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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Maria Kwiatkowski entitled "The Experience of an Elite Female Bodybuilder's Participation in Bodybuilding: A Dialogic Interview Presented as Narrative." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Cultural Studies in Education.

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**THE EXPERIENCE OF AN ELITE FEMALE BODYBUILDER'S
PARTICIPATION IN BODYBUILDING:
A DIALOGIC INTERVIEW PRESENTED AS NARRATIVE**

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Maria Kwiatkowski

August 1995

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving and supportive parents, Mr. Edward Kwiatkowski and Ms. Mary Fica-Kwiatkowski, who have allowed me to dream big and follow my intuition and to my sister and brothers, Laura Mahler and Jon and Edward Kwiatkowski who were always with me in heart, spirit and unending support. Finally, I dedicate this work to “Karen”, whose courage and honesty has made this work possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, a very sincere 'thank you' to “Karen” for her participation in this study. I hope that I have done justice to her story by accurately portraying her experience and engaging personality.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine how one elite female bodybuilder became involved in the sport of competitive bodybuilding initially and to gain insight into the nature of her experiences for the duration of her involvement in the sport. In order to enhance the literature regarding the experiences of professional bodybuilders, this study used the qualitative methodology of dialogic interview within an interpretist framework. The data are presented as conversational narrative. The participant was one recently-retired elite female bodybuilder who had extensive participation in both the National Physique Committee (NPC) and International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB) organizations and whose career spanned approximately twelve years. The qualitative technique of open-ended phenomenological interviewing was used in this study. The average interview lasted two hours with the total interview time approximating six hours.

Emerging aspects of the participant's experience included (a) how the participant got started in weight training, generally followed by competition, specifically; (b) personal drug use within the sport (c) surrounding issues of controversy the participant experienced; (d) the potential to earn a living while existing as a competitive bodybuilder and related expectations and disappointments; (e) personal self-esteem and how it influenced her decision to become a professional bodybuilding competitor; and (f) the way in which the participant is experiencing life after bodybuilding. These aspects or phases showed that the participant initially began general anaerobic conditioning to enhance personal appearance and moved into the sport of bodybuilding competitively

to enhance self-esteem through recognition and approval. The primary aspect, however, related to the issue of the participant's prolonged performance-enhancing drug use because of its physical and emotional implications upon her life; past, present and future. The aspects of the participant's experiences were compared to those of others portrayed in the literature. Based on recurring aspects and experiential similarities, suggestions were made for internal checks within the organizations of the NPC and IFBB and for further research addressing controversial issues experienced by the competitive bodybuilder.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Tell me, did you see the women's bodybuilding show that was on ESPN last night?

No, I don't have cable. Why? Was it any good?

Well, I have to tell you. I have always liked women who were either somewhat muscular or real athletic-looking, but I've never seen anything like this. I mean, I have no doubt in my mind that the women I saw could have competed in a men's show. They were *that* big.

Yes, I know what you mean. I happened to get to see one of the top competitors only two weeks prior to the Ms. Olympia, she was a guest poser at this show I went to see. She was so big that she didn't even have to really hit any poses, but just kind of strutted around and the audience was going wild. I have to admit, she did look phenomenal.

Are you saying you think this looks good? Don't you think it's gone a bit too far?

Maybe, but that issue has been debated from the start. Today, at least, it seems bigger is better if you want to win. Tomorrow could be another story. It changes daily.

Paraphrase of a conversation overheard February 6, 1995.

Bodybuilding, in general, is a sport many know of but few understand. In fact, it has been debated whether bodybuilding is a *real* sport at all (*Ironman*, November, 1991). The argument for excluding it as such posits that bodybuilding as a competitive venue exhibits no skill but merely displays that which has been achieved; namely, physique development. Moreover, prevailing stereotypes of bodybuilding participants as narcissistic self-caricatures, less than cerebral, and bad-tempered have done little to

enhance its reputation. As a career choice, the financial rewards of a competitive bodybuilder are limited. The cost of preparing for and participating in a contest usually exceeds the amount of prize money awarded. Real income is earned by obtaining endorsements, guest posing, opening a gym or by entering other venues such as Arnold (Schwarzenegger) has done through his acting career.

Female bodybuilding, in particular, has even more working against it. Not a single contest since the first Miss Olympia in August, 1980 has been without controversy. Every aspect of the competition from posing attire, to posing with clenched fists, to what is too masculine has been defined and redefined. Each female competitor has had to guess what type of contest shape she should present in order to be accepted by the judges standards as these standards are never consistent nor clearly defined from one year to the next.

Additionally, the earning potential for a female competitor is far below that of her male counterparts. In 1994, the promoters of the Mr. and Ms. Olympia hosted both the men's and women's competition simultaneously. Prize money awarded to the first place men's winner was \$100,000 as compared to \$35,000 for women's first place. Endorsements are fewer for the women and money is often generated by marketing oneself as a poster-girl emphasizing sexiness but playing down the attributes (mass, muscularity, and vascularity) that actually won the title.

In light of the negative issues that continue to surround the sport of bodybuilding, in general, greatly magnified for the female participant in particular, what piqued my interest was the continued participation of women in this sport despite prevailing problems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of an elite female bodybuilder; specifically, how she became involved in the sport of bodybuilding initially, and how her experience provoked further participation competitively. Additionally, this study sought to present a clear picture of how the participant experienced the duration of that experience as well as her perceptions regarding future options in light of her career choices.

Definition of Terms

Anaerobic. Activity that is high-intensity exercise that exceeds the body's aerobic capacity and build's up an oxygen debt. For the purposes of this study, such activity referred to resistance and weight training.

Bodybuilder. A person who utilizes weight training and related components for the express purpose of altering muscle mass, structure and definition.

Elite Female Competitor. For the purposes of this study, the participant of this study, having been selected by her possession of a pro card and/or participation in bodybuilding events sponsored by the NPC or IFBB organizations.

IFBB. The International Federation of Bodybuilders.

Judging Standards. The rules of the bodybuilding competition used for basis of comparison to rank the participants. Primary criteria used: muscularity, mass, and symmetry, secondary criteria used: presentation, and vascularity.

Mass (Bulk). The amount of muscle present (degree of).

Muscularity. The presence of well-developed muscles. Refers more to shape and definition than degree of (as in Mass).

NPC. The National Physique Committee.

Presentation. The ability of the competitor to effectively exhibit her physique, highlighting strengths and masking weaknesses. A very subjective component of judging often incorporating descriptors such as “grace”, “style”, “creativity” or “fluidity”. Also, not one of the primary elements of judging; used more often to break a tie between competitors.

Pro Card. A membership card that identifies a bodybuilding competitor as having the rank of professional.

Show. Word often used to refer to the bodybuilding competitive event. Synonymous with *competition*.

Symmetry. The judging standard exemplified by an excellence of proportion of the physique. Sometimes referred to as *balance*.

Weider, Joe. Considered to be the “father” of bodybuilding. Published first magazine, *Your Physique* in 1938. Currently publishes a number of magazines such as *Muscle and Fitness*, *Flex*, and *Shape*.

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made in reference to this study:

1. The experiences of the participant are important to understand initial and continued involvement in bodybuilding, generally and competitively.
2. Because the participant in this study considers herself to be retired from the sport with no fear of promoter backlash, the participant was better able to reflect on and communicate her experiences of participation in bodybuilding.
3. The participant has, to the best of her memory and ability, honestly answered those questions outlined in the Interview Guide as well as reported additional perceptions and feelings about her experiences.
4. The qualitative method of dialogic interviewing is a valid procedure for obtaining information about the personal experiences of the participant in this study.

Limitations of the Study

1. A “well-seasoned” competitor may have difficulty reflecting on experiences that possibly occurred many years prior to this study. This limitation may be most prominent in reflection of initial phases of the participant’s experiences.
2. The use of only one participant represents an additional limitation. This was necessitated by the application of the dialogic interview method designed to present the experience in an in-depth conversational format.

Scope of the Study

Because this study uses the qualitative method of analysis, neither the collected data nor the interpretist results can be generalized to the larger population. The focus of one individual's experiences is intended to enhance portrayal of the female bodybuilder in the current literature by offering a detailed description of one such person. While generalizations to other bodybuilding participants would be inappropriate, an attempt was made to determine the extent to which the experiences expressed by the subject in this study are similar to those reported by other bodybuilders in the extant literature.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study emerges primarily from its representation of one female bodybuilder's experience. The information obtained from this study has been examined solely for its uniqueness as an experience of the participant as a woman and to understand and value such experience without comparing or contrasting it with that which may have been reported by the male bodybuilder.

As discussed in *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (Reinharz, 1992), traditional research has been fraught with the tendency to take experiences of women and analyze them next to the experiences, behaviors, and activities of men. The problem with this approach is that the experiences of men are often used as the ruler by which women are compared to determine any deviances from what is often viewed as the correct response or norm. This tendency is evident in the present research conducted on the female bodybuilder.

In this study an attempt was made to enhance the traditional approach and inherent injustices by presenting the participant's experiences as unique reflections of participation that may or may not mirror that of her male counterparts. However, a modest attempt was made to determine the degree of similarities between the responses of the present participant and those of other participants, male and female, as reported in the available literature.

Additionally, it was hoped that this study would offer insights into such primary administrative bodybuilding organizations as the IFBB and NPC in response to their expressed concern for discovering better ways to address the needs of the bodybuilding population at large.

Finally, it was anticipated that this study would provide bodybuilding athletes themselves with insights into various aspects of the career-life of a participant of this sport and possibilities of shared experiences.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter current literature is presented that examines the experiences of the elite female bodybuilder and explores the subculture and related issues. While such information is limited, the available literature provides valuable glimpses and, consequently, insights into the lives of these women. It familiarizes the reader with not only the experiences of elite female competitors, but also surrounding issues and concerns the female competitor encounters. Much of this information was useful in assisting the attempt to conduct thorough but sensitive interviews.

In the first section, the ABC's of "the Disease", the book *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder* (Fussell, 1991) is primarily referred to. Although this book tells the story of a man's experience in the bodybuilding arena, it was used to supplement existing knowledge of the particulars of bodybuilding. It is one of the most detailed descriptions encountered of the day-to-day life of a bodybuilder and considered required reading for anyone interested in understanding and studying this sport.

The next section, "Experiences", begins with one of the most highly-recognized and foremost analyses of the elite female competitive bodybuilder, *Pumping Iron II: The Unprecedented Woman* (Gaines & Butler, 1984). This book is considered to be the definitive work on the subject and, though it sounds cliché, no review would be complete without it. This is followed by a review of the chapter titled "You can't just be muscular"

included in the book *Are We Winning Yet?* (Nelson, 1991). This chapter focuses almost exclusively on the career of Carla Dunlap, the first African-American Miss Olympia (1983). The final review is of a chapter from a recent ethnographic study of the bodybuilding subculture. Though the published work *Little Big Men* (Klein, 1993) is primarily a study of the male bodybuilder, the chapter “Sally’s corner” contains considerable experiential information of a sampling of female bodybuilders.

The section entitled “Controversy” includes three different articles offering viewpoints of the state of women’s bodybuilding, all attempting to answer the controversial question of whether women have gone too far in their quest for physique development. The first article, “Is women’s bodybuilding a dying sport: Or is it just having growing pains” (Dobbins, 1990), presents a positive outlook regarding the trend for women in bodybuilding. This is followed by “Androgen women: The shocking truth about steroid side effects!” and, as implied by the title, presents the opposing or negative view. This article has been included in this section rather than the next because its approach incorporates a much more personal look at steroid use than the technical rendering of the reviews of the final section. Finally, “Muscle madness” (Fraser, 1995) offers an outsider’s reaction to the physiques on display at the Ms. Olympia competition in Atlanta, Georgia.

The final section, “Juicing”, was necessitated by both the much-often referred to drug usage issue presented in the previous section and because the participant herself chose to discuss “the drug issue”. The sources used to gain this understanding were *Steroids* (Nuwer, 1990) and “The history of synthetic testosterone” (Hoberman & Yesalis, 1995). Both sources provide an overview of steroid use of athletes in general.

The A B C's of "the Disease"

"A kind of beefcake *Alice in Wonderland* . . . Hilarious. Marvelous. Entertaining . . .An inspiring book." (cover)

Camille Paglia, Boston Globe.

The above book review comment aptly reflects a personal reaction to this book. *Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder* (Fussell, 1991) is the source or guide for one who desires "to understand the truly bizarre world of hardcore bodybuilding." For the uninitiated, the introduction to this world really does create the feeling of stepping into the role of Alice. The reader feels this because the author is an unlikely candidate for this role and his first-person narrative takes both he and the reader through a funhouse mirror reflection of transformation.

The story begins with Sam Fussell, Oxford graduate and son of two university professors of English, and follows with the infliction of "the disease", so acquired when one becomes a bodybuilder. The transformation is complete as Sam, writer and academic, becomes "Rocky Mountain Way", a competitive bodybuilder. Though the story is well-written, amusing, and somewhat heart-breaking, the primary aim in reviewing this story was to gain a thorough understanding of the daily life of a typical bodybuilder, male or female. As such, *Muscle* (Fussell, 1991) provided a worthy description.

Along with a plethora of bodybuilding caricature stereotypes there was presented an equal abundance of descriptive and technical information that assisted in the attempt to conduct the interview sessions of this study with aplomb. Even though, as previously indicated, personal experience with competitive bodybuilding was used as a basis, this guide helped to fill in the gaps. Sam Fussell describes his first day in the gym; the intimidation he feels as he eyes the big guys by the free weights while he receives his own instruction from the pencil-necked geeks in the circuit training sections. Eventually, he does make his way over to “the other side” and learns the ropes of real training as instructed by “Sweepa” and “Mousie”. Along with learning correct training techniques, Sam learns he must also learn to be a bodybuilder by learning how to talk and walk like one.

This process is essential for the aspiring student of the bodybuilding subculture. Not only does one gain an understanding of the physical work involved in being a bodybuilder but also of the jargon necessary to understand what anyone who is immersed in this subculture might actually be saying. For example, when one bodybuilder asks another, “What day is it?” the response is not as you or I might say, Monday or Tuesday, but rather Legs or Back/chest indicating the body part(s) to be trained that day. It is this type of information that assisted me in developing the comprehensive dialect for interviews with my participant. The previous example is one of many presented by Sam Fussell regarding every stage of physical and mental development as he experiences it.

Experiences

In the Beginning . . .

Ah, the early days of women's bodybuilding. This is what *Pumping Iron II* (Gaines & Butler, 1984) is dedicated to. Interestingly enough, the controversy of women's bodybuilding highlighted in this book makes it clear that the authors and participants were not sure that early days would even have the opportunity to grow into later days. As the old adage states, "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

Covering the time period of 1980 to 1983, the outstanding issue of how to formulate universal judging standards for female competitors, focusing primarily on the question "What is too muscular," is never resolved. Today, numerous bodybuilding publications are still debating the issue of how far is "too far" for women's physique development and predicting that women's bodybuilding may have no future.

The primary reason this controversial issue still exists is evident in both *Pumping Iron II* (Gaines & Butler, 1984) and other current bodybuilding publications. Emphasis is placed on what men, the general public, contest promoters, and the media have to say, with only minor acknowledgment of the participants' struggle to define the sport for themselves. Consequently, the sport of female bodybuilding appears to be defined by those who control the bodybuilding industry. This frustration regarding lack of control by the women themselves is evident in the interview quotes provided in this book.

While *Pumping Iron II* presents an almost embarrassingly voyeuristic analysis of women's bodybuilding, offering numerous passages describing the competitors' facial beauty ("pretty, serious, big-eyed face), vital statistics ("36-23-35", "high, taut, generous

breasts”) and sex appeal (“both Cindy and DeeDee looked a little orgasmic, with things flashing in their fine chests”), it does also offer a few insights into these pioneering competitors’ initiation into and experiences of bodybuilding.

In 1984, a competitors’ meeting chaired by Doris Barrilleaux, founder of the first women’s bodybuilding organization, Superior Physique Association (SPA), was held to discuss the future of women’s bodybuilding. Along with issues of judging, posing standards, and drug testing the authors’ report that

. . . discussion led to a general and hotly felt condemnation of certain men, among them a number of writers, who in their efforts to impose male ideas and aesthetics on female bodybuilding were, in the view of these women, seriously damaging the sport by championing the wrong things (i.e., big muscles) and the wrong people (i.e., the female competitors who have them). (p. 78)

This is one of the earliest samplings of women’s expressed frustration at the intrusion of men and the media into their sport and the attempt by such outsiders to control the standards by which the sport would be measured. To be fair, however, it must be said that the competitors’ themselves had not yet reached consensus on the direction they wanted these standards to take. Two quotes illustrate this conflict:

I actually feel like if that’s their goal (to develop big muscles), then they should actually compete with men in the lightweight categories, you know? Because if you wapped off their heads they’d look like a man, so why not enter the men’s contests? (p. 79)

--Lynn Conkwright

I think the leaders of this sport are holding the sport back because they’re trying to keep muscularity out of it, and trying to say what women should look like. I think they should be asking what *can* women look like? Let ‘em go, free it up, and we’ll see what’s going on here, and then judge -- don’t start holding us back before it even begins. We haven’t even started to know what our whole potential is yet. (p. 86)

--Laura Combes

Bearing in mind that, with the exception of only one competitor featured in *Pumping Iron II*, Bev Francis, no competitor quoted nor any other pictured, would be able to obtain a pro card based on the level of muscularity required by today's judging standards. While the apparent present-day concurrence of more is better would seem to indicate that the sport has finally come to a decision regarding "too much", further literature review will demonstrate otherwise.

Aside from this issue of controversy and future direction of the sport, Gaines and Butler provide information about the women themselves, their perceptions and their experiences of participation. From their remarks it is clear that the competitors had very different views regarding posing. Rachel McLish's view, "I really don't enjoy posing that much, I'd rather give a bodybuilding seminar . . ." (p. 55) contrasted with the feeling expressed by Laura Combes, "I always do what I want to do, regardless of what the judges are looking for, because I feel this is an art form . . ." (p. 84) as she speaks further about her determination to pose with clenched fists. In the early '80's, the women posed with open hands splayed like a dancer's. To pose with clenched fists was considered unfeminine and Laura Combes was one of the first women to pose in this manner. In response to questioning about whether being muscular made her feel less feminine, Combes responded:

No. Because I think femininity is inside you. It's a state of mind, and being a lady and acting like a lady come from inside your personality. (p. 84)

--Laura Combes

Regarding the same issue, Bev Francis, the most muscular woman ever seen at the time of this book's publication, and who even today is reportedly the most muscular woman to ever step on a bodybuilding stage responded:

I think that muscles - working muscles - are beautiful in anything. They look fantastic on men, and they look fantastic on women. (p. 155)

--Bev Francis

With the exception of only a few competitors, *Pumping Iron II* gives only minor insights into the backgrounds of the competitors. Lisa Lyon was reportedly a “bright, articulate, good-looking UCLA cum laude graduate in anthropology” (p. 39). She began weight training to assist her in kendo, a Japanese martial art, and began entering contests at the encouragement of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Lisa was one of the first women to receive a great deal of media attention because of her bodybuilding participation. Lynn Conkwright came from an athletic background and began weight lifting to “get stronger for competitive gymnastics”(p. 64). No mention is made of how she made the transition to competitive bodybuilding. The authors do reveal the following:

What Lynn Conkwright is not also goes for most other female bodybuilders: she is not urban or very sophisticated, she is not at all dumb or dikey, revolutionary, oversexed, or illiterate. She is not blue-collar, or a drug user or a boozier or a feminist or a groupie. (p. 64)

That this is provided as a representative description of most of the competitors would explain why so little information is provided about individual women.

Despite the flaws of *Pumping Iron II*, its value must be weighed in the context of the time it was written. Though truly a patriarchal work, its publication introduced many to the theater of women’s bodybuilding and it is often credited with spreading the word about and aiding the continuance of the activity.

Carla Dunlap - A Profile

And who is this woman? She is Carla Dunlap, the first African-American Miss Olympia who won this title in 1983. While *Pumping Iron II* (Gaines & Butler, 1984) offers nothing about this woman, choosing only to include pictorial evidence that she even existed as a competitor, the chapter “You can’t just be muscular” included in *Are We Winning Yet?* (Nelson, 1991) tells her story exclusively.

For Carla, before there was bodybuilding, there were many other sports. She tried out for the high school boys’ swim team. Despite having beaten not only every boy but also the coach himself (as part of a challenge) she was not allowed on the team. Her exclusion led her to gymnastics where her participation was short-lived. At fourteen, Carla discovered first one, and then another, benign lump in her breast. Somehow Carla’s mother associated the emergence of these lumps with gymnastics participation. At her mother’s prompting, Carla quit the sport. She challenged her mother’s suggestion that she should return to swimming because there was “no dance in swimming” (p. 100). Later, she discovered synchronized swimming and became one of the best in the nation. Why she began bodybuilding is not really clear. Still, it was at the suggestion of a friend, Steve Wennerstrom (official historian for women’s bodybuilding for the IFBB), that prompted Carla to take up the sport.

Once she did, she changed women’s bodybuilding forever. Before Carla, women’s competitions were conducted primarily like beauty pageants, with the contestants wearing swimsuits and high heels. Carla kicked off those heels and American women bodybuilders have not worn them since. She also started doing poses that were

similar to the men's, designed to show off the muscle. It was this type of behavior that helped earn her the "compliment" of her male peers, "You've got balls" (p. 101).

As in *Pumping Iron II*, Carla talks about the early days. She discusses the issue of femininity, recalling the fact that she only began to win contests after a friend and fellow competitor suggested she wear makeup and fluff out her hair. The chapter also looks at the issue of race with the author's suggestion that it may have played a role in Carla's inability to obtain endorsements. The drug issue, the perceived rampant use of steroids by the competitors is also covered. This chapter causes one to reflect on the way that muscular women have changed the world for women in general by seeing the world through the eyes of one seasoned competitor. My intent was to get as much information as possible regarding Carla's experiences of her participation. This competitor is notable not only because she was the first African-American Miss Olympia, but also because she is one of the only pioneering competitors who is still involved in the sport as a judge and media representative.

More on Iconoclasts

Little Big Men (Klein, 1993) provides the details of a seven year long ethnographic study of the elite male body building subculture. Its purpose was to provide a social and psychological portrait of the individuals studied. The author's predetermined hypothesis is that the bodybuilding participant is exemplified by one who embarks on a quest for a large body in order to mask a vulnerable psyche. Hence, the title to represent the little psyche and big physicality. Though this is primarily a study of the men of this

subculture, a single chapter examines the experiences of the female competitor and provides some useful information.

From the twenty-two women that Klein interviewed, a few major players of the pioneering days of women's bodybuilding are profiled. Aside from the discussion of the early days, Klein includes a great deal of the experiences of how the women he spoke to got started in bodybuilding as well as various other aspects of the experiences that either kept them involved or prompted their exit.

Regarding involvement, "Candy" first walked into a health club in 1972. She is one of the pioneers of the sport. Described as a woman who once felt very shy and insecure about herself, she expressed the new confidence that emerged along with her new body:

. . . a lot of us (women) don't take the time to develop into the person we want to be. We go out and marry it. I'm determined not to go that way.
(p. 166)

Candy was also one of the first women to cross the line into what some considered to be too muscular. Next to today's competitors, Candy acknowledges that she is just a "peanut" (p.167). But without women like Candy paving the way, the muscularity of today wouldn't be possible.

For "Peta" the bodybuilding connection came through her career as a stripper. She began lifting weights to maintain a good physique. Because she was a self-proclaimed exhibitionist with experience in performing, competitive bodybuilding seemed a natural next step. The author suggests that Peta's exhibitionistic side is related to a "historic sense of poor self-image" (p. 168) and regarding said image, "which bodybuilding has helped alleviate" (p. 168).

Peta's exodus from bodybuilding came about because of a short bout with steroid use. She explains that she began using them when she felt "pressured" to compete. Her heart wasn't really into the rigors of competitive training, so she turned to drugs to ease the process. After winning this show, however, someone suggested to her that her winning was directly related to the steroids. Frustrated and angry, she smashed the trophy and proclaimed she didn't care about the contest. She admits that she felt her win was shallow and due to the use of the drugs. Peta felt that since she'd become a role model for women, and that her own use might cause imitation by other athletes, she quit the sport.

"Mary" is noted as being one participant who didn't fit the norm. Basically, Klein felt she differed from most competitors because she possessed a very high level of self-esteem. Mary was an athlete, a former Marathon runner who actually came to bodybuilding accidentally while rehabilitating injuries received from a car accident. No more is said about how she actually decided to embark on a career in competitive bodybuilding. However, she is portrayed by the author as a woman who represents the "new female bodybuilder: disciplined, tough, a trifle self-absorbed, and living in the present" (p. 173).

Though the remainder of the chapter discusses other issues of women's bodybuilding, I have chosen to only moderately draw from Klein's insights regarding these issues. This is chiefly because Klein presents these issues in contrast/comparison to the experiences of the men in his study. As stated, my purpose was to understand the experiences of one female participant without making cross-gender comparisons.

Controversy

Ignore the Doomsayers

Bill Dobbins is a successful photographer who has made a career taking photographs of famous and up-and-coming bodybuilders. As in the appearances he has made on various talk-shows, Dobbins presents his optimistic views of female bodybuilding in the article, “Is women’s bodybuilding a dying sport: Or is it just having growing pains?” (Dobbins, 1990). He begins the article by bulleting the various arguments that have been made by those who predict that women’s bodybuilding is on its way out. One by one, Dobbins addresses these concerns and, in doing so, not only dismisses the claims, but goes on to present evidence that female bodybuilding is not only not dying, but actually growing in popularity. He does acknowledge some problems, but also offers suggestions for solutions. One such solution, to combine men’s and women’s IFBB competitions to offer more exposure to the women, has actually been instituted. Dobbins also maintains that the drug-free status of the female competitors is evidenced by the fact that drug-testing has recently become a regular practice at major shows. Dobbins makes clear his view that the future looks bright for women’s bodybuilding and that it should soon stand on solid ground once all growing pains have been surpassed.

Oh Really?

The article titled “Androgen women: The shocking truth about steroid side effects!” (Dayton, 1994) takes issue with the optimistic view of Bill Dobbins and others like him. The primary focus of the article concerns the issue of excessive drug use that

Dobbins maintains is more myth than fact. As stated in this article, “There may be a few exceptions, but to compete nationally and at the pro level, female bodybuilders use drugs” (p. 139). Dayton goes on to provide quotes from anonymous women who tell their stories of how drugs that were used to enhance the prospects of success in the sport of bodybuilding have caused permanent damage and harmed their lives. The reason the damage caused is so great is that the dosages used by competitive bodybuilders actually exceeds the amount given to a woman who is undergoing a gender change. While Dobbins suggests that women in the sport of bodybuilding should be allowed to become as muscular as they choose, he provides evidence that such a trend only encourages the use of more and more drugs. Some of the side effects listed as a result of excessive drug use are: facial hair growth, acne, clitoral enlargement, deepening of the voice, and mood swings. As the article closes, it offers quotes from women who say they will not resort to drugs to win contests.

“Fitness Goes Berserk”

In “Muscle madness” (Fraser,1995), Laura Fraser offers her reflections of the competitors she encounters up close and at a distance at the 1994 Ms. Olympia Competition. Fraser indicates that her primary interest in attending this show was sparked by the knowledge that women’s bodybuilding is “one of the fastest-growing women’s sports in the United States today” (p. 194). This quote suggests that Dobbins was correct in stating that women’s bodybuilding is not dying at all. In fact, in only four years’ time, it continues to reflect growth. The author, and a companion, are somewhat baffled by the attraction. Both claim to like the look of strong women but clearly state

that, not only do they see the exaggerated physique development as too much, but actually use the description, “disgusting” (p. 195). Fraser notes that most of the competitors are close-mouthed regarding personal drug use but do say, generally-speaking, that drugs play a large role in bodybuilding. Fraser makes an interesting assessment by noting that an obsessive quest for size is just the opposite of anorexic behavior, neither being extremely healthy. The competitors try to maintain that their approach is much better than the model-thin look but Fraser judges the excessiveness of their lifestyle as reflective of women who are just as dissatisfied with their bodies as those not involved in bodybuilding. She closes by indicating that she wouldn’t trade her own body for an Olympia competitor’s even if attaining one could be easily accomplished.

“The Juice”

The Breakfast of Champions

The book *Steroids* (Nuwer, 1990), not only introduces the primary drug of choice, steroids, but also many others that are used by athletes to enhance performance. The purpose of this review, however, was to primarily understand the drug issue as it relates to the bodybuilder; therefore, discussion has been confined to that realm.

First, there is a great difference between corticoid steroids, prescribed by doctors, and androgenic-anabolic steroids, those used by bodybuilders. The former, are used for medical purposes to treat such ailments as anemia, burns, asthma, and cancer while the latter are used primarily to increase the levels of testosterone already present within the

body. Use of steroids by bodybuilders is not practiced as much for *performance* enhancement as for appearance enhancement.

There is a great deal of debate concerning the effectiveness of steroids to stimulate major muscle growth. Historically, testing has indicated that steroids produce minimal results. Unfortunately, these results appear to have too little influence on bodybuilders. This is probably due to the fact that the dosages used by bodybuilders far exceed what can be ethically duplicated in the laboratory setting. Bodybuilders resort to stacking, meaning that they use more than one type of steroid, layering one over another by cycling their ingestion (oral) or injection over various days, weeks, and months. Some of the evidence we have today regarding the side effects of steroid use are a direct result of the bodybuilder's personal choice to experiment with herself as a human guinea pig (Nuwer, 1990).

While there are side effects of steroid use that affect both men and women, such as acne, baldness, and mood swings, some are peculiar to women. These include, the deepening of the voice, increased growth of body and facial hair, cessation of menstruation and enhanced clitoral development. What is not known is the effect that steroid use might have on the offspring of female users. Again, because the dosages far exceed those which can be studied in a laboratory setting, a great deal is yet to be learned about the effects of steroid use, both positive and negative, on body builders.

'Roid History

The track record of steroid use is presented in “The history of synthetic testosterone” (Hoberman & Yesalis, 1995). Though the history of the steroid is not of paramount importance to the present study, the knowledge of how steroid use was initiated, in general, and in sports, in particular, is helpful in understanding how it made its way to the sport of bodybuilding. As such, it appears that synthetic testosterone became available as early as 1935 and made its way to the competitive athlete as early as the 1940’s. An American doctor, John Ziegler, became interested in steroids when he learned of their use by Soviet athletes. He then proceeded to test the drug on various athletes and on himself. Ziegler is often credited with bringing steroid use for athletic performance enhancement to the forefront. This article covers many uses of steroids over the years, some are still in practice and others have been discarded. Still the authors predict that the trend for the future will be toward greater acceptance of medically-prescribed testosterone treatment and hint that the use of drugs for performance enhancement is also losing its stigma.

Summary

The purpose of this review was to gather information and gain insight into the experiences of female bodybuilding competitors that have been previously reported. The material also enhanced understanding of the history of the bodybuilding subculture as well as controversial issues.

The in-depth personal story of Sam Fussell as relayed in *Muscle* (1990) was included because of its presentation of the bodybuilding lifestyle from start to finish. Despite the fact that this story relates a man's experience, it introduces the basic mechanics and technical aspects of competitive bodybuilding. Without this knowledge, the formulation of relevant interview questions would have been much more difficult.

Though little information is available relative to women's athletic experiences, three reviews were chosen because they offered different approaches to the world of women's bodybuilding. The first review provided a largely "outside-looking-in" view of the early days of women's bodybuilding; the second probed the reflections of one pioneering competitor's experiences; and the third profiled three of twenty-two women that were interviewed.

It is clear from this review that although there may be some underlying similarities, each woman's experience is highly unique; very few generalizations can be made. Moreover, the experiences of women in bodybuilding seem to have changed over time. Perhaps this is because female bodybuilding has become somewhat more accepted with each passing year. This progression suggests that the continued evolution of women's bodybuilding might reflect new experiences and issues not before reported.

The section "Controversy" was prompted by the fact that controversial issues broached by all pilot study participants were likely to emerge in this study. As the participant in the study is a retired professional competitor, it was possible that recurrent issues regarding the future of female bodybuilding might be voiced. Each article presented contrasting views of the current status of the sport and its acceptance.

Finally, “The Juice” section refers to the colloquial term for bodybuilding drug use. Though drugs were discussed by pilot subjects, it could not be assumed that the participant of this study would be willing to discuss them. Because of personal bias, the decision was made not to discuss the drug use issue unless the participant initiated the discussion and felt comfortable in relaying personal experiences, whether up close or at a distance. Still, being informed of this issue was necessary in the event the discussion did ensue.

In closing it should be noted that it wasn’t until the review of literature began that it became apparent that the experiences of women were almost always compared to those of men. Such a revelation assisted in the formulation of the theoretical framework designed to analyze the experience of the participant as unique and refrain from making the traditional gender comparisons.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology chosen to conduct this study was a qualitative method of dialogic interviewing. This refers to the process by which the experiences of a participant are obtained through interviewing that opens with a general question and then proceeds as a conversation between the interviewer and participant. There were a number of steps that were performed in support of this process.

Rationale

As identified earlier, the expansion of the traditional approach to research was chosen as a consequence of immersion in the current literature describing the experiences of the female bodybuilding competitor. Studies involving male subjects examined experiences within the context of that subculture within its own realm or, occasionally, as it exists within the larger population. It is only in the studies of the female competitors that previous analyses predominantly become one of gender comparison with the male experience being presented as the norm against which the female experience is measured.

Qualitative research became the methodology of choice because it provides for interaction between the researcher and participant that allows the parameters of the person's experiences to be presented or measured in a unique fashion. Because

understanding the uniqueness of a woman's experience is the basis for this study, a qualitative model was chosen as the most effective method of inquiry (Reinharz, 1992).

The dialogic interview was the qualitative procedure used to obtain the data for this study. This process begins with an open-ended question that asks the participant to provide a first-person description of her experience. In this way, the participant, not the researcher, leads the interview and determines the focus of the experience. In turn, the researcher carefully notes material that requires clarification or expansion and generates dialogic interviewing with additional probing questions. This method of interviewing hopefully avoids the imposition of an agenda upon the participant while allowing the participant the freedom of expression as the expert eye-witness to her own experience. While the procedure was designed to allow the participant to lead the discussion, the conversational approach allowed interaction with the participant using the researcher's personal experiences with the sport of bodybuilding to generate discussion and share understanding.

The interpretist framework within which the study was analyzed was chosen because it also emphasizes the interactionist approach to research. The study was not intended to predict the behavior of the participant but to understand and feel the experience as it was described. The essence of the interpretation is not singular but pluralistic in its analysis of the dominant aspects of phases that emerge within the experience (Reinharz, 1992). Each aspect of the experience is considered to be a valid and essential component in understanding the truth of the participant's perceptions of her experience.

Finally, because this is a qualitative study, its purpose was to describe the participant's experiences as unique and personal without the necessity of cross-gender validation. However, though results are not intended to be generalized to the larger realm of bodybuilding participants, an attempt was made to present similarities between the experiences of the participant and those of other bodybuilders in the extant literature, male and female.

Pilot Testing

I performed two pilot studies as requirements for two separate courses taken within my Master of Science curriculum of study. Both experiences provided much needed groundwork and practice for the development and execution of this study.

Unlike the open-ended interview process proposed for my research, the method used for my first pilot study was the scheduled standardized interview. My participant was an extraordinarily cooperative elite female competitor who provided me with answers to all of the numerous questions I drilled her with. Unfortunately, the structured design of this interview allowed very little freedom for the participant to vary from my established protocol. Because I recognized the restrictiveness of my research design, I used this interview as a learning tool to redevelop my approach.

In the second pilot-study I interviewed three women who were current participants of bodybuilding but would not be considered "elite" according to the parameters established for this study. I attempted to use the phenomenological approach but found myself asking perhaps too many probing questions that may have imposed my

own interests upon the information-gathering process. As indicated earlier, I exercised caution in avoiding this interview flaw with the subject in this study.

Bias Statement

I participated in a bracketing interview with a friend and fitness advocate who was not the selected participant interviewed in my study. This bracketing interview was an important step in the research process performed to make me aware of personal biases and assumptions that could influence or hinder the process of data collection and analysis.

I discovered that I had a preconceived notion that a woman would find herself drawn to bodybuilding because of previous competitive sports participation. Oddly, the bracketing interview showed me that my own involvement with bodybuilding reflected no such connection and that such presupposition was unfounded. I realized that I must allow the participant to describe her own experience and the factors that led to her participation. I was aware that even if the participant indicated previous sporting involvement, if it was not given as the primary impetus to began weight training, no assumption of connection would be presupposed.

Additionally, emerging as no surprise to me, was my strong bias against the use of performance enhancing drugs in bodybuilding competition. In trying to understand the experience of a female bodybuilding competitor's participation in this sport, it was plausible that information regarding the drug issue could come up during the interview, just as it did in this bracketing interview. In fact, this issue was addressed by three of the

four pilot participants I interviewed. Becoming aware of this particular bias proved valuable as it turned out because the participant in this study did discuss, at length, her own personal drug use within the sport of bodybuilding. The participant indicated that she felt comfortable discussing the issue and I did my best not to inhibit her freedom of expression in any way.

Finally, the bracketing interview reinforced my belief that I possessed sufficient knowledge of the sport of bodybuilding and its vernacular to conduct a probing interview. Limitations in my knowledge were diminished by examining a variety of literature on the topic (see Reference and Bibliography lists).

Participant

The participant in this study was a retired elite competitive female bodybuilder over thirty years of age. For the purposes of this study, this woman was considered “elite” because she possessed a pro card and had participated in bodybuilding events sponsored by both the NPC and IFBB organizations. The participant was considered to be “retired” as she had not participated in a competition within the year prior to the interview nor did she have any plans to compete in the future.

Procedure

The participant was contacted by phone and informed of the proposed study and my interest in using her as the sole interview participant. Once I received confirmation of

her willingness to participate, I made arrangements to schedule a convenient time and place to conduct the interviews. Because of the logistics, one of the three interviews was conducted in person and two were conducted over the phone.

The participant was informed that all interviews would be audiotaped and was required to sign a consent form (see Appendix A) before the process was initiated. The participant was allowed to select a pseudonym she felt comfortable with in order to protect her confidentiality and she chose the name “Karen” to be referred to for the purposes of the study. I gave her a reminder overview of the intent of the study as we had previously discussed and then proceeded with the first interview.

The interview began with the open-ended question, “Tell me about your experience of how you got started in bodybuilding, and keep in mind as you’re doing this that whatever you have to say is what I am interested in.” Other questions provided in the interview guide (see appendix B) were also used. The pace was set by the participant and probing questions were used to assist my understanding rather than to direct/control her information and responses. Though I anticipated the length of each interview would be approximately one hour, the initial interview lasted approximately three hours and subsequent interviews each lasted about one hour-and-a-half. While it was intended that each interview would be audio-taped and transcribed verbatim, a mechanical difficulty occurred during the first interview and only a portion of that interview was actually taped. Because I had become aware of the problem early into the session, I was able to take detailed notes using my skill in shorthand. The occurrence of this malfunction made

it imperative that the participant review and agree with all transcriptions. Notes reflecting mannerisms and body language were added to the transcription when deemed relevant.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, transcription, and participant approval, the data were read and reread several times in order to identify aspects of the experience and assign passages within each aspect heading. These aspects were initially identified and analyzed with only the participant in mind. I analyzed the material in this way in order to preserve the uniqueness of Karen's experience and to avoid the possibility of misrepresenting her story by forced identification with other accounts in the current literature. Though the interview progressed in a more disjointed pattern, the information from all interviews was merged within aspects and presented as narrative. The narrative style was used to preserve the conversational nature of the interview. My own personal thoughts and feelings are expressed in tandem with the verbatim quotes made by the participant. The data presentation reflects the actual interaction between interviewer and participant; I do not invoke the use of literary license or fiction. Once I felt that I had accomplished this task, I attempted to compare and contrast Karen's experiences with those of other individuals in the extant literature. This process is clearly delineated in the following chapters. Of the aspects identified, self-esteem and the drug issue were strongly reflected in earlier studies. Other aspects were also represented to some degree in other accounts and are highlighted in the tables presented in the last chapter.

I did not feel free to share the transcribed data transcription with a qualitative research group because it contained a great deal of personal and confidential information, particularly with respect to the participant's drug use, that could be traced to the participant. At the same time it was difficult to delete this information for public analysis without also destroying much of the accompanying information crucial to aspect identification. Therefore, I worked diligently to omit participant identifiers before compiling the narrative presentation.

Chapter IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Introduction

It was the most incredible thing I had ever seen. She was acting as the M. C. of the show. Every once in awhile, say, before the next group of contestants or something, she would say something about the guest poser. The poser was a surprise and she was really building “him” up, getting the audience really worked up about the treat we were in for. Finally, it came time for the guest poser to do “his” thing. Again, she gave a big lead in and then, she gave us a wink and said, “The surprise guest poser of the evening is me.” With that, she literally ripped off this little red dress she was wearing, the music started and she strutted around in the posing suit she had been hiding underneath and gave us an unbelievable performance. I’d never seen anything like it. The crowd was in a frenzy. She was really something.

The above statement was made by an individual who had viewed the participant of this study in this way. The man speaking was unaware that I even knew the woman who he was describing. The conversation emerged as quite a surprise to me while we were discussing an upcoming local show. I use this quote to open this chapter of data analysis because it contrasts starkly with the reported experiences of the participant. The above description portrays the participant as someone who is having a great time with her sport, a woman of confidence, a showstopper. Unfortunately, as the data will show, the view from the outside looking in represents a distorted reflection of the actual picture as seen through the eyes of the participant.

The following sections present the emergent experiential aspects of the participant interview. The findings focus on six phases: (a) getting started (generally and

competitively), the how of involvement; (b) the drug issue; (c) other controversial issues; (d) making a living: expectations and broken promises; (e) self-esteem, the truth behind the why of involvement; and (f) life after professional bodybuilding. Each aspect is presented separately.

Getting Started

This section reflects the participant's response to the initial question:

Tell me about your experience of how you got started in bodybuilding, and keep in mind as you're doing this that whatever you have to say is what I am interested in.

Before Karen was a bodybuilder, she was a model. As I look at her from my vantage point across the table in her home, I can see why; she is tall, slender, and very beautiful. While we talk, before Karen's boyfriend makes his exit, he goes into the other room and returns with a composite of Karen from a little over a decade ago that she used while she was modeling. In line with the model prerequisite, Karen was also very thin.

I first started, actually, just to gain some weight because I was thin, and I started, basically, at your spa type place and one of the guys that worked there was a bodybuilder and he trained at a gym. He wrote my first little program out for me and everything. It was three times per week and he kind of helped me. Then he told me that I should go to the gym where I should be seriously trained.

Karen makes a clear distinction between the place at which she first began exercising, the spa, and the place she moves on to, the gym. The former being the place where one mainly goes to do aerobics and drink exotic health concoctions, the latter being the place to go to engage in "serious" weight training. As reflected in the literature (Fussell, 1991, Klein, 1993), the distinction between the two facilities was much clearer

in the early eighties. This is not so much the case in the nineties. Serious weight training was not common among women in those early days, and the “gym” reflected this.

The gym that I went to, I think I was the only girl that worked out there for a long time. They didn’t even have a women’s locker room. I used to wash my hair in the sink before I would go to school.

Though the men Karen met at the gym were both friendly and helpful with training tips, she said that they really didn’t believe she was committed to her training; at least not until she decided to begin competing. I asked her how long she had been weight training before she started thinking about competition.

I would say probably . . . about a year. By that time I pretty much decided that I wanted to try that.

I pressed her further, wanting to know how she learned how to prepare for a competition.

I just did it by myself. Of course, you know, I did everything wrong the first time, but I learned a lot.

Well, apparently she knew more than she gave herself credit for, or at least she knew more than the other competitors. Karen not only won first place in her class in her first competition, but she won the overall title. The “overall” means each first place competitor from each class is compared against each other, the winner receives the title, the overall. This title can be very important in national shows as it is often the case that only the overall winner is able to go on to compete in a professional show. Karen’s win in a local show qualified her to compete in a state competition, held only a month later. Again, she won. This win, in turn, allowed her to enter the national level, but this time success did not come so easy.

After that I did my first national show. I didn't feel ready. At the time, I was working at the gym behind the desk. A lot of people were telling me I should go ahead and do it, and, like I said, I didn't feel ready, but I ended up doing it.

And how did she place?

I placed 12th. It was really depressing. You know, after you place so well before and then you're 12th. It's a let-down. Still, I learned a lot.

Despite this disappointment, Karen felt she had what it took to "make the pros".

Her next step was to do what aspiring competitors from all over the country and all around the world do to reach their goals, she moved to California, the bodybuilding mecca. She began working in a gym as a personal trainer and began preparing for another national title. The results were no better.

As I said, I placed 12th the previous year in the national show. The next show? I placed 15th. They (judges) said I was "too big", even though I went in lighter, 5 lbs. lighter than I had when I had competed the year before and placed higher!

Karen's frustration with her placings in these two national shows was directly related to her desire to "go pro". She gave me a lesson in how a competitor reaches the professional ranks.

There are, were at that time, three shows that you competed in to get your pro card, the USA, America and North America. You had to win your class in the America or overall in the other two. At least that's the way it's supposed to be. Although, it seems like there were always women showing up (in the pro shows) that had never won anything before and no one seemed to know where they were coming from.

Still, some of the bodybuilding publications had been noticing Karen and commenting on her previously poor placings, a factor significant in helping her to get

properly noticed. Though Karen did not achieve her dream of turning pro as quickly as she desired, she did get there a lot sooner than most. The very next year, after two consecutive placings below the top ten, Karen won first place in the USA and received her pro card. Karen often alluded to the role that “politics” plays in achieving success in bodybuilding, a game she feels she has never played very well.

The pro level was completely different. Once you’re on that level everything changes. Nobody is friends with anybody. If someone is friendly with you, they want something. Everyone is jealous, insecure. There is always someone who is coming along who is better than you. Any popularity or success achieved in this sport has a cost. Even then, it’s a short-lived success. You do what it takes. Someone suggested drugs.

The Drug Issue

Before I could allow Karen to say anything regarding the drug issue, I had to remind her that, ‘We don’t have to discuss anything you feel uncomfortable with.’ She responded that she wanted to talk about it. Personally, I found the ensuing dialogue to be extremely difficult. I felt that Karen and I had established good rapport. I liked her, she had a genuineness about her, an easy self-deprecating kind of humor. Sometimes too easy. I asked her when it was first suggested that she consider taking drugs.

Before the national level. They (promoters) used to do random drug tests, but that stopped. It’s funny, though. The judging is so inconsistent that I placed third in two shows, both on and off the drugs.

Karen had placed 12th in her first national show for being “too big” and 15th the subsequent year even though she was five pounds lighter. Later, she received the same ranking while both on and off drugs (steroids). Even so, Karen made it clear that drug use for appearance enhancement is not only common but rampant. I asked how she learned about drugs and how to use them.

There are these people who are around who will give you advice on drugs, for money of course. They will tell you how to take them or can help you to get them. I guess some of them are doctors, some are former or current bodybuilders and some of them are. who knows? They don't have any credentials, they're just people who claim to know about how to use them. Everyone is just so desperate to believe that there's someone who knows what to do.

One thing the so-called authorities on drug use had little to say about was the resultant side-effects of these drugs. Karen would experience these first-hand.

In the beginning, I felt I would do what I had to do because you want to win, put aside doubts. You try not to look in the mirror, don't want to see what you've become. You don't look like a woman any more. Some of the side effects are permanent, like my voice. I don't like to talk around people. It takes a few years to really see what's happening. People seem to get different things. Like I never had the acne. Who know's what's going to happen 5 - 10 years from now. Some of the women aren't around to even ask.

Several of the early competitors have killed themselves (gives some names). People don't even realize that all the competitors are on the drugs. There is no way on earth any woman can get that hard without some form of drug. It goes against nature. When I see these women (shakes head). For myself, I accepted it. I said, 'I have to do this'. Even if I said I really don't like the way I look. Look at what I have done to myself. It is really, really hard to live like that. I hated going anywhere. I would notice people who looked at me. At my height, when you are a woman, you're tall and you have large muscles, people think you are a transvestite. There were many, many times people would ask me that.

They would come up to you and say, “I really can’t tell, are you one of those he/she’s?” And I would still go to the gym and train there. Big change from now. I have not been in a gym in over a year. I look at these women and think, they don’t know what they are getting themselves into. I have to have a life after this.

Karen believed that the groundwork for drug use was laid back in the early days.

I would say it started way back, all the way to ‘79. Even (names an early competitor) did drugs. She did some steroids. I don’t know when it became such a big part of it though. The way these people look now is like cartoon characters. That is what is winning now, and what is in the magazines. I guess they just don’t care or understand what they are doing. They don’t see the changes that will be permanent. Now they have this growth hormone that they are using. If that isn’t absurd. The changes that occur are permanent and they are serious, changes in bone structure. You don’t just get muscle growth but bone growth, internal organ growth. I don’t think people realize. I mean, how many people know that (names another prominent competitor) has had excessive facial cosmetic surgery just to try and correct the problems from GH (growth hormone) use. Some of the women use GH to avoid the side effects of steroid use - not even realizing...

At this point, Karen shows me some pictures of her from her bodybuilding heyday. All have been taken by a famous man, a “photographer to the bodybuilder”, if you will. I tell her, quite honestly, that I don’t think these are too bad in terms of being “out there” or too masculine. She reminds me that I might think that because I too am involved with bodybuilding. To prove her point, though, she retrieves another picture explaining, “now here’s a scary one.” I have to admit, this particular photograph is a bit more intimidating. She appears to be carrying a great deal more muscular mass and development and an extremely low level of body fat, the latter evident particularly in her face. Moreover, her attire and expression contribute to the overall effect. While we agree that this photograph shows her at her “biggest”, Karen expresses her amazement that the current competitors are even bigger than she was at her most extreme.

They're really big, and I'm talking shorter women too. I mean, I'm thinking, 'What in the world are you doing to get like that?' but also the thing that really has gotten noticeable, is their faces. They're really looking bad, I mean, really looking bad. Like the last show, there were some girls, 5'2", their voices were deeper than mine (laughs).

I don't even think they're still drug testing because it was such a farce. They would call you in for a test, but they would either throw it away . . . it was just, it was just stupid. It was absolutely ridiculous.

I remember one time, it was (names the year), I got a Federal Express saying, "Karen, you have to report to Chicago within the next four days for your random drug test." They paid for the ticket, but I had to take the whole day, fly to Chicago, pee in a little cup, then fly back, which took from eight o'clock in the morning. I remember I didn't get home until almost midnight because Chicago was under a thunder storm thing, so I was sitting at the airport for five hours thinking, 'This is absolutely the stupidest thing I have ever done.' And if they, if anybody ever fails the test you don't ever, very seldom do they let you know about it.

Though Karen had much more to say about her use, I am including that information in the last section, "Life After Bodybuilding" because of the direct relationship she feels her past choice to use drugs has to her future choices. We did discuss other controversial issues, however, and Karen's strong feelings regarding these issues are equally evident.

Other Controversial Issues

One of the controversial topics concerned "marketability" or the ability of one to earn recognition or pay in the form of contracts, endorsements, sponsorships, publicity, etc. This is one of the few areas where the issue of gender differences emerged. We were discussing some of the top male competitors versus the top female competitors.

Without naming names, she pointed out that many of the top male competitors were not the American ideal of “conventionally” attractive, whereas the females were.

Or try to be, or become that way. It’s always been that way in women’s bodybuilding. Always a big double standard between men’s and women’s bodybuilding. Men, first of all, they just make so much more money at it. There is a big difference. They (promoters) just do it and they get away with it. They don’t ever change it. No one has ever tried to change it. Or, if they have tried it, they’re not successful. They favor the men. They always have and they always will and that’s just the way it is. They get more, they have more shows. They make more money, more people go to see it but that’s just the way it is.

Part of Karen’s feeling stems from such factors as a \$65,000 disparity between first prize money for men and women competitors in the biggest shows of all, the Mr. and Ms. Olympia. When I commented that perhaps women had the potential to earn more than the men outside of competition earnings, Karen disagreed.

No, I don’t think so, I really don’t think they ever will because women don’t, they’re just not as marketable. I mean, you know, first of all the whole entire sport is just a, um, what do you call it, just for a small little clique of people.

I then referred to it as a “subculture” and Karen continued.

It’s not going to be accepted by the public, it never will be, I don’t care how many times Weider (see Definition of Terms) tells you, “We’re going to be an Olympic sport.” Bull. No. It’s just not gonna happen. They just, that’s just crap that they feed them, the people (competitors), so they’ll think, “Oh yeah, we’re going to be an Olympic sport.” But the men are a little more accepted. I think that’s the way it will always be and I think that it’s more important to try to find women that are attractive facially because they can make more money that way, they’re a little more accepted, and they’re a little easier to sell than someone who is not. Whereas the guys, it just seems like as long as they’re big and real impressive it really doesn’t make much difference if they look like (names a prominent male competitor she considers unattractive).

We moved on to a new controversial topic, this time, something more light-hearted. Karen talked about posing, both the routine and amount of body exposure during the routine. Just like the standards for judging the competitors' physiques, what was and was not permitted changed from one year to the next regarding performance and presentation.

They gave us all a letter, all the pros that said . . . because the posing routines were getting real dancy and theatrical and it was kind of neat, I liked it that way. So they sent us a letter, and they were getting really long too (posing routines), three minutes is, like I've done routines that were three or four minutes and that was hard. So this letter said they could not be over three minutes and to cut down on the amount of dance in them and stick to more mandatory poses. Well everybody just raised such a fuss about that that they just forgot all about that and you could do what you want, just don't lay on the floor too much. Ben Weider thought that rolling around on the floor was just too sexual and seductive.

I relayed the story of when I myself had been in a show in which a competitor began her routine lying on the floor with her backside toward the audience in a teeny, tiny posing suit. I contrasted this competitor's exposure with my own attempts to keep my suit in place through the use of the competition posing glue. Karen laughed and informed me that their (Weider's) solution to a teeny, tiny posing suit was conducting "suit checks". Suit checks were not something I had ever experienced so I asked her to elaborate.

Because they were having such a problem with women, they said, with their suits being too small. Ben Weider was complaining about too much of their little "buttocks showing out of their suit" is how he put it. So, from then on, twice, now for prejudging and for the night show before the show you all had to, we all had to line up against the wall and turn around, and they would walk behind you and check each suit. It was just ridiculous.

Making a Living: Expectations and Broken Promises

In light of the many controversial issues Karen talked about regarding her bodybuilding career, I had to ask her what, if any, were the rewards of being a pro bodybuilder. How did she support herself? Did she have any fun? I realized that embarking on this line of questioning was a departure from the original interview guide. However, I had not anticipated that the interview would reflect a predominantly negative experience. I felt that only Karen could provide an understanding of her continued participation in the sport of bodybuilding despite its many disappointments. I asked her to start from the beginning. She mentioned she had become a personal trainer upon first moving to California.

That was an up and down kind of thing. It'd be doing great for awhile and then all of a sudden, whoa, you'd have two people. And then you'd run into people who were just not responsible, y'know, they don't show up, they won't pay you, so, there's really not much security in that job.

Since the personal training business was not always reliable, Karen also started working in a tanning salon. She remembers thinking, "Here I am, I'm a professional athlete here, so why am I working in this tanning salon?" This discussion of trying to earn a living jarred something in Karen's memory as she remembered suggestions others made of how she could "get by". In *Little Big Men*, Klein (1993) discusses similar experiences reported by the men he interviewed relative to prostitution. Here's how Karen remembers it.

Something I just thought of that we didn't talk about last time (referring to first interview). A lot, in California, and I suppose in New York and Florida, a lot of female bodybuilders do things, for money, that I never would do, and it's just, I just didn't want to do them (laughing) and I was very criticized for not doing that because you could make a lot of money. But you either had to wrestle men, or pose in front of them while they . . . do whatever they want to do, or . . . wrestle some other girls while they

watched. Really weird things like that and I just could not do that. I was not going to do that. And there, to be honest, there were a lot of offers, and they were willing to pay, y'know a good amount of money for a relatively short period of time, but I just couldn't do that. You'd be surprised how many of them are doing that just to survive.

Even my minimum participation in competitive bodybuilding introduced me to the extraordinary element of cost involved in being a competitor. I wondered aloud to Karen about how a true professional manages to pay for everything, gym membership, tanning, supplements, and travel.

That's one of the things about being a pro that you're supposed to get is your airfare, your hotel, meals. Things like that are supposed to be paid for. The IFBB is supposed to take care of it. For each pro, their expenses, well that's the way it started up. But, if they decide you're not a favorite or they really don't care if you're there or not, they'll invite you and say, pay your airfare, but not your hotel and not your meals or they'll pay half of that or they'll say it's all on you if you want to come which, y'know, is wrong. It's very wrong.

I have done it before. I have paid my own way. I have paid for my room and my food, but there's a couple of times I can think of that they did not pay my way, and I paid it. And there's girls that have been paying it every time, and they pay it. Just to be there, just to go. I don't agree with it, I don't think that's professional and I don't know what can be done to change it either.

I pointed out to Karen that it was only during the very beginning of our interview, when she was describing entering her first two shows, that I got any inclination of fun from her experience. I felt this line of questioning was warranted as I had expressed the purpose of this study was to understand how a competitor made the transition from general participation to competition. Karen indicated having "fun" only in the beginning of her competitive career. I felt justified in understanding her experience of her continued participation. The primary explanation, she said, would involve expectations.

Y'know when you first start out, and it's in the beginning and you're doing well, you get acknowledgment. People like want you to come to California, or call you to interview you. You have this big dream, 'This is gonna come true, and this is fun I really like this.

I went out there expecting, y'know I'm gonna turn pro, I'm finally gonna make it, I'm gonna have a contract with Weider, things are gonna be paid for, I'm gonna have sponsors, I'm gonna have endorsements, this is gonna be great. That is not the way it is at all. No one bodybuilder is making any amount of money with the exception of (names prominent female bodybuilder), I don't know about (another name). I don't think she does that well to be honest. There are very few women that even have a contract and their contracts are still basically hardly nothing, compared to what men are paid. It's a real slap the face and um, you kind of start to wake up after awhile and think, this is not right and it gets to be very hard to continue to train. You start being really scared, at least I know I did, because you put, what, twelve years or so, ten years of your life into something, that's all you've done. You think, 'Well I can do nothing else, I am trapped in this.'

That's where I thought I was. Living in a studio apartment, one little tiny room on the beach in Venice, by myself, um, I didn't even, I lost my car at that point, I had to sell my car, so I was riding a bike, training people at the gym, training myself, thinking this is all I'm ever going to have, this is going to be it and how much longer am I going to be able to continue doing this, because I get older every day and looking in the mirror thinking I've destroyed myself. I'm stuck looking like that, stuck doing that, and it just really scared me. I didn't have any idea what I was going to do. And then, my body, just, hurt me constantly all the time, and I thought, 'I cannot do this any more,' so.... it's very sad.

The above reflections were taken verbatim from the second interview. They describe, in detail, the emotional roller-coaster Karen was riding beginning with her move to California and culminating with the time she began to consider backing out. She felt stuck, like she had no other personal strengths, resources, or options. As we approached this turning point, the consideration of a way out, the end, I thought it

appropriate to go back to the beginning. I felt there might be deeper issues behind her answer to the question, ‘Tell me how you got started’, than just, “To put on weight.”

Self-esteem

Once again, I felt compelled to probe deeper than I had expected in order to understand the underlying issues that drew Karen to bodybuilding. Though a departure from the Interview Guide, I asked the general question, ‘What was life like growing up for you.’ Karen’s answers reached to the core of her attraction to bodybuilding.

It was OK. I don’t think I got the attention that I felt I needed. Of course, well, I’ve talked a little bit about this with my Mom, of course, she doesn’t understand that at all. She sees it differently.

I’m the oldest. They (parents) love me very much, but I just don’t feel like I got the approval or praise that a child needs. Not that they were doing it on purpose. They just didn’t know. They were married when they were 17 and I was born nine months later, and I just think they did the best they could, but it ended up causing me a lot of psychological problems that I think led to, actually to bodybuilding. My mother while she is a very good, caring and loving person she was a perfectionist and everything could always be done better than you do it. So, I felt like when I tried there was nothing that I could do right. I just always remember her saying, “Well you could do better, that’s not good enough” instead of “Oh that’s great.” And my Dad worked all the time. That’s really what I remember, y’know, he worked. Of course when he came home he would do the stuff around the house that men were supposed to do (laughs). I mean, he was a very good provider. We had, we lived well, but I just never got the kind of attention from him that I think I needed. So I just think it left me with very low self-esteem. I had no confidence. I had no idea what I was supposed to do when I grew up.

Karen acknowledged that she had no idea, no dreams of “What do you want to be when you grow up.” She felt that you simply grew up, fell in love, married and started a family. Beyond the “happy family” scenario, Karen had difficulty envisioning her future. It was the need for approval, however, that first got her interested in modeling and later bodybuilding. The big problem with bodybuilding, however, is that the initial approval she received turned to attention of another sort. Karen confesses that her parents were not ecstatic about her involvement with the sport. Earlier, Karen talked about the reactions she received from strangers that could be downright obtrusive. Moreover, the preoccupation with appearance-based judgment actually began to wear on Karen herself.

It’s not possible to do that all the time, be so preoccupied with appearance and what the judges think and what body part needs to be brought up and each person has, no matter how many drugs you do, there is a limit that your body is going to allow and you reach a limit as to what you can do. You can’t change bone structure or a shape of the muscle, that’s just the way it is. And once you are no longer of use to them (promoters) you are not a money making thing.

Karen says that her lack of self-esteem may have also been a contributing factor in her inability to play the political game necessary to get publicity and high placings.

It was something I just wasn’t comfortable with. Maybe that goes back to self-confidence. But I was told that often y’know they’d say, “Karen, you’re just not kissing enough ass.” For some reason, it just is really difficult for me to do that. But I didn’t think that I would have to do that. I didn’t think that was part of it. I’m an athlete, I look good, I train . . . but that’s not it because there are plenty who do better who are not as good, and it’s because they are kissing up to somebody somehow.

Karen did make it to the prestigious Ms. Olympia contest, not once, but twice. Anticipating perhaps at least a small glimmer of bolstered self-esteem from such an accomplishment. Instead, she found it was more of the same.

Horrible. Absolutely horrible. My first Olympia, you think, ‘This is it, this is prestigious’, y’know, isn’t this going to be great? You’re treated horribly, it was unorganized, it was fixed within from the very beginning. It was just a bad experience. I was really, really depressed about that for a long time.

I think about it. I still don’t know all the answers but just deep in my heart, I really believed things just did not go well because I just was not doing the right things. And I just, I don’t know. Something, I don’t know, was just saying, ‘This isn’t going to go well because deep inside, really deep inside you know this is wrong.

Life After Bodybuilding

It was the “just isn’t right” that eventually got Karen to walk away from her bodybuilding career. She’d reached the proverbial mountain top and it still wasn’t any better. Karen wasn’t having any fun, she never did learn to play the role of the political yes-woman, she still didn’t like the person staring back at her from the mirror and she was in constant pain.

From, I assume it’s just from all the years of abuse on my joints, my hips, my back, my shoulders and sometimes my knees hurt so bad. I can’t, I can’t bend over, it hurts me just to get up out of the chair. To roll over in bed at night, I moan and just grimace or whatever so loud, “Ron” (significant other) is just like, “Are you OK?” And, I don’t know if that’s ever gonna go away or if it’s gonna get worse. So that’s another thing that, it makes life really difficult. And it makes me, just every time it hurts, I think about, ‘y’know, you wouldn’t be here if you hadn’t done this to yourself.’ Y’know, and it’s real, Ron gets mad at me. He’ll say, “You just gotta go on, you’re fine. You don’t, y’know, so you got some aches and pains, we’re gonna work through those. But you’re fine, you don’t look bad. C’mon, just quit this self pity stuff. “ But, y’know, I can’t help

it. I just cannot help it. I try really hard but some days it's just, I just want to lay under the covers and cry. I just think, 'What am I going to do, what am I gonna do?' That was it for, however many years of my life, that's all I did. I don't know how to do anything.

As bad as the pain was that Karen described, it was not just the pain, but other factors that convinced Karen she needed to quit. Karen had worked through pain before. She had once suffered a serious injury that put a dent in her training and competing schedule. Still, she came back. Her comeback from overwhelming obstacles resulted in a placement mix-up. Though Karen placed third in a top show, she was announced as eighth in the standings. That's when she really began to think someone was trying to tell her something. Things in California got worse too.

I was still living in California. Things started getting worse. Not long after that, my financial situation got very bad. I was still doing personal training. I had to but I didn't want to be doing it any more. That's when I moved here. I liked it here, people seemed pretty nice. I liked the gym. I met Ron. One of the only good things that has happened to me in the last twelve years. I was still in the bodybuilding mode. The contract for an upcoming competition came in the mail. I decided to do this one more time, and I just knew it was going to be great. I placed 13th. I didn't even ask (the judges) for any explanation. Ron had never been to a pro show and he couldn't believe that it was run by such idiots. He said he didn't know how I could do this. My body cannot do this any more. My mind cannot do this any more. After that show, I was put in a hospital - fun. My body was so depleted. My sodium was so low I was near going into a coma. I thought I was going to die. There was also severe nervous breakdown. I put the poor man (Ron) through hell. I was just trying to recover. The drugs started leaving my system, I didn't cycle down. My hormones were off balance. I was running around like a lunatic, crying and screaming, thinking my life was over. Looking in the mirror and wishing the muscle would go away. I don't think women understand.

Karen emphasized that she was not against bodybuilding for women if they are truly doing it “for fun”. Other than that, she stated just as emphatically that she is totally against competition.

I am totally against it. It’s wrong, it’s just, it destroys you. And, I choose now not to train. I still feel really big and really ugly, and I’m trying really hard to get rid of it (laugh). And I’m thinking, ‘God, it’s been over a year and it’s just not going away (laugh).’ I am in such a hurry and I keep saying, ‘God, y’know, it’s been a year and I haven’t even lifted a weight I’m doing absolutely nothing except laying around here being a couch potato.’ How come it isn’t gone, and I think, ‘You know, for twelve years, every day of my life almost, I was throwing weights around.’ How can I expect it to go away so fast, but I do.

Karen doesn’t know what is next for her. For more than a decade, bodybuilding is all she has known. She described long conversations with her mother asking, “So, do you know what you’re going to do?” and the response always being, “No, I haven’t figured it out yet.” When I pressed her as to the one future she saw herself in, marriage with children, her response was linked to the drug issue.

If I could even have children, we don’t even know that, would they be, would there be, like a lot of things wrong with them? I don’t know. And I certainly would not want to do that to a child. So basically, you know, that’s something I’ve had to come to terms with this past year is that, I am not going to have children. I am just going by my own feelings. From some of the things I’ve read, but I would have to have complete, whatever you want to call it (laughs) go through all that, to know. But still you know, I don’t think they could tell me, maybe, “Oh, yes you can have a child, but I can’t tell you if there’s going to be something wrong with it. And um, you know, that’s something else, I’ve put it out of my mind for all those years, but I, I would have liked to have had a family. And um, (quietly) I’m just telling you, I don’t know, I just think, people don’t realize what you give up when you do that.

To look at the previous discourse from an optimistic angle, there appears at least one option that Karen no longer considers . . . suicide.

To be totally honest, and I don't think I've said this to anybody. I really think if I had to stay there (California) I would have committed suicide. I honestly don't think that I would be here. It was really close to that.

Suicide was an option when Karen felt she had nowhere to go and no one to turn to for support. Once Karen's brother understood what she was going through, he helped her to move on. Additionally, Karen met "Ron", the man she had described as being "one of the only good things that has happened to me in the last twelve years." As to the future role bodybuilding will play in Karen's future?

There is no future, believe me. Not only is there no future, but I know I would not do it again. Never in a million years.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of how one woman became involved with bodybuilding, generally and competitively, as well as to gain insight into her reflections of that experience during and subsequent to involvement. This study used the qualitative methodology of dialogic interviewing. In this way, the interview was conducted conversationally allowing both participant and interviewer to converse naturally and interact with the commonality of shared backgrounds. The participant was free to lead the discussion and the context was examined as a unique experience de-emphasizing gender comparisons. Said comparisons were only presented if initiated by the participant relative to parity issues within the sport. One former IFBB professional female bodybuilder participated in the study.

The emergent aspects of the participant's experience were: (a) how the participant got started in weight training, generally and how she made the transition to competition, specifically; (b) personal drug use within the sport; (c) surrounding issues of controversy the participant experienced; (d) the potential to earn a living while existing as a competitive bodybuilder and related expectations and disappointments; (e) personal self-esteem and how it influenced her decision to become a professional bodybuilding competitor; and (f) the way in which the participant is experiencing life after bodybuilding. The second, third and fourth aspects reflect the crux of the participant's

experience. In the following discussion I have attempted to relate several of the aspects to those presented in earlier literature representing competitive bodybuilding experiences.

Discussion

If it is true that one person's experience cannot be generalized to the larger population of bodybuilding athletes, then what can be learned from the experiences of one woman in tandem with this sport?

A clue might be found in the representation of Karen's experience as largely unfavorable as emphatically illustrated by her parting words on the place the sport of bodybuilding will have in her future.

There is no future, believe me. Not only is there no future, but I know I would not do it again. Never in a million years.

What went wrong? How did an experience that began as exciting and enjoyable as hers terminate in a reflected position of such finality. In what ways do Karen's experiences compare with the experiences of other competitors as reported in earlier literature? What can be learned about this sport from such a comparison and what implications can be drawn? How can the findings of this study guide future research?

While I acknowledge that Karen's experience is not necessarily representative of every bodybuilding athlete, it is important to present the comparisons of major aspects emerging from her experience with those described in the literature. There are sufficient similarities expressed within this study and the literature to suggest that there is both a need for improvement within the administrative levels of the NPC and IFBB and a more

accurate representation of the business end of being a bodybuilding participant. To adequately substantiate the afore-mentioned suggestions, however, would require further research specifically addressing these issues.

In the following tables similarities and differences between Karen's experiences and those expressed by individuals in other bodybuilding literature are presented. These experiences are presented as human experiences only, irrespective of gender, as the intent is not to evoke a gender analysis. Each aspect is discussed in the same order as it was presented in the previous chapter and does not necessarily reflect an order of importance.

Getting Started

The findings of this study detail an experience that began almost incidentally, in pursuit of the goal of "gaining weight", and entered into one of high hopes and dreams of recognition and financial reward. The pure enjoyment of participating in the sport primarily occurred at the beginning stages of involvement. As Karen began her pursuit of the "pro card", she found the pure pleasure of involvement dissipated by the reality of trying to earn a living and achieve recognition within a system heavily coated by political favorings.

In some ways, Karen was as much of an "Iconoclast" as the women described in *Little Big Men* (Klein, 1990). The difference between Karen and women interviewed in other research is that Karen did not express her identity with the distinction of being a pioneer in the same way that they did (see Table 1). The only real evidence that Karen provided that suggested she was, in fact, one of the first women from her area to be

Table 1. FEMALE BODYBUILDERS AS ICONOCLASTS

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Karen	The gym that I went to. I think I was the only girl that worked out there for a long time. They didn't even have a women's locker room. I used to wash my hair in the sink before I would go to school.
Martinez ¹	When I look in the mirror I see somebody who's finding herself, who has said once and for all it doesn't really matter what role society said I should play. I can do anything I want to do and feel proud about doing it.
Barrilleaux ²	Women can be airline pilots, they can be telephone linemen, they can be tugboat captains, they can be anything they want. So why can't they be bodybuilders?
Combes ²	The best part about it is when the little kids come up and say, "Hey, I've been training." I say, "Oh, you have?" And they say they can lift a hundred and fifty pounds. You got a little kid like this standing there and you're thinking, God, I could never have said that when I was a kid. If nothing else, we're knocking down some trees for some people behind us.
Willis ³	I think in the beginning you had a lot more women who were iconoclastic, more people who were in it for reasons other than sports. Now you get some real athletes, and they aren't here for the superneurotic reasons or the "feminist" reasons or to shake things up. In the beginning it was so new it was the kind of thing that attracted rebellious women. Today you got lots of women who look big as hell, but they're all followers, not leaders.

¹ Rosen, T. (1983). *Strong and sexy*. New York: The Putnam Publishing Group.

² Gaines, C. & Butler, G. (1984). *Pumping iron II: The unprecedented woman*. New York: Simon and Schuster

³ Klein, A. M. (1993). *Little big men: Bodybuilding subculture and gender construction*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

involved in bodybuilding is revealed in the simple description of her training environment.

The impetus that prompted Karen to become involved in bodybuilding, generally, also appeared to vary from that of other women presented in the literature. In fact, it is the how's of this involvement that reflects the least amount of consistency between bodybuilding participants. Some, like Karen, took up general weight training to improve appearance, others liked the performance aspect, and some had had previous competitive sporting experience. Differences in the motives for initial involvement are presented in Table 2.

Drugs and Other Controversial Issues

In this study, the use of performance-enhancing drugs figured prominently in the participant's experience of the sport of bodybuilding. Karen's view was that drug use saturates the competitive side of the sport and she felt that she needed to use them to remain competitive. Karen discussed her early drug use as an effort to reach the professional ranks. Moreover, she said that there was a great deal of confusion regarding the use of drugs, with no real "voice of authority" supplying directions. In the book *Muscle*, Fussell (1991) also writes of his inclusion of drugs in his contest preparation as soon as he decides to enter competition. Karen, in contrast, had competed in a few shows before she began to use steroids, but both competitors began to use the drugs as soon as they decided to enter the competitive arena. Fussell is educated in the use of steroids, both injectable and oral, by, not medical personnel, but his fellow bodybuilders and roommates.

Table 2. GETTING STARTED IN BODYBUILDING

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Karen	I first started, actually, just to gain some weight because I was thin, and I started, basically, at your spa type place and one of the guys that worked there was a bodybuilder and he trained at a gym. He wrote my first little program out for me and everything. It was three times per week and he kind of helped me. Then he told me that I should go to the gym where I should be seriously trained.
Tirapelli ¹	I discovered bodybuilding two years ago in California when a friend brought me to the gym, and I started playing with the weights. Bodybuilding was the only sport I'd never tried, and I thought, 'Oh, this is fun,' and joined the gym the next day. But soon it was more than just fun; I was drawn more and more to bodybuilding because I like pushing myself, experimenting, and competing against myself.
LoCicero ¹	I had always been athletic and competitive in high school, but I didn't start bodybuilding until February 1981, after my second child was born. I was skinny, weighed only 100 pounds, and found it awfully hard to get back in shape. Meanwhile, my husband was in the routine of working out at Mr. America's Gym (on Long Island), so one day I joined him. The next thing I knew I was dreaming that I could look the same as the women bodybuilders whose pictures I saw at the gym.
McLish ²	When I got to college I got away from any strict routine as far as cheerleading training or practices of anything like that goes, and I went home one day and my Dad says, "That's not the body I used to know." I wasn't out of shape, believe me, but the muscle tone just wasn't all there. That's all he had to say. I immediately snapped and I went to a health club, a really nice spa with all kinds of equipment and weights, and I fell in love with the atmosphere.

¹ Rosen, T. (1983). *Strong and sexy*. New York: The Putnam Publishing Group.

² Gaines, C. & Butler, G. (1984). *Pumping iron II: The unprecedented woman*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Table 2. GETTING STARTED IN BODYBUILDING (CONT'D)

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Murray ³	<p>I was planning to give the Dallas Cowboys (cheerleaders) another try. I was told if I lost more weight, come down to around 130 pounds, I could made the team. Ron Love (male bodybuilder) told me I had great symmetry and good thighs, and should try bodybuilding. I told him I wanted to be a cheerleader.</p> <p>On the day she told me I wouldn't made the squad, I got back on the plane. It was a Sunday in May, 1985. I said to myself right there, I was going to be a bodybuilder.</p>
Schreiner ⁴	<p>Schreiner, from a small town near Stuttgart, Germany, also took up bodybuilding for a roundabout reason. She had scoliosis, a pronounced curvature of the spine. A physical therapist suggested that she strengthen her back through weight training.</p>
Fussell ⁵	<p>It was that simple at first -- at least, so I thought. By making myself larger than life, I might make myself a little less frail, a little less assailable when it came down to it, a little less human. In the beginning I planned to use bodybuilding purely as a system of self-defense. It wasn't until later, 80 muscle-crammed pounds later, that I learned to use it as my principal method of assault.</p>
Sandoval ⁶	<p>Hey, I'm in it for the sport. I ran track in college, played three sports in high school. After that accident a few years back I had to stop marathon racing. Weight training was part of my rehabilitation, and since I made good (muscular) gains so easy, I began getting serious about this (bodybuilding).</p>

³ Bradford, R. (1990, Spring). Meet Lenda Murray. *Women's physique world*, pp. 9 - 13.

⁴ Brainum, J. (1991, June). Let's talk about women's bodybuilding. *Muscle and fitness*, pp. 150 - 152 and 205 - 206.

⁵ Fussell, S. W. (1991). *Muscle: Confessions of an unlikely bodybuilder*. New York: Avon Books.

⁶ Klein, A. M. (1993). *Little big men: Bodybuilding subculture and gender construction*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

In the articles, “Dying to win” (Luoma, 1993) and “Death by dessication” (Brainum, 1993), the authors discuss the problematic role misinformation plays in amplifying the pitfalls of drug use along with administrative avoidance of acknowledgment of such use as factors that contribute to bodybuilders’ harm, in general, and to the death of bodybuilding competitor, Mohammed Benaziza, in particular. It is believed that the failure of the sport of bodybuilding to own up to the rampant use of drugs allows the incidence of such tragedies such as a competitor’s death. While most dangerous sports have medical personnel on hand in case of an emergency, Brainum (1993) and Luoma (1993) feel that the sport of bodybuilding, knows its competitors use drugs pretends not to know, and consequently, does not provide the kind of backstage medical personnel that may have been able to save Mr. Benaziza’s life. (The competitor died immediately after winning the show he participated in; attributed to the use of prescription diuretics.)

Therefore, Karen’s experiences, in tandem with the literature, suggest that in those cases where bodybuilders are choosing to engage in drug use, the potential for tragic consequences is heightened by both an abundance of misinformation and a lack of supporting precautionary measures provided in the instance of a medical emergency.

While there are those competitors who have stated that they have not used performance-enhancing drugs, all acknowledge that said use does permeate the sport. While the true incidence of drug use within the sport of bodybuilding merits further investigation, there seems to be deeper issues that are not being addressed. In Karen’s case, there are physical and emotional side effects related to drug use. In the case of the competitor, Mohammed Benaziza, the result of drug use was fatal.

Besides the issue of drug use that Karen spoke about at length, there are other controversial issues that she talked of that made participation confusing. Such issues included: standards of judging and placement that varied from year to year; standards of presentation for posing and posing attire that also were inconsistent; paid-for-expenses that differed among professional competitors; and lack of parity between male and female competitors regarding prize money, contracts and endorsements. Regarding these other controversies, the one that figures most prominently among other competitors in the literature involves the issue of judging standards, or “big vs. feminine”. Over a decade has passed, and not only have these standards varied from year to year, but within years, from show to show. A competitor may make the decision to compete only once per year using the entire year to prepare for a chosen show. The statements of Karen and those of other participants reflect the ongoing psychological battle the bodybuilder is fighting in trying to determine just how to prepare for any given contest. Tables 3 - 6 represent a comparison of comments made concerning the several issues of controversy found in this and other studies.

Making a Living?

Karen knew that earning potential as an amateur bodybuilder left something to be desired. A career as a bodybuilder requires as much time as any other job. A typical day means waking up early to do some before-breakfast cardiovascular activity, followed by eating and then training and then eating and often, training again in the evening. Then, of course there’s tanning and posing practice. Basically, it is this type of

Table 3. METHODS BY WHICH BODYBUILDERS OBTAIN DRUGS

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Karen	There are these people who are around who will give you advice on drugs, for money of course. They will tell you how to take them or can help you to get them. I guess some of them are doctors, some are former or current bodybuilders and some of them are. . . who knows? They don't have any credentials, they're just people who claim to know about how to use them. Everyone is just so desperate to believe that there's someone who knows what to do.
Fussell ¹	Vinnie led me into his own room to continue my education. The place looked like a Federal Express terminal, filled with plain brown envelopes and cardboard containers of all sizes. Vinnie's business, he readily admitted, was steroids. At the foot of his bed was his "treasure chest," as he called it, a footlocker holding scores of magical growth enhancers in bottle and vial form. I couldn't believe the sheer variety of pharmaceutical options available to those involved in the pursuit of muscular accretion. A whole new world opened up to me filled with mystical names and properties.
Bradshaw ²	I had a doctor who would prescribe anything--he was an older guy, kind of a quack. Actually, he was a retired dentist, if you can believe that, and he ran a health food store. Even though he was retired he had the power to write scripts, so I talked him into writing me a script for Anavar. It was kind of an open prescription, so I sold a few bottles. Later, I hooked up with a pharmacist in Oklahoma City who was very, very, wide-open about it. You could literally walk in and he'd sell steroids to you over-the-counter and ring them up like he was selling candy. He had bodybuilders walking in and out of there all day long.

¹ Fussell, S. W. (1991). *Muscle: Confessions of an unlikely bodybuilder*. New York: Avon Books.

² Luoma, T. C. (1993, Feb.-March). Steroids for sale . . . not. *Muscle media 2000*, pp. 103 - 105.

Table 4. EXPERIENCED SIDE-EFFECTS OF DRUG USE

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Karen	<p>The drugs started leaving my system, I didn't cycle down. My hormones were off balance. I was running around like a lunatic, crying and screaming, thinking my life was over. Looking in the mirror and wishing the muscle would go away. I don't think women understand.</p> <p>You try not to look in the mirror, don't want to see what you've become. You don't look like a woman any more. Some of the side effects are permanent, like my voice. I don't like to talk around people. It takes a few years to really see what's happening. People seem to get different things. Like I never had the acne. Who know's what's going to happen 5 - 10 years from now. Some of the women aren't around to even ask.</p>
Fussell ¹	<p>It was the acne I couldn't hide. As the months flew by and I trained and ate and injected, the acne invasion spread from my face to my neck, my chest, my upper back, even my scalp, until, finally, it found it's way to my shins and toes. Wherever I had skin, I had pimples.</p> <p>But the biggest pain was in my ass. It ached constantly from my twice weekly injections. For weeks on end, a bad shot left a knot, a fist-sized tightening and swelling.</p>
Anonymous ²	<p>It's controllable with plucking, but it's definitely thick enough to be considered a beard.</p> <p>It's kind of like a 16- or 17-year old boy when he first starts to grow a beard.</p> <p>-- Women referring to side-effect of facial hair growth.</p> <p>It drove me crazy, it was rubbing against everything, and it was incredibly sensitive. It was really tough to ignore.</p> <p>-- Woman referring to side-effect of clitoral enlargement.</p>

¹ Fussell, S. W. (1991). *Muscle: confessions of an unlikely bodybuilder*. New York: Avon Books.

² Dayton, L. (1994, August/September). Open forum: The androgen women. *Muscle media 2000*, pp. 138-144.

Table 5. JUDGING STANDARDS: BIG VS. “FEMININE

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Karen	As I said, I placed 12th the previous year in the national show. The next show? I placed 15th. They (judges) said I was “too big”, even though I went in lighter, 5 lbs. lighter than I had when I had competed the year before and placed higher!
Barrilleaux ¹	For three years I’ve argued that there are two types of women and that the solution would be two types of contests. Except for one Florida promoter, I’ve met nothing but opposition, yet this is where the controversy lies. How many men with narrow shoulders and wide hips win the men’s contests?
Combes ¹	I talked with Bill Pearl and he said there’s only one way for sport to go, to achieve size and shape and definition, just like the men. It doesn’t mean you have to look like a man, it just means you have to go for it. How can you judge a sport without going to the max? That’s what it’s all about, seeing how far you can go.
Conkwright ¹	I actually feel like if that’s their goal (to develop big muscles), then they should actually compete with men in the lightweight categories, you know? Because if you wapped off their heads they’d look like a man, so why not enter the men’s contests?
Elomaa ¹	In Europe we don’t like the big muscular girls. We think they are like men without mustache.
Schreiner ²	One thing I don’t think people understand is that, actually, the new standards really aren’t new at all. Femininity, with some muscle, was always supposed to have priority over excessive muscularity, but there wasn’t much consistency regarding that factor in the past.

¹ Gaines, C. & Butler, G. (1984). *Pumping iron II: The unprecedented woman*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

² Teper, L. (1992, July). The future is now. *Ironman*, pp. 46 - 52.

Table 5. JUDGING STANDARDS: BIG VS. “FEMININE” (CONTD)

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Wennerstrom ³	At the athletes’ meeting (chaired by Wayne DeMilia) prior to the prejudging, contestants were informed that a change in the judging criteria would be in force for this contest. Put simply, the IFBB guidelines had always stated that judges were to render their decisions by placing utmost importance on shape and proportion, along with an appropriate level of muscularity. Having drifted from this standard in past years, it was now to be brought more clearly back into focus. All that third-place finisher Laura Creavalle could do after the contest was shrug her well-developed shoulders and knuckle down for the next show. Creavalle possessed one of the most muscular and well-prepared physiques in this event, and her scores in round one reflected the judges’ confusion in placing her in an appropriate position.
Teper ⁴	Despite the changes, there were no changes when it came down to deciding who’d wear the Olympia crown. Just as the “new look” failed to change a lot of things resultwise, it also caused promoter Wayne DeMilia to flunk the final exam in terms of producing droves of new fans who were jumping at the chance to see the more “feminine” competitors. Although no official attendance figures were announced, it’s safe to assume that there were well under 2,000 paid ticket holders at the finals.

³ Wennerstrom, S. (1992, July). The show to end all shows. *Flex*, pp. 106 - 110 and 120.

⁴ Teper, L. (1993, January). New script, same story. *Ironman*, pp. 58 - 62.

Table 6. LET'S TALK ABOUT POSING

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Karen	Because they were having such a problem with women, they said, with their suits being too small. Ben Weider was complaining about too much of their little "buttocks showing out of their suit" is how he put it. So, from then on, twice, now for prejudging and for the night show before the show you all had to, we all had to line up against the wall and turn around, and they would walk behind you and check each suit. It was just ridiculous.
Conkwright ¹	When I pose I feel no sexual thing at all -- I'm not out there being seductive.
McLish ¹	I really don't enjoy posing that much. I'd rather give a bodybuilding seminar instead of doing a guest posing appearance, because I really don't enjoy getting up there in a little bitty skimpy bikini and strutting my stuff. For competition I will because it's required and I want to do my best. I do enjoy it for competition, but not just for show at all.
McGough ²	Oh, c'mon! Renaming the female tush "IFBB regulations?" Following a certain amount of cheek exhibited at the 1990 Ms. Olympia, female competitors received an official circular reminding them that: "Bikini bottoms must not breach IFBB regulations!"
Lebowitz ³	Banned poses? Which ones? Just about any pose done in a bikini could be considered erotic.
West ³	Let's keep bodybuilding out of the gutter and make it a classy activity. Contestants who subject themselves and the audience to exotic-dance moves should be scored down and given a severe reprimand.

¹ Gaines, C. & Butler, G. (1984). *Pumping iron II: The unprecedented woman*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

² McGough, P. (1992, July). Biased achievement awards. *Flex*, pp. 132 - 135.

³ Lebowitz, B. & West, C. (1993, May). Point counterpoint: Provocative posing? *Ironman*, p. 36.

schedule that makes it very difficult for aspiring competitors to hold down conventional jobs. Personal training is often the “other” career of choice because it allows the bodybuilder to insert clients into her schedule. It is exactly this type of lifestyle that makes the pro card so coveted.

The dream is, as Karen relayed, that once the pro level is reached, the bodybuilder will be in the money because of the expectation of signing contracts, acquiring sponsors, doing guest posings, etc. As Karen explained:

I went out there expecting, y’know I’m gonna turn pro, I’m finally gonna make it, I’m gonna have a contract with Weider, things are gonna be paid for, I’m gonna have sponsors, I’m gonna have endorsements, this is gonna be great. That is not the way it is at all. No one bodybuilder is making any amount of money with the exception of (names prominent female bodybuilder), I don’t know about (another name). I don’t think she does that well to be honest. There are very few women that even have a contract and their contracts are still basically hardly nothing, compared to what men are paid. It’s a real slap in the face and um, you kind of start to wake up after awhile and think, this is not right and it gets to be very hard to continue to train. You start being really scared, at least I know I did, because you put, what, twelve years or so, ten years of your life into something, that’s all you’ve done. You think, well I can do nothing else, I am trapped in this.

The paradox becomes clear. The short-comings and broken dreams make it hard to continue, and the time and total commitment already given make it just as hard to think about quitting. For the participant of this study, at least, the experience of reaching the upper echelons provided less access to money and perks than expected. The only other option Karen felt she had that promised any amount of real money involved the living room performance of posing or wrestling. Something she felt she could not do.

The extent to which bodybuilders actually resort to this alternative money-making route is difficult to ascertain. This is not a subject that many bodybuilders have here-to-fore been willing to talk about and I found little evidence in the literature to which to refer. One of the few comments I could find involving this subject was made by Rachel McLish (Gaines, 1984).

Last year I got calls from people who wanted me to wrestle men for seven thousand dollars. I said are you kidding me? I'm not going to make a sideshow out of bodybuilding. (p. 108)

While bodybuilders may not be eager to talk about the shadier side of making a living, there is some evidence of it in numerous bodybuilding publications advertising videos displaying either women wrestling or training and posing nude. Alan Klein (*Little Big Men*, 1993) is one of the few authors who has discussed the subject openly. However, that research deals primarily with the issue of male bodybuilders engaging in prostitution. Though the literature is unclear regarding the difficulties of earning a true living as a professional bodybuilder, Karen's experience was that the money was going anywhere but in her pockets.

The Role of Self-Esteem

The role that self-esteem played in Karen's selection of competitive bodybuilding appears to also be evidenced in the experiences of other competitors in the extant literature. If anything, self-esteem is a more primary focus in other literature than in this study, where it took a backseat to Karen's emphasis on the drug factor.

Karen described herself and her parents as “perfectionists”. Throughout her life, Karen achieved successes in school, athletics, modeling and later, bodybuilding. Despite these successes, she felt she still lacked approval from her parents. Every achievement could be improved and Karen incorporated this thought process into personal admonishments of failure. When Karen first entered bodybuilding, she was having fun. She liked training, liked the results and got the attention she’d been seeking. Competitive bodybuilding would be the avenue to more success, attention and approval; or so she thought. The desire to succeed, the personal perfectionism, threw Karen into the sport full throttle and she was ready to run any risk to reach the top.

Reaching the ranks of the professional was highly misrepresented. The dreams of contracts, endorsements, recognition and pay was overstated. She found herself in California, the bodybuilding mecca, having to vie with numerous other competitors for personal training clients resulting in the necessity of obtaining a second job in a tanning salon and selling her car.

In the beginning, Karen blamed herself for her lack of success. The inability to achieve “the dream” caused Karen’s self-esteem to bottom-out and she considered suicide for the first time in her life.

In *Muscle*, Sam Fussell (1991) initially maintains that his decision to get “the disease” stemmed from self-preservation. He talks about his need to discontinue being the source of target practice for the crazies of New York and thinks the armor of muscle will help his cause. At the end of his book, however, Fussell sees things differently. He discusses the idea that being a bodybuilder not only kept people away from him, it also helped him keep things inside himself. Issues he wanted to avoid dealing with were

ignored in place of a total focus on how many reps, sets, grams of, days of, etc. Numbers replaced feelings. Fussell summed it up this way.

I became a bodybuilder as a means of becoming a caricature. The inflated cartoon I became relieved me from the responsibility of being human. But once I'd become that caricature, that inflated cartoon, I longed for something else. As painful and humiliating as it is to be human, being subhuman or superhuman is far worse. (p. 249).

Other athletes have told less poignant stories. Some, like Carla Dunlap (Nelson, 1991) and Bev Francis (Gaines, 1984) entered bodybuilding because of previous sports involvement and found it to be a means of continuing as a competitor.

Still others echo Karen's experience of looking for approval and attention. This view is most clearly portrayed in the book *Little Big Men* (Klein, 1993) where few participants present the persona of self-confidence and assurity. The issue of self-esteem and its potential role in the lives of Karen as well as several other bodybuilders portrayed in earlier literature is presented in Table 7.

Life After Bodybuilding

The participant in this study made no bones about her feelings about her bodybuilding career. Not only does bodybuilding presently have absolutely no place in her life, but she indicated she would not do it over again given the choice. The saddest revelation is not that Karen and other athletes of many sports don't always encounter the fame and fortune they'd hoped for. The real tragedy lies in the options, or lack

Table 7. EVIDENCE OF ISSUES OF SELF-ESTEEM

Participant/ Reference	Comments
Karen	They (parents) love me very much, but I just don't feel like I got the approval or praise that a child needs. Not that they were doing it on purpose. They just didn't know. They were married when they were 17 and I was born nine months later, and I just think they did the best they could, but it ended up causing me a lot of psychological problems that I think led to, actually to bodybuilding. My mother while she is a very good, caring and loving person she was a perfectionist and everything could always be done better than you do it. So, I felt like when I tried there was nothing that I could do right. I just always remember her saying, "Well you could do better, that's not good enough" instead of "Oh that's great."
LoCicero ¹	When I started training I was also going through many changes in my life. My husband and I were separating, and I had to support myself and my children. Bodybuilding not only helped me feel confident and in control. It helped me grow up.
Bell ²	The only time a boy would call me is when he needed his homework done. Then suddenly they'd be nice to me. God, I didn't care. It was just nice to have someone seem like they liked you.
Francis ²	One of the things I enjoyed most about bodybuilding was going from flat-chested and being razzed about it to people all of a sudden noticing my body. I had this nondescript body. Now men say, "Wow, check out the bod!"
Willis ²	I had to do something, and don't know what would have happened had I not gotten into it (bodybuilding). I've gained twenty pounds of muscle. Back then I had no shapeliness. I was built like a boy. People used to really laugh at me. So bodybuilding has meant a lot to me. I'm almost thirty-four now. It's the first time people pay me compliments. I feel proud to walk through a crowd.

¹ Rosen, T. (1983). *Strong and sexy*. New York: The Putnam Publishing Group.

² Klein, A. M. (1993). *Little big men: Bodybuilding subculture and gender construction*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

thereof, that she and other women bodybuilders feel are open to her now that her bodybuilding career is finished. The lack of preparation for this transitional phase has been reflected in the lives of many athletes, successful or not. Fortunately, the topic of transition is receiving more attention in the current literature in sport psychology (Williams, 1993).

Bodybuilders may continue to suffer the pangs of career termination trauma more than other athletes because of their lack of organization and recognition as athletes. In fact, I found it difficult to locate any substantial information about the whereabouts and subsequent career choices of former bodybuilding participants. Most of what I do know has been obtained either from hearsay or in one to two line captions accompanying pictures of bodybuilders in the gossip departments of bodybuilding publications. Local gyms relate such rumors as: Tonya Knight married a millionaire, suffered a medical ailment and now, who knows? Six time Ms. Olympia, Cory Everson, retired to “go Hollywood”, apparently, didn’t make a big splash, and is now still heavily tied to bodybuilding by writing columns, selling posters, and making personal appearances at gyms. Bev Francis, former powerlifter and one of the biggest women to compete in bodybuilding, owns a gym and does personal training. Carla Dunlap, the first African-American “Miss” Olympia is sometimes seen commentating and/or judging for both bodybuilding and fitness competitions. The only article I was able to find deals with, perhaps, the most famous female bodybuilder of all time, Rachel McLish (Dobbins, 1992). Rachel tired of the rigors of the sport, the constant dieting, training and discipline. She had this to say:

I got to the point where I really didn't feel I had anything left to prove. I'd won championships. I had two Ms. Olympia titles. There were so many other challenges in my life that after awhile going through so much to win yet another contest simply ceased to be worth it. (p. 103)

Still, Rachel's life seems to have turned out OK. She married a successful film and television producer and starred in one of his movies. She also created a line of "bodywear" sold in K-Mart. Regarding training, Rachel is clear that she began working out before she became a competitor and will continue to do so for the rest of her life.

Rachel's story stands in stark contrast to Karen's. One woman benefited from her involvement with bodybuilding the other is not even interested in walking into a gym. It is possible that Rachel McLish was able to exert more control as she really was one of the pioneers of the sport with a little more latitude in the development of her career. By the time Karen reached the pinnacle, bodybuilding was an established big-bucks venue with a lot at stake for the thriving fitness industry. Nevertheless, the real reasons for the differences are at this time unclear.

More than blaming the big, bad, bodybuilding administration, Karen admits that her own past choices have limited her future possibilities.

If I could even have children, we don't even know that, would they be, would there be, like a lot of things wrong with them? I don't know. And I certainly would not want to do that to a child. So basically, you know, that's something I've had to come to terms with this past year is that, I am not going to have children. I am just going by my own feelings. From some of the things I've read, but I would have to have complete, whatever you want to call it (laughs) go through all that, to know. But still you know, I don't think they could tell me, maybe, "Oh, yes you can have a child, but I can't tell you if there's going to be something wrong with it." And um, you know, that's something else, I've put it out of my mind for all those years, but I, I would have liked to have had a family. And um, (quietly) I'm just telling you, I don't know, I just think, people don't realize what you give up when you do that.

Even though Karen is willing to take responsibility for past choices that may limit future options, I am somewhat baffled that she doesn't seem to envision anything that she may be capable of doing outside of bodybuilding. I believe that the extreme negativity she feels toward the sport has placed restrictions on her future that do not apply to some of the other competitors. A number of former competitors are still tied to bodybuilding through careers such as personal training, owning gyms, judging shows, etc. However, Karen wants to be as far as possible from anything remotely related to bodybuilding.

For me as a human being, not distant researcher, the rapport and friendship I have built with Karen makes it difficult for me to listen to her pain and hopelessness. I know that I am not supposed to become too involved, but I can't help but hope that she wakes up to see the same strong, intelligent and promising woman that I saw. I hope that she understands that the strength, eloquence and honesty she revealed in telling her story can carry her to success in other endeavors.

Summary

The findings of this study suggest that there are links between the experiences of Karen and those of other participants of professional bodybuilding. Despite these links, however, the dearth of information relative to personal experiences of participants in this sport also demonstrates the need for additional study. I find this need particularly imposing considering the painful context within which the participant of this study, as well as many others, portray their competitive experience.

Implications

Perhaps the strongest implication of this study is the need for further studies that probe the life of the competitive bodybuilder as more than caricatures. While there are similarities between the results of this study and the accounts in other literature, a call to arms for major changes within the institution of competitive bodybuilding must be checked by the need to provide more widespread evidence of abuses.

The dialogue with Karen opened doors for future research with an eye to specific issues reflected by her and individuals cited within the literature. The issue of suggested rampant drug use within the sport is one potentially-fruitful area of focus. Most importantly, if drug use is widespread the promoters and administrators must address ways to provide a safer environment. If drug use is overstated, the voices of authority must work with the participants to improve the image of the sport and avoid the image that “you have to use drugs to stay competitive.”

In either instance, at present, the truth is unknown. In fact, the issue of drug abuse in this sport is tiptoed around. I suggest that the issue of anonymity could be preserved while at the same time reaching a larger population of bodybuilding athletes through the administration of a study that would incorporate both qualitative and quantitative elements using interviews and surveys.

I also suggest further study must be conducted in the area of controversy that “never seems to go away”, that is, judging standards. Along with this, issues of gender parity and realistic earning expectations should be investigated. At present, there seems to be an indication that the participants have little to say about the direction of the sport regarding marketability and appeal resulting in discontent and a loss of a true sense of

involvement. Such a perception might be investigated in a study of perceived locus of control among participants. Finally, as with many athletes, issues of career transition need to be examined to determine the extent to which the bodybuilder, as athlete, is able to move out of the subculture and into the mainstream of society.

The Biased Perspective - A Reflection

As previously discussed, because I have been personally involved in bodybuilding competition though, admittedly, at a limited and amateur level, I have my own perceptions about the direction the sport has taken and have personally experienced some of the controversy and politics mentioned by Karen. The most important personal issue has been drug use by some participants.

During the interview I attempted to keep my personal feelings at bay and allow the discussion to enter this subject only if initiated by the participant. As evidenced, Karen did initiate discussion of the topic and I hope she felt completely free to voice her feelings.

Karen was very open on the subject and shared her experiences of drug use candidly and descriptively. I had expected her to avoid the issue or skirt it as is common in interviews with professional athletes. Instead, I was shaken by the strength and power of her story.

I also found that I had great difficulty keeping my own emotions in check. The truth is, I like Karen a great deal. She presented herself warmly and genuinely and her pain was difficult to witness. I sincerely desire for Karen to know the truth about herself

as the winner she always has been and am thankful that I've had the privilege of learning from her story.

Conclusions

This paper represents one woman's experiences as a professional competitive female bodybuilder. It isn't a pretty story, but it is a powerful one. Karen is retired, therefore, she felt more open to speak frankly about her experience. For those women who are at the beginning or peak of their bodybuilding careers, I would expect a less revealing interview.

Though an initial reading might seem to indicate otherwise, Karen's experience has not left her a bitter woman, but it has caused her needless physical pain and emotional anxiety. Bodybuilding started out to be fun and healthy. For Karen it became tedious, disappointing, and even life threatening. In that sense, I hope that this study has shed some additional light on the life of one member of a misunderstood subculture.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE
CULTURAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of the elite female bodybuilding competitor.

You will participate in an informal interview with only yourself and the interviewer present. A tape recorder will be used to provide a word-for-word transcription. You will be provided with a copy of the completed transcription to allow you to make corrections or delete material you do not want to be included in the study. You may be contacted, by phone, after the initial study to allow the interviewer to ask additional questions or request clarification of some material. Your participation will not require any mental or physical risks.

Your identity will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be used to identify your interview. Your name will not be used in any published documents without your approval.

You may ask questions prior to, during and subsequent to this procedure. You may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice toward me.

I have read and understand the explanation of this study and agree to participate.

Participant _____ Date _____
Witness _____ Date _____

Project Director: Craig A. Wrisberg, Ph.D.

Interviewer: Maria Kwiatkowski

301 Cheshire Drive /#152
Knoxville, TN 37919

(615) 588-3897

APPENDIX B**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Tell me about your experience of how you got started in bodybuilding, and keep in mind as you're doing this that whatever you have to say is what I am interested in.
2. Tell me about your experience of how you decided to participate in bodybuilding as a competitive sport.
3. Tell me how you learned weightlifting and contest preparation.
4. After you competed in your first bodybuilding competition, what was it about your experience that made you decide to enter another competition?
5. What role will bodybuilding play in your future, if any?