuilding could reflect a way to stay in shape, be healthy, and/or provide an avenue for creativity. Competitive bodybuilding was embraced as a lifestyle and valued for its sociability. Participation sometimes led to personal development, but participants conveyed there was also a dark side. Competitive bodybuilding was an extreme sport, and for some, there were risks and identity vulnerabilities.

The findings showcased not only the variety of meanings that were associated with competitive bodybuilding but also the diversities amongst members such as on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality and participant background. In so doing this research has contributed not only to bodybuilding literature, (i.e. moved it beyond its fixation on gender), but also to sport generally where there have been calls for greater appreciation of such differences (Dewar, 1993; Y. Smith, 1992). Furthermore, different ethnicities have been highlighted – alternatives to the ‘black’ (African American) identity – as well as variances among these groups (e.g., Māori, Pacific Island, German, Asian). The Thesis also highlighted the experiences of a gay male bodybuilder, and showed how the sport has positively contributed to his identity in ways that have rarely, if at all, been academically documented (Pronger, 2000). The findings also referred to the experiences of older, active, competitive bodybuilders – identities that have often been ignored in past research. The outcomes showed how these dimensions can affect sporting experiences, contribute to pleasures, challenges as well as feelings of sameness and/or difference. This study has therefore explored beneath the “general” to expose the “fragmentation” and the “particular” which resides within competitive bodybuilding (Powell & Longino, 2002) in so doing reflecting a more postmodern perspective of identity.

Notions of identity choice, selection and image-consciousness were also exposed within the research (Giddens, 1991; Powell & Longino, 2002). Participants utilised the tools and performative arena of competitive bodybuilding to emphasise, downplay, and/or redefine aspects of their identity. The bodybuilders were conscious there were options available to them concerning how they defined and portrayed their gender. They viewed themselves as active agents manipulating these, and other aspects of their identity. Through props (e.g. makeup) and performance, the bodybuilders showcased themselves. They also experimented and created illusions about their looks and personas. The blurring of traditional interpretations concerning gender reaffirmed the postmodern stance that words should not be attached to objects or acts as meanings may vary due to time, place and context (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). For example, graceful acts of dance utilised in competitive bodybuilding routines emphasised not only the femininity of the female participants but also the masculinity of the male bodybuilders. Hair removal and appearance management were not necessarily considered acts of femininity but rather activities within bodybuilding that were undertaken by both male and female participants yet experienced and conceived differently. The ambiguity of words and experiences were also observed during the learning phase of bodybuilding. Novice bodybuilders were required to revisit their traditional understandings of ‘pleasures’ and associate them instead with acts and feelings many had previously considered less pleasurable. Battling physical discomforts, and not ‘giving in’ to weak moments or ‘cheats’ in order to achieve their goal became a new form of ‘pleasure’.

Fluidity was observed in the bodybuilder descriptions concerning ‘class’ and ‘health’. Class could be shaped and expressed through practices such as graceful acts, use of makeup and a lack of tattoos. These bodybuilder interpretations therefore differed from more structured classifications, such as the classifications utilised by the modernist approach, which were based predominantly on economic or social grounds (Powell & Longino, 2002). Assessments of health and the extremes of bodybuilding also assumed varying positions based on relativities. The bodybuilders

questioned what was healthiness? Healthy relative to what? Their identities were therefore fluid, complex and unstable - open to a multitude of interpretations.

Bodybuilder identities were not static but subject to frequent review. These changes were influenced by time, place, context and their competitive bodybuilder cycle. They were also influenced by social group exposure. The research found that female bodybuilders shifted their parameters of femininity to encompass greater levels of muscularity, mental toughness and competitiveness with increasing involvement in the sport. As emphasised by Rail (1998a p. xiii) in a postmodern world the truth can prove "so relative as to be nonexistent in any general sense". The 'truth' of the bodybuilder identity, was not a singular, universal vision that individuals held, even of themselves, but interpretative depending on how they assessed themselves from various perspectives, situations, group relationships, mindsets, life phases and moments in time.

Despite the fluidity and ambiguity of identity, however, the research discovered that the structures, generalisations and power relationships advocated within a modernist approach still existed (Powell & Longino, 2002). In terms of class, the costs of participation were not completely irrelevant. Bodybuilding could prove expensive, thus socio-economic considerations were pertinent. Traditional roles such as work, motherhood and fatherhood also influenced and shaped participant identities. The bodybuilders were conscious that social boundaries existed. They experienced pressures to fulfil expectations and to negotiate their bodybuilder regimes with these considerations in mind. Bodybuilding intersected with their life phases (Kroger, 2007). For example, the sport proved popular with participants who had reached a point in their life when they had reclaimed their independence back from initial family responsibilities and the 'attention needs' of young children. This timing intersected with broader appeals also associated with age. The knowledge and regimes of bodybuilding enabled these 'older' participants to defy the traditional markers of age such as middle age spread. Furthermore, instead of slowing with age,

they were active, focused and purposeful. Transgressing modernist generalisations, these older bodybuilders were valued, respected and admired for their bodies. Furthermore, they did not ‘feel’ or ‘act’ their age and indeed, many were proud of their age. However, these possibilities were only realised and valued by the bodybuilders as a result of their comparisons with the traditional classifications and expectations associated with the ageing process.

The postmodern emphasis on consumer culture, the body and youthful appearance was reaffirmed in bodybuilding. Bodybuilding was used as a physical attractiveness tool by many of the participants. The application of competitive bodybuilding practices enabled participants to physically manipulate their bodies to create socially attractive ideals of muscular, lean physical looks. The use of photographs and DVD’s provided a mechanism to monitor physical change. Yet there were also contradictions. The regimes and competitive extremes could ‘age’ participants and make them feel less attractive (e.g. too thin). Participation could change of dynamics of sexual attractiveness and/or its desirability (e.g. their residual energies for sex after training).

A further key discovery from the research was that competitive bodybuilders did not perceive their bodies as stable consistent images, but changeable depending on timing, context and state of mind. The bodybuilders discussed their varying interpretations and contradictory truths. Participants could be suddenly amazed by the changes they had achieved as a result of their training, uncertain whether progress had been made and/or experience big days, small days, proud and uncertain days. Although existing research concerning postmodernism has emphasised the significance of the body (Powell & Longino, 2002), the extent of diversity and complexity of individual bodily experiences does not appear widely appreciated. ‘Embodiment’ has much to learn from these experiences. As emphasised by Craib (1998) and Shilling (1999) embodiment is more than just about inhabiting or working upon a body. Beyond the externalities there are also “pulsating organs” (Craib, 1998) and the sensation of a living, thinking, feeling person. Research

must capture more fully the totality of embodiment, how it is experienced in real life and in varying contexts.

The bodybuilding research also exposed some short comings within postmodernism in relation to the body. Participants did not perceive their bodies as completely elastic or a blank slate in terms of self-design. The bodybuilders considered their bodies to be genetically-coded with a variety of strengths and weaknesses that related to the bodybuilding experience. Although participants strove to manipulate their bodies, their muscularity, shape and definition was also influenced by their biological tendencies. Some bodies and/or body parts were perceived as ‘naturally’ gifted and dimensions such as sex, age and race could also play an influential role.

Bodies were also ‘fixed’ to the self and this changed the dynamics and relationship between the sport and identity. Unlike sports such as golf and tennis, where participant tools of the trade (e.g. clubs and rackets) could be put aside, to bodybuilders their bodies were permanently attached and their identities less flexible. Intersections between their bodies, sport and their selves were interwoven resulting in added benefits (e.g. sexual attractiveness outside of the bodybuilding environment) but also challenges (e.g. socially ostracised).

The emphasis on the externalities, imagery and consumerism of identity within a postmodern context has been criticised for by-passing the significance of internal factors as these may also be important to identity (Wheaton, 2003). This was reaffirmed in the bodybuilding research. Assuming the image of a competitive bodybuilder was unable to be readily purchased or easily created. Unlike Wheaton’s (2003) windsurfers where participants could purchase clothes and equipment, and assume the look of the sporting participant, it was hard within competitive bodybuilding circles to become a ‘pretender’. Acquiring a very muscular, lean body of the competitive bodybuilder (as opposed to e.g. the non-competitive weight lifter) necessitated significant levels of hard work, diet and sacrifice. Furthermore, whilst the outcomes of this

process showed externally on the bodies of participants, being a competitive bodybuilder was experienced as a very internal process. The sport tested participant commitment, mental toughness and their internal strength. In so doing, it reaffirmed Wheaton's (2003) perspective that group membership often extends beneath the superficiality of the exterior image. There may be an authenticity to identity – a sense of 'commitment' – that is significant within the identification process yet undervalued in the postmodern approach. Previous studies have also provided limited insights into the emotional and internal dimensions of identity – the trials and tribulations of sacrifice, commitment, passion, fantasies, the sense of competitive glory, loss and uncertainty, the internal battles, the variety of mindsets, coping strategies and inner dialogues. These experiences and their shared understandings are important aspects of individual and collective bodybuilder identity.

### **Contributions and limitations**

This research has contributed to identity research by illustrating how principles that have been discussed more conceptually (Burke, 2001) can be related and experienced in real world settings. The findings have added substance to the abstract bones of postmodernism providing a sense of everyday realism to this approach. The bodybuilders provided specific examples of the diversities, fluidity, complexities and ambiguities of their identities. The research emphasises the interpretative capacity of identity – its multiplicity of truths depending on the time, context, state of mind, the 'eyes' and social hats through which participants assess themselves. The research also argues that identity, whilst social, is also influenced by perceptions of genetic possibilities, as well as being internally experienced and potentially a personal journey of self discovery. The research indicated there can be an innate dimension to identity, but identity also unfolds and has the capacity to change – to be amended through participation, determination and choice. However the potential for self-design (postmodernism) verses the genetic limitations of the body (modernism) is a delineation often debated within in bodybuilder circles, yet received minimal

attention academically. The research provides empirical substance for viewpoints such as Craib's (1998) who believes that in order to progress identity understanding greater attention should be dedicated to the internal, psychic and emotional elements. The dominance of sociology, whilst an asset, can be construed as an Achilles heel, because sociology tends to overshadow the other dimensions of identity which are also important aspects in the totality of understanding identity. This research advocates a more integrated approach to exploring identity, encompassing not only the social but internal, mental and emotional factors.

The framework developed for this research, although simple, has proved an effective tool that has the capacity to be refined and adopted by other researchers (see Figure 10.1). In so doing, it counters the argument that theories and perspectives can not or should not be combined, and responds to calls for greater integration (Stets, 2006; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The framework showcases the interrelationship between multiple bases of identity – person, role and group – and how these identities can, and why they should, be studied together (Stets, 2006).

This research has contributed to the neglected sphere of identity change (Burke, 2006; Stets, 2006) and multiple identity management (Stets, 2006; Thoits, 1986). It has illustrated the dynamic, evolutionary nature of bodybuilder identity, highlighting the adaptive strategies bodybuilders used in the face of varying situations; complexities; identity transitions as a result of time and group exposure; and broader identity adjustments to maintain overall identity fit. The research has discussed reasons for retirement providing insights from former competitive bodybuilders in so doing showcasing that identities whilst no longer 'active' still play an influential part of identity. These outcomes, displayed in Figure 10.2, collate previously isolated and/or non-existent facets of bodybuilding research into the identity framework.

The findings have highlighted what it means to be a bodybuilder from the position of the participant, and how bodybuilding is experienced in the context of their 'real lives'. The key

argument of the research is that identities should not be studied in isolation (e.g. the bodybuilder identity) but instead considered as one of multiple identities (Burke, 2003; Thoits, 1986, 2003). To understand the athletic identity requires an appreciation of participants as holistic beings, having multiple identities. There is a need to acknowledge the individual, their internal drivers, background and the social context within which they function, which relates to modernism. However, previous research has tended to examine the athletic identity in isolation and has forgotten or by-passed the broader and fragmented self which relates to postmodernism.

The research contributes to greater understandings of the diversities within sport – such as age, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender. The investigation discovered that whilst there were commonalities in bodybuilder identities, there were also differences in how these factors were combined and experienced and given meaning by participants. These insights assist, not only academically, but also practically (e.g., to coaches, sports psychologists and clinicians) as they relate to athlete performance and support. The findings have also contributed to specific areas within sport that were considered worthy of attention, such as mental toughness, competitiveness, the experience of ‘flow’, the interwoven dimensions of sport, dance, art and performance, notions of serious leisure, athletic commitment, health, risk (e.g., eating disorders, body image, steroid use), the complexity of sporting bodies, and emotions.

This study contributes to international studies. Bodybuilding research predominantly showcases a British or American perspective and frequently perpetuates a stand point arguably of a past era (1970s–1980s). This research has provided a New Zealand insight, a contemporary investigation of competitive bodybuilding and has moved identity explorations beyond fixations of gender and/or the body. This has included consideration of national and cultural identity often overlooked in previous bodybuilding studies.

The methodologies within this research have also been creatively used, including visual research that is rarely used in sport research. To provide a comprehensive and insightful look at bodybuilding in New Zealand, quantitative data on the sport has been collated on a national scale (such a scale was previously non-existent) and combined with rich insights and visuals from participants themselves. However, the limitations of this research are also acknowledged. The findings can not be generalised as representative of all bodybuilders in New Zealand and they must be framed as relative to country and era. The time spent in the field was balanced within the constraints of a tight schedule and limited budget. The interpretation of the data was subjective and viewed through my insider perspective, although attempts to prioritise participant perspective (phenomenology) and to allow a grounded theory approach were adopted. In addition, the use of tools, such as factor analysis whilst helpful, is not an exact science (Miller et al., 2002).

### **Future research and final thoughts**

Literature is frequently critical and pessimistic of bodybuilder identities, and during the course of this research these notions infiltrated what had previously been my unconscious engagement of bodybuilding. I began questioning whether I was engaging in the sport for enjoyment, habit, social body pressures and/or guilt. Conversely, phenomenological studies, with their emphasis on the pleasures of bodybuilding, are guilty of by-passing the realities; sometimes you do feel like ‘crap’ during your workouts. Sport research must be more adventurous, and must fully reflect the minds, bodies, emotions, and holistic experiences of sports people.

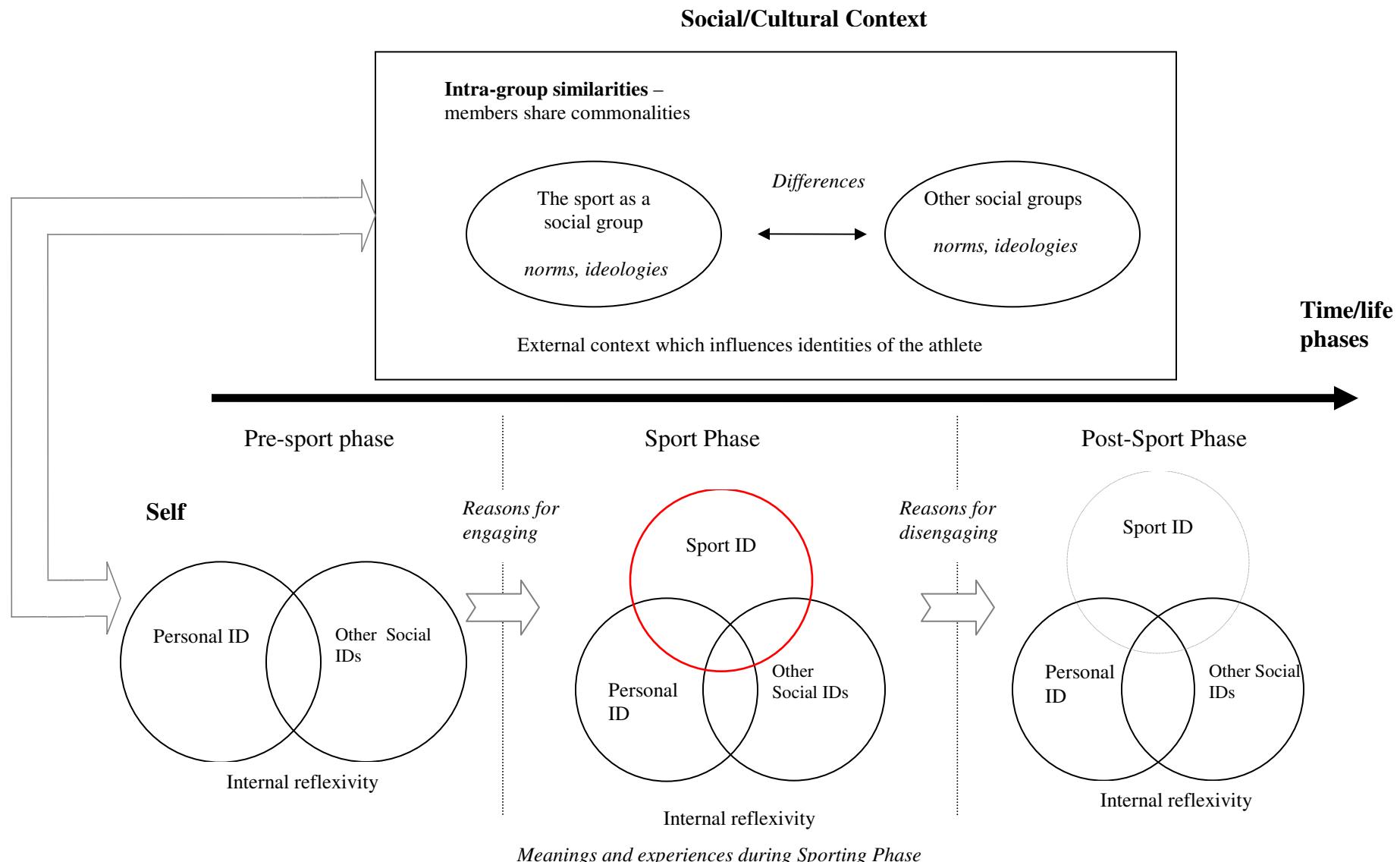
This form of research entails coming to grips with the complexities of the body, including its relationship with emotions, self, context, and interfaces with others. There is also a need for openness and the avoidance of a critical spirit. Decisions to take performance-enhancing substances may contravene some sporting or social values but much can be learnt from these first-

hand experiences. Commitment to sport is complex and subjective including how this is negotiated amongst personal, social and lifestyle expectations, and this has yet to be fully captured by theory. There is a dearth of literature on athlete experiences in sports such as bodybuilding, figure skating, diving and gymnastics, where competitive outcomes are determined not only by sporting rules but by human judgment. The emotional consequences that flow from these types of assessments may differ from more ‘objectively’ judged sports.

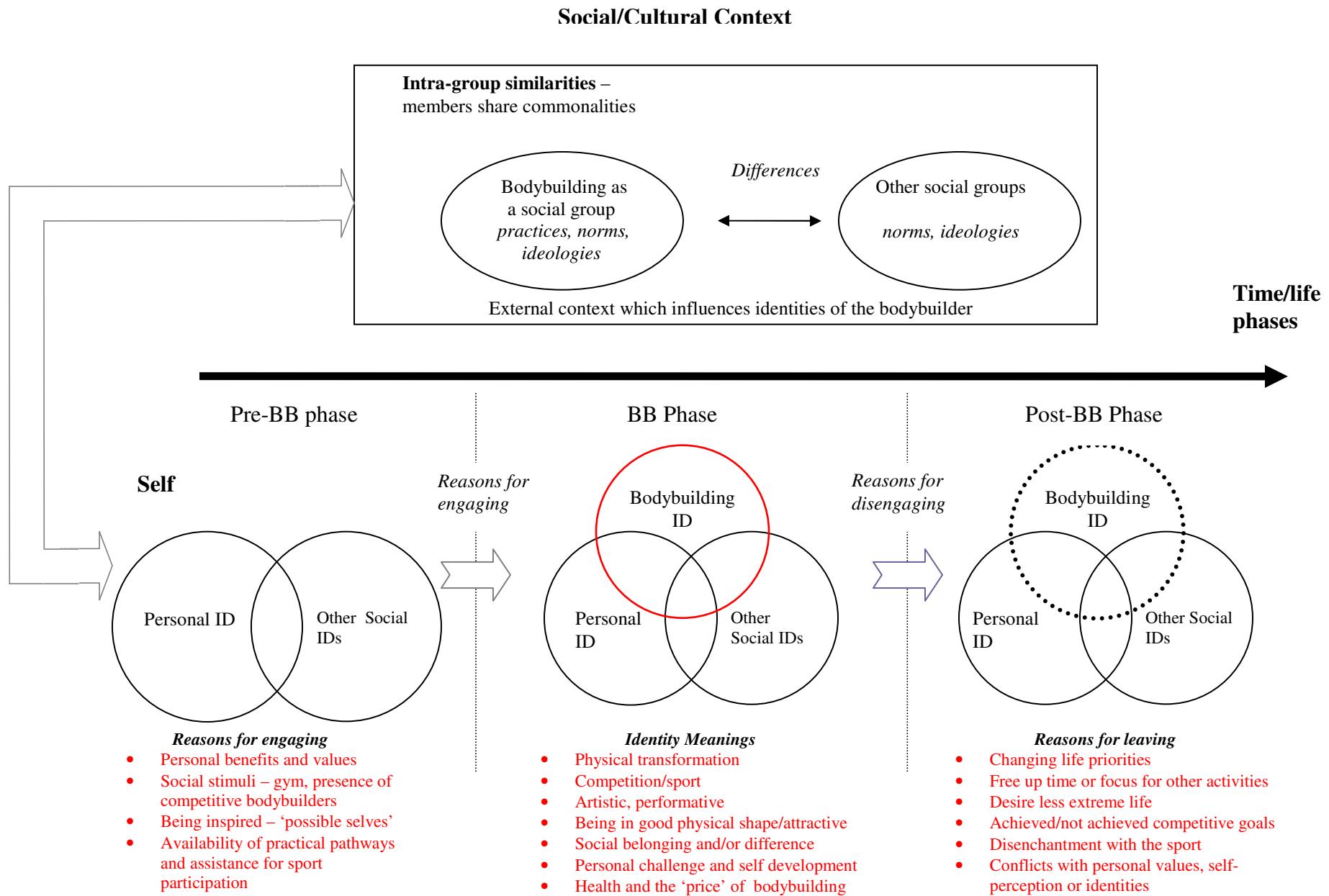
There is potential for future research, not only to consider the diversities of participants within sport, but to advance this notion further – by acknowledging athletes as holistic beings, that is, to recognise the multitude and complexity of their identities, and how they are interwoven, experienced and managed in everyday life. This research has discovered that sometimes we overlook the obvious – that bodybuilders, and athletes, are not just sports people, but ‘real people’ too. Much can be gained in research by ‘bracketing’ and listening first and foremost to the real life experiences of sporting participants. The rewards are rich however the process is not always easy. Prior knowledge will always infiltrate analysis. There may also be pressure placed on the researcher to adopt a ‘position’ prematurely as well as criticism that by seeking new horizons there is a lack of appreciation and/or understanding of current traditions by the researcher. During the course of this research I have experienced all of these and acknowledge being guilty of some.

The focus of this future research should be to consider sporting identities as they really are – human, changeable, complex, contradictory, and messy. It must also acknowledge that identities are not simple, homogenous or isolated from their broader selves. They are not static. Participants’ motivations, meanings, pleasures and challenges can change, evolve, and vary from one another. Athletes as not always conforming, competitive, committed identities whose priorities are to excel in their sport and/or to be positive role models. These lofty ideals appear placed on athletes, which does not appear to be the case in art, philosophy or music (Dimeo,

2007). Rather than being critical of, concerned about or by-passing these diversities and complexities, research should embrace them as the varying ways athletes see and experience their world. They are a source of research inspiration – and one which I shall continue to explore.



**Figure 10.1** The sport-identity research framework



**Figure 10.2:** Research Results

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Interview consent form

Appendix 3: Interview question schedule

Appendix 4: Interview field notes guide

Appendix 5: Methodology coding examples

Appendix 6: New Zealand Bodybuilding: Competition categories and Rule Guides – extracts  
from the NZFBB and NABBA rules

Appendix 7: Quantitative findings

- a. Respondent differences based on gender
- b. Respondent differences based on age

Appendix 8: The Competitive Bodybuilders Interviewed

Appendix 9: Published articles

## APPENDIX 1



**Department of Management**  
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### The Experiences of Competitive Bodybuilders in New Zealand Survey Information Sheet

#### Researcher's Introduction

My name is Anne Probert. I am a bodybuilder and a doctorate student at Massey University who is researching competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand. I am interested in learning more about the experiences of competitive bodybuilders and how this activity has influenced their lives.

#### About This Survey

This survey has been sent to you as well as other bodybuilders living in New Zealand, who are:

- Active competitors (or)
- Have been competitors (or)
- Training for their first bodybuilding competition.

Its purpose is to provide an overview of bodybuilders in New Zealand (e.g. numbers, demographics, experience and opinions).

#### Survey Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will not have to disclose your name on the survey form. Your individual response will be combined with other responses to produce the survey findings. All completed questionnaires will be stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed upon completion of the research programme.

The results of this survey will hopefully be published through a variety of avenues such as academic literature, mainstream journals and relevant sport or information sites. They will also be used as a basis for more in-depth research which involves interviewing bodybuilders about their experiences and life-stories.

If you participate in this survey, you can:

- Receive a copy of the results (ie a profile of competitive bodybuilders in NZ) and
- Indicate your interest in being interviewed about your bodybuilding experiences and life-story.

## **Your Involvement**

This survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your participation involves ticking the appropriate boxes in the attached questionnaire, then returning your response in the free-post envelope provided by Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

## **Your rights**

Your completion and return of the questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

## **Project Contacts**

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions about this research.

### My contact details are:

Anne Probert  
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### My Chief Supervisor at Massey University is:

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Thank you for your time and consideration.

## **Committee Approval Statement**

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher (s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher (s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistance to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethic & Equity), telephone 06 350 5249, email:[humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz).

## The Experiences of Competitive Bodybuilders in New Zealand

### 1. I am:

(please tick one box)

- Male (1)<sup>11</sup>
- Female (2)

### 2. My age is:

(please tick one box)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 20 years of age (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> 40 – 49 years (4) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20 – 29 years (2)         | <input type="checkbox"/> 50 – 59 years (5) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30 – 39 years (3)         | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 60 years (6) |

### 3. I predominantly live in the following regional location:

(please tick one box)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auckland/Northland (1)         | <input type="checkbox"/> Marlborough, Nelson & Bays (6) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waikato/Bay of Plenty (2)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Westcoast (7)                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gisborne/Hawkes Bay (3)        | <input type="checkbox"/> Christchurch/Timaru/Oamaru (8) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taranaki/Wanganui/Manawatu (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> Otago/Southland (9)            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wellington/Wairarapa (5)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please state (10)      |

### 4. My ethnicity is:

(please tick as many boxes as appropriate)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New Zealand European (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Niuean (6)                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maori (2)                | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese (7)                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan (3)               | <input type="checkbox"/> Indian (8)                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cook Island Maori (4)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (such as Dutch, Japanese etc) (9) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tongan (5)               | Please state _____   |

### 5. People who live in the same household as myself include:

(please tick as many boxes as appropriate)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My legal husband or wife (1)                      | <input type="checkbox"/> My sister (s) and/or brother (s) (5) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My partner, de facto, boyfriend or girlfriend (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> My flatmate (s) (6)                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My son(s) and/or daughters (s) (3)                | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above – I live alone (7) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My mother and/or father (4)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please state: (8)             |

### 6. My employment status is:

(please tick one box)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not in paid employment (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Self employed (4) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employed full time (2)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Student (5)       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employed part time (3)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (6)         |

<sup>\*</sup>Please ignore these numbers. They are for office use to assist with coding purposes.

**7. The highest qualification/s I have is/are:**

(please tick one box)

- No qualifications. (1)
- Secondary school qualifications. (2)
- Tertiary qualification/s. (ie Qualification/s I have completed after secondary school which has/have taken more than 3 months of full time study to achieve). (3)

**8. In terms of my bodybuilding experience, I have:**

(please tick one box)

- Competed in one or more bodybuilding competitions (Go to Q.9) (1)
- Not yet competed in a bodybuilding competition, but I am intending to compete (Go to Q.10) (2)
- Other. Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_ (go to Q.19) (3)

**9. I have already competed in the following number of bodybuilding competitions:**

(please tick one box)

- 1 competition (1)
- 2 - 4 competitions (2)
- 5 -10 competitions (3)
- More than 10 competitions. (4)

**10. In 2005 or 2006 I am:**

(Please tick one box)

- Definitely aiming to compete in a bodybuilding competition (ie one or more) Go to Q. 11 (1)
- Possibly going to compete in a bodybuilding competition. Go to Q 11 (2)
- Unlikely to compete. Go to Q 12 (3)
- Definitely won't be competing in a bodybuilding competition. Go to Q.12 (4)

**11. The NEXT competition I am intending (or am considering) participating in takes place in the following year/month:**

(Please tick one box)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> April, 2005 (1)     | <input type="checkbox"/> March, 2006 (12)             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> May, 2005 (2)       | <input type="checkbox"/> April, 2006 (13)             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> June, 2005 (3)      | <input type="checkbox"/> May, 2006 (14)               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> July, 2005 (4)      | <input type="checkbox"/> June, 2006 (15)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> August, 2005 (5)    | <input type="checkbox"/> July, 2006 (16)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> September, 2005 (6) | <input type="checkbox"/> August, 2006 (17)            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> October, 2005 (7)   | <input type="checkbox"/> September, 2006 (18)         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> November, 2005 (8)  | <input type="checkbox"/> October, 2006 (19)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> December, 2005 (9)  | <input type="checkbox"/> November, 2006 (20)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> January, 2006 (10)  | <input type="checkbox"/> December, 2006 (21)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> February, 2006 (11) | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided/Unable to say (22) |

12. My last bodybuilding competition was: (Please tick one box)

- Less than 6 months ago (1)
- Between 6 – 12 months ago (2)
- More than 1 year ago, but less than 2 years ago (3)
- 2-4 years ago (4)
- 5 or more years ago (5)
- Nil. I haven't yet competed (6)

13. The category I am planning (or would like) to compete in for my next competition is:

*NB: if you are not intending to compete, please indicate the category of your last competition.*

(Please tick one box)

**Female:**

- Physique (novice) (1)
- Physique (open or international) (2)
- Physique (age category eg Seniors, Masters, Under 20yrs, Secondary School Girls) (3)
- Figure (novice) (4)
- Figure (open or international) (5)
- Figure (age category e.g Seniors, Masters, Under 20yrs, Secondary School Girls) (6)
- Shape (open or international) (7)
- Fitness-model (8)
- Undecided/Other (Please explain) (9)

**Male:**

- Physique (novice) (10)
- Physique (open) (11)
- Physique (age category e.g.Juniors, Masters, Secondary School category) (12)
- Athletic (novice) (13)
- Athletic (open or international) (14)
- Athletic (Masters) (15)
- Undecided/Other (Please explain) (16)

14. My training programme currently includes the following:

i. Number of hours of cardio per week:

(Please tick one box)

- Less than 1 hour (1)
- 1-2 hours (2)
- 3-5 hours (3)
- 6-9 hours (4)
- 10 or more hours (5)

ii. Number of hours of weight lifting per week:

(Please tick one box)

- Less than 1 hour (6)
- 1-2 hours (7)
- 3-5 hours (8)
- 6-9 hours (9)
- 10 or more hours (10)

15. When I am not competing, my off-season weight is usually: (**Please tick one box**)

- Lighter than my competition weight (1)
- The same as my competition weight (2)
- 1-4 kgs heavier than competition weight (3)
- 5-9 kg's heavier than competition weight (4)
- 10-14 kgs heavier than competition weight (5)**
- 15-19 kgs heavier than competition weight (6)**
- 20kgs or more heavier (7)**
- Not Applicable: eg “Not yet competed” or “Competed too long ago to recall” (8)**

16. My eating programme typically contains the following supplements:

*(please tick as many boxes as appropriate)*

i. Off season

- No supplements (1)
  - Protein powder (2)
  - Creatine (3)
  - Glutamine (4)
  - BCAA's (5)
  - HMB (6)
  - Fat Burners (7)
  - Other/s (please state) (8)
- 
- 

ii. 12 weeks out from a competition.

- Not applicable – eg “Not yet competed” or “Competed too long ago to recall” (9)
  - No supplements (10)
  - Protein powder (11)
  - Creatine (12)
  - Glutamine (13)
  - BCAA's (14)
  - HMB (15)
  - Fat Burners (16)
  - Other/s (please state) (17)
- 

17. My main sources of information on competitive bodybuilding is/are/were as follows:

*(please tick as many boxes as appropriate)*

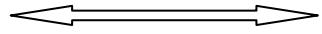
- My personal trainer (1)
  - Personal trainers/experts employed by my gym (2)
  - Other bodybuilders (3)
  - Bodybuilding web sites (name main one's used) (4)
  
  - Bodybuilding magazines (name main ones used) (5)
  
  - Other (please state) (6)
- 

18. In addition to myself, the following person/s are (or have been) competitive bodybuilders:

*(please tick as many boxes as appropriate)*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My legal husband or wife (1)                      | <input type="checkbox"/> My sister (s) and/or brother (s) (5) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My partner, de facto, boyfriend or girlfriend (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> My flatmate (s) (6)                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My son(s) and/or daughters (s) (3)                | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above (7)                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My mother and/or father (4)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please state (8) _____        |

**Please indicate (by circling the appropriate number) how much you personally agree or disagree with each statement.**



<b>Statements</b>	<b>Please circle one number</b>			
	1	2	3	4
19. I am satisfied with how my body looks.	1	2	3	4
20. Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle.	1	2	3	4
21. I feel "different" from other people because I am a Bodybuilder.	1	2	3	4
22. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life.	1	2	3	4
23. I believe I have balanced outlook on health and fitness.	1	2	3	4
24. If I miss a workout I feel extremely guilty.	1	2	3	4
25. I consider I have a balanced lifestyle.	1	2	3	4
26. When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions.	1	2	3	4
27. I consider participating in bodybuilding competitions to be a healthy activity.	1	2	3	4
28. Relative to other people of a similar age, I consider myself physically superior.	1	2	3	4
29. I believe some aspects of bodybuilding are unhealthy but I am willing to do what it takes in order to compete.	1	2	3	4
30. I enjoy wearing clothes, which display my physique.	1	2	3	4
31. If I wasn't involved in bodybuilding, I would still have the same personality.	1	2	3	4
32. I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this.	1	2	3	4
33. I believe that bodybuilding is a form of vanity and obsession with bodily perfection.	1	2	3	4
34. I fear public ridicule when I tell people I am involved in bodybuilding.	1	2	3	4
35. Participating in bodybuilding competitions is something which I am involved in now, but it isn't something I see myself doing long term.	1	2	3	4
36. I have experienced concern and pressure from family and/or friends that I could become too muscular.	1	2	3	4
37. If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way to enhance bodily appearance.	1	2	3	4
38. If female bodybuilders become too muscular, they become less feminine.	1	2	3	4
39. My bodybuilding physique makes me feel more sexually attractive.	1	2	3	4
40. I consider those involved in bodybuilding to be mentally stronger than those who are not.	1	2	3	4
41. Sometimes I wish I wasn't (or hadn't been) a bodybuilder.	1	2	3	4
42. If I could eat junk food all day and still be lean and muscular, I would.	1	2	3	4
43. I would consider implants (e.g. pecs, breast, calf implants ) in order to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape.	1	2	3	4
44. My relationships suffer during bodybuilding training periods.	1	2	3	4
45. I don't restrict my diet post competition.	1	2	3	4
46. Other parts of my life have been negatively affected as a result of bodybuilding.	1	2	3	4
47. If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders.	1	2	3	4
48. The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity.	1	2	3	4
49. At bodybuilding events, my prime aim is to win.	1	2	3	4
50. I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug/steroid-free.	1	2	3	4
51. The majority of my friends are also bodybuilders.	1	2	3	4
52. I don't care what other people think about my body.	1	2	3	4
53. When I tell people I am involved in bodybuilding, the reaction from women is usually more positive than those from men.	1	2	3	4
54. Bodybuilding has made me less sociable.	1	2	3	4

55. Comments in relation to the above:

---



---

Willingness to participate in further research

(Please tick one box)

- Yes, I am Interested in potentially being interviewed **regarding my life-story and experiences as a competitive bodybuilder.** 56 (1)

My contact details to receive further information about this, are as follows:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal details: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- No, I am not Interested in being interviewed **regarding my life-story and experiences as a competitive bodybuilder.** 56 (2)

**Copy of survey results**

(Please tick one box)

- Yes, I am Interested in receiving a copy of these survey results. 57 (1)  
**(Please indicate preference)**

**Email (provide email address)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Post (complete the following postal details):**

“The bodybuilder”

Street or PO Box: \_\_\_\_\_

Town/City: \_\_\_\_\_

- No, I am not Interested in receiving a copy of these survey results. 57 (2)

Thank you for your contribution.

**Please return this completed questionnaire by Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2005 in the post-paid envelope.**



**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT**  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
Telephone: 64 6 356 9099 x 2777  
Facsimile: 64 6 350 5661

**The Experiences of Competitive Bodybuilders In New Zealand  
Interview Information Sheet**

**Researcher's Introduction:**

My name is Anne Probert. I am a bodybuilder and a doctorate student at Massey University who is researching competitive bodybuilding in New Zealand. I am interested in learning more about the experiences of competitive bodybuilders and how this activity has influenced their lives.

**Participant Recruitment:**

I have approached you concerning your interest in potentially being interviewed for this research as I am aware you are a bodybuilder who is either:

- An active competitor (or)
- A competitor in the past (or)
- Are presently training for your first bodybuilding competition.

I am hoping to interview between 20-40 bodybuilders from a cross-section of ages, competitive categories and levels of experience. It will include both males and females.

**Interview Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in the research, it will comprise one interview scheduled during the next six-month period. This interview will be taped recorded, transcribed word-for-word then returned to you for checking. This gives you the opportunity to delete any material you do not wish to have included in the research. To protect your name, you will be referred to by a fictitious name (alias) of your choice. Any use of photographs stemming from the interview process, will only be used with your permission and your facial identity will be protected, unless you provide permission to the contrary. All research information will be in my possession and stored in a locked cabinet. It will be destroyed on completion of the project, unless retained for reasons with your permission. I am hoping to be able to publish the research in academic and practice journals and I would ensure you receive a summary of these findings.

**Participant Involvement:**

I will personally be conducting these interviews and if you agree to participate, I will ensure they are scheduled at a date/time/place of your convenience. They will consist of you talking about your experiences and life-story as a competitive bodybuilder in your own words. I would envisage such an interview would take between 45 minutes to 2 hours to complete.

**Your rights:**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any question;
- Withdraw from the study at any time;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- To ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview/s.

**Project Contacts:**

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions about this research. My phone number is: 06-7513091 and email is aprobert@xtra.co.nz. My Chief Supervisor at Massey University is Dr Sarah Leberman. Her contact details are phone: 06-3505799 ext 2785 or email: S.I.Lieberman @massey.ac.nz.

If you are happy to take part in the research, please complete the enclosed consent form and return it to me in the pre-paid envelope. I will then make contact with you to arrange a convenient time to meet.

**Committee Approval Statement**

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher (s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher (s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistance to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone 06 350 5249, email:humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

## APPENDIX 2b



**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT**  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
Telephone: 64 6 356 9099 x 2777  
Facsimile: 64 6 350 5661

### The Experiences of Competitive Bodybuilders In New Zealand

#### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

**Please tick preferred option:**

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

- Yes  
 No

**Please circle preferred option:**

I agree / Do not agree to my interviews being audio taped.

I wish / Do not wish to have my audio-tapes returned to me.

I agree / Do not agree to have my photo's which I provide at the interview phase, used in the research as long as my facial identity is protected.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full Name (printed)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date of next bodybuilding competition (if relevant): \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Current status – competing? Former competitor? Inactive? – check stats...

1. Briefly – how would you describe yourself? What things are important in your life?
2. Can you describe your life story **NB – can refer to photo's**
  - (*background, growing up & significant points – good & bad*)?. *NB: Mother/Father work? Class? Ethnicity? Partner? Children?*
3. Describe how/why did you first start weight training?
4. How/why/when did you decide to compete in your first BB'ing competition? What was (or is) your goal?
5. What was it like? Describe the experience – *pre-comp/comp day/post comp. diet/training/waxing etc/on-stage (posing, music routine, feelings?) post comp (first thing afterwards?)*

#### **FOR 1+ COMPETITORS**

6. Why do you continue to compete?
7. With your subsequent competition/s – has the experience been similar or different to your first competition? If different – how?
8. Has bodybuilding influenced your goals, social life, body image, lifestyle, eating/training, values and attitudes at all?
9. What parts of your BB'ing experience do you find:
  - Most rewarding?
  - Most satisfying?
  - Most important?
  - Easiest to accomplish?
  - Beneficial to other areas of your life?
  - Do you experience good days/phases?
10. What parts of your BB'ing experience do you find:
  - Most punishing?
  - Least satisfying
  - Least important?
  - Most difficult to accomplish?
  - Detrimental to other areas of your life?
  - Do you experience bad days/phases?
11. How do you think the general public view bodybuilding? Do you think they perceive there are any risks associated with bodybuilding?
12. Is bodybuilding healthy? In your opinion, are there risks associated with BB'ing? If so, what are they?, Have you personally seen or experienced any of them first hand?

13. What do you do with your spare time?
14. What impact has it had on relationships (in personal and professional life?)
15. How does BB'ing relate/interface with other aspects of your life such as social life, friends, career and hobbies?
16. What enables you to pursue bodybuilding to the extent that you do?
17. (*If they mention support – as per above*) – Who gives support? What sort of support do they give you?
18. What has been the reaction of others to your involvement in BB'ing?
19. How do you perceive yourself in relation to non-bodybuilders?
20. Thinking about the types of people that are involved in bodybuilding - What do they have in common? How are they different (if at all)?
21. Has your background influenced your BB'ing experience?
  - What do you value?
  - What is your philosophy on life?
  - Are these expressed through your BB'ing experience?
  - Have your values changed/remained the same since taking up BB'ing?
22. What does bodybuilding mean to you?

## **FORMER COMPETITORS**

23. What made you decide not to compete anymore?
24. How has no longer competing affected you? How are you feeling now?
25. Have your views concerning your BB experiences changed since you stopped BB'ing?
26. Have your values in general changed or stayed the same as they were when you were BB'ing?
27. Do you still participate in weight training at all?
28. Are there any elements of the BB'ing lifestyle or culture that you still participant in now?

## **PHOTO'S**

29. Significant life photos – describe them, Why are they significant?
30. Photo/Picture of a BB'er you admire the most – why do you admire this person?
31. Favourite BB'er photo of themselves – why is it your favorite? Significance? How does it make you feel?

**CHECK LIST:**

- All questions done? Participant Info sheet – All info needed?
- Consent form – signed? Arrangement for copy of photo?

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **Interview Field Notes & Personal File:**

**Interview No:**

**Date/time of Interview:**

**Location:**

**Participant Name:**

**Participant Pseudonym:**

**Interview completion time:**

### **Background details:**

Age:

Employment:

Qualifications?

Father's job?

Mother's job?

Partner?

Children?

Background?

BB'ing Competitive Status (active?):

Other:

### **Personal File:**

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **Methodology Coding Examples**

#### **Becoming a Bodybuilder**

- Participant Background
- Joining the gym
- Triggers to compete
- First competition experiences

#### **Bodybuilder Evolution**

- Subsequent competitions – experiences/ changes/similarities
- Knowledge and learning

#### **Identity Overall**

- Meanings, Motivations, Benefits
- Conflicts
- Emotions, feelings, sensations
- Bodybuilder descriptions, What it takes to be a bodybuilder, Group Descriptions
- Stereotypes, Perceptions, comments of others
- Feeling different from others
- Bodybuilding – a changing world

#### **The Body**

- Body Changes
- Body and gender
- Body image
- Breast implants
- Genetics and the body
- Body modesty
- Feeling Sexy/Sexual Attractiveness
- Attractiveness
- Bodily display

#### **Bodybuilding as Healthy/Not Healthy**

- Balanced/Unbalanced
- Healthy and unhealthy dialogues
- Bodybuilding as risky
- Steroid use/non use
- Bodybuilding as a weight loss tool
- Eating
  - Discipline - eating
  - eating - clean / bodybuilder diet
  - Post comp - men - eating
  - Post comp eating - women
  - risks - eating disorders
  - Risks - food
- Extreme/obsessed

### **Competing**

- Competition categories – perceptions/choices
- Being competitive, experiences of competition,
- Competitive improvements/changes

### **The Challenge/Doing it**

- Bodybuilding as personal – a challenge
- Discipline/regimes/schedules
- Time management, Sacrifices
- Mind/focused/mental aspects
- Questioning is it worth it
- Easiest part/hardest part

### **Personal development**

- Self improvement
- Testing boundaries

### **Creative/Performing/Art**

- Being Creative
- Performing

### **Socialness/Individuality**

- Bodybuilding as social
  - Not being social/unfriendly
  - Selfishness
  - Support structures
  - On own, Individuality
- 
- **The Lifestyle**

### **Multiple Identities and Bodybuilding Intersections**

- Ethnicity
- External friends/hobbies/social
- Fatherhood, Motherhood
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Widower
- Partners
- On Own
- Work
- Gender
- Age
- Gay/Sexuality

### **Leaving**

- Reasons for giving up
- Taking time out
- Experiences post retirement

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **New Zealand Competitive Bodybuilding Competition Categories and Rules: Selected extracts from the NZFBB and NABBA guides and rules books**

#### **Selected Extracts from the NABBA Rule Book**

##### **Competition Classes**

###### **FITNESS-MODEL**

Fitness-Model One Class

###### **SHAPE WOMEN**

Shape Women One Class

International Shape\* One Class

###### **FIGURE WOMEN**

Secondary School Girls One Class

Senior Figure 35 years +, 45 years +

Novice Figure Short Class, Tall Class

Open Figure Short Class, Tall Class

International Figure\* One Class

###### **PHYSIQUE WOMEN**

Senior Physique Women 35 years +, 45 years +

Novice Physique One Class

Open Physique One Class

International Physique\* One Class

###### **ATHLETIC MEN**

Master Athletic One Class

Novice Athletic Short Class, Tall Class

Open Athletic Short Class, Tall Class

International Athletic\* One Class

###### **PHYSIQUE MEN**

Secondary School Boys One Class

Masters Men 40 years +, 50 years +

Junior Men One Class

Novice Physique Short Class, Tall Class

Open Physique Short Class, Tall Class

International Physique\* One Class

###### **MIXED PAIRS**

Mixed Pairs One Class

###### **PLEASE NOTE:**

\* International Classes are only available at World and Universe Qualifiers, and the New Zealand National Championships.

## **Class criteria**

### AGE GROUPS

#### Masters Men

Class 1: 40 years and over on the day of competition

Class 2: 50 years and over on the day of competition

#### Senior Women (Physique and Figure)

Class 1: 35 years and over on the day of competition

Class 2: 45 years and over on the day of competition

#### Junior Men

Rule: Under 23 years of age on the 1<sup>st</sup> January, in the year of competition

#### Secondary School (Boys and Girls)

Under 19 years at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January in the year of competition

(School ID may be required)

### HEIGHT DIVISIONS

#### Physique and Figure Women

Class 1: Tall, Over 1.63m

Class 2: Short, Up to and including 1.63m

#### Physique Men

Class 1: Tall, Over 1.72m

Class 2: Short, Up to and including 1.72m

#### Athletic Men

Class 1: Tall, Over 1.75cm

Class 2: Short, Up to 1.75cm

Rule: Height – 100 + 2 = Maximum Allowable Weight

## **Class rules**

### NOVICE STATUS

Rule: One who has not previously won a contest, or placed in the top three in the NZ National Championships. INTERNATIONAL

### STATUS

Rule: Athletes will be recognised as International if they have competed at either a NABBA World or NABBA Universe Championships.

Rule: NZ National Champions will gain International Status (as of 2002)

Rule: Open Class Champions will gain International Status (as of 2002)

Rule: The International Status will remain current for two years (from the date of the competition) Athletes who attain International Status will be recorded on a Register.

Rule: The Recognition is specific to the class the athlete competed in

### CLASS RESTRICTIONS

Rule: There must be three athletes to constitute a class

### COMBINED CLASSES

Rule: If there is less than three athletes in a class, athletes will compete in a combined class.

Rule: Novice and Open classes, where possible, should not be combined.

Rule: Athletes competing in a combined class will retain their ‘nominated’ class status.

Example: Only One Senior Figure is entered – class not recognised. Senior Figure combines with Novice Figure. If the Senior Figure places in the top three of the Novice Figure Class, she will still qualify for the Nationals as a Senior Figure..

### **ATHLETIC CLASS RULES**

Rule: Novice and Open Athletic competitors, who come in too heavy, can compete in the corresponding Physique Class.

Rule: International Athletic competitors who come in too heavy may compete in Open Physique

## **ROUNDS OF COMPETITION**

**ROUND ONE – STRUCTURAL ROUND** In this round the contestants are required to line up facing the Judges in a relaxed or semi-relaxed state. Competitors who flex or stand in an overly tense posture may be warned by the Head Judge to relax. If the contestant persists he/she risks being marked down by the Judging Panel.

This round is used by the Judges to assess the standards of symmetry, proportion, muscular development, posture and general deportment in a relaxed state.

Competitors line up in front of the Judging Panel for assessment by the Judges from the front. They will then be instructed to make a quarter turn to the right for an assessment of the left side, a further quarter turn to the right for an assessment of the rear of the physique, a further quarter turn to the right for an assessment of the right side followed by a further turn to face the judging panel once more.

Contestants should remember that this is the first view that the Judges have of their physiques and should realise that posture and deportment are important in this first impression.

**ROUND TWO – COMPULSORY POSING COMPARISONS** This is the most important round for both contestants and Judges. The contestants are required to perform the mandatory poses in groups for comparison of each other by the judging panel.

The mandatory poses are designed to display the relative development of every muscle group and allow comparisons of the contestants by the Judges on equal and fair terms.

It is in the interest of all contestants that they know these poses well and can perform them confidently to display their physique to the best of their ability.

### **ROUND THREE – INDIVIDUAL ROUTINES**

In this round each contestant performs a personal posing routine, set to music, for a maximum of sixty seconds.

Presentation is an important consideration in this round, although Judges will be looking for tone, shape and quality of individual and collective muscle groups. The main criteria for selection and placing will be symmetry, proportion, muscular development and condition.

## **CLASS DEFINITIONS**

### **FITNESS-MODEL**

The Fitness-Model Class differs from Shape in that:

This is a fitness competition and not a body building class.

Athletes can have a reasonable amount of body fat.

Routine shows energy in a dance or fitness style

The regulation Judging Rounds apply:

Symmetry 50%  
Routine 50%  
Round One: Symmetry

Athletes line up on stage, go through four quarter turns to the right.

Judges are looking for good muscle tone and good posture.

Athletes should have good to excellent muscle tone with clean, tight lines and appear to have a reasonable level of body fat.

Two piece fitness costume to be worn (not bikini)

Round Two: Individual Routine

Two piece fitness costume to be worn (not bikini)

The routine should convey a high level of energy and be fitness or dance orientated

## SHAPE WOMEN

The Shape Class differs from the Figure Class in that:

The degree of development is much lower than that which is necessary for the Figure Class.

Muscular definition is only slightly shown

There should be no vascularity visible

The ideal objective should be to achieve good symmetry and athletic tone. A Shape Woman should not have body fat percentage as low as that of the Figure Women

Presentation, Deportment and Preparation take an increased importance in the Shape Class, as these qualities enhance the feminine aspect of the fitness shape athletes.

The regulation Judging Rounds apply:

Symmetry 50%

Routine 50%

The time allowance for routines is one minute

Routines should be choreographed based around the standard bodybuilding poses and presenting a more artistic routine, showing originality

Jewellery and accessories are optional.

The wearing of shoes is optional.

There is one Shape Class, that is, there are no dividing height classes

Posing Bikini to be worn for both rounds

Props allowed (props are not to cover the body)

## FIGURE WOMEN

The Figure Class differs from the Physique Women's Class in that:

Symmetry and Proportion are more significant than muscularity.

The ideal objective should be to achieve a firm, toned, feminine physique. There should be a degree of muscularity and muscular separation to the physique, however the figure competitor should not have the degree of development, definition, separation or striation like that of Physique Women.

The Figure Women's muscles should show good development, they should be full and well rounded while still showing separation and definition.

Presentation, Deportment and Preparation take an increased importance in the Figure Class, as these qualities enhance the feminine aspect of the figure athletes.

The poses for Figure Women are as follows:

1. Double Biceps from the front
2. Side Chest from right side
3. Side Tricep from right side
4. Rear Double Biceps with one leg displaying calf and leg bicep
5. Side Chest from left side
6. Side Tricep from left side
7. Abdominal and Thigh Pose with arms placed behind the head

The agreed NABBA criteria requirements for the Figure Women is as follows:

During the rounds stated earliest the wearing of jewellery is optional.

Shoes must be worn

Hands are to remain open during all comparison poses, and the individual routines

#### **PHYSIQUE WOMEN**

The emphasis must be on muscular shape maintaining a feminine look, that is, without the heavy muscular development and size of a male physique.

The ideal objective should be to achieve balanced development and muscular separation, without going to an extreme that would render the physique asexual or competitive on equal terms with a male body builder.

The ideal well-balanced athlete should present (In equal importance):

Muscularity, Mass, Separation, Symmetry, Proportion

Please Note: The wearing of jewellery is optional,

The wearing of shoes is not permitted

Physique Class poses are to be executed with the hands closed (clenched)

There is one Physique Women Class, that is, there are no dividing height classes like other classes.

The poses for Physique Women are as follows:

1. Double Biceps from the front
2. Lat Spread from the front
3. Side Chest from right side
4. Side Tricep from right side
5. Rear Double Biceps with one leg displaying calf and leg bicep
6. Rear Lat Spread with other leg displaying calf and leg bicep
7. Side Chest from left side
8. Side Tricep from left side
9. Abdominal and Thigh Pose with arms placed behind the head

#### **ATHLETIC MEN**

The Mr. Athletic class has evolved from the Mr. Physique class for men who have good athletic bodies without the large mass of a physique athlete. This class, although equally disciplined, is more attainable to a wider spectrum of athletes, and those not genetically pre-disposed to muscular bulk.

This class must show all the requirements of low body fat and separation like that of an ideal physique athlete, but without the heavy muscular development of a physique bodybuilder.

This class is run as per our normal body building rules.

The ideal objective of the Physique Athlete should be to attain a low body fat level, balanced development and muscular separation.

The athlete should present (In equal importance):

Muscularity, Separation, Symmetry, Proportion

The poses for Athletic Men are as follows:

1. Double Biceps from the front
2. Lat Spread from the front
3. Side Chest from right side
4. Side Tricep from right side
5. Rear Double Biceps with one leg displaying calf and leg bicep
6. Rear Lat Spread with other leg displaying calf and leg bicep
7. Side Chest from left side
8. Side Tricep from left side
9. Abdominal and Thigh Pose with arms placed behind the head

#### **PHYSIQUE MEN**

The ‘original’ Body Building class. Over the years the classes on offer to bodybuilders has evolved and diversified, but the classic Mr. Physique class has held the test of time.

This class caters to what some may call ‘hard-core’ body builders.

The ideal objective of the Physique Athlete should be to attain a low body fat level, balanced development and muscular separation.

The athlete should present (In equal importance):

Muscularity, Mass, Separation, Symmetry, Proportion

The poses for Physique Men are as follows:

1. Double Biceps from the front
2. Lat Spread from the front
3. Side Chest from right side
4. Side Tricep from right side
5. Rear Double Biceps with one leg displaying calf and leg bicep
6. Rear Lat Spread with other leg displaying calf and leg bicep
7. Side Chest from left side
8. Side Tricep from left side
9. Abdominal and Thigh Pose with arms placed behind the head
10. Most Muscular Pose

#### **Selected Extracts from the NZFBB Guide**

### **HOW TO ASSESS AN ATHLETE'S PHYSIQUE: BODYBUILDING**

#### **GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

When assessing a competitor’s physique, a judge should follow a routine procedure, which will allow a comprehensive assessment of the physique as a whole. During the comparisons of the compulsory poses, the judge should first look at the primary muscle group being displayed. The judge should then survey the whole physique, starting from the head and looking at every part of the physique in a downward sequence, beginning with general impressions, and looking for muscular bulk, balanced development, muscular density and definition. The downward survey should take in the head, neck, shoulders, chest, all of the arm muscles, front of the trunk for

pectoralis, pec-delt tie-in, abdominals, waist, thighs, legs, calves and feet. The same procedure for back poses will also take in the upper and lower trapezius, teres and infraspinatus, erector spinae, the gluteus group, the leg biceps group at the back of the thighs, calves, and feet. A detailed assessment of the various muscle groups should be made during the comparisons, at which time it helps the judge to compare muscle shape, density, and definition while still bearing in mind the competitor's overall balanced development. The comparisons of the compulsory poses cannot be over-emphasized as these comparisons will help the judge to decide which competitor has the superior physique from the standpoint of muscular bulk, balanced development, muscular density and definition.

### **MEN'S COMPULSORY POSES**

Front Double Biceps

Front Lat Spread

Side Chest

Back Double Biceps

Back Lat Spread

Side Triceps

Abdominals and Thighs

### **ASSESSING PREJUDGING**

In assessing Prejudging, overall shape and that of the various muscle groups is important. The judge should favour competitors with a harmonious, classical physique. The judge should look for good posture and athletic bearing, correct anatomical structure (including body framework, broad shoulders, high chest, correct spinal curves, limbs and trunk in good proportion, straight legs, not bandy or knock-kneed). The judge should also look for good skin tone with an absence of surgical or other scars, spots, acne or tatoos, which the IFBB considers as a skin blemish, tidily dressed hair, well-shaped feet, and toes. When having difficulty in placing two or more competitors who seem to be on the same level, the judge should look for faults in those aspects listed above which will help to differentiate among the competitors.

### **3.4 ASSESSING THE FEMALE PHYSIQUE**

First and foremost, the judge must bear in mind that this is a women's bodybuilding competition, and that the goal is to find an ideal female physique. Therefore, the most important aspect is shape – a muscular yet feminine shape. The other aspects are similar to those described for assessing the male physique, but muscular development must not be carried to such an excess that it resembles the massive muscularity of the male physique. Definition of women's muscles must not be confused with emaciation resulting from extreme loss of weight. Competitors shall also be assessed on whether or not they carry themselves in a graceful manner while walking to and from their position onstage.

### **WOMEN'S COMPULSORY POSES**

Front Double Biceps

Side Chest

Back Double Biceps

Side Triceps

Abdominals and Thighs

## ASSESSING FREE POSING

In the Finals, the judges will be assessing each competitor on how well they display their physiques to music. The judge will look for a smooth, artistic and well-choreographed routine, which may include any number of poses; however, the compulsory poses must be included. The competitor must also include intermittent pauses so as to display the muscular development of his or her physique. Lying flat on the posing platform, “moon” poses and pulling the posing attire so as to display the top inside of the quadriceps or the gluteus maximus shall be strictly forbidden. In mixed-pairs competition, the competitors will be assessed both individually and as a unit with particular attention being given to how well their individual physiques complement each other and how well they move in unison.

## **HOW TO ASSESS AN AMATEUR FITNESS COMPETITION**

### INTRODUCTION

Judges are strongly reminded that they are judging a women's FITNESS competition and not a women's BODYBUILDING competition. The type of muscularity, vascularity, muscular definition, and/or dieted leanness displayed by the female bodybuilder will not be considered acceptable if displayed by a fitness competitor and therefore, must be marked down. There are no height classes as the number of competitors is too small to warrant them. If there is a significant increase in competitors, height classes will be introduced.

### GENERAL PRESENTATION

Judges are reminded that the competitor's posture and bearing, at all times while onstage, is to be considered. The overall image displayed should demonstrate poise and self-confidence. This is especially true at all times when the competitor is standing relaxed and during the comparisons of the quarter turns.

When standing relaxed, the competitors shall be warned against adopting a tense pose, with arms flexed and out to the side in a display of masculinity. A relaxed stance means that the competitor must stand erect, head and eyes towards the front, shoulders back, chest out, stomach in, feet together, and arms RELAXED and hanging freely at the side.

During each of the quarter turns, the same rules shall apply. Again, the stance shall be erect, head and eyes towards the front, shoulders back, chest out, stomach in, feet together, and arms RELAXED and hanging freely at the side.

## **ROUND 2 - ROUTINE**

In this round, the athlete performs a fitness routine, to her own choice of music, the length of which shall not exceed **90** seconds.

### **HOW TO ASSESS A BODY FITNESS COMPETITION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Body fitness is considered a new discipline in response to the demand for a competition where the emphasis is placed on aesthetics-beauty combined with an athletic physique.

There are two categories in Body fitness competitions as follows:

1. Up to and including 164cm.
2. Over 164cm.

These are the NZFBB height standards.

International height standards are:

Up to 158cm – Short

158cm – 164cm – Medium

164cm and over – Tall.

Body fitness consists of the following rounds in a **Regional competition**:

1. Pre-judging – Round 1 (Two piece bikini) Quarter turn comparisons
2. Pre-judging – Round 2 (Two piece bikini) Free posing routine
3. Finals – (Two piece bikini) Free posing routine

Body fitness consists of the following rounds in a **National competition**:

1. Pre-judging – Round 1 (Two piece bikini) Quarter turn comparisons
2. Pre-judging – Round 2 (One piece swimsuit) Quarter turn comparisons
3. Finals – Round 3 (Two piece bikini) Free posing routine

### **ASSESSMENT OF ROUND 1 (Two piece bikini)**

In this round, the competitors are brought onstage, in numerical order and in single line. They are directed through the comparisons of the quarter turns, first as an entire group and then in smaller groups of no more than five competitors at a time. Each judge is expected to watch all of the comparisons and not just those that a specific judge has requested. High heel shoes are compulsory in this round.

## **ROUTINE**

In this Round high heel shoes are not permitted – bare feet is mandatory.

The routine shall not exceed 90 seconds.

## **HOW TO ASSESS A WOMEN'S FIGURE COMPETITION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This is not an IFBB recognised class so the criteria and format for judging was locally developed.

The class was developed for women who trained in the gym with weights but didn't want to or didn't have the genetics to grow muscle to the standard required for bodybuilding physique. There can be a fine line between the two classes in New Zealand with several Figure ladies having the ability to make excellent physique class bodies and vice versa and this of course does happen.

The height categories are the same as Body Fitness as follows:

1. Up to and excluding 164cm
2. Over 164cm

Women's figure consists of the following rounds:

### **ROUND 1 – QUARTER TURNS – TWO PIECE BIKINI, HIGH HEEL SHOES**

### **ROUND 2 – COMPULSORY POSES – TWO PIECE BIKINI, HIGH HEEL SHOES**

Judges shall evaluate the following aspects of this round:

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| ▪ Shape        | Displaying firm round muscles to exhibit a feminine shape or contours.   |
| ▪ Presentation | The ability to present the physique in each of the five compulsory poses to show the major muscle groups called for and the rest of the body to achieve a feminine balance from head to toe. |
| ▪ Body Tone    | The degree of firmness of all parts of the body when posing  |
| ▪ Skin Tone    | The tightness of the skin when posing with an absence of skin blemishes  |
| ▪ Grooming     | An immaculate package from hair to shoes taking in the evenness of the tan, the fit of the bikini, the enhancement with appropriate jewellery.   |

- Muscle Development      The appropriate development of lean muscle to complement the poses.

With all the poses, excessive muscle development and definition is not favoured and athletes showing these features will be marked down.

### **ROUND 3 – FREE POSING ROUTINE – TWO PIECE BIKINI – NO SHOES TO BE WORN**

#### **CONTEST RULES**

##### **Body shaping Figure**

Must wear a two- piece bikini , you have the option of under wires , sequins , lames it can be made of fabric of your choice which must conform to accepted standards of taste and decency The bikini must reveal the abdominal muscles as well as the lower back muscles. The pants must cover at least half of the buttocks and NO “G” Strings are permitted Shoes only in round 1 and 2 . Watches and jewellery may be worn

##### **Body shaping fitness**

In round 1 You must wear a two- piece bikini , you have the option of under wires , sequins , lames it can be made of fabric of your choice which must conform to accepted standards of taste and decency The bikini must reveal the abdominal muscles as well as the lower back muscles. The pants must cover at least half of the buttocks and NO “G” Strings are permitted Shoes only in round 1. Watches and jewellery may be worn

##### **Round 2**

**A fitness costume** that is decent and covers the chest and buttock areas , Flesh coloured thighs are acceptable. Gym shoes are required

**There is no longer Compulsory posers in this class**

##### **Couples**

The bikini is of the requirements of both the Bodybuilding male and female. At the evening show you also have the same flexibility as the bodybuilders

##### **IFBB bodyFitness**

Regional Must wear a two- piece bikini, you have the option of under wires , sequins , lames it can be made of fabric of your choice which must conform to accepted standards of taste and decency The bikini must reveal the abdominal muscles as well as the lower back muscles.

The pants must cover at least half of the buttocks and NO “G” Strings are permitted Shoes only in round 1 . Watches and jewellery may be worn

Round 3 same as round 1

Note ( these are requirements for NZ ,international is different )

**All women's divisions**

During the pre-judging, the hair must be worn off the shoulders so as not to hide the musculature of the shoulders and upper back. Hair ties must be a neutral colour. The hair may be styled for the evening finals. In the event of judging during the evening finals (for the overall title or a tie) female contestants must revert back to the pre-judging requirements in terms of bikini and jewellery standards.

**Bodybuilding**

Contestants shall wear no watches, jewellery or body piercing, sunshades, footwear or body piercing on stage, and no chewing gum or food is permitted. All women at the evening show may wear jewellery.

## APPENDIX 7a

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS – RESPONDENT DIFFERENCES BASED ON GENDER

Analysis of the survey rating scores pertaining to questions nineteen to fifty-four highlighted differences of significance ( $p < .05$ ) between the mean scores of male and female respondents.

#### It suggested that females agreed more strongly than males with respect to the following statements:

I consider I have a balanced lifestyle.

Female M=3.30 SD= 0.65 Male M=3.14 SD=0.74 (F=.031; p>.05; t (242.72) = 2.12, p<.05).

I enjoy wearing clothes which show off my physique

Female M=3.15 SD= 0.78 Male M=2.86 SD=0.89 (F=.1.73; p>.05; t (374) = 3.24, p<.05).

If I wasn't involved in bodybuilding I would still have the same personality.

Female M=3.37 SD= 0.83 Male M=3.06 SD=0.98 (F=2.17; p>.05; t (376) = 3.23, p<.05).

Bodybuilding is something which I do now, but isn't something I see myself doing long term.

Female M=2.78 SD= 1.03 Male M=2.51 SD=1.04 (F=.641; p>.05; t (360) = 2.39, p<.05).

I have experienced concern and pressure from family and/or friends that I could become too muscular.

Female M=2.43 SD= 1.16 Male M=2.12 SD=1.02 (F=15.53; p<.05; t (311.07) = 2.75, p<.05).

I would consider implants (e.g pecs, breast, calf implants) in order to obtain the ultimate bodybuilding shape.

Female M=1.78 SD= 1.10 Male M=1.28 SD=0.71 (F=73.11; p<.05; t (364.72) = 5.44, p<.05).

I believe bodybuilding in New Zealand is largely drug/steroid-free.

Female M=2.41 SD= 0.84 Male M=1.99 SD=0.89 (F=2.01; p>.05; t (371.00) = 4.49, p<.05).

#### It suggested that males agreed more strongly than female respondents with respect to the following statements:

Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle.

Female M=2.85 SD= 0.98 Male M=3.35 SD=0.78 (F=.8.17; p<.05; t (377) = 3.33, p<.05).

I feel different from other people because I am a bodybuilder

Female M=2.30 SD= 1.00 Male M=2.66 SD=0.99 (F=0.16; p>.05; t (371) = 3.33, p<.05).

When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions.

Female M=2.61 SD= 0.90 Male M=2.81 SD=0.89 (F=1.77; p>.05; t (371) = 2.07, p<.05).

I consider participating in bodybuilding to be a healthy activity.

Female M=2.69 SD= 0.89 Male M=2.89 SD=0.89 (F=.543; p>.05; t (371) = 2.12, p<.05).

Relative to people of similar age, I consider myself physically superior.

Female M=2.89 SD= 0.89 Male M=3.14 SD=0.85 (F=.061; p>.05; t (373) = 3.26, p<.05).

I believe I am a disciplined person and bodybuilding helps me to demonstrate this.

Female M=3.28 SD= 0.71 Male M=3.45 SD=0.63 (F=1.48; p>.05; t (371) = 2.25, p<.05).

If steroids were legal, I believe that controlled and carefully planned use of them is an acceptable way of enhancing bodily appearance.

Female M=1.47 SD= 0.93 Male M=2.16 SD=1.18 (F=33.48; p>.05; t (233.70) = 5.90, p<.05).

If steroids were legal, I believe they would be more acceptable for use by male bodybuilders than female bodybuilders.

Female M=2.41 SD= 1.09 Male M=2..69 SD=1.08 (F=0.78; p>.05; t (375.00) = 2.40, p<.05).

The muscularity of male bodybuilders enhances their masculinity

Female M=2.56 SD= 0.94 Male M=2.85 SD=0.90(F==4.83; p<.05; t (295.62) = 2.90, p<.05).

At bodybuilding events, my prime aim is to win.

Female M=3.00 SD= 0.97 Male M=3.21 SD=0.88 (F=0.75 p>05; t (374) = 2.11,p<.05).

When I tell people I am involved in bodybuilding, the reaction from women is usually more positive than men.

Female M=2.23 SD= 0.91 Male M=2.69 SD=0.85 (F=0.0 p>05; t (371) = 4.87,p<.05).

## APPENDIX 7b

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS – RESPONDENT DIFFERENCES BASED ON AGE

Analysis of the survey rating scores highlighted potential differences of significance (p<.05) between the mean scores of participants aged over and under 40 years.

It suggested that participants under 40 years agreed more strongly than participants over 40 years with respect to the following statement

If I could eat junk food all day and still be lean and muscular I would.

U/40yrs M=2.32 SD= 1.11 O/40yrs M=1.85 SD=1.04 (F=.4.6 p<.05; t (331) = 4.22, p<.05).

It suggested that participants over 40 years agreed more strongly than participants under 40 years with respect to the following statements

Bodybuilding is an integral part of my lifestyle

U/40yrs M=2.84 SD= 0.71 O/40yrs M=2.86 SD=0.83 (F=.801 p>.05; t (377) = 3.20, p<.05).

When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my life.

U/40yrs M=3.09 SD= 0.82 O/40yrs M=3.39 SD=0.73 (F=.433 p>.05; t (374) = 3.61, p<.05).

When preparing for a bodybuilding competition I feel in control of my emotions.

U/40yrs M=2.51 SD= 0.88 O/40yrs M=2.94 SD=0.71 (F= 4.06 p<05; t (323.64) = 4.64, p<.05).

I consider bodybuilding to be a healthy activity.

U/40yrs M=2.60 SD= 0.85 O/40yrs M=3.01 SD=0.90 (F=.1.71 p>05; t (371) = 4.46, p<.05).

Relative to people of similar age I consider myself physically superior.

U/40yrs M=2.79 SD= 0.88 O/40yrs M=3.26 SD=0.80 (F= 1.46 p>05; t (373) = 5.30, p<.05).

## APPENDIX 8: THE BODYBUILDERS INTERVIEWED

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Comment
Abby	F	30's	NZE	Retired physique competitor who trains other bodybuilders. Her partner is a competitive bodybuilder whom she lives with.
Allan	M	Early 40's	PI	Competed successfully on the national and international circuit (Physique). His partner is a former competitor. Together they run a gym.
Antony	M	19	NZE	Has successfully won his age group categories (Physique). Aspires to achieve Pro bodybuilding status. Works fulltime. Lives at home with parents and siblings. Single.
Bertha	F	30's	NZE	Successful national Physique bodybuilder. Has competed successfully internationally. Large muscular body. Takes steroids. Married with Children. Employed.
Bob	M	30's	NZE/German	Has competed nationally and internationally (Physique). He has a larger muscular body and currently takes steroids. Lives with his girlfriend, has no children. Works full time.
Brian	M	30's	NZE/Maori	Competed in over 10 competitions in Physique. Nationally successful. Has a large muscular body and currently takes steroids. Works in a gym. Is married with children.
Cathy	F	40's	NZE	Employed. Has competed in one competition in Figure, but planning to compete in more. Has a husband and teenage children.
Conan	M	30's	Maori	Has competed in three competitions in Physique. Has a partner and young children. Employed.

Dave	M	40's	Māori	Started competing six years ago. Has a partner and grown up children. Competes several times a year – often in Athletic. Works full time. Has competed in over 10 competitions.
Donna	F	20's	Asian	A novice bodybuilder. Was interviewed prior to and after her first competition which was in Figure. Has a boyfriend. Tertiary Student.
Fay	F	30's	NZE	Former competitor. Has won national and international bodybuilding titles in Figure and Shape. Separated from her husband. No children. Lives with another bodybuilder. Has competed in over 10 competitions. Works and trains other bodybuilders.
Fred	M	20's	NZE/Māori	Competes in the Athletic category. Has a wife. No children. Works full time. Has competed in over 4 competitions.
Janet	F	20's	NZE	Employed. Separated from her husband. Has a young child, which she is raising. Has competed in two events – one in Figure, another in Physique.
Joan	F	60's	NZE	Took up bodybuilding in her 50's. Has competed in over 50 events in Physique. Lives on her own. Works part time – some voluntary.
Gavin	M	30's	NZE	Former competitor. His wife was also a competitive bodybuilder. Now they have a young child. Employed. Has not competed for a year.
Harry	M	20's	NZE/Maori	Single. Flatting with other men of similar age. They are not bodybuilders. Works full time. Has competed in 2-4 events. Interviewed whilst recovering from surgery - his injury stemmed from overtraining. Competed in Physique.

Heidi	F	30's	NZE	Separated from her husband. Currently in another relationship. Works in a gym. Has young children. Competed in Physique.
Jake	M	40's	PI	Married. Nationally successful competitor. No longer competing as often.
Jay	M	30's	PI	Training for his first event in a Physique category. Married with children.
Kate	F	30	NZE/Maori	Recently married. Nationally successful female Physique bodybuilder. Works full time. Competed seven times.
Mary	F	30's	NZE/Maori	Competed in 2 competitions in Physique. Did not enjoy being a bodybuilder. Has not competed for two years. Now runs marathons.
Michael	M	20's	NZE/Maori	Nationally successful Physique competitor. Has also competed internationally. Lives with wife. No children. Works full time.
Stuart	M	30's	NZE	Has competed in two competitions in Athletic. Aiming to compete again. Works full time. Gay. In a relationship.
Steve	M	40's	South African (white)	Former competitive bodybuilder. Has competed with and without steroids. Works. Now plays squash. Has not competed for five years.
Shelly	F	40's	PI	Interviewed prior to and after her first competition (Physique). Has children. Is married to a bodybuilder. Works.
Sharon	F	30's	NZE	Married. Has competed in two competitions. Has a husband and children. At the time of her interview she had not competed for over two years – but during the course of this research she returned to competing.

Shona	F	50's	NZE	Widower. Has competed in over 10 competitions. Competed for the first time in her 40's. Lives on her own. Her children are grown up. At the time of interview had not competed for 1-2 years. During the course of this research she returned to compete.
Tammy	F	30's	NZE	Did three competitions in Physique. Married. Has young children. Has not competed for over two years.
Tania	F	40's	NZE	Lives on her own. Works full time. Currently training for her first competition.
Todd	M	40's	NZE	Divorced. Lives on his own. Has teenage sons. Competed in two events. No longer competing. In his 40's. At time of interview had not competed for a year.
Vivian	F	30's	NZE	Nationally successful Figure competitor. Married. Has children at home. Is not employed in the workforce.
Zara	F	30's	Asian	No longer competing. Works full time. Competed five times. At time of interview had not competed for over two years.

## **APPENDIX 9: PUBLISHED ARTICLES**