

SUBVERTING THE IDEAL?

CANADIAN FEMALE BODYBUILDERS' RESISTANCE OF IDEALIZED FEMININITY

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Abstract

Women's bodybuilding, and the muscular physique cultivated within the sport, radically confronts hegemonic sex/gender binaries by challenging the social construction of the female body as frail, fragile or limited (Bunsell, 2013). In the context of competitive bodybuilding, however, women's colonization of the muscular body is policed through competition judging criteria that, to date, monitor and manage women's extreme muscularity in order to stay within certain ranges of acceptable gender and sexuality (Heywood, 1998). Female competitors are required to display femininity and implied heterosexuality on stage through their attitude, gestures, posing, make-up, hairstyle, and adornments (Lowe, 1998). This study aimed to examine the experiences of female bodybuilding competitors to understand the ways in which they perceive and negotiate the imposition, expectations and normalization of idealized femininity within current bodybuilding competitions. Qualitative methods (in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews as well as ethnographic fieldwork) were used. The participants consisted of nine female bodybuilders with previous competitive experience. The analysis was informed by feminist deconstructions of sex, gender and sexuality in sport (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009) as well as by Foucauldian understandings of discipline/surveillance and technologies of the self (cf., Rabinow & Rose, 2003). The data gathered went beyond this focus to underline the contradictory views that some female bodybuilders hold of female muscularity and femininity. These views pointed to the influence of broader cultural perceptions on alternative versions of femininity constructed by bodybuilders. This influence, in turn, seemed to play a role in the bodybuilders' acceptance or tolerance of the competition judging criteria. In short, the analysis demonstrated that the participants were able to negotiate the judging criteria, albeit at times reluctantly and with frequent expressions of criticism and disapproval.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“Bodies are socially constructed and experienced, objective and subjective, specular and sentient. The body, self and culture are intertwined.”

(Monaghan, 2001, p. 332)



She struts on the stage towards the judges and the audience, her calves immediately visible in her six-inch stiletto shoes; her straightened long hair covers much of her strong back, and it swings almost synchronously to the rhythm of her hips moving deliberately from side to side. She waves and smiles. “Always smile at the judges”, she remembers, “you don’t want them to dislike you.” She stops and moves into the first mandatory pose: placing one hand on her hip, she flexes her muscular legs, sucking in her stomach and pushing her chest out with her swimsuit partially covering her breast implants. There is applause from the audience, most of whom consist of men. She then transitions into the second mandatory pose: A full turn facing the back wall. Stepping one leg forward first, she pushes her hips out, pausing half-way to offer a better view of her well-developed hamstrings and glutes. Her smile turns into a slightly-opened mouth, her stare into a rather suggestive one. Some start to whistle in the audience.

She then makes the full turn and faces the back wall. Her legs apart, her torso partially bent forward, her hands hanging on the sides of her hips, her hips pushed back as far as possible, and her glutes and hamstrings facing the audience. The whistling and howling from the audience

becomes loud and uniform. In this position, she places one hand on her hip, turns her upper body, flicks her hair and faces the audience. She does a quick wink at the judges, a sweet smile, a cute shoulder shrug – this may, after all, secure her a bit of advantage over the next few dozen competitors who await their turn anxiously backstage. The head judge then instructs her to walk to the back wall. She recognizes this as her opportunity to impress the judges with her seductive walk, and so she struts her way to the wall and back. Her hips move ever so slowly and deliberately from side to side and her feet cross with every swing – her torso erect, her back retracted and her chest pushed out, she flaunts her femininity and heterosexuality with every step.

The assertions of strength and invulnerability have carved their marks on her body. Her muscles – the definition, the striation – demand attention. In a contest against efforts which try to conceal and erase them, her muscles struggle to remain visible. Her body is evocative of a battle of cultural tensions, contradictions painfully palpable to the viewer – a body that has claimed its self-ownership, yet offers complete accessibility; a body that has intentionally deviated from the dominant culture, yet attempts to reclaim its normality through plastic surgery; a body that is hard, yet soft, threatening, yet tamed. It is the body of a female bodybuilder¹.

Bodybuilding is the “pursuit of a muscular physique through a regime of weight training and a tailored program of nutrition” (Mosley, 2008). Although women’s bodybuilding, and the muscular physique cultivated within the sport, can be used as a way to radically confront and resist the culturally accepted constructions of femininity (Choi, 2003; Heywood, 1998; Roussel & Griffet, 2000), the anecdote noted above demonstrates that this is often not the case. Muscled women in bodybuilding competitions today are often compelled to present themselves in highly feminine and sexualized ways. In other words, they are discouraged, in implicit and subtle as

well as explicit and overt ways, from expressing themselves through their muscularity and strength. Instead, they are encouraged to apologize for challenging traditional understandings of the female body, and to re-establish the lines they have crossed through emphasized – and in some cases exaggerated – femininity and sexualization. Female bodybuilders are mandated, through the official judging criteria, to display a hyper-feminine image on the stage – the resistance of which may potentially be the reason why many of these women turned to bodybuilding in the first place. The compulsory nature of such criteria means that the choice of resistance of hegemonic femininity is no longer an alternative or option for any female bodybuilder who decides to enter competition.

Previous research has tended to focus on women who become active consumers of the patriarchal institution of bodybuilding, internalizing many of the same standards that the gatekeepers of this sport try to enforce (Duff & Hong, 1984; McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009). For example, Boyle's (2005) study of six female bodybuilders demonstrates the way in which these competitors actively engage in reproducing hegemonic gender ideals and heteronormativity, and become as deeply devoted to policing their femininity as the gatekeepers of the sport. What has not yet been explored adequately in the extant literature is the experiences of those women bodybuilders who choose to resist the normalization and expectations of emphasized femininity and heterosexuality in competitions. This gap in the literature is even more pronounced when the experiences of Canadian women bodybuilders are considered, as critical research on Canadian women bodybuilders' experiences in the sport is even more limited, if not entirely absent.

Hence, the aim of the study was to address this gap in research by exploring the experiences of Canadian female bodybuilders with regards to the ways in which bodybuilding

competition judging criteria frame hegemonic femininity in bodybuilding. More specifically, the objective of this project was to examine the experiences of these athletes to understand the ways in which they resist the imposition and policing of idealized femininity within competitive bodybuilding. The key research questions were:

1. How do Canadian female bodybuilders negotiate the imposition, expectations and normalization of idealized femininity within current bodybuilding competitions?
2. How do the current judging criteria impact women's bodybuilding and competitors?

While previous research has focused mainly on female bodybuilders who become active reproducers of the patriarchal norms in bodybuilding, little attention has been paid to the way in which resistance is formed and exercised; this project pays particular attention to competitors' resistance (or lack thereof) to such norms. Once again, this paucity in research on women bodybuilders is even more pronounced when Canadian female bodybuilders are considered.

Thesis Overview

The second chapter of this thesis book will provide a review of the existing socio-cultural research and literature on women's bodybuilding practices, competitions and competition judging criteria. It will encompass such discussions as: the paradox of muscularity and femininity and the potential for resistance; the regulation and sexualization of female muscularity in mainstream media; and research examining female bodybuilders' own perceptions of muscularity and femininity. It will also consider the debate in the current literature on whether bodybuilding can be an empowering practice for women.

The third chapter will outline the methodological considerations of this study, including the procedure and execution, theoretical framework, the strengths and weaknesses, and the researcher's personal experiences in this project.

Chapters 4 and 5 will analyze and discuss the findings of the study. Chapter 4 will examine the participants' perceptions of bodybuilding, the reasons for their involvement, and their views around femininity and muscularity. Chapter 5 will consider the competitive aspect of the participants' lives. This chapter will examine the participants' responses to some of the norms in competitions, as well as the official and unspoken judging criteria. The final chapter of this book will sum up the findings of this project, summarize the prominent themes and offer a discussion of future directions.

Providing better and more equitable sporting experiences for people of different backgrounds and dispositions means that we must identify and study groups at risk of marginalization. Female bodybuilders, as occupants of different embodiments, constitute one such group in society and, as such, we must engage in better understanding their negotiations, struggles and lived experiences within organizations who attempt to erase, regulate and police their bodies.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

“Whether it be beefcake or cheesecake, it’s still cake.” (Fussel,1994, p.45)



This chapter provides a brief overview of some areas of literature relevant to the critical socio-cultural study of women’s bodybuilding. This includes a brief overview of the history of women’s bodybuilding, as well as an exploration of such areas as, the potential of female muscle for resistance; the regulation and policing of female muscularity in competitions; the sexualization of the female bodybuilder in mainstream mass media; the paradox of muscularity and femininity in women’s bodybuilding; discussions around bodybuilding as an act of resistance or reinforcement of the patriarchal views of femininity and research examining female bodybuilders’ own perceptions of muscularity and femininity.

History of Women’s Bodybuilding

Before delving into limitations imposed on female bodybuilders, a brief history of the sport is warranted. The first federation to hold a women’s bodybuilding contest was the International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB), which remains the biggest bodybuilding federation to date. Female bodybuilding emerged as an organized sport in Canada in 1978 (Felkar, 2012). Before this time, the only places in which women had the opportunity to participate in (a different version of) this sport were beauty pageants. In these contests, women

“wore high heels, makeup and jewelry, and they were judged for both beauty and fitness” (Lowe, 1998, p. 57). The social and cultural successes of the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s influenced the landscape of women’s bodybuilding, where women were more readily seen as capable of competing in their own bodybuilding competitions.

Since the conception of the sport of women’s bodybuilding, the level of muscularity that women have been able to obtain has increased dramatically (Heywood, 1998; Lowe, 1998). In response to this ever-growing muscular achievement in women’s bodybuilding, federations have introduced new competition categories, in which muscularity limits have become increasingly smaller (Boyle, 2005; Heywood, 1998). In order of highest to lowest levels of muscularity, these additional categories are Physique, Figure and Bikini respectively. Additionally, another category named Fitness was introduced in 1996, which, in addition to the more traditional posing component of bodybuilding competitions, also consists of a gymnastics/dance routine (Heywood, 1998).

While existing research has tended to focus on bodybuilding within the U.S. context, little is known about the experiences of women bodybuilders in Canada despite the large number of the Canadian participants in the sport, as well as the history of the women’s bodybuilding in Canada. The Canadian Bodybuilding Federation (CBBF) is the most prominent bodybuilding organization for amateur bodybuilding, fitness and figure competitions in Canada, and is “the only Canadian organization which qualifies competitors for competition at the International Federation of Bodybuilding (IFBB) World Championships” (CBBF, 2012). Although the rules and regulations enforced in CBBF competitions are identical to those in American bodybuilding competitions², it is not clear whether Canadian women bodybuilders’ experiences of and negotiations with the current competition rules are similar to the findings of the current literature,

as most of the studies have been conducted within the American context. An aim of this project is to fill this gap on what the experiences of women bodybuilders are within the Canadian context.

Women's Bodybuilding, the Regulation of Female Muscularity and the Potential for Resistance

The sport of bodybuilding constitutes a site in which the normalized beliefs around the physical capacity of the two sexes are manifestly contested. It also provides a site where the traditional ideals of feminine beauty are often fiercely adhered to and, at times, over-emphasized. As Lowe (1998) notes, “no other sport so embodies the tensions and contradictions between femininity, strength and muscularity than female bodybuilding” (p. 9). Because the presence of large muscles on the female body serves as a striking example of gender norm defiance, it is often perceived by many men and women as threatening to the conventional gender order. For this reason, female muscle is often perceived as in need of containment and policing (Heywood, 1998; Schulze, 1990). Thus, the gatekeepers of the sport of bodybuilding have devised rules and regulations within the federations which ensure that the muscularity of women is carefully policed and tamed (Choi, 2003).

Heywood (1998) suggests that “if [female muscularity] was not activist, if it was not *doing something*, there would be no need... to contain it” (p. 97). Following this line of reasoning, one could argue that muscularity can potentially offer women the means to overtly – and perhaps radically – resist some of the sexist cultural norms. Female bodybuilding can be viewed as a practice in which the culturally accepted correlations between femininity and vulnerability/submissiveness are manifestly challenged. Because a physically strong and capable female body demonstrates that the bio-reductivist notions of physical limitations in women are

socially constructed, and because such a body dispels the myth that physical strength and muscularity are the ‘natural’ and exclusive capacities of the male body, bodybuilding can be viewed as a form of empowerment for women (Choi, 2003; Heywood, 1998; Roussel & Griffet, 2000). For those women who wish to do so, cultivating a muscular and traditionally ‘unfeminine’ body may be utilized as a way of not only opposing the normative prescriptions and reproductions of gender mythology, but also naturalizing a new standard of femininity. This may be the reason why some women engage in bodybuilding, a reason which is not formally recognized (or is perhaps disregarded) in women’s bodybuilding competitions.

Lowe (1998) writes about bodybuilding regulations stating, “because IFBB is a closed federation, everyone within the organization must accept and abide by its rules and regulations or face being barred. Thus, consent to the hegemonic standards by all members is written into the bylaws of the organization” (p. 60). Competitors in all different divisions and categories of competition (bodybuilding, physique, figure, fitness, and bikini categories) can be officially penalized for failing to comply with the requirements of idealized femininity (enforced via the sport governing body) by being “excessively” muscular, not having a “graceful” walk on the stage, or “resembling the male physique” too much (IFBB, 2009). These criteria are noted in the competition rules of the International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB) regarding the assessment of the female physique:

First and foremost, the judge must bear in mind that this is a women’s bodybuilding competition, and that the goal is to find an ideal female physique. Therefore, the most important aspect is shape – a muscular yet feminine shape. The other aspects are similar to those described for assessing the male

physique, but muscular development must not be carried to such an excess that it resembles the massive muscularity of the male physique. Definition of a woman's muscles must not be confused with emaciation resulting from extreme loss of weight. Competitors shall also be assessed on whether or not they carry themselves in a graceful manner while walking to and from their position onstage. (IFBB, 2009, p. 48)

Similarly, the WBFF (a fitness federation who recently altered its original name 'World Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation' to 'World Beauty, Fitness & Fashion Inc.' – a remarkable and revealing 'adjustment' on the part of the federation) states on its website that some of the components on which female competitors are judged include "grace and presentation, skin tone, hair, makeup, suit selection and shoe choice" (WBFF, 2012). It also labels the fitness and bikini categories the "Diva Fitness" and "Diva Bikini", and officially identifies the bikini category as "primarily a beauty contest" (WBFF, 2012). Other unofficial (though recommended) criteria which are just as important in determining an athlete's placing in a competition include creating a hyper-feminine presentation through long painted nails, heavy jewellery and the wearing of high-heeled stiletto shoes and an eye-catching (often skimpy) competition suit. While not a central focus of this study, it is important to also acknowledge that body modification through plastic surgery (e.g., getting breast implants) has also become an unofficial requirement for many competitive women bodybuilders (Felkar, 2012; Heywood, 1998).

Simply put, the competition criteria mandate the expression of the hegemonic form of femininity exclusively. The penalties that may result from failure to produce acceptable femininity in competitions can range from stigmatization (e.g., being judged as too 'manly'),

lack of acceptance within the social and bodybuilding communities, and being banned from competition and blacklisted by the judges, which can be largely detrimental to an athlete's competitive career and chances of gaining prize money and sponsorships (Boyle, 2005; Choi, 2003; Felkar, 2012). Choi (2003) has compared the attempt to penalize female bodybuilders for being too muscular (i.e., defying hegemonic norms of femininity), to punishing a runner for being too fast: "A similar situation would be limiting the speed at which women runners can run or the height that women high jumpers can jump lest they become unfeminine" (p. 73).

Despite the attempts that have been made by the gatekeepers to restrict, control and monitor the muscular development of female bodybuilders, the size of the competitors' muscles has been increasingly on the rise (Boyle, 2005). One could speculate that this phenomenon is a form of resistance from the athletes, indicating their refusal to be contained by the hegemonic ideals. In response to this ever-growing muscularity in women's bodybuilding, different federations including the IFBB have introduced new competition categories, each of which has successively lowered the muscularity requirements for women, while simultaneously placing greater emphasis on expression and display of femininity through demeanour and physical presentation (Heywood, 1998). Although the explanation offered by the gatekeepers of the sport of bodybuilding for the recent introduction of smaller categories often identifies this trend as an attempt to foster more inclusivity in the sport (by welcoming a wider population of female competitors of different muscular achievements) (Heywood, 1998), this movement toward 'smaller' bodies has, quite conspicuously, been accompanied by a simultaneous movement in the direction of more sexualized representation of women in these categories. Such a movement has, ultimately, had the effect of diminishing and negating the competitors' athletic achievements, and has served to turn back the clock to representing them as (hetero)sexualized objects of male

gaze (Heywood, 1998, p. 55). The introduction of new competition categories – specifically categories that privilege smaller physiques and less explicit muscularity – demonstrates but one technique involved in the policing of the female muscled body, and points to the ways in which the emancipatory potential of contemporary women’s bodybuilding is resisted. Another way of diffusing the challenge that muscular women pose to the gender order is to present the female muscle as a new form of sex appeal (Choi, 2003; Heywood, 1998; Holmlund, 1997; McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009).

Sexualization of the Female Bodybuilder in the Media

As femininity is often equated with (hetero)sexuality, the sexualization of the bodybuilders’ images can be viewed as an attempt to restore neutrality and universality to the troubled gender binary. As Choi (2003, p. 78) points out, “repositioned as desirable (hetero)sexual object, the female bodybuilder is tamed and less threatening to the patriarchal gender order.” The hyper-sexualized images of women bodybuilders produced in magazines and other fitness outlets are used to counteract the threatening nature of large muscles on women, assigning a traditional role to these athletes and reducing them to solely sexual beings (Choi, 2003; Heywood, 1998; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996).

For example, in *Flex Magazine* (a popular bodybuilding magazine) the portrayal of fitness models (as competitors are often labeled) frequently comes close to resembling pornography. This highlights the way in which muscular physiques – despite blurring the visible distinctions between the sexes – can still be posited as (hetero)sexually accessible, desirable and exploitable; some even go as far as promoting this potential to be female muscularity’s “best” asset (*Flex*, August 1997 p. 121). Such pronounced emphasis on the sexualization of female

muscle effectively fulfills the task of shifting the focus away from the labour and athletic achievement of muscle building and, in so doing, re-establishes normative notions of muscularity by positing visible muscle as masculine and granting the domain of bodybuilding to men. The absence of sexualization of the male bodybuilder in the bodybuilding media further reaffirms this notion (Choi, 2000; Heywood, 1998)³.

The argument of commercial sexuality (i.e., the idea that the marketability of female competitors is heightened through emphasized sexual portrayal, or the notion that “sex sells”) appears to be a common explanation offered by the sport governing bodies and heads of bodybuilding magazines (e.g., *Flex Magazine*) for representing these athletes in such ways (Heywood, 1998). This line of reasoning is not free from criticism. Although women bodybuilders may find visible muscularity aesthetically appealing (Duff & Hong, 1984), defining aestheticism in terms of sex appeal, as is often done in women’s bodybuilding, is problematic. This view of female muscularity not only re-assigns conventional roles and adjectives to women (who have otherwise emancipated themselves from traditional stereotypes), it also universalizes and singularizes the aim of bodybuilding to one of appearing more (hetero)sexually attractive (Heywood, 1998, p. 99). Furthermore, this view prioritizes the supposed needs and desires of the audience above the athletes’. Heywood (1998) suggests that the sexist logic of marketability is problematic because it undermines “the possibility that bodybuilding functions in the lives of some individuals as a crucial space of sovereignty or self-ownership... independent of the desires of others” (p. 97). Portraying female muscle in a predominantly sexual mode is not only a neglectful (and perhaps demeaning) depiction of the athletic labour/accomplishment involved in bodybuilding, it is also dismissive of the many other benefits and pleasures which female bodybuilders may obtain from physical training.

The sexualization of the female bodybuilder in the media, coupled with judging criteria which mandate idealized femininity and sexualization serve to re-/establish the boundaries that visible muscularity of female bodybuilders cross. However, the infusion of traits that simultaneously repel and reinforce hegemonic femininity is paradoxical. The construction of such a body also calls into question the empowering potential of bodybuilding for women. The next two sections will consider the paradoxical residence of hegemonic and non-confirmative features in the muscled female body, and the potential of such a body for resistance of idealized femininity.

The Paradox of Resistance and Reinforcement

The question of whether female bodybuilding is a practice of resistance or reinforcement of the patriarchal norm is one to which a great deal of research on women's bodybuilding has been dedicated. Some researchers including Bartky (1998), Bunsell (2012), Heywood (1998), Felkar (2012), Krane et al. (2004), Roussel and Griffet (2000) and Sawicki (1991) have maintained that there is subversive potential in bodybuilding. For example, Heywood (1998) makes the compelling argument that "bodybuilding is a form of healing, one way of physically and psychologically creating a safe space in which one is neither weak nor a victim" (p.17). Roussel and Griffet (2000) add to this by suggesting that "the bodybuilding world sets its boundaries, builds itself, defines its position, and embraces its specificity" (p. 146). Similarly, since muscled women trouble the common perception that coexistence of muscularity and womanhood is an unnatural phenomenon, Mansfield and McGinn (1993) reason that "the female muscled body is so dangerous that the proclamation of gender must be made very loudly indeed" (p. 64).

In contrast to such optimistic views of the quest for and embodiment of muscle in women, another line of thinking argues that women's bodybuilding is often a paradoxical manifestation of both the reinforcement and defiance of archetypal femininity (Bolin, 1992; Boyle, 2005; Fisher, 1997; Grogan et al. 2004; Hall 1996; Johnston, 2010; Miller & Penz, 1991; Wesely, 2001). As noted earlier, the transgression that female muscularity commits does not go uncontested in competitions. Once again, because the expression and interpretation of the body in terms of its muscularity has traditionally been restricted to the male physique alone, the mere existence of female bodybuilders can be perceived as an attack on gender norms. The judging criteria serve to counteract this transgression, police and regulate women's femininity in bodybuilding competitions and restore hegemonic norms. The choice to disobey or disregard these criteria is often accompanied by such consequences as stigmatization, negative feedback from the media and others, and the possibility of an unsuccessful career (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Dworkin, 2001; Helbert, 1997; Mean & Kassing, 2008).

Female bodybuilders, in this regard, occupy a paradoxical position in competitions, where they are pressured and/or required to simultaneously fulfill two sets of inherently contradictory expectations: pursuing the aim of the sport of bodybuilding, which is to achieve muscularity and leanness, and presenting this muscular development in a narrowly-defined feminine style (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Krane et al., 2004; Lenskyj, 1994). Hence, while muscularity can be seen as a potentially viable act of resistance for women, emphasized femininity in bodybuilding competitions can also be perceived as a clear instance of containment and compliance. St. Martin and Gavey (1996) suggest that while the mere existence of muscle on female physiques can be seen as an irrefutable violation of the cultural gender codes, a female bodybuilder's own dedication to self-surveillance and feminization of her body is an act of

conservation – and at times exaggeration – of idealized femininity. In this way, women's bodybuilding is “both feminist resistance and as an object of femininity's recuperation” (p. 56).

Within a non-competitive setting, then, the practice of bodybuilding can be argued to provide empowerment and independence for women. But within the context of formal competitions where the female body is openly assessed for its femininity, bodybuilding provides a paradoxical site in which female muscle is both nurtured and simultaneously disciplined. In other words, in a sport where muscular development is the objective, female muscle is both welcomed and carefully regulated. And because of the compulsory nature of the appearance and stage presence criteria for women, athletes who wish to compete are left with no choice but to conform, as they are mandated to reproduce the traditional notions of femininity (Lowe, 1998)

Outside of competitions, there is surveillance from family and friends, in the form of comments reminding and encouraging the bodybuilders to avoid hyper-muscularity or ‘loss of femininity’ (Bunsell, 2013). In competitions, however, the warnings often come from the judges. These pressures compel some competitors to ‘correct’ their allegedly un-feminine bodies through artificial means (such as plastic surgery) as well as through the display of *feminine apologetic*. Lowe (1998) cites Felshin (1974) in explaining that “feminine apologetic [is a way to compensate] for entering a traditionally masculine domain. It functions to legitimate women's involvement in sport and to reduce role conflict that they might experience as a result” (1974, p. 115). These criteria, however, have very little or no impact on the assessment of men's physiques. Indeed, behaviours such as grimacing, growling and even yelling are often displayed by male competitors on the stage, which seem to produce no negative evaluation of their physiques by the judges. Women competitors, on the other hand, are advised to smile at all times on the stage and avoid loud, guttural noises (Lowe, 1998). Hence, the toughness of a muscular

female body, with the assistance of artificial ‘enhancers’ such as silicone breast implants and other forms of plastic surgery, as well as the often fake hair/nails, is effortfully tamed and softened back into the conventional corporeality for women (Choi, 2000; 2003).⁴

Female Bodybuilders’ Perception of Muscularity and Femininity

To an outsider, the sensitivity to and panic around the maintenance and reconstruction of femininity – referred to by Heywood (1998) as the “crisis over femininity” (p. 9) – may be easily perceptible and manifest in the competitors’ demeanour. Their bodies appear to be involved in a struggle to resemble traditional femininity in spite of the visible musculature. How, then, do the bodybuilders themselves perceive the current subculture of bodybuilding?

In the previous section, the debate around the feminist potential of women’s bodybuilding was discussed. One line of argument posits women’s bodybuilding as an empowering practice, while most other research argues that – at least within the context of competitive bodybuilding – this practice can be perceived as both subversive and submissive to the patriarchal norm. Among the available literature focusing on the bodybuilders’ own lived experiences, most have centred on the submissive aspect of competitions (Boyle, 2005; Johnston, 1996; McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009). These studies have examined the competitors’ submission to and/or internalization of the sexist cultural beliefs around gender roles, and some of the ways in which such notions get reproduced by these women despite their own expression of disapproval of such beliefs.

Boyle (2005), for example, noted a clear tension in the participants’ own depictions of female bodybuilding, in which they appeared to “defy gendered constraints on female muscle and protected them” simultaneously (p. 138). Similarly, McGrath and Chananie-Hill (2009)

found instances of both subversive and normative gender attitudes in some of the comments made by their participants. While some of these bodybuilders expressed stark disapproval of the cultural fear around female muscularity, such attitudes were accompanied by the occasional reversal of their position on this matter, marked by comments advocating self-surveilling practices which would prevent “dewomanization” of oneself or the “crossing gender lines” (McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009, p. 248). Thus, it seems that even those women who claim to use bodybuilding as a tool to resist dominant notions of femininity, do (at times) replicate the same normative discourses in subtle ways. The reproduction of the dominant gender binary despite the (apparent) intention to resist it, makes one suspect – as Bordo (1993) suggested – that the “discipline and normalization of the female body [has been] an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control” (p. 166).

The discussions that have been offered in this chapter so far around hegemonic femininity in competitions prompt another set of questions: is the compliance of the female competitor a voluntary act, resulting from a wilful acceptance of cultural ideals or is it coerced by the current judging criteria? Could it perhaps be a result of desensitization towards or unawareness of the sexist norms of the bodybuilding subculture? A few studies that have taken these questions into consideration (Boyle, 2005; Krane et al., 2004). For example, in her study of six women bodybuilders, Boyle (2005) concluded that although the participants “do not passively accept all of the constraints placed on their bodies... it is clear that they must contend with these values if they wish to be successful athletes.” (p. 146). In this regard, the compliance observed in the competitors should not always be perceived as a voluntary choice. As Bordo (1993) and Krane et al. (2004) have suggested in the past, being feminine for women is not merely a choice with neutral consequences: “if the only women privileged are those who

conform to ideal femininity, and [if a] woman wants to garner social acceptance, then the only “choice” seems to be conformity with the ideal” (Krane et al., 2004, p. 316). Felkar (2012) also points out that “stigmatization, marginalization, sexism, racism and homophobia are [the] punishments for breaking and blurring the boundaries of society’s traditional understanding of the female body” (p.40). If reproducing hegemonic femininity is the only way to gain acceptance, and the consequences of failing to do so are dire, then it is plausible that a considerable portion of the female bodybuilding population complies, not out of free will, but rather because of the pressure to do so or the consequent positive reinforcement. Thus, while the existing judging criteria may not trouble or burden many of the competitors, they may pressure, marginalize or exclude others who do not subscribe to such narrowly defined prescriptions of femininity. More research is needed to investigate this possibility further.

The Focus of This Study

Women’s bodybuilding, and the muscular physique cultivated within the sport, challenges the hegemonic sex/gender binaries by defying the naturalized ‘truths’ which regard the female body as frail or fragile. Muscled female bodies (particularly heavily muscled ones) call into question the traditional ideas of male (physical) superiority and, in doing so, shake the very pillars on which gender norms are based. As such, these bodies may be perceived as threatening by the dominant culture, and in need of regulation. The transgressive potential of these athletes’ muscles are contained in the sport of competitive bodybuilding through the judging criteria which oblige emphasized femininity, as well as with the use of a predominantly sexual mode of representation in the media. This emphasis on femininity, however, not only creates a paradox in the sport, but it may also marginalize or exclude some of the bodybuilders.

While previous research has focused on reproduction of the patriarchal ideologies and practices within the institution of bodybuilding, little (or no) research has been dedicated to the understanding how (or whether) resistance is exerted in this system.

This study aimed to address this gap in research by exploring the experiences of these athletes in efforts to understand the ways in which they negotiate, and in particular resist, the imposition and policing of idealized femininity within competitive bodybuilding. The key research questions were:

1. How do Canadian female bodybuilders negotiate the imposition, expectations and normalization of idealized femininity within current bodybuilding competitions?
2. How do the current judging criteria impact women's bodybuilding and the competitors?

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

“How can one be sure that what returns is precisely what had disappeared? Or that what returns not only appears, but is reappearing?” (Lyotard, 1995, p.92)



This study employed qualitative research methods including in-depth, semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation and fieldwork in attempts to explore the ways in which female bodybuilding competitors perceive and negotiate the normalization (and at times imposition) of hegemonic femininity in Canadian bodybuilding. This chapter will discuss the methods employed in this study, including the theoretical framework underpinning the methodology, some of my personal experiences as a nascent researcher as well as some of the study's strengths and limitations.

Methodology: Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

Nine participants were interviewed in this study in in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview format is one in which “questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but interviewers are allowed the freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions” (Berg, 2004, p. 81). An interview guide was utilized for

all of the interviews (see appendix C). It is generally recognized that in the semi-structured interview format, some questions may be posed in an altered form or order depending on conditions such as the flow of the interview and the development of other appropriate/effective probes or questions based on the responses of the participants during the interview process (Berg, 2004). By posing open-ended questions to the interviewees, I attempted to leave the discussion open for them to respond in ways that they found meaningful, and provided them with the opportunity to direct the dialogue as they saw fit. In so doing, I hope to have attained responses from the participants in a way that, in Hermanowicz's words, "shows the flesh...behind all of the garments they wore in everyday social life" (2002, p. 480).

The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes (most lasted approximately an hour), with questions designed to elicit the participants' views and narratives regarding their perceptions of femininity and muscularity; their experiences within bodybuilding competitions over time; and their beliefs and attitudes on the competition rules and norms with a particular emphasis on the ways in which competitors negotiate and/or resist the current judging criteria. Conducting semi-structured interviews was an appropriate form of data collection for this research project because the aim of the study was to consider the individual's accounts of competitive bodybuilding rules, practices and norms. For this reason, however, the results are not necessarily representative of or generalizable to the rest of the bodybuilding population.

During the interview process, I used an audio-recorder and made some conceptual notes during and after the interviews. Interviews were then transcribed into computer files, with the supplementary notes added to them. Other notes regarding these conversations, as well as ethnographic accounts were also transcribed after our interactions and logged into a database. I have used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

Participant Recruitment and Descriptions

The nine interviewees for this study were chosen using two recruitment methods: purposive sampling at local gyms, and snowball sampling technique whereby existing participants recruit or refer future participants from among their acquaintances. Although recruiting participants who competed within the same federation may have generated data with a higher degree of reliability and comparability, this would have limited the available participants and may have posed a major restriction on the recruitment process. For this reason, as well as the general difficulty in access to the bodybuilding subculture (Roussel & Griffet, 2000), I formed a sample of convenience and did not restrict the recruitment criteria to one exclusive federation or category alone. As a result, the participants who were recruited for this study included competitors from the following federations: The IFBB (International Federation of Bodybuilders); the WBFF (World Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation); OPA (Ontario Physique Association); UFE (Ultimate Fitness Events); IDFA (International Drug-Free Athletics); and Fitness Star.

This project was primarily concerned with an active engagement in bodybuilding (in other words, the deliberate act of developing muscle) rather than with the size and amount of muscle that each participant was able to develop. Consequently, competitors who were recruited possessed different levels of muscularity, had competed within different competition categories, and thus had acquired qualitatively different competition experiences. Out of the nine competitors who were recruited, four had competed in the Bikini category alone (KM, SP, LO, SK); two had competed in both the Bikini and the Figure categories (TD and CDB); AJ had competed only as a Figure competitor; CD had competed in both Figure and Physique; and BB

had been a former natural bodybuilding competitor, as well as a Bikini judge. In addition, these participants differed in the extent of their competitive experience – for example, their competitive status (former vs. current), the number of times they had competed, the competitive options available to them, etc.

Participant Observation and Ethnographic Field Work

I attended two bodybuilding-related events during the course of this research project: the Toronto Pro SuperShow as well as a stage presence workshop. The first event, which took place in Toronto in May 2013, is a widely-promoted, annual bodybuilding event in which a few IFBB competitions (among other things) are hosted. The space at the venue of the show itself is rented to various bodybuilding-related companies, and is filled with a large number of booths. On the day of the event, I had the chance to visit each booth and speak with some of the athletes (both male and female) that were present. The majority of these athletes – who were often bodybuilding competitors themselves – had been endorsed to represent the company and promote the product being sold (often bodybuilding supplements, gear and equipment). At this event, I also had the opportunity to watch two IFBB competition shows (Figure and Bikini categories) and collect ethnographic field notes. This event helped me to gain first-hand exposure to the bodybuilding community and become familiarized with the subculture.

In addition to the Toronto Pro SuperShow, I also attended a stage presence workshop led by a rather successful former WBFF Fitness competitor and judge. This workshop, which lasted about six hours, covered information on numerous aspects of bodybuilding competitions, some of which included the following: how to physically prepare for the competition (i.e., diet and exercise tips); instructions on how to prepare one's appearance (hair, makeup, nails); instructions

on tanning; suggestions on the colour, pattern and style of competition suit and shoes; the role/importance of other aspects of ‘feminine’ beauty and appearance, and how to achieve these; insight on the ways in which the judges are instructed to evaluate the competitors; and detailed instructions on the posing routine and stage presence (for both the Bikini and Figure categories in IFBB, and the Fitness category in the WBFF). The final three hours of the workshop were spent practicing the different poses, walking and gestures. Attending this workshop provided insight into the official, as well as the unofficial yet practiced, rules of the competitions. Learning about these expectations in competition was an important aspect of the participant observation and fieldwork employed in this research.

Methodology: Data Analysis

Grounded Theory

As informed by a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the interviews were transcribed and coded into initial, axial and selective codes. The constant comparative method was used to code and analyze data in order to develop concepts (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Once categories were established, they were combined to discern common themes. Those themes were then related back to the original research questions in order to develop an emerging coding scheme from the data. In building and using theory, I tried to remain cognizant of the two things Maxwell (1996) cautioned against: “There are two main ways in which qualitative researchers often fail to make good use of theory...the first fails to explicitly apply or develop any analytic abstractions or theoretical framework for the study...the second type has the opposite problem: it imposes theory on the study” (p.36). I attempted to avoid these pitfalls. I first engaged in discussions with the female bodybuilders around their experiences and

perceptions of the bodybuilding sub-culture, and once the data on these questions was collected, I was able to return to and apply theoretical discussions to their lived experiences. It must be emphasized that this research project represented a small case study and as such (despite having achieved thematic saturation) the findings may not be generalizable beyond the context of the group of individuals examined.

My analysis of the data collected was informed by feminist deconstructions of sex, gender and sexuality in sport (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009) as well as by Foucauldian understandings of discipline/surveillance and technologies of the self (cf., Rabinow & Rose, 2003). As it shall become evident in Chapters 4 and 5, these theoretical frameworks were appropriate for this project given that a primary focus was the production, reproduction and resistance of emphasized femininity in bodybuilding by women athletes, in addition to the sport governing body's attempts to police female muscularity and produce docile female bodies through competition criteria.

Ethics Approval and Confidentiality

This research was conducted with the permission of and according to the policies set out under the York University Graduate Student Human Participants Research Protocol and York University Human Participants Research Committee (HPRC). As such this research project complied with required ethics, confidentiality, and informed consent procedures as per York University guidelines.

Participants were informed at the onset of the interview, both verbally and through the Informed Consent form (see Appendix B), that their participation in this project was completely voluntary and confidential. Participants were informed of all confidentiality provisions and the

nature of the research to the fullest extent possible, only in so far as it did not jeopardize the confidentiality extended to any other research participant. All information, including field notes, collected in the research process was used in confidence. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of research participants. Specific references that may have identified participants, specific situations or locations were altered. Transcripts were made available to participants, though none wished to view them for the purposes of verifying the interview record. Transcripts and recordings of the interviews are saved on the researcher's personal computer in password-secured documents, and these documents are only accessible by the researcher, and available only to her supervisor and herself.

Methodological Strengths and Limitations

There are a number of sociocultural studies done on women's competitive bodybuilding (e.g., Boyle, 2005; St. Martin & Gavey, 1996; Wesley, 2001), the primary focus of which has been the category Bodybuilding. The more recent categories, as a result, have not gained adequate attention. This study is one of the first to explore the newly-formed category of Bikini, and the ways in which female competitors perceive and experience the requirements and normative practices distinctive to this category. The nine women whose narratives were examined in this study had had various competitive experiences (for example, they had competed within different competition categories or federations); thus there was a fair amount of variability within the study sample, in that the participants' experiences may have been qualitatively different. Furthermore, the study constituted a small sample size which may have been a limitation. However, the responses offered by the nine participants were enough to reach thematic saturation for this study.

Methodological Experience

Often there is a personal reason that motivates one to investigate a particular research area. For the remainder of this chapter, I will reflect on my own experiences in an effort to illuminate my personal reasons for becoming interested in this topic. In doing so, I may be able to shed light on how this research affected me and how my perspectives consequently shaped the study.

The “Insider” Factor

My specific interest in bodybuilding emerged about three years ago, although I have almost always been a weight-trainer and an athlete. For this reason, at numerous points during the study, I found myself closely identifying with the narratives my participants offered to me. For example, although I have never participated in a bodybuilding competition, I do consider myself a “serious” weightlifter and perhaps even a bodybuilder. I train, both cardio and weightlifting, on a daily basis with focused attention towards increasing my muscle mass and decreasing body fat much like most bodybuilders do (as opposed to, for instance, functional strength or other forms of training). I engage in this form of training because, like most bodybuilders (and indeed as all of my participants, discussed in Chapter 4), I am attracted to muscular visibility in women and personally desire to increase my muscular definition and size. Another example of my personal connection to my participants’ experiences is in terms of diet and its significance – I pay close attention to my diet and ‘eat like a bodybuilder’ (five to six small meals per day, eating every two to three hours, and adherence to a controlled balance of vegetables, protein sources, some carbohydrates, and little fat in most meals). Almost all of my

participants stated that they experienced a ‘struggle with food,’ and this perception resonated with me; it is a familiar mentality towards food. Lastly, like many bodybuilders, I have experience training clients and providing them with nutritional guidance. I have had personal training experience at two different gyms, as well as training clients at home. Therefore, not only have I had experience with bodybuilding as a student and a teacher, but it has been a significant preoccupation in my life, particularly during the past three years. Furthermore, during these three years, I have become interested and involved in following different bodybuilding events, news and recognized athletes in the online media.

As such, I feel that I have, to some extent, gained an ‘insider’ status to the world of bodybuilding, and that my views and perceptions of bodybuilding have gradually undergone some changes as a result. Although I have always had some interest in the ‘muscular look’ on a woman, I now know that I look at (and see and evaluate) bodies differently: in the process of interviewing my participants, I felt propelled to consider my own responses to some of the very interview questions I was asking of my participants. One of the questions I asked of my participants was to describe their idea or image of the ideal female body. My own answer to this question, I was amused to learn, was strikingly different from what it would have been only two years ago. To give an example, I now consider a Figure competitor’s body (in other words, a broad back, wide and round shoulders, and a small waist) attractive; this certainly was not the case some years ago. Whereas I found ‘toned muscularity’ appealing before, I now have a new appreciation for visible (and perhaps ‘excessive’) muscularity and striation. My appreciation for bodybuilding also extends to some of the other bodily alterations that are induced by it. What I mean by this, for example, is the increased visibility of one’s veins, particularly after a training session (often referred to as ‘the pump’). This is another change in my perception that came

about as a result of my interest in and exposure to the bodybuilding ‘world’. While these changes allowed me to understand the views of my participants better, they also granted me an insider status which may have proved problematic to my position as a researcher.

Shutting Off Personal Views

I entered this research process with the view that a researcher must remain neutral to her study participants and research topic; I believed that neutrality was possible. The changes that I have noticed in my perceptions of bodybuilding and muscularity, as noted above, may have placed a barrier to the neutrality that I, as a researcher, attempted to maintain during the research process. I (thought I) was cognizant of this potential drawback of my insider status, and tried to prevent my personal convictions from influencing my observations, assessments and analysis of the descriptions I was offered. Nevertheless, during the course of the study I came to realize that absolute objectivity was not possible, particularly when the views that were being offered by the participants were in conflict with my own. This brings me to another point which requires emphasis here.

As a female weightlifter, I personally view bodybuilding as an empowering activity for women; it is something that I have experienced at an individual level. This perspective was also discussed in Chapter 2, where the empowering potential of bodybuilding for women was mentioned within some of the existing literature. It is my personal belief, however, that bodybuilding competitions should promote (or at the very least allow for) this empowering aspect of weightlifting to be manifested. It is also my personal judgement that the Bikini category in particular diminishes this potential by focusing the ‘spotlight’ on women’s sexuality rather than their accomplishments in strength and athleticism. For this reason, I had – without

necessarily intending to – anticipated the women in my study to express outrage over the criteria, and to vocalize this protest clearly and solemnly.

As a feminist researcher, I was outraged by the requirements of the Bikini competitions, while my participants seemed tolerant of the current state of affairs. Thus, as an interviewer, I often found my beliefs in conflict with the responses I was being offered by my participants. If they identified an issue in competitions with which they disagreed, I focused on that point and pressed them on it in order to find out how unpleasant they found the issue. And it was disappointing for me to see that none of them were terribly bothered or offended (to the extent that I was) by the competition rules. However, I tried to contain my sentiments during the interviews, as I wanted my participants to develop and elaborate on their narratives without any interference. Still, at times, I felt somewhat disingenuous and even insincere for not exposing my true views to my participants. How much of myself I was able to disclose to these women, and how much needed to remain concealed, occasionally proved to be a tricky negotiation, and I allowed my personal judgement to guide me through the process.

During the analysis phase of this research, I had some additional struggles with the data I had gathered. Once again, because of the absence of outrage that I had anticipated (and perhaps subliminally hoped for), the analysis that I conducted portrayed a rather grim and negative picture of my participants. This was pointed out to me by my supervisor, who also reminded me that hegemonic norms operate successfully because of the naturalization of the status quo. In other words, my analysis and the negative light in which I had depicted the responses of my participants was holding these women responsible for the adoption of the status quo, when in fact much more complex processes were at play. This was a helpful reminder from my supervisor (though, admittedly, it had to be made more than once), because it pointed out that, among other

things, I was contradicting one of my own beliefs – namely that the process of normalization, rather than the individual choices influenced by normalization, should be problematized.

Reflecting on this, I also recognize that my focus on the agent rather than the structure of society contradicted my own personal ideologies as well. In this sense, I realized that I was also adopting a normalized view, namely that the individual must be held responsible over the structure. If one does not acknowledge the way in which social ideologies and practices are normalized and naturalized, and instead directs the responsibility onto the individual (as I did, to some extent, in my initial analysis) the issue inevitably becomes over-simplified and misconstrued.

Chapter Conclusion

Our current understandings of the competitive experiences and perceptions of female bodybuilders seem to be incomplete. The gap in this research is especially evident in the existing literature on the new bodybuilding categories of Figure and particularly Bikini, whose emphasis on display of hegemonic femininity is greater than other categories. This study aims to understand the way in which the judging criteria in bodybuilding competitions are perceived and negotiated among female competitors. The main research question is, how do Canadian female bodybuilders negotiate and, in particular, resist current judging criteria in Canadian competitive bodybuilding?

The remaining chapters of the thesis will examine and discuss the patterns that were detected in the responses of the participants, as well as some of their implications. Chapter 4 will discuss the views and experiences of the participants outside of competitions, with particular focus on their perceptions of female muscularity. Chapter 5 will consider the responses and

perceptions on competition rules, norms and expectations. The results and analyses offered in these two chapters will be summarized in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

CHAPTER 4

The Personal Aspect: Motivations and Perceptions

“I like the soft muscle look. But it’s still soft where it’s not like a guy with all the veins popping out.” (SK, participant)



Reasons for Participation

This chapter will examine study participants’ perceptions of and discourses around femininity and muscularity in their everyday lives. In particular, the chapter focuses on the participants’ constructions of such beliefs *outside* of the context of bodybuilding competitions. The chapter will first consider some of the common internal and external motivations or incentives for bodybuilding among the participants. These incentives will be outlined and their potential impact on the female bodybuilders’ perceptions of femininity will be explained. The chapter will then delve into a more detailed exploration of the ways in which the participants conceptualize femininity and muscularity. Finally, the chapter will examine the link between participants’ self perceptions of desirable female embodiment and bodily surveillance and embodiment and surveillance as understood by others.

The questions of what motivates some women to engage in a non-conventional activity, such as bodybuilding, and to create bodies that are considered by many as unfeminine (or, in some cases, deviant) inform and impact the research questions in this study. This section explores participants’ internal motivations to bodybuild while the next section examines the

external factors that provided the participants with incentives to participate in bodybuilding (and competitions). These factors may help contextualize women's negotiation with competition conditions or the current evaluation criteria employed in competitive bodybuilding, and provide some insight into their reasons for competing.

Internal Incentives

Each participant in this study shared her personal story of why and how she first became involved in bodybuilding and later in bodybuilding competitions. A central and recurrent theme around participation in bodybuilding was the sense of empowerment that it often generated. This sense of empowerment was identified and stressed by every single participant in this study as a crucial reason for their initial engagement with and continued involvement in weightlifting. While participants' definition of empowerment varied – some of the participants regarded empowerment as a way to increase one's mental capacity and confidence, while others conceptualized it as improvements made to one's physical strength and independence – the consensus among participants was that the practice of bodybuilding entailed both of these aspects simultaneously. LO stated:

For me [bodybuilding] meant being strong, and not giving up and giving it your all, and even when you're tired being dedicated and determined and finding that fire within you and working hard and being disciplined at home, and when you're out with your diet. It was such hard work and I felt empowered. It was an empowering experience, I felt strong. I felt inner strength as well as outer strength... being able to put my body through what I put it through and still stay motivated at the same time.

What LO seems to emphasize in this quote is what all of the women in the study deemed as valuable, significant and appealing about bodybuilding: the personal mental and physical challenges it presented and the feeling of empowerment that was derived as a result of overcoming these challenges.

In SP's view, for example, the physical development and independence produced through bodybuilding was the most empowering factor:

It's about looking strong, looking fit. Having some definition. Having some sense of, you know, you don't need a guy to lift those grocery bags for you cause you have the strength yourself. I think it's related to independence. I really enjoy having enough personal strength more than anything.

The same perspective was echoed by AJ, who also placed emphasis on the physical aspect of bodybuilding as a reason for feeling empowered:

[Bodybuilding] makes me feel strong, and it makes me feel like I can keep up with the boys. 'Cause if I'm somewhere where something needs to be moved, or I have to carry a heavy grocery bag, or something I have to carry out of the store, I don't need someone to help me. I can do it, I can be independent. Yeah it is very empowering that way, absolutely.

While most participants, like AJ, seemed to greatly appreciate and value the physical enhancements that lifting heavy weights made to their bodies, other comments focused more on the gains in mental capacity. BB said:

I have a confidence now that I would have never had – ever. You push yourself beyond your mental limits and all of a sudden it breaks mental barriers and for the first time in your life you think, holy shit! All this stuff is in my head! I can do anything I put my mind to.

CD considered the primary benefit of bodybuilding to be the boost it gives to one's confidence and mental power:

[Bodybuilding] definitely builds confidence. Makes you believe in yourself and it made me believe that I could achieve anything I want if I want it bad enough. You know, against all odds, no matter who said I couldn't do it. I was like "yeah I can and I will." It's really about increasing mental strength, and mental power, and mental belief.

In CD's view, bodybuilding itself is such a demanding endeavour (both physically and mentally), that engaging in it on a regular basis – and succeeding to transform one's body – will undoubtedly boost one's sense of self-trust and confidence. In identifying empowerment as a significant reason for bodybuilding, CD also went on to mention this as a reason for becoming involved in competitions:

That's the beauty of this sport. The fact that if you could do something like this, there's really not a whole lot you can't do, right? I owe who I've become and the strength I've acquired over the years to this world, fitness, health, competing [brief pause], predominantly competing.

Being competitive specifically for CD was the factor that created the drive and the resulting sense of accomplishment; a set competition date acted as a measure by which the journey of strength training, dieting and bodily transformation became concretized, measurable and therefore accomplishable. This interpretation of the role of bodybuilding competitions was also expressed by AJ: "I entered the competition to give myself a physical end goal. Can I get my body to the best shape in this certain amount of weeks and then present it on stage." As she further explained, although getting to competition day successfully was the goal, for her, the journey that it took to get there seemed to be the more appealing and important aspect:

I think one thing that draws anyone to fitness is to be able to set a goal and finish it too. The competition at the end is really just the icing on the cake. Being able to accomplish something is the part of the draw towards it. It's doing something new, something outside of one's comfort level.

The same sentiments about the significance of the journey towards competition day were reiterated by CDB:

Because of the sport itself – the journey to the stage – I gained so much self-motivation. It turned me into a pretty strong person that I was on a goal, I was able to achieve it and there was nothing that could stop me. You work so hard, you know there's a final day, you know, I have so many weeks left to stand on stage. So I guess it drives you more to get there. For me it was to stand on stage. If I say I'm gonna do it – I'm gonna do it. There's nothing that's going to stop me, you know, I find that that competition day is the gold.

Hence, for participants, competition day as the final point on their training journey seemed to be an important motivator which concretized the goal of the fitness challenge. However, despite the role competitions played in contextualizing the fitness journey, bodybuilding (i.e., the practice of lifting weights on a daily basis) was consistently identified as the real root of empowerment. LO articulated:

Bodybuilding is empowering. Putting your body through a lot of hard work and seeing results. That's what it [i.e. competitions] should be about. No matter Bikini, Figure, Fitness, Bodybuilding, whatever. The fact that you're at a gym and committing to so much time there and lifting weight and dropping your body fat. You should be presenting your body [in competitions] in that way, rather than a sexual way.

LO's words capture a commonly held sentiment among participants that competitions are – and should be – about physical fitness and that the internal incentives – chiefly a sense of inner and

outer strength and empowerment – ought to be the primary focus of the competitions as well (this concept will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6). This is an important distinction worth stressing here as it frames the discussions around compulsory femininity in the following chapters. The challenge and accomplishments derived from bodybuilding and competitions seemed to be a major and important source of pleasure for the participants which, in turn, provided them with motivation to continue bodybuilding. There were external incentives which inspired competitors to stay involved in bodybuilding. These incentives will be discussed in the next section.

External Factors

The support and encouragement of others was a central source of external motivation for continued involvement in bodybuilding among the participants. The personal sense of accomplishment that the participants unanimously felt from engaging in bodybuilding, as noted above, was often enhanced with a sense of admiration from one's social circle. SP explained the joy of receiving such positive feedback in the following way:

Usually I get great feedback. Usually it's "wow! It's amazing you can do that or that you have the time to do that" and "oh you look great, I can't believe you look that good at your age or after having kids." That feels good when people make comments like that.

SP considered social support to be a positive by-product of bodybuilding. Other participants also often referred to the compliments they received from others, usually family or friends, as positive reinforcements:

It definitely sets me apart from the average. [People say] “oh that’s great you can do that and fit it in your day.” Sometimes people are impressed...but I definitely get respect. That’s for sure. For being able to handle myself. Most people who know me, or even those who have just met me, they wouldn’t underestimate my ability to do something. So you definitely get respect that way. (AJ)

Being recognized for one’s dedication and discipline was perceived as a positive external factor by AJ. Of all the factors she identified, however, the most important was receiving respect from others for her accomplishments. She was not alone in this as TD was another participant who pointed to respect from others as an influential motivator:

You’re part of a small percentage that’s doing [bodybuilding]. I feel like people respect you. They kinda look up to you and it feels good. I mean I post pictures of myself after my shows and the amount of compliments that you get... people do look up to you.

To have the capacity to inspire others, as well as being looked up to and admired, were factors which TD found meaningful. Others – like CD and LO – seemed to find respect or recognition beneficial and advantageous in other ways. CD, for example, agreed that the recognition gained through bodybuilding was positive; she also appreciated the opportunity to extend this

recognition beyond one's immediate social circle. She believed that the competitions provided the outlet for this:

[Competitions] are also a way to promote yourself as well – inadvertently. Because your name gets put out on the internet. Helps you put a name out there for yourself, which is kind of cool. So it's like free promotion just because you did something that is rare. And also growing in terms of popularity.

Self-promotion, as CD explains here, can be an indirect consequence of competitions which may provide additional incentive for these athletes to bodybuild, and particularly, to pursue their bodybuilding aspirations competitively. Competitions grant a competitor the opportunity to build a (positive) reputation and to expand this recognition beyond one's immediate social circle to broader audiences. In addition, this "growth in popularity" can offer competitors the opportunity for potential business advancements and financial success. LO elaborated on this potential of competitions further:

One of the big positives is that the world sees it. When you become a personal trainer, to be able to say I made it to the national level, you know I received my pro card, people look up to you and they actually believe that you're that much of a better trainer because you competed. So there's a status associated with it.

Competitions can be advantageous to one's career growth in the fitness industry. Indeed, seven of the nine participants in this study had careers and jobs related to this industry. As LO pointed

out, a bodybuilder can make substantial career advancements as a personal trainer if she is successful (or merely experienced) as a competitor. Against this backdrop, competing becomes more than just a fun activity or a personal challenge; participation in competitions (and particularly winning or scoring high) becomes a goal for which sacrifices are justified and, as will be discussed below, so are compromises.

This fitness career advantage can also take the form of endorsements and contracts by other companies and magazines. For SK, her vision of competitions seems to be framed by the possibility of access to other fitness avenues/opportunities. Indeed, she explicitly identified impressing the endorsers as an important factor that she took into consideration when entering and preparing for a show:

People can still pick you up for endorsements for magazines and whatever, and they want you to sell their brand and represent the image that they're trying to portray. Your presence is what they want when they have you out there selling their supplements or whatever they're looking for. It's all about what they're trying to brand, what they're trying to sell, what's going to bring them more money, right? Like what's going to sell their product?

In addition to endorsements, SK also discussed the importance of pleasing the judges. This is another factor which impacts or may help further one's fitness career. Therefore, impressing the judges can be viewed as a useful tactic to obtain a higher score in competition, gain recognition and thus advance one's career. In SK's view, it was also important for a competitor to create an appearance (based on one's image, accessories and gestures) that would meet the *judges'*

preferences and win their favouritism: “The way you walk, the way you carry yourself on stage [is important]. It all depends on who’s judging you, what they’re looking for, what they find attractive. It’s whatever the judges want to see and what they’d like to see.” Again, the implied suggestion in this comment is for the competitors to construct their image – in addition to their physiques – in a way that would impress the judges and the endorsers. Interestingly enough, the question of *why* the construction and presentation of one’s appearance *should* be subject to assessment in a fitness competition did not seem to be considered. Thus, there seemed to be an absence of resistance to the judging criteria, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

To recap, competing serves as a big incentive for many bodybuilding competitors; among other things, competitions are valued because of their potential to lead to various other opportunities. In this way, competitions become more than just fun, and for those who compete a lot more may be at stake. Compliance with the competition criteria, in this sense, becomes crucially important.

Negotiating Dominant and Alternative Discourses around Female Muscularity

While it is important that we recognize participants’ internal and external motivations for participation, in order to understand competitors’ negotiation of idealized femininity in bodybuilding competitions, it is necessary to explore their constructions and conceptualizations of muscularity and femininity. This section will examine participants’ perceptions of femininity and muscularity, as well as the role the participants’ social environments (i.e., surveillance and interactions with others) tend to play on these constructions.

As women who actively participate in bodybuilding and in bodybuilding competitions, and who volunteered to participate in this study, it should come as little surprise that muscularity

among the study participants was generally regarded in a positive light. The participants' perspectives supported research noted in Chapter 2 that identified shifts in contemporary cultural perceptions of femininity to include moderate levels of muscularity (commonly referred to as "toned" or "soft muscularity") for women (Dworkin, 2001). However, these studies acknowledge that there still exists a 'glass ceiling' for muscularity in women, and the ideals expressed in this study supported this proposition. That said, the acceptance of and positive regard for women's muscularity did vary in degree from one participant to the next and none of the participants welcomed unrestrained muscularity in women. All of the participants (including those competing in the more muscular categories such as Physique and Bodybuilding) did express opposition to 'excessive' muscularity in women.

For example, SP at first described muscular definition and visibility, "not just being toned", as a desirable physical feature in women. But she later condemned "muscularity to the point of masculinity". For her, there seemed to exist a line after which femininity can turn into masculinity if one's muscularity is not effectively managed and softened: "I wouldn't wanna build muscles to the point of looking masculine. That's not attractive to me. I think that there is a fine line between building too much muscle and looking masculine and keeping that feminine look." The second part of SP's quote is revealing of her internalization of the doctrine that muscularity *is* masculinity, and therefore inherently incompatible with femininity. In other words, in a smaller and less visible form, muscularity can be acceptable or even seen as an asset on a woman's body, but its hyper-visibility is deemed as masculinizing. SP's perceptions and beliefs of muscularity in women, in this sense, do challenge traditional views of female corporeality, but not at its fundamental roots.

The same concerns were voiced by CD who, despite allowing for more flexible negotiations around femininity and what counts as acceptable muscularity for women, clearly saw an essential difference between men and women and how much muscle they could (or should) build:

I like to see muscular development on a woman. I'd like to see nice arms, nice glutes. I really like to see muscular legs that are toned... but I mean, preserving the curves, the chest. Again, if you can build it naturally, chances are you'll preserve your femininity. Introducing a male hormone into your body is obviously going to make you look more manly. Now you're losing what you're initially supposed to be and women are not designed to be men. We're designed to be women. So you're now definitely going to risk losing what makes a woman a woman.

As this quote demonstrates, CD's stance on this matter was constrained by the idea that women and men are *designed* to be different and that the preservation of such a difference is crucial. She maintained that femininity is a trait that has biological and natural roots, and gaining muscle through unnatural means will lead to loss of femininity. This type of discourse, which considers male/female physical differences as biologically constructed, can serve as a form of justification for the difference in treatment and requirements for male and female categories in bodybuilding competitions. Against this backdrop, gender appearances (as well as the performances of femininity and muscularity) are viewed as categorically distinct and the assessment of men and women (particularly in bodybuilding competitions) on these bases as reasonable and warranted.

CD's utilization of this concept, then, suggests her internalization of the myth that the hegemonic appearances of femininity are natural and therefore universal among all women.

CD's application of biological determinism to femininity was notable, given the fact that her views of appropriate muscularity were fairly different from the rest of the group and vastly different from cultural beliefs. The gap between her preferences for muscularity and the conventional view on femininity was made even more discernible when she spoke of women who used unnatural methods such as drugs to achieve greater muscularity:

I've never been one to judge anybody, because I've been judged my whole life. So if it makes you happy to look that way, and when I say that way I mean super muscular and you're abusing steroids to achieve this muscular look that females naturally can't achieve... but if that's what makes you happy and you in your eyes see that as attractive and you're happy with that, you like that then all the power to you. It takes a lot of work to look that way. And so I respect the amount of time they invest – doesn't matter if they're doing drugs or not. At the end of the day they're not looking that way because they just popped pill. They're looking that way because they worked they ass off.

CD disliked being judged on her muscularity and as a result, tried to refrain from judging other (more muscular) women. What is significant in this quote, once again, is her reproduction of the standard narrative of 'natural femininity' given the fact that she seems comfortable with the idea of women pushing the limits of their muscular capacity to the fullest extent. Indeed CD's views

of femininity were strikingly unconventional, in that she later regarded visible muscular development on the female body as a “better representation of womanhood”:

Do I think it looks more manly? Yeah. Do I find it very attractive? No. Do I find what I do attractive? Yeah. In fact I find it to be more representative of what I believe a female should be because I think women really need to find their strength and recognize how strong we are as women. But again, people are gonna think that I’m manly, because I look bigger than most women, and that’s fine. But it’s in my skin, I feel good and I like it.

As a result of having been subject to negative comments herself, CD seemed sympathetic towards those in the same predicament. Her perceptions of where the boundaries of muscularity should lie for women, as the quotes above indicate, seemed to be much more flexible and permitting compared to the rest of the participants. However, CD’s view of the *look* of this category was very similar to other participants’ in that she rejected the Bodybuilding category as feminine or appealing. Others, like KM, were not as liberal on this topic, or accepting of the muscularity level of female Bodybuilding competitors:

I think muscle is great... But should women have the muscle that we see the heavy-duty Bodybuilders or Figure competitors have? By no means no. like, like it’s *extreme* [emphasis added by participant]. Of course women aren’t supposed to be like that but they look like that because of the abuse of a lot of drugs. But it’s not

natural. It's gotten that way through artificial ways, there's no real way to get around it.

KM implies that 'natural' femininity has a specific look for which the Bodybuilding or Figure competitors do not qualify. Her choice to include the Figure look in the 'unnatural' category is interesting because it is commonly believed within the bodybuilding community that achieving the muscularity of a Figure competitor through natural means is possible and quite realistic; indeed a great number of, if not most, well-known professional Figure competitors claim to have achieved their muscularity naturally. KM's statement also, once again, presupposes that femininity has a universal look and that all women are "supposed to" fit this image.

The idea that hegemonic femininity is a universal female trait or one that is sought and desired by all women was reiterated by other participants in the study as well. SK, for example, responded with the following quote when asked about the reason why the male and female mandatory competition poses differ: "So obviously the guys wanna be bigger right? Whereas the girls are trying to get that very nice kinda X [referring to the hourglass shape]. So they want the shoulders to be the biggest, the waist to be small and the hips to be big again." While the description of the ideal feminine form diverges somewhat from conventional or idealized femininity (e.g., big shoulders seen as desirable), this quote nevertheless is reproductive of hegemonic norms in its core assumption: that men "obviously" desire to be bigger, implying that females naturally do not. Such a supposition – that women do not desire to be big, or at least not as big as 'the guys' – is even more questionable given that this assumption is being attached to female *bodybuilders*: women who deliberately enter a non-traditional physical activity where 'bigness' is indeed celebrated.

KM also seemed to believe that women ‘normally’ do not desire (what she considered) “extreme” muscularity. Although she spoke favourably of muscled women (“I’m not into women being all soft and dainty and... no. That’s not what I think is feminine. I think muscle is great. Muscle in general is fantastic. I think women should have muscle to give them shape”), she didn’t believe women would freely seek or desire ‘excessive’ muscularity. She stated: “I think women are forced to be masculine in bodybuilding categories to come to par with men, in order to be seen as bodybuilders.”

The term ‘forced’ is an interesting choice of word by KM in this statement. Similar to SK’s comment, this word implies that women (including Figure competitors) do not wish to be *so* muscular, or in KM’s view, masculine; this desire, in other words, is seen as deviant or unnatural. The statement also implies that when a woman does become so muscular, there must be another explanation – other than personal desire – for it. But this clearly is not true of all women, as there were a few examples in this study alone who confessed to being attracted to (and actively seeking) this level of muscularity.

Overall, the two statements convey a sense of ambivalence. The first statement is a non-traditional view of femininity and the second is a reproduction of dominant notions that posit muscularity as a naturally masculine trait. Later, KM offered her description of femininity, in which elements of hegemonic femininity were even more discernible:

What does femininity mean? Okay is it a bodybuilder? No. Is it a woman with muscle? Sure why not, not a problem. Longer hair, nice long nails, you know, groomed and nice. But I think femininity is a package. It comes from inside, it comes from realizing you’re a woman and just by realizing your strength and being able to

be hard at times and also being soft. I think that's the thing about femininity. Being able to be softer.

Here KM explicitly names traits that have been traditionally associated with femininity: long hair, long nails and being soft. Once again though, the juxtaposition of these hegemonic traits with the non-traditional 'hardness' and muscularity that she also views favourably created an ambiguously unconventional view.

One way of interpreting this ambivalence is by considering the conflicting natures of a competitor's immediate environment and the broader culture. The set of physical characteristics celebrated by the bodybuilding subculture are in (at times sharp) contrast with the femininity standards of the broader culture (and the ones encouraged by one's social circle). Despite the recent growth in social acceptability of light muscularity in women (Dworkin, 2001), it is still clear that "sizeably muscular bodybuilding physiques transgress the normative features of fit-looking or athletically muscular/toned bodies" (Monaghan, 2001, p. 333). Dworkin (2001) further suggests that the "increasing size of the female bodybuilder is only [socially] acceptable once 'tamed' by beauty" (p. 335). The interaction (and clash) between the ideals of the bodybuilding subculture and the social values/pressures can create an internal conflict. This conflict, in turn, can manifest itself in inconsistent and ambivalent messages around muscularity, which occasionally may favour the nonconventional ideals of the bodybuilding subculture, and at other times reproduce hegemonic ideals.

The quotes offered in this section demonstrate that non-traditional as the views and characterizations of femininity assigned by the women in this study may be, they did ultimately find (too much) muscularity to be incompatible with or unnatural for femininity. Such a view

supports the gender binary which posits muscularity (and the set of characteristics it represents such as strength, autonomy, toughness, capability, etc.) as the exclusive male domain for which the female physique is unsuitable. As Aoki (1996) asserts, a female bodybuilder is “*something like a man... she looks like a woman who fails to look like a man who fails to look like a woman*” (pp. 61-64; emphasis in original). In this way, the colonization of the muscular body is deemed as deviant. Subscription to this idea, then, may prompt the need for surveillance. Surveillance can be conducted by others (who remind and encourage one to police oneself and remain within the acceptable, conventional gender boundaries) or by the self. The next two subsections will examine the influence of surveillance on the athletes’ behaviours and perceptions.

Surveillance

Surveillance by Others

The statements made by some of the participants indicated that they were surveilled for their muscularity. This type of surveillance (cf., Foucault, 1977) included remarks and cues by others who encouraged the bodybuilder to inspect her bodily transformations and to remain compliant with hegemonic cultural norms. Some of the participants (particularly those who had competed in ‘bigger’ categories, including AJ, BB and TD) had experienced this type of surveillance first hand. AJ’s physical progress and transformation, for example, was inspected by her family in the following way: “When I first started, I did run into a little bit of trouble with my family. They would say things like, ‘but don’t get too big, that’s not attractive’”. This quote indicates that deviation from the hegemonic norm can evoke anxiety in close relatives and friends, who in turn begin to scrutinize the physical changes in the bodybuilder and attempt to

steer her away from what is perceived as excessive muscularity. Meanwhile during this process a narrow, limited and constricting definition of femininity becomes (re)produced, the emphasis of which by others can promote its internalization by the bodybuilder herself.

BB and TD recalled similar encounters with others who warned them not to deviate too much from the norm. The people in these social interactions, however, seemed to be more vocal and less inhibited in expressing their disdain towards the participants' muscularity. BB noted: "So people were very turned off. My family at first was like, 'what are you eating? Dog food again?' They were pretty unsupportive. Total strangers would be like, 'ew she looks like a guy, are you a guy or a girl?'" TD recounted:

I've had some negative feedback where certain people would say, you know, 'you're looking manly or you're looking too strong for a woman' ...[they would say about a couple of girls I train with] 'where is she hiding a certain body part or how manly does she wanna be'?

Conversely, the participants who were not heavily muscled (all of whom were Bikini competitors, including LO, SP, KM, SK) had not experienced the same degree of reaction or surveillance by others first hand or to the same extent as BB or TD. Still, some of them explained that they had witnessed other women bodybuilders be negatively judged by others. The following quote by SP exemplifies the extent to which the general population can be intolerant (or perhaps threatened by) muscularity in women:

I've heard negative comments about people who are very muscular, like Figure competitors. I've heard a lot of negative feedback from men and women alike, that no that's not feminine, that doesn't look right. Women who have muscle like that, that it feels unnatural.

In addition to the surveillance of muscularity in women, these quotes highlight two other points which were discussed earlier in this chapter: first, the unquestioned readiness with which many accept the assumption that there is something unnatural and suspiciously wrong with heavily muscled women; and second, the degree to which such bodies are deemed and stigmatized as deviant. Hence, being immersed in a culture where a muscular female body is considered deviant, and where deviance is discriminated against, places considerable pressure on a bodybuilder to manage and normalize herself. Furthermore, being the target of various remarks by others who encourage such policing and reconstruction of one's body, can promote engagement in panoptic surveillance of the self (Foucault, 1977).

Self-Surveillance

Some of the participants internalized the standards of femininity/appropriate muscularity to the extent of having these cultural codes govern their views and treatment of their own bodies. These women indeed expressed desire to avoid excessive muscularity and, not surprisingly, this created a fair amount of ambivalence in their depiction of the type of body that was acceptable or desirable for women.

BB was one such participant. She had previously indicated that as a judge, she evaluates competitors based on their feminine appearance. As she went on to elaborate on this, it became

apparent that she not only felt such criteria were fair, but also considered them so important that they could be a reflection of one's self-respect: "If you're going on stage in front of 500 people I think you should have some self-respect and do your hair and make-up." This assertion is loaded with a number of messages. The rather strong words of the statement indicate BB's conviction that a culturally appropriate appearance is necessary on stage. Moreover, in an implicit way, this statement seems to recommend self-surveillance: Embedded in the suggestion that failure to comply with hegemonic norms is indicative of one's lack of self-respect, is the recommendation for compliance with the norms (which can be ensured through self-surveillance). Against this backdrop, the statement can be argued to moralize the acts of compliance and self-monitoring. To not engage in these practices is not simply different or deviant; it is immoral, and as such it is *deserving* of moral judgement. One can see how such a statement has the potential to legitimize not only the judging criteria, but perhaps also stigmatization and discrimination against deviance. Moralization of the act of compliance can ensure one's consent to the norm – an effective means of exercising control and maintaining power relations. In the context of bodybuilding competitions, moralization of compliance (as well as self-surveillance) can compel the competitors to accept the judging criteria, even if they do not genuinely appreciate them.

The self-surveillance implicated in the judging criteria, which BB seemed to endorse, was not appreciated by some of the other participants including LO. LO disagreed with the *external* form of self-surveillance promoted in competitions, which placed emphasis on appearance factors such as nails, makeup and tan. But when it came to muscularity, she seemed more willing to self-surveil. For example, LO explained that she decided to compete in the Bikini category "because it was the least muscular and [she] saw it to be the most feminine." In this statement, she seemed to indicate that she was watchful of her muscular development. However, her

position on this matter was somewhat ambiguous. Although from the statement above one may conclude that, in her view, muscularity is unfeminine and masculinizing, this turned out to not be the case. When she described her view of muscularity more clearly, she explained: “When I see muscle I find it very attractive. And there’s another aspect of knowing how much work is involved in becoming that way. It’s a lot of hard work, there’s a lot of discipline. And there’s proper diet.” Later on during the interview, LO seemed to once again retract this position and return to her previous statement by asserting that she is not interested in building more muscle. The discrepancy in her statements became even more noticeable when she again implied that there is a contradiction between muscularity and femininity. When asked to clarify, LO explained that though attracted to the muscular look in *other* women, she is uninterested in seeing added muscle and definition to her own body:

I’m not interested in competing in Figure, because I would have to put on more size and that’s something my trainer has told me. For myself I wouldn’t want that. As much as I can appreciate someone else being bigger, and I can be ‘like oh my god, they look really good,’ for myself I wouldn’t want that. I wouldn’t wanna be more muscular than I am.

LO’s overall attitude towards muscularity in women, as is evident in her statements above, remained ambiguously opaque during the course of the interview. Though apparently in favour of muscularity in other women, LO seemed to maintain a policing eye on her own muscular development. This instance of contradiction was perhaps telling of conflict within the individual between personal preferences and social constructions. In other words, while one can remain

admiring of a female body that violates cultural codes without violating these codes oneself, when it comes to subjecting one's own body to these violations, there seems to be much more caution, reluctance and self-surveillance involved. In LO's case, she seemed mindful of the hegemonic boundaries of femininity.

Like LO, TD also did not appreciate the pressure exerted by the evaluation criteria to self-police and conform to the ideals of femininity. However, when it came to the bodily standards of femininity, TD was in favour of gaining muscle. Furthermore, negative comments and, more generally, surveillance by others did not seem to encourage self-surveillance in TD. To the contrary, it seemed that being negatively judged by others incited a greater desire in her to violate hegemonic standards of femininity. On this topic, she said the following: "I think a lot of the negative comments come from people that are jealous, or perhaps don't have the drive to do it themselves. I mean if anything it just makes me wanna push even more." It seemed that the negative feedback TD received served as a form of positive reinforcement for her to try for a more muscular physique.

Another participant whose statements indicated self-surveillance was CD. As was mentioned earlier, CD considered the maintenance of hegemonic traits of femininity important and necessary for a woman. She identified the preservation of "the curves and the chest" to be a defining feature of femininity, and deemed them as things that "make a woman beautiful." She also confessed to having had breast implants herself. The similarity between CD's description of femininity and the conventional views were perhaps telling of CD's internalization of the normalized discourses on this topic. Her own engagement in practices that were meant to reshape and 'correct' her body demonstrates an instance of self-surveillance. Perhaps, being a visibly muscular woman herself, this voluntary participation in bodily modification served as a way of

ensuring that she did not diverge too far from the acceptable standards of femininity. However, this surveillance and submission by CD to the hegemonic norms was not comprehensive; on the one hand, CD actively replicated the standard vision of femininity, and on the other hand, she seemed to utterly reject it.

An example of the latter was found in CD's frustration with the policing that she felt her muscularity was under in competitions. She attributed the surveillance, among other things, to the pressure exerted by the judges who encouraged and/or demanded her to reduce her muscularity for competition purposes: "One year I was told I had too much muscle, so the training now changed to lose fat and also lose muscle. And I didn't like that." First of all, this constitutes one example of the way in which women's muscularity is regulated and managed in competitions. A second point that must be noted here is CD's rejection of surveillance by others, as well as her refusal to surveil herself. Despite her decision to contain her muscularity for competition purposes for a number of years, she was not happy about this situation. Eventually, rather than having to compromise her desire for greater muscularity, CD decided to transition to the Physique category where, she explained, having larger muscles is actually welcomed.

In this case, much like TD, the pressure that CD faced from others did not seem to (overtly) lead her to police her own muscularity. As far as her level of muscularity was concerned, CD also seemed more or less unaffected by the surveillance she was under. She described her transition to the Physique category and her new, unrestricted freedom to build larger muscles as exciting and refreshing. Her happiness about the prospect of building even larger muscles, therefore, spoke of her lack of concern for the opinions and judgements of others. Nevertheless, this lack of concern and the simultaneous effort to self-correct created some

tension in her perception of femininity and muscularity. Overall, CD seemed happy to engage in self-surveillance in some ways, while at other times refusing to do so.

Overall, most of the participants in one way or another seemed to be watchful of their muscularity. For those competitors who appeared to engage less in muscular surveillance, appearing feminine still seemed to remain a relatively important consideration. While these competitors did not explicitly self-police (or permit other pressures to contain) their muscular development, they nevertheless desired to appear feminine.

Chapter Summary

This chapter first examined the participants' reasons for becoming/remaining involved in bodybuilding as well as in competitions. It then considered the participants' views on femininity and muscularity *outside* of competitions, and finally, the ways in which they were affected by and engaged in surveillance. While all of the competitors regarded female muscularity in a more positive light than the conventional view, they all nevertheless felt that there is a limit after which the muscular look on a woman becomes unpleasant. Some related muscularity to masculinity, and others used the rhetoric of biological determinism to universalize their conceptualizations of femininity. Furthermore, the reproduction of dominant discourses around femininity and muscularity among the participants were accompanied by frequent instances of ambivalence. Frequently, the statements produced by the participants around femininity appeared to be reproductions of dominant gender discourses, indicating the adoption and internalization of these beliefs. The perceptions of muscularity and femininity discussed in this chapter became a central theme in the interviews, which, though not directly addressing the main research question

(i.e., the competitors' negotiation of hegemonic femininity in competitions), informed it in an indirect way. The next chapter will take a look at the competitive aspect of bodybuilding.

CHAPTER 5

The Competitive Aspect: Negotiating the Judging Criteria

“I don’t think the posing criteria in competition is fair. I think it’s demoralizing. I don’t think it’s right. The posing is more on the sleazy side than the powerful and empowering.” (SP, participant)



The competitive experiences of the study participants in women’s bodybuilding will be the main focus of this chapter. The chapter will examine the participants’ views and perceptions of some of the norms in competitions, as well as the official and unspoken judging criteria. First, a brief overview of the competition norms will be provided. In describing these norms, a general distinction between the official and unspoken aspects of evaluation criteria will be drawn. Then, the participants’ awareness of the judging measures, as well as their responses to these criteria will be examined. This section will be divided into judging criteria pertaining to one’s physical appearance, as well as the expectations around posing and performance of feminine/sexual gestures on stage. Finally, the chapter will consider the main research question of the study, namely the participants’ resistance (or the lack thereof) of the hegemonic ideals of femininity in competitions. The lack of alternative options at times seemed to drive competitors to accept the criteria. It will also be argued that the internalization of normalizing discourses can legitimize and reinforce the norms/judging criteria.

The Judging Criteria

Official versus Unofficial Evaluation Criteria

Before delving into the responses of the participants, a brief description of judging practices and competition norms is warranted. There will be an attempt to describe some of the official and unofficial criteria which are used in competitions to evaluate the bodybuilders. Before that, however, it is important to mention that such a distinction will be difficult to concretize for the following two reasons: first, because there are a number of different bodybuilding federations whose criteria, though comparable, are not entirely identical, it is hard to generalize the description to all existing federations. Second, the identification of the *unofficial* aspects of the judging, ipso facto, cannot rely on official and verifiable evidence; rather, it relies heavily on individual anecdotes, experiences and judgements.

In addition to the posing routine and physique conditioning, there are a number of other factors on which the female competitors are generally evaluated. These differ in each bodybuilding federation, but generally include things such as attire, shoes, hair, make-up and tan. The IFBB Bikini category competition criteria, for example, state the following: “The bikini of *any* color and pattern and high-heels of *any* style and colour will be worn. The hair *may* be styled. Athletes are expected to have a *natural and healthy* tan. Jewellery *may* be worn.” (IFBB, 2011; emphasis added). These are the official rules of the Bikini category, which may seem fairly flexible and inclusive. Furthermore, there is no mention of make-up, nails, breast size or performance of femininity/sexuality. As will be discussed momentarily, the competition criteria are quite different in practice than what is stated on the websites. These federations also provide numerous workshops which aim to provide future competitors with further explanation and education on what is expected in competitions. Given that finding detailed information on the

evaluation criteria online is nearly (if not completely) impossible, attending these workshops are tremendously beneficial and informative for those who wish to compete.

As mentioned in the methods section, I attended a stage presence workshop during which I learned quite a bit about the unspoken expectations and rules of competitions. Generally speaking, the criteria pertaining to one's appearance are not simply optional (as stated in the quote above), but strictly required. In other words, if one is to have any chance at being recognized in competition, the hair *must* be styled, the tan *must* be dark and the style and colour of the high-heels and bikini matter significantly (depending on the preferences of the judges on the day of the competition). Furthermore, the competitors are told that the make-up worn must be exaggerated, and that those who perform feminine (or sexual) gestures on stage are judged more favourably. What also seems to stand as a firm yet unspoken rule is that larger breasts (very often attained through breast implants) are desired (and even required) for successful competitors. Within the bodybuilding community it is often said that these criteria – which are obviously irrelevant to one's physical conditioning – can be of greater importance than the criteria on fitness.

The official posing routine in the Bikini category is also overtly sexual.⁵ A description of the 'Bikini walk' was provided in the vignette section of the introduction. To recap, this routine involves the competitor walking to the front of the stage, facing the judges with one hand on the hip and then doing a half-turn to face the back wall. In this position, the competitor is expected to have her feet apart or together, and push her hips back as far as possible to emphasize her back and legs. Although the Bikini rules on the IFBB website prohibit the competitors from turning their upper bodies to face the judges in this position (IFBB, 2011), this is in fact a very common practice in competitions, and it is not banned. What is more, the competitors are encouraged to

engage in gestures such as winking, quick shoulder shrugs, swinging the hips while walking, having the feet wide apart, and doing a slow or exaggerated half-turn to face the back. In other words, the competitors are encouraged (or explicitly instructed) to perform suggestive gestures on stage. It is useful to note that this sexualized performance of femininity is not characteristic of other female competition categories (e.g., Figure). Male competitors, as well, are not required officially or expected unofficially to amplify their sexuality as part of the sport.

Awareness of the Evaluation Practices

In order to examine the competitors' perceptions of the judging criteria, it was important to confirm that all of the competitors were knowledgeable about the norms and expectations discussed above. These general expectations which were unrelated to one's physical conditioning will be referred to as the 'additional' judging criteria (e.g., hair, makeup, nails, shoes, tan, etc.). Although the participants were not explicitly asked, they all seemed to be aware of these additional criteria. Interestingly, this common knowledge existed despite the fact that most of the participants had not visited or read the criteria section on the federations' websites.

These women had at some point learned about the unspoken criteria (though they did not specify how they came to learn about them) and spoke knowledgeably of the common competition rules and measures by which their performance and display of hegemonic femininity was assessed. They were aware, for example, of the type of presentation that was likely to grant them more favourable judging and increase their score. CDB expressed her knowledge of the importance of presentation on stage in the following way: "In Figure, you need to have your makeup nice and have the right shoes. Same with the suit, the colour can mean everything. And the amount of bling on your suit can mean getting between first place and third place." Similarly,

BB, who herself had had some experience as both a Bodybuilding competitor and a Bikini judge, offered some insight into what the judges look for in Bikini competitions and what type of presentation is more likely to be successful: “The hair, the makeup, nails, stage presence, posing, all those things in some cases matter more than the physique.”

BB went on to express skepticism regarding the suitability of these criteria for a fitness competition. Even as a judge, she confessed to being unsure about whether the Bikini category (and the judging criteria associated with it) was about fitness at all:

In the beginning when Bikini first came out we were like, how are we supposed to judge this? They told us basically imagine the cover of a magazine. Would you want them to be on the cover of the magazine? And so it planted the question in my head: is this division really about the physique or is this about people who want a segue into fitness modelling?

The idea that fitness competitors should be assessed on whether they fulfill the criteria of commercial magazines is very telling in itself. The combination of modelling with fitness (which is standard in the Bikini category) is a rather prominent and naturalized intersection in the bodybuilding subculture, and the conception of the Bikini category seems to have deepened this conjunction further. This relationship between fitness and modelling seemed to be very well known to other participants in the study as well:

It’s about the way you walk, the way you carry yourself on stage... cause people can still pick you up for endorsements or for magazines and whatever, and they

want you to sell their brand and represent the image that they're trying to portray.

(SK)

The criteria are based on looks. It's aesthetics. So if they want a blonde person, a blonde person wins... Do they carry themselves a certain way on the stage... They want what they can put on the cover of a magazine not necessarily what looks fit.

What the bikini look is for is extremely commercial. (KM)

[The federations] definitely want to see definition, a bit of a definition but more of a soft – more feminine I would say – bikini kind of body. Something that you would see in a magazine. (SP)

Evidently, the participants were aware of the fact that creating an image that is 'marketable' was an influential factor in their assessment, particularly in the Bikini category. Expectedly, this commercial look had to be in line with hegemonic concepts of femininity and this, too, was well understood by the competitors. SK was able to provide a rather comprehensive list of the things the judges consider in competitions:

Hair is a big thing. I made a mistake in my first show and I put my hair up and was told by one of the judges later, you never wanna put your hair up. You want your hair to be as big as possible, your makeup as big as possible. But you have to remember that you are up on stage. You have to make everything much bigger and exaggerated.

They also do like a lot of bling. Posing is huge. And huge emphasis on swimwear and stuff like that.

LO also expanded on this list of judging criteria offered by SK by adding tanning as an important component of the competitions. She explained that she had personally encountered a negative experience with tanning in the past:

You can lose marks if your makeup doesn't look good, or the hair has to look a certain way. You have to look perfect. Your tan... you can lose marks for your tan not being dark enough. Apparently, my trainer said, that's the reason why for my first show I came second place. Because the tan wasn't dark enough. But I went to the tanning company of the organization! So I didn't think it was fair at all.

The quotes offered in this section all demonstrate the participants' knowledge of the fact that the judging criteria do not solely take into consideration the physical fitness of the individuals, but rather many other aesthetic factors unrelated to fitness. The participants had been able to gain this knowledge through word of mouth, personal experience or attending workshops that were organized by the federations themselves. The participants were also asked to describe their perceptions and thoughts on the judging criteria. Some found the additional criteria to be in conflict with their personal views or preferences. The women shared their methods of negotiating these additional criteria. The next section will examine this area further.

Responses to the Competition Expectations

This section highlights the ways in which the competitors perceived, responded and reacted to the official judging criteria that reinforce idealized femininity in competitions. It will become clear in this section that there were participants who were quite capable of negotiating the judging criteria, or accepting them without compromising their own beliefs. An analysis of these competitors' responses and their potential for resistance or compliance will be discussed in more detail in the next section. This section will deal more broadly with the competitors' perceptions and reactions to the competition expectations.

The additional criteria will be divided into two categories: appearance (which involves the overall presentation and image of the competitors, including such things as their makeup, hair, nails, suit, shoes and jewellery) and stage presence (involving competitors' actions and gestures on stage, including the mandatory poses). As the description in the previous section indicated, in Bikini competitions, the latter is a component that often encompasses a sexualized representation of the bodybuilders, and is either compulsory or highly encouraged in competitions. The participants were not asked about these two categories separately during the interviews. Rather, they spoke of their opinions on the criteria as a whole, and later the responses were divided into the aforementioned categories.

Responses to the Appearance Criteria

When asked about the competition criteria that mandated the display of idealized femininity through appearance (i.e., makeup, jewellery, nails, shoes, etc.), the participants' responses varied and often depended on the mode of presentation. The reactions ranged from favourable attitudes towards such criteria to indifference to slight or moderate agitation. Most of the participants seemed content with the current state of affairs. Among these competitors, some

deemed the appearance criteria as necessary, fair or fun. Others seemed indifferent and had no strong feelings about these criteria.

The responses often depended on the specific criterion being discussed; in other words, some criteria that were deemed as problematic by one participant may have been considered fine or acceptable by another. In this regard, there was little consensus on the topic. For AJ, for example, the inclusion of hair and makeup as judging criteria was seen as fine and acceptable:

I think that the hair and the makeup can also be a fun part of it when you learn sort of what works for you. I think it really needs to be enough for that individual person. That's a fine part of judging. Presenting yourself means having your hair a certain way, that looks good, having your make-up done.

Whereas hair and makeup was considered by AJ to be “a fine part of judging,” the tanning component was seen as a very necessary part of presenting one's physique:

The spray tan I don't mind, I actually quite like the tanning part of it, because you need to do it – it actually absolutely does bring out the definition in your muscle and you *have* to have that done well. You will be marked down if that's not done well.

In contrast, the main element of the competitions for which AJ professed strong dislike was the common practice of breast augmentation surgery. She claimed to have personally witnessed

other competitors with breast implants be judged more favourably in competitions, whereas her own refusal to undergo plastic surgery had been a disadvantage for her:

If I could change something about the competitions it would be to have more women competing who don't have breast implants. I know that I placed fourth in my last competition, and the three models ahead of me all had breast implants... and that makes me wonder. Then it's frustrating.

In AJ's experience, competitors who refuse to reconstruct their bodies through plastic surgery (once again, in an effort to fulfill hegemonic standards of femininity) were at a disadvantage in competitions. Interpreted slightly differently, these competitors were in a way punished (through receiving lower scores) for their refusal to comply with hegemonic norms (or indeed the norms of the bodybuilding subculture). CDB echoed AJ's concerns regarding breast implants. Her emphasis though, was on the Bikini category where, according to her, all the winners have had this plastic surgery:

I found the more you can strut your stuff , which means the bigger butt and the better boobs that you have, the more attention you could get and the higher the placing. Let's face it: you will never see a Bikini girl win that doesn't have any cleavage. I have not seen one yet. Because when you lean out, you naturally lose all that cleavage. So when you're standing on stage and you can really see people have had implants.. because you can see it sitting on top of the muscle and you go ...

‘yeah you won, yeah you won, yeah you won’ ... because everybody that won has had implants.

CDB also explained that this norm was not due to the panel of judges being male-dominated, as judging panels are usually evenly divided with men and women (other participants also confirmed this fact). However, despite being critical of this practice in competitions, CDB went on to explain that she could not exactly blame the judges:

If it was all males judging, you would understand. The reason I think some of the females judge think that way is because they’ve all been competitors themselves. Most of them have seen that the cleavage and whatever else you can accentuate your body with looks good on stage. You know, if I went to judge, and I sat down and looked at it, you know, the perfect package is that girl who has nice lean abs and nice form and cleavage. So would I do it different? I don't know.

It seemed that CDB considered bigger (and presumably unnatural) breasts and cleavage an *enhancement* to the female body. AJ, too, who as mentioned, was also very critical of this practice went on to add the same curious twist to her conceptualization of breast augmentation through plastic surgery: “That’s the only thing that bothers me. Because the shape definitely does look... more balanced when you have a larger breast size.” Although AJ opposed plastic surgery for herself (she disclosed this at another point during the interview while also mentioning that she was not against the practice as in general), in this statement, she contends that a female body with larger breasts is “more balanced” than one with smaller breasts. Whether by “more

balanced” she was referring to a body that is more representative of the ideal female body is a question which was not probed further during the interview and therefore remains open to speculation.

Nevertheless, AJ made it clear that in her competition experiences, having larger breasts was favoured and considered a form of enhancement to the female physique – another way in which hegemonic femininity was promoted and rewarded in competitions. Her frustration stemmed from the unfair advantage that the competitors with larger breasts received in their overall scores, but the way she chose to interpret and describe this advantage was rather intriguing:

It’s making an alteration to your body. So is that natural? That would be my question. So if I enter a natural competition – which usually right now only means that you do not take steroids or other enhancing drugs – is having a breast implant, that is an alteration to your natural figure, natural? But as of right now, it is not considered an alteration. It doesn’t mean that you can’t enter the competition. You are calling yourself natural and entering a natural competition because you haven’t taken any drugs. But breast implants aren’t natural. So that’s where it bothers me.

From the beginning of the interview, AJ emphasized that the only form of bodybuilding she valued and endorsed was the *natural* form. She also explained that she had only competed in natural competitions. Here she raised a valid question regarding the prevalence of plastic surgery in competitions, particularly natural ones. By contextualizing this issue of breast implants in the way that she did, she offered an interesting interpretation of the concept. Besides plastic surgery,

she did not seem to have a problem with any of the other appearance criteria. She indicated that being judged on the colour of her suit was fine, and that “the hair and the makeup didn’t bother [her] as much.”

Like AJ, CD also was not bothered by the hair and makeup criteria. In fact, she felt that having a feminine presentation – in competitions as well as elsewhere – was an important thing regardless of how muscular a woman gets. Though she had previously expressed non-traditional views regarding femininity (stating that being visibly muscular is a better embodiment of femininity), this time she revealed views that were much more compatible with the hegemonic ideals:

[The hair, makeup, jewellery and nails] is the *fun* part about [competition] cause you get to go out and feel beautiful on that day. If your hair is not done or your make-up is not done, it’s not finished and it’s all about the finish. I love it, like that’s the fun day.

This statement, added to CD’s belief that on stage one should “move in a sexy manner versus a mechanical manner,” falls fairly in line with the femininity component of the competitions (as well as the broader cultural standards of femininity). The overlap between CD’s vision of femininity and the cultural views may be an indication of her internalization of the hegemonic norms (discussed further in the next section). Her statement replicates normative discourses around feminine beauty and embodiment, which appears somewhat contradictory to her previous stance on the issue. Furthermore, it is important to point out that CD’s participation in reproduction of conventional norms of femininity is evidently voluntary. Despite the compulsory

nature of the competition criteria, CD apparently has no trouble at all complying with them; her choice to accept and partake in the appearance requirements of competitions seems to be a consensual decision.

SK too seemed to be content with the judging criteria on appearance. In fact, conspicuously absent throughout SK's interview was the expression of any form of complaint about the current system or the criteria. The only criticisms offered by her were ones that targeted the competitors themselves. For example, she was critical of the extent to which some of the competitors became preoccupied with their physical 'imperfections':

[In competitions] you can definitely see a lot of mental struggles going on. There was one girl who did very well, she placed top 10, and she got surgery to fix her middle toe because it wasn't perfect enough. And I think it was at that point where I was like, 'wow it's cool if you wanna see how far you can push your body but if it's controlling your life to the aspect where your toe is not perfect enough,' I don't think that's healthy or right for that person.

Although SK was critical of the emphasis that individual competitors placed on physical appearance (a concept different from physical fitness), she did not apply the same scrutiny to the appearance aspect of the judging criteria. SK was one of the few competitors who had no comments about the criteria concerning the appearance of the competitors. In fact, she expressed sympathy for the judges:

I have no comment about that, like it's a very hard thing to judge. I wouldn't wanna change the criteria. I think that's fine. It's very hard to pick criteria to judge girls that way. I mean their job is hard enough as it is. And if you don't like the way they judge then I would pick a different sport.

SK's final words communicate her belief that those who enter a bodybuilding competition should accept the criteria *as they are* prior to entering competition (this point was emphasized by her at several different points during the interview). In effect, the last part of this statement suggests that those who choose to compete must not challenge the competition practices as they have the option of not competing. Furthermore, it also suggests that it is acceptable for the bodybuilding federations to choose what form of femininity is considered appropriate, and to have it mandated and imposed on the competitors. An implication of this line of thinking is the restriction of personal agency and its overriding by institutional authority.

Another participant who approved of these judging criteria was BB. Her comments on the importance of doing one's hair and makeup before entering the stage was discussed in the section on self-surveillance. In her judgement, the presentation of oneself on stage in a culturally appropriate manner was indicative of one's self-respect, and the failure to do so was grounds for moral judgement. Other participants were not as eager to endorse the criteria concerning the appearance of the competitors. These competitors expressed unhappiness with one or some aspects of the judging criteria, and all of them, in one way or another had accepted or continued to accept these criteria (as evidenced by their continual participation in the sport). What was

interesting, once again, were some of the participants' simultaneous approval and skepticism toward the competition rules which mandated a glamorous, feminine appearance.

CDB was one of the participants who reacted to the appearance criteria both favourably and disapprovingly. At first, she identified what she felt was the positive and rewarding aspect of producing a glamorous and feminine look: "You train for 20 weeks, and you're constantly in sweats, and you're constantly going to the gym, go to work, prep food... You know what, getting glamorous for that one day and doing the photo shoots and everything is like your final pay off." CDB was then asked whether she considers the inclusion of these criteria in judging to be fair. At this point, CDB seemed to abruptly change her attitude towards the criteria. She disagreed and claimed to have been so displeased by such criteria that she decided to temporarily withdraw from competitions, and was unsure whether she was going to compete again: "Looking at the whole package [i.e., hair, makeup, nails, etc.]... I disagree with it and it's kind of what has driven me to back from the sport for now." Here is a distinction that must be underlined: although CDB felt that the process of creating a feminine appearance for the competition day was fun and rewarding in itself, she was not convinced that having this as an *assessable* element in the competitions was a fair model of evaluating fitness. She then explained that wearing heels is the aspect that she dislikes the most, although her perspective on this issue turned a bit ambiguous near the end:

I like that Bodybuilding form [i.e., posing routine] instead of being in heels and more glamorous. I don't like being in heels, I'm not the type to be in heels. If I have to walk on stage barefoot and do a routine and show off muscle, I'm really attracted to that type of competing. Rather than standing in a line-up and showing the same posture.

The posing in Figure seems to be more *high maintenance*: the hair and the nails have to be done and look good, the suit has to be blingy and the heels. And the heels are the big thing that I don't like... But when I look at it I love the look of the Figure girl, and the heels, and the more glamorous look.

CDB's stance on this matter at first seemed quite clear. She plainly expressed her dislike for wearing heels and seemed to allude to the undesirability of the "high maintenance" nature of Figure competitions. Her comments regarding this form of presentation were consistently negative until she confessed to liking the look on *others*. At this point her perceptions of the 'Figure look' seemed a bit ambivalent and hard to concretize: her fondness of the glamorous look did not appear to follow her previously negative comments on this form of femininity.

As mentioned earlier, incongruent and ambiguous statements were abundant in the participants' discourses. SP was another example of a competitor whose perceptions of the appearance criteria conveyed ambivalence. She also began by criticizing these criteria, though rather reluctantly and unsurely. She had competed in the Bikini category of WBFF, which consists of two rounds: the "swimwear" round and the "evening gown" round. Much like a beauty pageant contest, the latter component of this category requires the competitors to dress in formal gowns and present themselves in this manner on stage. SP first criticized the evening gown round in the following way:

With the WBFF, I know their judging is also based on what you wear. Especially like for the evening gown look. They're trying to go more for the vegas look. So, I think that that's a bit over the top, that it's a bit unnecessary, to go that route, cause then

you're actually weeding out women who can't afford let's say those thousand-dollar gowns to be in that competition. Whereas it should be more focused on, you know, how much they worked... it's how I feel.

Although this statement does not focus on the compulsory femininity aspect of the evening gown round, it does encompass a very central criticism of the WBFF competitions (and almost all bodybuilding competitions as well): the financial barrier that this component of the WBFF Bikini competition places on participants will necessarily exclude those who do not have the economic capacity to become involved. In this statement, SP also alludes to another aspect of this component of the WBFF Bikini category, namely its irrelevance to a *fitness* competition. This was a point to which SP returned more than once during the interview:

I feel that it's kind of pageanty [sic] to be doing something like that, and I kind of question, personally, the need for it. It's almost like they're trying to judge your femininity, by putting on a gown? I mean, I don't know... it's more fashion as opposed to fitness, and I looked at it as more of a fitness competition. I don't know, that's how I looked at it. I mean it was nice to dress up too, at least...you know what I mean? But I didn't see the necessity for it.

Here SP draws direct attention to the importance of femininity in bodybuilding competitions, explicitly condemning it as a criterion on which competitors should be judged. She identifies the gown round of the Bikini competition as a blatant compulsion of hegemonic femininity, for which the WBFF makes no apologies.⁶ However, near the end,

her stance on this issue becomes somewhat ambiguous as she (hesitantly) confesses to enjoy the gown round:

I know with the WBFF they're trying to get that prestige. Like "bigger is better" kind of mentality. Very entertaining kind of outfits. I mean personally I'd like to see that myself, it's kind of cool... it's not your everyday look, right? Um but the same token it's kind of like... is that going to set me apart from the next girl even though I worked just as hard as her? So that's the only thing I think they could work on, so maybe even create a different vision for that, to give people that choice.

Although SP was not all in favour of the standards of judging and the necessity of the evening gown element of the Bikini competitions as a whole, she seems to question it somewhat reluctantly and indecisively. Overall, SP was critical of the evening gown portion of the WBFF Bikini competition because of two different reasons: first, because they introduced a financial barrier which not many people could overcome; and second, because the femininity that is made compulsory in this round (or both rounds) is, in her view, unnecessary and irrelevant. Despite her criticisms of this round of the Bikini competition, SP went on to accept the criteria and compete within the WBFF federation anyway.

The same sentiments were expressed by another competitor of the WBFF Bikini and Fitness categories. TD used a very similar rhetoric to criticize the WBFF federation for its emphasis on appearance and aesthetics:

A lot of money goes into the WBFF and if I had known better it wouldn't have been my first choice for my first show. It's very pageant-like. Very diva-ish. I would never compete with them again. The reason why I compete is for body structure. I find that if your hair has to look nice and your makeup has to look nice, there are a lot of people out there who don't have thousands of dollars to spend on a show, but they spend all this time training and all this blood, sweat and tears and they don't get recognized because their shoes aren't as expensive.. so I just don't agree with it.

Like SP, TD started off by isolating the financial aspect of competing as the barrier in competitions. She explained the difficulty such a barrier may pose to a great number of potential competitors. As compared to SP though, TD seemed more strongly opposed to the norms and requirements of this federation. Indeed, she was one of the few participants in this study who was rather assertive and vocal about her concerns and criticisms of the competition criteria. However, here again money was identified as the primary issue and there was no mention of the policing and regulation of femininity. For clarification purposes, TD was asked to consider a hypothetical scenario in which the financial barrier was removed from competitions:

Interviewer: So let me then ask you a hypothetical question. Let's say if the federation said it was going to provide make-up artists and hair stylists and all those people for free – in other words, if money wasn't an issue – but they still said, you are required to do this, and you will be judged on it. How would you feel about that?

TD: I would still feel the same. At the end of the day you have to look, um, you have to look the part right? You know the aesthetic portion of it, I just don't agree with it. I don't think it's necessary. Not at all. If one girl has long luscious hair, I don't think that should be a factor in deciding who gets a trophy. Someone putting makeup on their face better than the other girl, I just don't agree with it. It's still so much planning involved and yeah I would get my hair done and my make-up done, but I would do it all myself.

What is important to point out here is that TD was very clearly opposed to the *assessment* of women based on their appearance; she disagreed with the incorporation of these factors into the evaluation criteria, though not necessarily opposed to the idea of having her hair and makeup done for the competition. The way she expressed her disagreement with the requirements of femininity in Bikini competitions was clear and firm. Like SP, TD also decided to continue competing despite her strong opposition to some of the judging criteria. In effect, TD also accepted these criteria though for evidently different reasons than some of the other participants.

LO was similar to TD in her firm opposition to the forms of femininity that is normalized and particularly mandated in competitions: "When you're competing you have to have a full face of makeup. The fake hair, the fake nails, none of that is feminine to me. I think it's more fabricated and superficial." As this quote indicates, LO was quite outspoken about her thoughts on this matter. She clearly expressed that she disliked the way in which notions of femininity were dictated to the competitors, and policed in Bikini competitions. Furthermore, she decided to oppose one aspect of these criteria (i.e., nails) despite having been warned about the potential

consequences by her trainer. Instead, she expressed herself in a form that she personally approved of:

My trainer wanted me to get my nails done. And I don't agree with that and I didn't get it done. I probably lost marks for that. I don't like long nails and I think they're disgusting and that's my personal opinion. So he said, well you're gonna lose marks for that. And I said well I don't care. I'm gonna lose marks for that. And I probably did.

LO decided to take an individual stance against the judging criteria with which she personally disagreed. In contrast, others (like TD) who at times also expressed unfavourable attitudes towards these criteria did not *act* upon their disapproval. She ultimately decided to enter the Bikini competition, but believes that it was her last and she will not compete again.

Overall, despite the frequent expressions of agitation with these criteria, most of the competitors seemed to not perceive any profound problems with the compulsion of hegemonic femininity vis-à-vis makeup, hair, jewellery, nails, shoes and competition suit (and the evening gown for those who competed in the WBFF Bikini category). Similarly, despite the frequent criticisms offered by almost all of the competitors, most did not seem to be displeased or dissatisfied enough to exercise overt resistance or protest. The next section will examine the competitors' thoughts on the criteria concerning the mandatory posing, gestures and stage presence.

Responses to the Posing Requirements and Norms

Another aspect of the competitions which is tied closely with the sexualization of the competitors is the mandatory walk and posing, as well as the movements and gestures that the competitors are encouraged to do in order to receive higher scores. This was another aspect of the competitions discussed by the participants. They described their perceptions of the judging criteria which instructed performance of hyper-femininity and sexualization through the walk, posing and gestures.

The competitors began by describing their thoughts and feelings on posing in competitions, and at this point, the question was left open ended for them to discuss any categories with which they were familiar. CD, AJ and CDB – all of whom had been Figure competitors and therefore visibly more muscular – admitted to liking a form of posing which involved flexing the muscles and making them visibly stand out.⁷ Out of these three Figure competitors, CD had decided to move up to the Physique category as it allowed and encouraged muscularity in women. She was happy about this transition because she seemed to have reached a glass ceiling in the Figure category:

One year I was told I had too much muscle, so the training now changed to lose fat and also to lose muscle. And I didn't like that. And so I would run and run and run to lose muscle so that I'd lose size. But for me, if I train, I have a natural inclination to build. So it really was difficult, and now I'm like why don't I just do Physique, where they like muscle, right? Like that's what they want is they wanna see how much muscle you can build. So I'll do it!

Her transition to the Physique category, however, provided her with the opportunity to build more muscle and she seemed eager to embrace this change: “I’ll go out and do a posing routine, and I’ve never done it before, and it’s just something different, so it’s exciting again. So that’s what I’m doing right now. But it’s exciting, and it’s new, it’s different.”

AJ and CDB also seemed interested in the Physique category and posing. As was mentioned in the previous section, CDB liked the Bodybuilding posing routine (where one has to flex muscles) more than “being in heels and the high-maintenance look” of the Figure competitor. However, despite liking the performance of the Physique and Bodybuilding categories, CDB stated that she “loved the *look* of the Figure girl, and the heels and the more glamorous look.” Here, once again, there seemed to be a discrepancy in the discourse of one of the participants. CDB seemed to find the feminine presentation and the posing of the Figure category appealing, but not for *herself*; for herself, she preferred a type of posing that involved flexion and exaggeration of muscularity.

AJ also preferred the Physique and Bodybuilding posing routines (as opposed to Figure) precisely because this type of posing requires muscular flexion and visibility. She contrasted the routine in the Physique posing to the Figure category:

I’m personally drawn to the Physique category because in that category you actually get to pose and show off your muscles. So you get to do a front double bicep pose, you get to do an ab pose, a back double-bicep pose. Whereas in Figure you get to walk in heels... I personally like the actual posing of bodybuilding, I like sort of seeing the muscle stand out. The definition stand out and it looks bigger when you pose.

CDB and AJ's shared a preference for muscular visibility. Despite being aware of the stigmatization attached to muscularity in females, they seemed uninterested in hyper-feminizing their image (which would presumably safeguard them from negative comments). To the contrary, these women seemed intrigued by not only the type of *physique* that defies hegemonic femininity, but also the type of *posing* that exaggerates this defiance further. Moreover, their attraction to heavy muscularity also challenges the conventional assumption that women invariably desire to be smaller than men. For all three of these women who have been able to achieve visible muscularity, what is appealing about Physique and Bodybuilding competitions is the chance to 'flaunt' their muscles – an act that would be deemed as culturally unfeminine.

Although AJ and CDB did perceive Figure to be a more "glamorous" category and, in that regard, less appealing than the Physique category, they nevertheless thought it to be preferable to the Bikini category which they viewed as less representative of the sport. Rather than strength and muscle, the mode of bodily representation in the Bikini category regards the female body as primarily an object of sex appeal. Furthermore, the showcasing of the body in the Bikini category is not focused on visible muscularity; indeed, the Bikini competitors are strictly discouraged from having muscular definition (i.e., muscle showing through) and are officially penalized by the scoring system for muscular visibility and definition.

AJ communicated her lack of interest in the Bikini category in the following way: "I'm not drawn to the Bikini category personally. Cause I find that it's more modelling type. But it's usually a woman that has larger breasts. It's similar to figure but looser. It's almost... sultry? Can I say that?" It seems that to AJ the Bikini category is less concerned with the athletic aspect of bodybuilding and also less representative of the athleticism of the competitors. In CDB's case,

the attention given to sex appeal, and the lack of regard for one's hard work and effort was what deterred her from the Bikini category:

I find the Bikini girls...are just cleaning up their diet for a few weeks and going to the gym and doing some cardio and lifting some weights. And I don't feel that they've put that effort that I have. I've put my body through extreme circumstances to get that lean and put on that much muscle. So it feels like I get up on stage, I'm happy with what I've done but when you see Bikini girls getting pro cards, it undermines the sport.

It is interesting to point out that CDB considers the Bikini category as a detriment to the sport of bodybuilding, rather than the sexualization that takes place within it. Apparently, for CDB, the link between the Bikini category and sexualization has been naturalized so that the two are considered synonymous. For CDB, who regards bodybuilding competitions as a sport concerned with athletic achievement, the Bikini category (which devalues muscular definition/visibility and, more than any other category, places importance on factors such as hair, makeup, competition suit colour/design and facial beauty) should not be included in bodybuilding or regarded as a sport. In fact she identifies this aspect of Bikini competitions as the reason why she will never consider competing in Bikini again:

I would never do Bikini again. I know I, 100%, would never do Bikini again. It's not a sport anymore. It's more about the glitz and the glamour and you strutting it. I have been an athlete all my life. It took away from that. It made me feel I was in a

modeling show rather than a sport.” There is a BIG difference between Figure and Bikini.

The idea that there is a qualitative difference between the mandatory poses in the Bikini category versus the Figure category was something that was stated or insinuated by most of the participants in the study. Moreover, most (but not all) of the participants regarded this difference as problematic. CDB elaborated on her thoughts on the difference between Bikini and Figure by once again drawing parallels between the two categories: “There is something about the posing and the way you come out on stage [in Figure]. The expectations... it feels like you’re basically just showing off the results of your hard work. And how far you’ve pushed your body, rather than a glitz and glamour show.” For her, the Bikini category (or the set of poses associated with it) was seen as a way to assess the competitors’ sex appeal and adoption of conventional standards of beauty; in this sense, it was regarded as less representative of one’s efforts and commitment to training. LO concurred with this view. She expressed the following thoughts on the posing associated with the Bikini category:

I don’t think other categories were as inappropriate as my category [i.e., Bikini]. Figure wasn’t at all like ours. It was just posing rather than acting or flirting or all that other stuff. It was different. I didn’t find anything wrong with it... [In Bikini] I think the winking of the eye, the flipping of the hair, the flirting with the judges that they seem to do, or pushing your bum out... it’s demoralizing.

In addition to being different from Figure, LO evidently considers the Bikini category to be “inappropriate”. BB too strongly problematized the gestures in Bikini. In describing how a competitor should “properly showcase” her physique, she said the following:

[Some Bikini competitors] are constantly shaking their hips around... do not place your arms over your head, this is not a photo shoot. Do not stick your ass so far out that judges can see up the places they don't need to see. A lot of women try to roll their hips because in some federations they want that... but rolling your hips like looking all slutty and stuff.. that's degrading.

BB's fairly negative description of the Bikini walk contrasted that of TD's; TD's description conveyed a much more positive and optimistic tone:

Bikini is a sexy, soft approach to posing. You're not holding any positions, you're just kind of walking around. With Figure, there's mandatory poses that you need to hold for a long time, and it's more difficult. Bikini you're just standing there, sticking out your butt, sticking out your chest, flipping your hair around. It's a more fun, sassy approach... But I mean not everybody has that flare and that sassiness right off the bat. But with the mandatories, it is a lot more hard work.

TD too felt that there was a difference between the Bikini and Figure categories, with the latter being the more difficult of the two; however, she did not seem to find the Bikini poses as problematic as some of the other participants.

Overall, the participants seemed to feel that the posing in the Figure category was a more appropriate way of displaying one's muscularity, and the Bikini category was viewed as less relevant to one's physical accomplishments. The posing in the Bikini category was often deemed as inappropriate and unsavoury, and some of the participants felt uncomfortable performing them. In addition to the posing routine, the competitors also disagreed with the appearance criteria in competitions in various ways and to different extents. The main problems with the criteria were identified as unfairness and irrelevance to fitness. Once again, the Bikini category was generally identified as more problematic, as it was said to place greater emphasis on appearance than other categories. Among the participants who had offered verbal criticisms of the judging criteria, most had in practice decided to comply with them. Other participants did not voice any complaints at all, and accepted the judging criteria without resistance. In fact, there were instances where the criteria and the norms in competitions were legitimized through normalizing discourses. The next section will provide an examination of such cases.

(Reluctant) Consent

Chapter 4 examined the participants' views of femininity outside of competitions. In this chapter, we have considered some of the responses that the participants gave regarding the judging criteria. To address the main research question (how did the participants negotiate idealized femininity), however, a more in-depth analysis of the participants' resistance to or compliance with the expectations of idealized femininity in competitions is warranted. This will be the aim of the rest of this chapter. The views of the participants will be discussed with a focus on their potential to provide resistance or consent. We will start by considering the absence of resistance in participants, or in other words their consent to the ideals of femininity endorsed in

competitions. The term ‘reluctant’ has been added to the subtitle because, as shall be demonstrated in the subsection that follows, some of the competitors chose to comply with the competition norms *despite* being overtly unhappy with them. It will be argued that their hesitant approach indicated a lack of alternative options when it came to competitions.

Lack of Alternative Options

While some participants deemed the judging criteria as reasonable and seemed happy to comply, others expressed frustration and dissatisfaction. As mentioned previously, a few competitors (like TD and LO) strongly disagreed with some of the criteria that conflicted with their personal beliefs or reasons for entering competitions. They were vocal and clear about their frustration. Still, they both decided to compete and while TD remained competitive after her negative competitive experience, LO was deterred from wanting to compete again. There were others (e.g., AJ and SP) who seemed mildly dissatisfied and annoyed by the competition criteria, but did not find them too problematic. These competitors were at times critical of some of the competition aspects, but ultimately seemed to have accepted them. Regardless of the level of disapproval that the participants showed of these criteria, all of them (perhaps with the exception of LO) had decided to carry on with their competitive endeavours at the time of the interviews. Some of the participants (who were not happy with the practices, yet considered the prospect of change within the system of competitions unlikely) appeared to accept the judging criteria reluctantly. These participants were doubtful of their ability to create change, and therefore remained compliant. The lack of alternative options available to these women seemed to lead to an indifferent or accepting attitude, which was evident in their decision to not use their power to resist the criteria. This section will briefly discuss and provide examples of this.

When asked to comment on the judging practices, many of the competitors began by criticizing the criteria in one way or another. Overall, for some of the competitors, these criteria were not greeted favourably. A problem that was commonly identified was lack of fairness. The appearance requirements of the competitions were criticized by many of the competitors on the basis that these factors created unfair dis/advantages. To these competitors, having a more or less glamorous or feminine look was not a relevant measure of one's hard work and dedication to fitness. Similarly, when it came to the Bikini posing routine, a few of the participants who had competed in this category seemed to find the movements and gestures inappropriate for a fitness competition. They, too, felt that having the ability to execute this 'performance of hegemonic femininity' skilfully was not a suitable measure of the effort they dedicated to bodybuilding.

However, despite the criticisms and objections, the participants did not utilize their power to resist or create change in the system. For example, when AJ was asked about her thoughts on the advantage women with longer hair supposedly have, she responded: "I just think that overall... being feminine, and that's our society, is having longer hair. And I don't think that's changing any time soon." This statement conveys an attitude of resignation; it seems as though AJ considers the push for fairness in the competitions as futile.

Even the unfairness that was identified by so many as unacceptable seemed to not incite enough motivation for resistance. A commonly-held explanation as to why unfairness were to be expected and ultimately accepted in competitions was the notion that 'nothing is fair'. This was duplicated by a number of participants: BB said, "In reality, nothing about physique competing is fair," while MK noted, "Well, nothing in life is fair." SK added:

Well, nothing in life is fair, right? I think that's just the way it is. That's the way they judge and the criteria they have in order to pick a place. If you want fairness, do triathlon and it's quite clear who's gonna come in first. This is all on someone's perspective or perception of what is beautiful. If you take that into consideration, there's no other way that they could judge you.

The sentiment that these statements convey is that progress is not achievable or, at any rate, not likely. This may be due to some form of pressure to comply, or it may be an indication of the status quo having been naturalized. LO's case exemplifies the former possibility adequately. Although she was strongly against the criteria, she ultimately felt compelled to conform due to lack of alternative options: "I never imagined the walk to be this way. But the thing that I liked about Bikini was that it was the least muscular. But I'd just suck it up because I thought, well, if this is what's required then this is what I have to do." LO explained that she firmly disagreed with the posing criteria, but performed them anyway because she was required to. As this example demonstrates, the competitors may feel obliged to comply, or simply feel that they have no other options.

For LO, who prefers the less muscular look on a female, the lack of alternative options became a dilemma as she was neither willing to perform the Bikini mandatory poses, nor was interested in building more muscle in order to move up to the Figure category (where the poses were not deemed problematic by her). She elaborated on this by saying that in her interactions, this seemed to be the predicament in which many Bikini competitors found themselves:

The girls that I spoke to and practiced with weren't comfortable with [the posing and walking]. [One of the girls] said, you know I was the same way as you and still don't feel comfortable. I just do it. It's awkward, it's uncomfortable, and we all feel that way. Nobody was comfortable with it. It was more like, we just have to do it, you know, put on your face, improvise basically. You can do this, pretend you're... whatever... making love to the judges, that you wanna have sex with them. And I'm like, but I'm not! I'm not that kind of person!

This anecdote points to the problematic arrangement of Bikini competitions: that the less muscular competitors (who would only qualify for the Bikini category) are expected to perform sexual gestures. If the description provided by LO here is true (i.e., that most Bikini competitors do feel uncomfortable performing the Bikini poses), then it raises the question of whose preferences are being favoured and fulfilled in competitions.

Some of the statements by other competitors conveyed a sense of vulnerability or inferiority in competitions. Feeling vulnerable may be a less defining factor in motivating one to employ one's power to resist, but it can speculatively lead one to feel incapable or less eager to protest and create change in the system. At times during the interviews, this did seem to be the case. To demonstrate this, an example is warranted. SK explicitly identified this sense of vulnerability in the following statement:

You're up on the stage and the chances of you being picked are so slim, and it's so tough. You're so vulnerable. Mentally you're a little fragile. To put in that much

work and that much effort, not to be called out or not to be recognized on that day, is sometimes very hard on your ego.

One can conceivably see how this sense of vulnerability can diminish one's assertiveness or confidence; rather than prompting a competitor to act or resist, it can inhibit one's potential desire to protest. A similar sense of vulnerability was present in TD's description of one of her competitive experiences: "When I went backstage, my confidence went down the drain. Seriously. Anything below 5th place, you're just not recognized." The same sentiment of inferiority was echoed by SP who added: "I didn't like being singled out. It could be demoralizing for some people. And that could be more of a negative experience for some people."

Overall, this sense of vulnerability or inferiority that some of the competitors feel may be a contributing factor to the absence of explicit resistance in competitions. This section dealt with the instances of reluctant consent, in which the competitors felt pressured to comply or simply saw no other alternatives. There were, however, other instances in which the criteria were accepted voluntarily by the participants, and still other times during the interviews in which resistance was shown. The next section will examine the participants' voluntary compliance with the competition norms, and their resistance of them.

Absence and Presence of Resistance

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I entered into this study with expectations of radical forms of resistance from the participants. I anticipated that my participants would demonstrate far more

fierce protest against the form of femininity imposed on them in competitions. Throughout the interviews, it became increasingly clear that the form of resistance that I had initially been anticipated from the competitors did not take place. The two sections on appearance and posing alluded to some of the ways in which most of the participants consented to and resisted the criteria and expectations around hegemonic femininity in competitions. The following section will examine the potential reasons for the participants' voluntary consent to the competition criteria/norms. The concluding section of this chapter will finally explore the moments in which resistance to these criteria had indeed been demonstrated by the participants.

Internalization and Reproduction of Normalizing Discourses

The absence of explicit resistance among the participants seemed to have resulted, in part, from the lack of alternative competitive options available. Another explanation for the consent among the participants seemed to be the internalization and adoption of the dominant narratives of femininity, which in turn manifested themselves in the voluntary reproduction of normative practices by the competitors.

One of the main observations of Chapter 4 was that femininity and the description of an ideal female body offered by some of the participants consistently differed from its more traditional portrayals; however, these descriptions were still often discernibly imbued with elements of idealized femininity. An example of this was seen in CD's description of femininity (a curious mixture of conventional and non-conventional elements), in which muscular and large breasts were both identified as ideal feminine attributes. The presence of the more traditional ideals of femininity in CD's description spoke of the internalization of the dominant discourses around this topic. But the fusion of traditional and non-traditional features creates an image that

is filled with ambiguity: it is neither a complete embodiment of normalized visions of femininity, nor a dismissal of these perceptions.

CD's internalization of hegemonic ideals of femininity also showed up in other segments of the interview. For example, she perceived the conventional 'feminine activities' (i.e., body projects) to be part of the fun associated with the competitions:

[The hair, makeup, jewellery and nails] is the *fun* part about it cause you get to go out and feel beautiful on that day. If your hair is not done or your make-up is not done, it's not finished and it's all about the finish. I love it, like that's the fun day.

Scholars have highlighted that agency is a critical dimension of understanding power and privilege, and this must be taken into consideration when evaluating (women's) experiences of objectification (Bartky, 1990; Berger 1972; Young, 1990). Haug et al. (1987), for example, suggested that women experience identity, subjecthood and pleasure in the process of bodily objectification. In other words, the engagement in body projects (such as using makeup, painting one's nails, etc.) is usually a voluntary choice that the female agent makes to comply with sexist norms. The voluntary reproduction of standard narratives can be aided through internalization. CD's personal interest in engagement in body projects leads her to view the inclusion of these criteria in the judging of competitors as fine and fun; that is to say, she finds nothing wrong with the idea of having these activities as criteria on which competitors are *assessed*. Moreover, her definition of beauty seems to be a reproduction of dominant discourses around the notions of feminine beauty (i.e., having one's hair and makeup done). In this way, CD's internalization of ideals of beauty, what looks appropriate on a woman and what looks "finished" (all of which

follow culturally favoured ideals) lead her to voluntarily consent to the judging criteria.

Expressed in a different way, it is arguably CD's internalization of the cultural notions of beauty (and femininity) that acts as a form of prerequisite for the unquestioning and agentic acceptance of the judging criteria.

The reproduction of the standard narrative of femininity, namely the view that doing one's hair and makeup is a fun activity, was echoed by others as well. AJ had the following to say about this portion of the judging criteria: "I think that the hair and the makeup can also be a fun part of it when you learn sort of what works for you. I think it really needs to be enough for that individual person. That's a fine part of judging." AJ had expressed minor complaints previously in the interview about the emphasis on hair and makeup in competitions, saying, "it definitely has become more and more over the years, and I've definitely noticed that there's more emphasis on having your make-up a certain way." But she eventually concluded, "the hair and the makeup don't bother me." AJ seemed to have arrived at the conclusion that scoring female bodybuilders on their hair and makeup is an acceptable part of judging because she considered these activities to be fun.

CDB also concurred with AJ and CD in that she considered the preparation of one's appearance for the show as a fun and rewarding aspect of the competitions, stating that "getting glamorous for that one day and doing the photo shoots and everything is like your final pay off." However, she made it clear that she did not view this as a fair component in the assessment of female competitors: "I disagree with it and it's kind of what has driven me to back from the sport for now." While all these women had similar views and attitudes around engaging in body projects, their stances contrasted when it came to the inclusion of these factors in the judging. All

of them shared the view that doing one's hair and makeup for competition is fun and rewarding, but CDB resisted the idea that these should be included as elements of judging.

CD's adoption of the dominant narratives of femininity seemed to have extended to her views on the posing as well. When discussing the posing routine, the ambivalence that had characterized her depictions of a feminine appearance could also be seen in her description of feminine posing. In her statement, CD also implicitly associated (hetero)sexiness with femininity:

Even in Physique, there still should be a feminine component to it. You don't wanna come out there not looking all pretty and cute, because that obviously sells you, if you can somehow manage that sexiness, that curvature, that makes a woman beautiful, then obviously you're gonna increase your likelihood of winning. But it definitely... there is an element of preserving that femininity. For sure, that's why you get all dolled up and you go out and try to move in a sexy manner versus a very mechanical manner and I think that makes or breaks somebody who comes out and does very mechanical poses versus somebody who comes out and does this very exotic dance to showcase their muscles. People are gonna look at that quite differently.

One implicit remark in this quote that is important to demystify is that femininity and sexualization are inherently intertwined. In CD's view, to preserve one's femininity is to be sexy, which is what, in her judgment, "makes a woman beautiful." She also believes that "moving in a sexy manner" (presumably only for women) is superior to other modes of bodily presentation.

Once again, internalization of such dominant discourses paves the way for consent to criteria that compel women to present themselves in sexual ways.

This glorification of bodily objectification was internalized as well as verbalized by the participants. The reproduction of particular phrases and expressions will be given independent attention in this section. The perception that the sexualization of the female body is respectable and admirable was reproduced, accepted or tolerated by others in the study as well. This perception seems to be reinforced within the bodybuilding community through the use of normalizing discourses, and the euphemistic form they take. The participants in this study occasionally engaged in this practice in subtle ways. For example, as noted earlier, the way in which Bikini competitors are encouraged (or mandated) to present themselves on stage (referred to as the 'Bikini walk') involves poses that distinctively emphasize the competitors' sexuality more than their fitness and muscularity. The sexual gestures and movements involved in the Bikini walk often serve as a measure of how confident a competitor feels on the stage. SP's depiction of the Bikini walk illustrates the way in which performance of certain sexual gestures and posing in the Bikini category can be euphemistically associated with confidence and, therefore, deemed as acceptable/desirable:

I think that the way you carry yourself on stage, the little twerks or whatever you do makes you stand out a bit and makes you different from the next girl. I think all those do matter on how they judge confidence – absolutely. When somebody looks confident, everything looks natural. They look like they don't care, they're just having fun with it. And I think that's probably a good quality to have!

This comment is an instance of the intersection between internalization of dominant discourses and consent. Expressions that glorify the sexualization of the female athletes are commonly employed in the bodybuilding community. These phrases can distort the reality of some competition norms, and in doing so they conceal or obscure the meanings implicated in these practices. By equating the performance of sexual gestures with confidence (something that is arguably done in other cultural contexts as well), the objectification of the female body is masked as a prized and celebrated act, and therefore made easier for the athletes to accept and engage in. Simply put, if one is to believe and internalize the idea that sexualization of one's body is a form of confidence, then one is much less likely to resist (and more likely to consent to) judging criteria which mandate or encourage women to objectify their bodies in competitions.

If performing sexual gestures on stage is seen as a positive personality trait, one to be highly regarded and actively sought by the competitors, then the internalization of this association can account for the competitors' collusion in creating bodily objectification. The following statement by SP may illustrate this point more clearly:

I know women who did well in the competition were women who were more comfortable and more fluid and more natural in their walking, in their posing. Where it looked like they owned the stage because they belonged there. Very generally, women that were comfortable in their own skin.

What SP's statement demonstrates here is the employment of euphemistic labels to portray the bodily objectification of women in Bikini competitions in a positive light and, in doing so, concealing or deflecting attention away from the negative aspect of this norm. In a broad sense,

euphemism can be described as “a substitution of an unpleasant word by another...that expresses the idea with an appearance that is more pleasant, less shocking or honest” (Gomez, 2009). This version of the reality is then legitimized and spread around often by means of attaching a (seemingly technical) label to a practice. Phrases such as ‘owning the stage’ and being ‘comfortable in one’s own skin’ are examples of the type of euphemistic language that renders bodily objectification in fitness competitions acceptable and desirable. Euphemistic phrases can portray these acts as a normal and necessary part of the competitions.

In the above comment, SP explicitly identifies the poses as a form of expressing one’s confidence and the ability to execute them skillfully as a good quality to have. Despite her rather positive depiction of the Bikini walk, however, SP did also occasionally pause to question it:

She looked super natural, she looked good and confident, she looked great! That’s when I had my a-ha moment. I realized that’s what the judges were looking for. I thought well done, fine... but I thought this was a fitness competition? [laughs].
You know what I mean?

Here, SP described the competitor who was picked as the Bikini winner by the judges. She starts by offering positive adjectives, such as “good”, “confident” and “great” to describe her, but ended by slightly diverting to a more critical position and questioning the judging. She hesitated and showed doubt regarding the place of such gestures in a fitness competition. This shows that despite her approving attitude of the Bikini walk, SP did not accept the judging criteria in an entirely docile and unquestioning manner. Her seemingly compliant attitude was accompanied with occasional hints of resistance. The use of euphemistic language can perhaps be effective in

producing conformity and submission. Hence, promoting sexualization of women as a positive personality trait can lead to the approval of the criteria that mandate it. Likewise, the glorification of idealized femininity can be an effective means of inciting conformity.

Another normalizing phrase which routinely appeared in the participants' descriptions and comments was the phrase 'total package'⁸. Used as an expression to refer to the 'perfection' of one's appearance, this label can serve to legitimize the criteria on appearance: the elements of hair, makeup, shoes, jewelry, nails, competition suit and so on. In other words, a competitor who has "the total package" is one who not only has a great physique, but also has been able to fulfill these other expectations of hegemonic femininity. In a way, this label can make the additional criteria seem like a natural and expected *extension* of the fitness criteria. The technical tone of the label can also distract from the question of the legitimacy or fairness of these criteria. The phrase was duplicated by almost all of the competitors, and a few examples are provided here:

In Figure and Bikini, competitors are judged based on their overall package. (CDB)

Well it's a whole package basically. You want your hair to be as big as possible, your makeup as big as possible. But you have to remember that you are up on stage.

You have to make everything much bigger and exaggerated. (SK)

From a judge's perspective, it's the total package. You're gonna go with someone who has a polished look. (BB)

BB's comment further associates the expression "total package" with "polished look". If a 'total package' implies the expressions of idealized beauty, then this association further supports the presumption that idealized beauty is a naturally superior form of presentation. A corollary implication of this suggestion is that alternative forms of presentation are un-polished, undesirable and therefore inferior. SK's comment also involves another frequently-employed expression which makes the connection between being on stage and "bigger and exaggerated" natural. This type of normalizing discourse assumes that being on stage necessitates the need for makeup, shiny stiletto shoes and a showy outfit – that these factors must necessarily go hand-in-hand – despite the fact that the competition itself is generally believed to be about fitness and irrelevant to those things. The naturalization of this association can result in little to no resistance or questioning of the practices.

Not surprisingly, the rhetoric produced by SK suggested the internalization of dominant discourses. This was indicated in the similarity of hegemonic ideals and her ideals of femininity, which were conspicuously more harmonious with the dominant perceptions than most of the other participants'. In Chapter 4, it was mentioned that she explicitly identified muscularity and vascularity as masculine traits, and disapproved of the 'hard' look in women. Her internalization of dominant discourses was also evident in the way she explained the difference between male and female poses. Her untroubled assumption that all women desire to be small(er than men; including those who have entered a non-traditional field and dedicated much time and effort to altering their bodies to become bigger), indicates the internalization of the standard narrative on muscularity: that muscular development is an enterprise in which men alone are interested (and one which women fear or resent). Like CD, the internalization of these notions of femininity

seemed to have situated SK in a position that made the acceptance of the competition criteria unproblematic.

It was mentioned previously that at one point during the interview, SK offered advice on the things competitors should keep in mind when practicing their stage walk and constructing their femininity – or in other words, getting ‘stage ready.’ She believed that one of the main considerations in this process should be to create a type of stage presence that would please and impress the endorsement companies as well as the judges. In her view, then, rather than embracing one’s individuality and agency, the predominant preoccupation of a competitor should be to conform to the standards of femininity set out by the federations and the judging criteria. In a way, she proposed that competitors make the judges’/endorsers’ preferences their primary concern and alter their own image accordingly. This view implies that the competitors’ own reasons for getting involved in bodybuilding and competitions matter less or are irrelevant. She elaborated further on her own willingness to comply when she expressed satisfaction with the services provided by the federations to prescribe femininity: “People who run the show usually have posing clinics. They tell you exactly how to pose on stage. They’re actually really good at telling you what looks best for your body as well.” It seems that SK did not find the prescription and policing of femininity that take place in competitions troubling. To the contrary, she seemed quite happy to abide by these rules and to take the judges’ recommendations on how to pose and appear on stage.

SK’s passivity towards the posing expectations and the policing of stage presence resembled that of SP’s. First, SP confessed that she was not comfortable with the “flaunting” the competitors were required to do. She said:

I'm not normally an exhibitionist. [The walking] was really out of my element surprisingly. It's not something I could say I was comfortable doing. Even now I'm still not comfortable with that. I don't normally go flaunting myself at the beach even. You know, I usually cover myself up or I'm kind of more withdrawn with that. Here you're trying to smile and have fun [laughs]. Very hard for me, it's not a natural environment, so it's a bit out of my element. Yeah, it was a little bit nerve-wracking for sure.

Despite her admission that the “exhibitionist” qualities (which would presumably have increased her chances of doing well in the competition) were not the kind of gestures she felt comfortable performing, SP did not overtly protest the gestures or the posing routine requirements. For example, this form of physique exhibition was seen as “nerve-wracking” rather than sexist, unacceptable or simply inappropriate for a fitness competition. Instead, in the comments that followed, she seemed to hold *herself* responsible for not feeling comfortable with the type of femininity that had been dictated to her:

But because I saw that confidence in other women as they were walking down the isle, that helped me. I became more comfortable in my own skin. I think by watching other women BE comfortable in their own skin, and be proud of it, that I started realizing I *should* be proud of this. [Emphasis added by the participant]

In her description of how she successfully fulfilled the expectations of femininity in her first show, SP showed that she was willing to disregard or push beyond her comfort level in order to

meet the competition expectations. She drew on the apparent comfort of other women to bring herself to perform the required gestures with more ease. She also used this observation to legitimize the requirements of the Bikini walk by identifying the will to perform these gestures as a “good quality to have”.

SP’s absence of resistance (and indeed acceptance) of the Bikini criteria were, once again, similar to SK’s. Although (unlike SP) SK did not explicitly speak positively of the Bikini rules, she also did not protest or question them. This was reconfirmed later when she stated that the judging criteria were fair, and she expressed sympathy for the judges, saying that “their job is hard enough as it is”. She also suggested that if a competitor does not like the judging criteria, then she should “pick a different sport”. The rhetoric utilized by SK here is a reproduction of the justification that is offered by the federations themselves. The message here may be decoded into the following interpretations: First, it is implied that once the competitors have entered a show, the onus is now on the individual to accept the criteria; This, for some, may mean to potentially have to reconcile their personal values with the preferences of the judges; and second, it is implicitly suggested that the competitors should be held accountable for not agreeing with the criteria.

To reiterate, the suggestion by SK that the personal reasons, views and preferences of the competitors are secondary to those of the officials is a reproduction of the federations’ own rhetoric. This view discounts some of the reasons why the competitors became involved in bodybuilding and competitions in the first place. As was discussed in Chapter 4, one of the major internal incentives for these women to stay involved in bodybuilding was the sense of empowerment it granted them. Also, interestingly enough, both SK and SP identified this as a

major motivator for not only getting involved in bodybuilding initially, but their interest in competitions:

[Bodybuilding] is dedication, having a goal and putting that first and knowing that you accomplished your goals. Making sacrifice. (SK)

[Bodybuilding] to me felt empowering because now I have more control over my life. To a lot of [the competitors] it's not even about the looks – I find it very interesting, even for myself... it's also about challenging yourself. It's more a sense of empowerment and a sense of um... strength, physical strength, and challenging yourself. (SP)

In summary, the participants in the study were willing – to varying degrees – to reproduce the dominant discourses in competitions and to engage in the sexist practices. Although the judging criteria mandate the display of hegemonic femininity in competitions, some of the competitors did not perceive them as obligatory and, at times, even showed enthusiasm as they engaged in these practices. For them, the decision to comply with the norms and the judging criteria seemed like a completely free choice, unbounded by external pressures or expectations. This absence of awareness and radical resistance however, was not ubiquitous and was coupled with numerous instances of critical questioning, resistance and even protest. Some of the participants seemed quite reluctant to comply, and were more firm and vocal in their protests of the judging criteria. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to a discussion of such instances of protest.

(Subtle) Resistance

Among the aforementioned reproductions of normative discourses, and the overall sense of compliance in the participants, there were also occasional bouts of resistance. These instances of resistance were generally conveyed in a subtle and less blatant way than I had initially expected. There were times when questions, doubts or concerns by the competitors challenged and critiqued normative ideologies around femininity and gender roles. There were also frequent statements of protest and questioning by the participants when they described their views of the competition judging criteria. This section is dedicated to the discussion of such instances of resistance.

To recap, the participants in this study all agreed that bodybuilding is a meaningful and empowering experience for women. An extension of this notion, expressed by more than half of the participants, was the idea that competitions should represent an empowering space where hard work and dedication, more than anything else, is prized. In other words, these competitors felt that competing should be about the physical training, and the competition judging criteria must be a reflection of this.

SP, for example, seemed slightly disappointed by the additional judging criteria as she had considered the challenge to be a matter of physical training: “I thought it was about fitness. To me it was more about putting myself out there, challenging myself and getting to that point. It’s more fashion as opposed to fitness, and I looked at it as more of a fitness competition.” She was not alone in her criticism. The same frustration was expressed by AJ and TD, who also did not find the competitions fair in this regard. AJ explained that her expectations of the competitions were different than what often actually happened:

Sometimes I know the judge marked me good for the suit and one marked me average. Maybe someone likes the colour and someone doesn't. It's frustrating; I don't like it at all. Because that's not why I entered the competition in the first place, right? I entered to give myself a physical end goal.

Once again, the physical training aspect of bodybuilding was the reason AJ was involved in competitions. TD, too, spoke of the hard work associated with training and her wish that this aspect be recognized and rewarded more in competitions. She singled out the WBFF to criticize the federation for the emphasis it placed on appearance criteria, and claimed that she would never compete within it again. The following summarizes her view on this issue:

A lot of money goes into the WBFF and I would never compete with them again. The reason why I compete is for body structure. I find that if your hair has to look nice and your makeup has to look nice, there are a lot of people who spend all this time training and all this blood, sweat and tears and they don't get recognized because their shoes aren't as expensive... If one girl has long luscious hair, I don't think that should be a factor in deciding who gets a trophy. Someone putting makeup on their face better than the other girl, I just don't agree with it.

She then offered her recommendations for a better system of judging in bodybuilding competitions:

If I could change something about the competitions, it would be being less worried about the aesthetic portion, and just trying to figure out who actually went out there and worked really really hard. And just comparing people based on their muscle.

LO and CDB, as well, did not think that the judging criteria around looking glamorous or sexy reflected their own reasons for competing. LO clearly explained that her reasons for competing were quite different from what she felt was valued in competitions:

For me competing meant being strong, and not giving up and giving it your all, and even when you're tired, being dedicated and determined and finding that fire within you and working hard and being disciplined at home, and when you're out with your diet. It was such hard work and I felt empowered. And I almost wish that the competition itself would've been more about the physical, not about how you're walking and posing. That part was very uncomfortable for me.

CDB also strongly disapproved of the criteria, specifically those of the Bikini category. She seemed to think that the introduction and growth of this particular category was diminishing the sport of bodybuilding as a whole:

A lot of federations are now phasing out bodybuilding; they don't even have a Physique category. All there is now is a Bikini girl. And I start to go, where is the sport? We lost the sport. We lost the sport criteria of it, which is you put your body

through hell and back to get there. I don't feel the Bikini girls have put that effort in that I have. But when you see them get pro cards, it undermines the sport.

CDB suggested that the Bikini category was not a good reflection of what the sport of bodybuilding should be about. There were others who also appeared to concur with this suggestion, themselves seeming critical of the Bikini practices and norms. TD for example said:

Years ago in Bikini, there was no working out involved. I didn't think it was fair. A lot of those girls would win trophies and get endorsements and become successful meanwhile there are girls for Fitness Model and Figure, training 24 weeks out and they wouldn't get recognized.

The suggestion that the athletic work involved in Bikini is less than other categories was refuted by AJ. But the sentiments around it not representing the goals and values of bodybuilding was shared by her as well:

I'm not drawn to the Bikini category. I find that that's more modeling type. So it's a body that's definitely athletic, but most Bikini models usually have implants... and they try to look a little bit more sexy... a little bit more... almost... sultry. But do the girls still train hard? Yes. I would not take away from that.

In AJ's view, Bikini was a category which involved the same amount of hard work as any other category; but the emphasis placed on the aesthetic portion of it seemed to deter her from the category. KM also agreed with this:

In terms of the Bikini category, it's all about aesthetics. It's nothing to do with fitness; you can't even perform a skill. The criteria are based on looks. Do they carry themselves a certain way on the stage? They [i.e., the officials] want what they can put on the cover [of a magazine] not necessarily what looks fit.

BB, too, agreed with the view that the Bikini category seemed closer to modeling than bodybuilding. After explaining that "all the other criteria account for more than 50%" of judging, she questioned the place Bikini category had in physique-related competitions.

BB confessed that as a judge, she had doubts about whether the Bikini category was suitable for a bodybuilding competition. Also, as a former competitor in the Bodybuilding category, she echoed AJ in stating that she would not be interested in competing in Bikini herself: "I'm not really motivated to train myself to wear heels. I'm more of a tomboy, and um, I can't get that walk down. Frankly, that's just not my personality." "The walk" (i.e., the Bikini walk) was an issue that was commonly identified as problematic and objectionable by most of the competitors (Bikini and non-Bikini alike). BB elaborated on her thoughts on the Bikini posing at a different point during the interview. She explained that some federations encourage the sexual gestures in competitions, but some of these acts were, in her words, "slutty" and "degrading".

LO and CDB also expressed negative feelings about the posing in the Bikini category. Both of these women had found bodybuilding a positive and empowering experience as a daily

practice, but explained that their experiences of competing had not been positive precisely because of the posing criteria. For CDB, competing in the Bikini category was a one-time adventure which she claimed she would never repeat again. After having been convinced by her coach to compete in the Bikini category for the first time (as opposed to the Figure category in which she had previously competed), CDB noticed a discernible difference between the posing in Bikini and Figure:

I find with Bikini girls... some were all out there. Some were putting their butt out in the air, waving it for the judges... I guess just really strutting your stuff. And I guess the whole confidence slash strutting your stuff became more of a [pause] what should I say [pause] became more of a stripper walk. And I found the more you strut your stuff, which means the bigger butt and the better boobs you have, the more attention you could get and the higher the placing. Let's face it, you'll never see a Bikini girl win that doesn't have any cleavage. Every time I went to a posing workshop it felt like... I felt like I was losing respect for myself. Because I felt the posing was more about showing off and not the sport. And I felt the difference between posing in Bikini and the posing in Figure.

These are strong words of protest by CDB, which evidently indicate that she is in no way in favour of the Bikini walk. She also seemed reluctant to negotiate the imposition or performance of this form of femininity in competitions, although she eventually did do so. CDB's choice to never compete in the Bikini category again can be considered a strong form of resistance, though

this was limited to the Bikini category alone (she stated that she may continue with the Figure category in the future).

Perhaps the strongest example of protest against the imposition of idealized femininity in competitions (in practice rather than merely verbal) came from LO who, in practice rather than merely verbally, resisted an aspect of the criteria. As mentioned earlier, she explained that despite the pressures from her trainer and competition criteria to have long nails, she was unwilling to negotiate her principles on this matter. She knowingly chose to lose marks but not compromise her own position on this issue. Although LO's refusal to wear long nails may not be a significant and radical form of protest, it was the only form in this study which involved a competitor employing her individual power to take a stance against the competition criteria. None of the other competitors went as far as employing their own power to resist *in practice*. In addition, since LO had been left with no other option but to comply, she had decided to quit competing altogether after her first show. She did not challenge or resist any of the other femininity criteria in competitions, despite clearly finding some of them problematic. For example, as indicated earlier in this chapter, she was frustrated with the tanning portion of the competitions, and preferred to have this element eliminated. Her thoughts on the Bikini walk, as well, can be summarized in the following statement: "I don't think it's fair. I think it's demoralizing. I don't think it's right. The posing is more on the sleazy side than the powerful and empowering."

The quotes provided in this section demonstrate that the women in this study were not passively conforming to the notions of idealized femininity dictated by the judging criteria. Almost all of the participants did, at times, pause to express skepticism or resistance (to various extents). While some of the participants readily (or passively) accepted idealized femininity in

competitions, others showed more reluctance and disapproval. The latter group, though dissatisfied and frustrated, nevertheless seemed pessimistic about the prospect of future change. As a result, they, too, maintained a tolerant attitude towards the problematic aspects of the competitions, and eventually complied. Hence, with regards to the norms of femininity in bodybuilding competitions, there seemed to be an overall sense of acceptance among the competitors, albeit for distinctly different reasons.

Chapter Summary

This chapter first discussed the participants' views and perceptions of the competition criteria and expectations. It then examined the participants' negotiations with these criteria, and the degree to which the women in this study were willing to submit to or resist expectations of idealized femininity in competition. In particular, the posing and appearance criteria associated with the Bikini category was identified by most of the competitors as problematic. Despite the frequent expressions of disapproval or dissatisfaction by the participants, there seemed to be an absence of radical resistance among them. The final chapter of this thesis will provide a global summary of the themes discussed so far.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to examine the ways in which women who have participated in bodybuilding competitions perceive, negotiate or resist the judging criteria that mandate or otherwise encourage display of idealized femininity. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do Canadian female bodybuilders negotiate the imposition, expectations and normalization of idealized femininity in current bodybuilding competitions?
2. How do the current judging criteria impact women's bodybuilding and competitors?

The nine women who participated in this study expressed their views on femininity and muscularity, and discussed their perceptions of the competition judging criteria. During the course of the interviews, participants raised many important issues as they reflected upon and shared their experiences. In this process, a number of dominant themes started to emerge, some of which were unanticipated:

- 1) The responses offered by the participants conveyed some ambivalence as some of their views challenged as well as reproduced dominant perceptions, narratives and ideals of femininity.
- 2) The responses showed that the participants were able to negotiate the judging criteria by accepting or tolerating them. For this reason, there was no significantly radical form of opposition to the institutionalization of hegemonic femininity among the participants. However, this overall sense of tolerance was accompanied by occasional critiques and resistance to the competition norms.

Although the first main theme did not directly address the research question, it provided some cultural contextualization of the competitive experiences of the participants and, in so doing, indirectly informed the major questions of this study. The participants' perceptions of femininity and muscularity may seem contradictory (to an outsider), as they are both alternative to hegemonic femininity and therefore transgressive, but also contained and policed. This relationship between femininity and muscularity in the eyes of the participants became a central narrative that seemed to influence their perceptions of competitions, and were therefore significant and relevant to the major research questions. This concluding chapter will provide a global summary of the research themes and identify some future areas of research.

Summary of Research Themes

A recurrent theme throughout the interviews was the contradictions in the participants' experiences, narratives and perceptions around femininity and muscularity as well as about bodybuilding competitions. In Chapter 4, the women's thoughts on femininity and muscularity were discussed. The quotes captured the women's beliefs and views on what femininity "looks like", as well as their attitudes towards muscularity in women. Not surprisingly perhaps, all of the participants in the study deemed muscularity as an attractive and enhancing feature for a female body. Much like Duff and Hong's (1984) findings, these women seemed to have constructed "a new concept of femininity that combines aspects of traditional definitions with added dimensions of muscularity and body symmetry" (p. 374). Unlike the homogenous sample that Duff and Hong utilized in their study, however, this study's group consisted of competitors who had participated in different categories, and thus had preferences for (and achieved) different muscularity levels. Some of the participants, like CD, viewed muscularity as a rather

significant and necessary component of femininity (and sex appeal). This supported Bartky's (1988) suggestion that female bodybuilders are neither particularly consumed by cultural codes of femininity, nor are they troubled by their own transgression of such boundaries.

However, notable among these study participants was the perception that 'too much' muscularity is incompatible with femininity. The women also placed an upper limit on female muscularity. In other words, participants did not accept female muscularity unconditionally and felt that there exists a muscularity level at which the female body will become masculine.

Furthermore, the study participants considered the supposed resemblance between the muscled female body and the male body unattractive and even inappropriate. This was a contradiction that had appeared in the participants' discourses: though at times critical of the ways in which muscled women were unjustly stereotyped as 'abnormal' or treated unfairly by others, the women in this study did nevertheless themselves reproduce, in some ways, dominant discourses of hegemonic femininity (cf., Duff & Hong, 1984; Wesley, 2001). The contradictions that were observed in this study were similar to what Boyle (2005) observed among her participants: the descriptions offered by the professional and amateur female bodybuilders in her study also defied culturally produced limits on female muscle while simultaneously protecting them.

The idea that the more muscular a female physique gets, the closer it becomes to the male body in shape and appearance implies that muscularity is inherently a masculine trait. This equation of muscularity with masculinity was also observed in Boyle's study as she writes: that "muscularity is invested with the power to metamorphose femininity into masculinity" (2005, p. 138). Although the attitudes of the women in this study of Canadian female bodybuilders regarding female muscularity were unusually accepting and positive (a level of acceptance which also surpassed what Dworkin (2001) referred to as the socially constructed "glass ceiling" on

women's muscular strength), they still seemed to have internalized the normative perception that muscularity is a masculine trait. A few of the participants explicitly identified heavy muscularity as 'unnatural' for women. These comments supported previous assertions that "bodybuilding is seen as *unnatural* when it challenges dominant interpretations of gender identity" (Wesley, 2001, p. 167, emphasis in the original) and that "deliberately muscular women disturb dominant notions of gender" and "open up a site of conflict and ambiguity" (Schulze, 1997, p. 9).

There was another way in which the competitors' perceptions of femininity created ambivalence: the descriptions of bodily beauty offered by the participants often simultaneously defied and reproduced hegemonic ideals of femininity. For example, CD described the ideal body as having a broad back *and* large breasts and she argued that both were desirable embodiments of femininity. While the first part of this description goes against commonplace notions of femininity, the second part appears to be a reproduction of these norms. KM's description of an ideal body also portrayed a muscular body as attractive, while simultaneously integrating features of conventional femininity (such as long hair and nails) into this description. Because of the intermittent incorporation of traditionally feminine elements into their descriptions of the ideal female body, the views of the participants in this study did not quite support Roussel and Griffet's assertion that "female bodybuilders are marginalized because of their diverging perception of bodily beauty (2000, p. 130). While clearly not reproducing the normative views of femininity in an all-encompassing way, these women offered descriptions that also were not totally foreign to the hegemonic ideals. A more accurate view of how these women conceptualized feminine beauty is captured in Duff and Hong's (1984) suggestion that female bodybuilders see muscularity as "*increasing* their femininity and *adding* to their attractiveness" (p. 374; emphasis added).

The ambivalent views of femininity that the participants held seemed to affect their perceptions of the judging criteria in competitions. Their ambivalence towards muscularity and femininity, a central narrative in their interviews, contextualized the participants' experiences of competitions and therefore informed the main research questions about how competitors negotiate the competition criteria. The participants' statements about the judging criteria were considered in Chapter 5. Here, it was shown that some of the participants perceived the requirements of femininity (i.e., having long nails, exaggerated make-up, high heels, etc.) as fun, rewarding or otherwise harmless components of the competitions. For instance, the casual way in which SP explained the significance of executing skillfully such gestures as "little twerks" of the body on stage, demonstrated her acceptance of such practices. Some of the participants actively endorsed these requirements with further confidence, regarding them as a *necessary* part of the competitions. The expression of favourable attitudes (toward not only the hegemonic ideals of femininity, but also the imposition of these ideals in bodybuilding competitions) seemed to once again contradict the participants' non-traditional muscularity preferences. In other words, the participants endorsed both normative and non-normative views simultaneously.

An expansion of this idea may make the paradox more discernible: all of the women admired female muscle; some even confessed that they would welcome the opportunity to flex their muscles on stage and display them in a more exaggerated manner (a markedly unconventional preference, even among competitors). This preference at first may appear as a challenge to the prevalent assumption that women invariably seek to be small(er than men) or that they detest muscular growth. It may also make the competitor appear as deliberately resisting and defying naturalized narratives concerning the way in which women wish to appear and/or behave. However, this 'defiant image' is lessened when these women profess to take

pleasure in engaging in traditionally feminine rituals/bodily practices, creating a (hyper)feminine image and, at times, (hyper)sexualizing their own bodies. Of this observation, one is rather tempted to conclude that after having deliberately constructed physiques that stray away from the mainstream, some women attempt to reconcile their transgressive bodies with the standard ideals by over-conforming to hegemonic norms, or in other words, to engage in the ‘feminine apologetic’ (Lowe, 1998). Though this may be a mere speculation, it is congruent with previous assertions (e.g., Choi, 2003; Guthrie et al., 1994; Hargreaves, 1994) that “in pushing at the limits of gender identity, lipstick and blonde locks are as necessary for the woman bodybuilder as they are for the female impersonator” (Mansfield & McGinn, 1994, p. 64).

Inconsistent and paradoxical though these views may appear, there seems to be a plausible explanation for them: these women are at a broader level immersed in a culture where traits associated with hegemonic femininity are celebrated and glorified. But at the same time, they are engaged in an activity – and a subculture – which valorizes a different set of traits that, for the most part, are oppositional to those valued by the dominant culture. Therefore, it is not especially surprising that there were some instances of ambiguity and that many of the statements uttered during the interviews seemed to convey inconsistent messages.

The bodybuilding subculture does not exist in a social vacuum; the broader social and cultural attitudes around femininity, masculinity and muscularity operate in complex ways to influence (and be influenced by) women’s bodybuilding. The women in this study, and more generally all female bodybuilders (like other female athletes), are not isolated or shielded from the dominant cultural environment and the constructs of femininity normalized through it. Female bodybuilders are women who intentionally engage in an activity that is unconventional (for women), and transgressive of the dominant cultural norms. As the participants in this study

expressed, they derive pleasure, empowerment and many other positives from this practice. At the same time, those female bodybuilders who compete have to negotiate judging criteria that *do* require idealized femininity, and these negotiations therefore convey ambivalence. While some of the women in this study thought these criteria were fun or acceptable, others found them restrictive, demeaning and problematic. The female bodybuilders in this study communicated ambivalence, perhaps because they find themselves *to be* in an ambivalent position.

To appear muscular, and at the same time embrace traits of hegemonic femininity, is what is expected, if not required, of these women in competitions. Furthermore, with regards to femininity, the expectations of the broader culture can be said to be in direct contrast to the physique bodybuilding creates. The amalgamation of two seemingly incompatible views into one may be symptomatic of the clash or blending of broader social forces (which condemn muscled women) and the views of the bodybuilding subculture (which treasure muscle on the female body). These are the covert personal struggles of competitors to construct a self-identity which is harmonious with the broader social norms, praised and valued within the bodybuilding subculture, and – perhaps most importantly – in line with one’s own preferences for the balance between muscularity and femininity. While there may have been an absence of critical attention to women’s bodybuilding from the participants (e.g., the fact that no one raised the issue of the different posing and requirements in the male categories), the women in this study did engage in an untraditional activity that granted them with many benefits such as confidence, strength, praise, etc. They are not social dupes, but are negotiating the paradoxes within the bodybuilding subculture, and the clashes/inconsistencies between the two cultures in ways that make sense to them.

A second major theme started to emerge in the responses of the participants, which also provided an answer to the chief research question of this study: The participants were able to negotiate the competition criteria by accepting or tolerating them. Despite this tolerance, however, there were numerous instances in which criticisms of the current competition criteria were vocalized. Considering the discussions offered in Chapter 5, the participants' reactions to the arrangements of femininity in competitions were generally positive, and some of them freely engaged in "technologies of femininity" (Wesely, 2001). A reference to an observation from this chapter may further clarify this theme.

Three women – CD, AJ, and CDB – stated that they were attracted to the posing routine in Physique and Bodybuilding categories, which involved flexing (a component that is prohibited in other categories). First, this reveals a piece of information important to the current research study, namely the way in which certain competition regulations (in this case, the posing routine for any category other than Physique and Bodybuilding) intentionally or unintentionally (but at any rate, quite explicitly) prohibit gestures that are considered masculine and unfeminine, and thus sanction only a very restrictive form of femininity. It is also revealed here that at least *some* of the competitors' desire to surpass the "glass ceiling of muscularity" (Dworkin, 2001), to become "bulky" and "shredded", and to showcase their muscled bodies in an overtly unconventional form. Referring to Bartky's feminist Foucauldian analysis of women 'pumping iron', it can be said that the suggestion that women bodybuilders have "little concern for the limits of body development imposed by current canons of femininity" was supported to some extent in this study (1988, p. 83).

The key message, however, was that all three of these women responded favourably to the *femininity* criteria of the competitions. They all indicated that such criteria as having the hair,

nails and make-up done were rewarding and fun. This is not to overstate the significance of engaging in these technologies of femininity, or to suggest that such technologies, especially in the mild form of make-up and hair, are inherently reprehensible. It is, however, important to emphasize once again that these are *required* criteria on which competitors are *evaluated*, and they can be problematized in that capacity. Furthermore, the acceptance of such criteria by women who have used their “corporeal agency” (Wesley, 2001) to construct bodies that transgress hegemonic femininity (especially in such a blatant form as flexing muscles) adds to the counterintuitive appearance of this conformity. This compliance was not restricted to the three women mentioned here, but rather was observed in all of the participants to various extents.

Examining this pattern from a Foucauldian perspective, there is something to be said about the simultaneous interaction between two factors, namely the pushing of the limits of gender boundaries and bodily surveillance/discipline. This is a point that has been noted in a number of articles in the past. If muscle is the signifier of male power and masculinity (Dyer, 1992; Gillet & White, 1992; Randall, Hall & Rogers, 1992; Wesley, 2001), then its development on the female body can erode culturally constructed gender boundaries (Grogan et al., 2004) and result in anxiety for both the constructor and the observer. Therefore, to counteract the transgression/challenge that visible female muscularity poses to dominant beliefs, body technologies such as makeup, hairstyle and plastic surgery may be accepted and employed by the bodybuilders (Mansfield and McGinn, 1993). This analysis can explain the participants’ acceptance of the demands for femininity in competition and elsewhere, without negating their desire for larger and more visible muscles.

Another potential reason for the lack of resistance observed in the responses is the possibility that the competition criteria were not accepted by (at least some of) the participants,

but merely *tolerated*. As was suggested in one of the section in Chapter 5, the lack of alternative options for the competitors may have had something to do with their lack of protest. A number of participants suggested or implied that appearing as feminine so to meet the judging criteria – insofar as it increases one’s likelihood of winning even at the expense of one’s freedom of expression – is a worthwhile pursuit. In other words, implicit in their rhetoric was the idea that reconstructing one’s image to fit the prescriptions dictated by the competition governing bodies is crucial, even if it means compromising personal standards, principles or beliefs. This is a possibility that was noticed and described by Lowe (1998) as well, when she considered the potential consequences for female bodybuilders if they were to diverge too far from competition norms or rules. Once again, it is important to consider that female bodybuilders simultaneously reside in two different cultures with contradicting expectations. In addition, in order to succeed in competitions, it is crucial to follow competition guidelines. Put simply, it is plausible that compliance may be preferable or mandatory when the stakes are perceived to be high. This does appear to be the case at competitions, at least for some of the competitors.

While the women in this study may have felt pressured by the sport governing bodies or the norms of the subculture of bodybuilding to construct and perform hegemonic femininity, it must still be kept in mind that constructing muscled bodies is inherently an act of resistance for women (McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009) and should be regarded as such, irrespective of other attempts to feminize or fetishize the body. Indeed, if female muscularity was not a manifest form of gender transgression, then there would be no need for hyper-feminizing the muscled female body. The deliberate pursuit and construction of deviance is in itself an act of resistance.

Both major themes discussed so far (i.e., the contradictory messages and the absence of resistance) can be explained in terms of the internalization of certain beliefs, narratives, ideas,

etc. In this sense, both themes are interconnected. This idea requires some unpacking coupled with a few examples: First, as was already demonstrated, the paradoxes that were noted earlier in this chapter may implicate the internalization of the ideals from both the bodybuilding ‘world’ and the broader culture. As the bodybuilding world is not completely secluded from the dominant cultural perceptions, these women’s ideals of femininity were affected by the ideals of the bodybuilding subculture as well as the broader cultural norms. To restate the example that was used earlier, desiring a broad back may be indicative of the ideals of the bodybuilding culture, while the preference for larger breasts implicates the internalization of dominant views of femininity. This internalization of dominant norms and ideals can then assist with acceptance and adherence to the competition criteria that idealize and celebrate hegemonic femininity.

For example, if having large breasts is accepted as an ideal feature of femininity, then having competition norms that endorse and encourage breast implants (as was indicated by some of the participants in this study) may not be viewed as problematic. Likewise, if a competitor has internalized and accepted the dominant discourses (for instance, that getting one’s hair and makeup done makes a woman beautiful), then she is more likely to accept (or at least tolerate) the incorporation of these practices into the judging criteria. Referring back to CD’s comments, it is conceivable that her internalization of cultural preferences on what femininity is and how it should be expressed, also shaped her views on what form of femininity is acceptable in competitions. In a sense, her adoption of the dominant discourses seemed to pave the way for an accepting attitude towards the competition judging criteria. Thus, the internalization of the cultural standards of femininity can potentially and partially explain both research themes: Where there was internalization of the dominant norms, there was a lack of protest, as well as a

tendency for contradictory discourse. The paradox of femininity and muscularity also became evident when the endorsement of cultural norms seemed to supersede the reasons to defy them.

Future Research Directions

The sample in this study consisted only of Canadian female bodybuilding competitors. Future research can include other key persons in the competitive bodybuilding scene, such as the sport governing bodies, judges, media and male bodybuilders. Furthermore, although this study is one of the first of its kind to look at women's bodybuilding in Canada, geography was not a central consideration and focus in this study. Therefore, future research would profit from dedicated examination of the ways in which bodybuilding and its governance is influenced by being in or outside of Canada. Another possible direction for future research is examining the lack of pressure on male sexualization in bodybuilding, and contrasting the ways in which men's and women's bodybuilding categories differ in this sense.

In this study, the participants singled out the Bikini category and the posing routine and practices associated with it as the most problematic category. After having examined the participants' negotiation of the form of idealized femininity that is most manifestly endorsed in the Bikini category, several other questions are prompted: What are the implications of the Bikini category? What are its potentials? What does it mean for women's empowerment, especially in sports? These are questions that, given the novelty of the category itself, deserve more in-depth and individual attention. Thus, future studies can tackle each of these questions separately. Since most of the participants in this study chose to speak about the Bikini category at length, these questions were considered to a limited extent in this study and can therefore be speculated about.

First, it is possible that the competitions and the categories have changed to the extent that they now, far from appearing deviant, accommodate and appeal to a much larger subgroup of women, including those who deeply endorse hegemonic ideals of femininity. Another possibility is that this great shift has taken place in the culturally dominant perceptions of femininity: A shift large enough to have made it possible for the supporters of idealized femininity to be able to reconcile their ideals with the physical demands of the Bikini competitions. A third possibility is that there has been a shift on both sides of the equation (namely the competitions and the dominant culture), which have resulted in a reconciliation and fusion of the two forms of femininity into what is now known as the Bikini category.

To effectively conceptualize the role of the Bikini category in serving women's liberation and empowerment, or otherwise undermining and subtracting from it, is a topic that requires further examination. The question of whether the Bikini category, as a novel and rather nuanced form of bodybuilding, has a subversive potential is one to which no definite or certain answers can yet be given. On the one hand, it may be considered an improvement and a positive step in a way of accommodating a wider range of interests, without requiring 'extreme' bodily practices. On the other hand, its rules and regulations can be seen as detrimental to the image of bodybuilding as a sport (because it implicates an unfair dis/advantage where none is necessary), to the women who are dedicated to the practice and lifestyle of bodybuilding and, more generally, to women's empowerment and liberation from having their femininity and sexuality defined, policed and tamed. The conclusion that one can draw about the Bikini category from examining the results of this study alone is an echo of St. Martin and Gavey's closing note that "women's bodybuilding can be seen as both feminist resistance and as an object of femininity's recuperation" (1996, p. 56).

This research study examined the competitive experiences and perceptions of female bodybuilders, with particular attention to the ways in which they negotiated norms of idealized femininity in competitions. Although the original research question focused on normalized notions of hegemonic femininity in competitions, the data gathered went beyond this focus of to underline the unusual and seemingly contradictory views that some female bodybuilders hold of female muscularity and femininity. These views were connected to the main research question, in that they pointed to the influence of broader cultural perceptions on alternative versions of femininity constructed by bodybuilders. This influence, in turn, seemed to play a role in the bodybuilders' acceptance or tolerance of the competition judging criteria.

In this thesis, I hope to have demonstrated that the cultural implications and meanings of women's bodybuilding, including the Bikini category, cannot be reduced and dichotomized into either a resistance of hegemonic ideals of femininity, or a reinforcement of it. Rather, it must be subjected to a much deeper, intricate and more careful analysis and interpretation, because as the women in this study demonstrated, women's bodybuilding does have the potential to simultaneously accept and subvert the ideal.

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Notes

¹Felkar (2012, p. 40) defines a female bodybuilder as “any woman who intentionally builds her body through rigorous diet and training to gain significant amounts of muscle mass”. Similarly, Mansfield and McGinn (1993, p. 51) describe a bodybuilder as “a [female] who deliberately cultivates an increase in mass and strength of the skeletal muscles (hypertrophy) by means of the lifting and pushing of weights.” In this sense, the definition of a female bodybuilder includes women competing in all of the aforementioned categories of competition in most of the main current bodybuilding federations: Bodybuilding, Physique, Figure, Fitness, and Bikini categories.

² “Affiliated national, regional and continental federations ... join the IFBB of their own free will and, in so doing, agree to abide by the constitution and rules.” – (IFBB Rulebook, 2009 Edition)

³ The suggestion that male competitors are not “taught” or encouraged to act sexy on stage in efforts to sway the judges or increase their chances of winning does not negate the possibility that they experience other form(s) of pressure around sex and sexuality.

⁴ Plastic surgery among bodybuilders may be used as a means of reviving one’s ‘lost femininity’. In competitions, though, it has been documented that competitors are encouraged by the judges, both implicitly and explicitly, to undergo breast augmentation in order to improve their placement in competitions (Choi 2000; Guthrie et al. 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Heywood, 1998; Wesley 2001; Lowe, 1998). Moreover, competitors often indicate awareness of the unfair advantage given to athletes with breast enhancements (Lowe, 1998). The competitor’s overall attractiveness, too, has been documented to play an influential role in the judges’ evaluation, and consequently the outcome of the competition (Lowe, 1998).

⁵ Some may interpret the acts performed in the Bikini posing routine as non-sexual. Among the participants that were interviewed in this study, the views on this topic were divided. Some participants argued that whether or not sexualization is promoted as a part of the posing in competitions depends on the federation. The view provided here is the researcher’s own interpretation of the Bikini posing routine in general, and may not be representative of other views offered.

⁶ In 2013, the WBFF officially changed its name from World Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation to World Beauty Fashion and Fitness.

⁷ This form of posing is common in Physique and Bodybuilding categories, where in one round, the competitor has a given amount of time (about one minute) to perform different poses. The choreography of this “posing routine” is left up to the competitor, but the routine must include the mandatory poses for these two categories. For the Physique category, the mandatory poses include: Front double biceps; back double biceps; side triceps; side chest; and front ab/thigh. The women’s Bodybuilding category includes the Physique poses, as well as two additional poses: Front lats spread and back lats spread.

⁸ This was an observation that was made during the interviews as well as in other settings (i.e., while conducting ethnographic fieldwork), suggesting that this type of discourse is common in the bodybuilding community as a whole.

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. I'm going to ask you to describe your background in the sport of women's bodybuilding.
Probes:
 - How/why did you first start bodybuilding?
 - How/why did you first start competing?
2. I want to ask you about your current involvement in the sport of women's bodybuilding.
Probes:
 - How often do you train?
 - How much time do you dedicate to this sport in total (including training, cooking, classes, other?)
3. What is it about bodybuilding that interests you?
Probes:
 - Why do women get involved in bodybuilding/describe the motivations to want to build muscle
 - Can you think of some stories or instances where you had a special/different experience (good or bad) as a result of being a bodybuilder?(Describe the identity of a bodybuilder/what does it feel like to be a bodybuilder?)
 - Is bodybuilding different for men than women? How?
4. Describe your experiences of competitions?
 - What motivated you to become involved in competitions?
 - What did it feel like? What were your expectations? Stories? Likes/dislikes?
 - What are some of the common practices that women engage in in preparation for a competition?
 - How do you feel about these practices?
 - What have your experiences been like since then?
5. In your opinion, what criteria do women get judged based on in competitions?
Probes:
 - How do you feel about these criteria?
 - How did these criteria compare to your expectations from before?
6. Describe the ideal female body.
Probes:
 - Have your ideals of the female body or femininity changed since you became involved in bodybuilding?
 - Why or why not?

-
- If yes, what do you think caused it? How do you feel about these changes (do you consider them positive or negative)?
7. I want to ask you about femininity in this industry... What does it mean to be feminine and how important is it? Why?
 - Is that what it means to you as well?
 - Who gets to decide what looks feminine?
 - How much freedom do you and other bodybuilders have in expressing 'other' forms of femininity (both in and outside of competition)
 8. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of the competitions? Are you happy with the way things are? Do you think it's fair?
 9. Negatives/positives of the *practice* of bodybuilding?
 10. Negatives/positives of competitions?
 11. If you could change things about competitions, how would you change them?
 12. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments you would like to share with me? Is there anything that we didn't discuss that you feel is important to this discussion? Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Date:

Project Title: Subverting the Ideal? Canadian Female Fitness Competitors' Resistance of Idealized Femininity

Investigator: Bahar Tajrobehkar, BSc (York University)

Supervisor: Parissa Safai, PhD (York University)

This Informed Consent Form, in conjunction with the Study Information Sheet, should give you a basic idea of the research project and what your participation will involve. A copy of both the Informed Consent Form and Study Information Sheet will be left for your records and reference. If you have further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Bahar Tajrobehkar at btajro@yorku.ca or Parissa Safai, PhD at psafai@yorku.ca.

Purpose of the Research:

The objective of this proposed research is to examine the experiences of Canadian female bodybuilders with regards to bodybuilding competition judging criteria. This study employs qualitative research methods, specifically ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with those who are familiar with this topic, and who are willing to share their opinions, experiences and thoughts.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

You are invited to participate in one in-depth interview. The one in-person interview will last between 30-90 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience, with the possibility of a telephone interview should the need arise.

Risks and/or Compensation:

We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. There is no financial compensation for research participants; however, you may request a copy of the final report.

Voluntary Participation:

The decision to participate or not is **completely voluntary** and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study:

You can stop the interview at any point in time or decline to answer any specific questions **without consequence**. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University or any other

group associated with this project. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, all data collected as a result of your participation will be destroyed.

Confidentiality:

The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed, but the name of the participant will not be recorded. Any material used in publications resulting from this study will have identifying characteristics omitted or paraphrased to maintain your **anonymity**. **Confidentiality** will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

All interview material and data will be kept in a locked facility accessible only to the researchers. You can review your transcript at any point in time during the study, and within two years of the conclusion of this project, unless you request otherwise, all interview materials will be destroyed.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, agree to take part as a volunteer in this project. I understand the data will be kept in strict confidentiality by the researcher. I give permission to be interviewed and be recorded on tape. I understand that I can view a copy of my transcripts at any time during the study, and that all interview materials and data will be kept in a secure location accessible only to the research staff. I understand that within two years of the conclusion of this project, unless I otherwise request, all interview materials will be destroyed. I understand that the research may be published, but that my name will not be associated with the research project. I understand that I have the right to refrain from answering any questions posed and that I can terminate the interview at any time at my discretion. Likewise, I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

I have been give the opportunity to ask any questions that I see fit and all have been answered to my satisfaction. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____