Female Bodybuilding: Exploring Muscularity, Femininity and Bodily Empowerment

by

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to build upon the literature on women's athleticism by using bodybuilding as a vehicle for exploring associations between women's muscularity, notions of gender and bodily empowerment. Feminist cultural analyses of women's bodybuilding have claimed that muscularity is constrained by gendered meanings surrounding the sport and the female body (cf. Bordo, 1993; Coakley, 1994; Schulze, 1990).

The purpose was to explore how personal interpretations of muscularity by competitive female bodybuilders contributed to their definitions of gender and empowerment through the body.

Three competitive female bodybuilders were recruited. Ethnographic techniques were employed, including observations of subjects' training sessions, ongoing fieldnotes, and individual in-depth interviews to uncover the women's interpretations of their muscularity, gender and bodily empowerment. Data analysis involved organization of the data into themes using the computer program NUD.IST.

The women re-defined certain values and expectations of femininity based on norms of discipline and restriction (cf. Bartky, 1993; Kissling, 1991; Willis, 1990). As such, it was revealed that muscularity contained possibilities for transforming common cultural images of the female body and meanings surrounding women's athleticism (cf. Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Markula, 1993).

From this, the women gained a sense of bodily empowerment which they defined as self actualization through confidence building, a positive body image, discipline, independence, inner strength and self awareness. This reinforced the idea that shifted understandings of gender through muscularity exist as one route to women's bodily empowerment as they function to replace dominant meanings which limit women (cf. Horden, 1993; Obel, 1996; Theberge, 1987).

The women's sense of empowerment related to their visions of gender and their bodies in that these challenged traditional symbols of male dominance, involved independence and physical 'space-taking', and provided role models of female capability extending beyond the personal (cf. Hall, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994; Nelson, 1994).

This analysis contributes to the existing literature by questioning the contention that bodybuilding does not constitute a form of empowerment because it is limited by the dominant ideologies of female body image, behaviour and sport surrounding it (cf. Bryson, 1990; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Miller & Penz, 1991).

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, feminist researchers have increasingly focused on gender relations as conceptual frameworks for analysing women's experiences. Thus gender stereotypes and social constructions of gender, along with links between sex inequality and institutional processes are often the focus of such feminist evaluations (Messner & Sabo, 1990).

Gender can be seen as related to historically constructed patterns of power relations which contribute to notions of gender and dominant cultural ideology. Gender has been described as a social category that defines and distinguishes males from females, and is problematic because it often contributes to unequal relations between the sexes (Costa & Guthrie, 1994). Although the significance of differences such as race, class, age, religion, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation in shaping women's reality cannot be ignored, one can also view women as a group who can share common oppression through gender. In order to understand and eliminate such oppression, feminists begin their analyses with women's experiences and perspectives (cf. Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Bryson, 1990; Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Davis, 1990)

Gender is also a dynamic process through which power relations between the sexes are constantly constructed and contested (Messner & Sabo, 1990). Gender therefore involves both elements of male domination, and ways in which women resist it and form spheres of influence, control and empowerment. Working with this conceptual definition of gender requires analyses of women's experiences that explore negotiations between individuals and the dominant cultural meanings surrounding them (Messner & Sabo, 1990). Hence it appears that feminist research should explore, not just various forms of gender oppression in women's lives, but the notion of women forming spheres of autonomy and empowerment by re-defining dominant cultural ideologies or meanings.

Feminist cultural theory is one avenue for exploring issues of gender and the dominant cultural ideologies (such as those of the body), in contemporary society. It is used to present interpretations of cultural frameworks and their various meanings in the lives of women (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Davis, 1990). It also approaches the practices of individuals, such as bodily

or sporting practices, as forms of cultural production; as creations of human agency with the potential to be transformed (Hall, 1990). Sport and fitness practices are thus sites of contest which encompass patterns of gender relations in wider society (Birrell & Theberge, 1994).

Culture can be defined as both a space in which dominant groups attempt to ideologically legitimize their power and where meanings are also defined and mediated by individual interpretation (Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Thus culture is made up of hegemonic meanings and values, as well as the ability to re-construct them to suit personal needs and therefore form potential arenas of resistance or liberation. Women's abilities to resist (i.e., critiquing or not complying to) certain dominant normative cultural constructions (for example, dominant meanings and images surrounding the 'feminine' body and beauty), and to re-define these meanings for themselves, may both be avenues for women's bodily empowerment (Messner & Sabo, 1990).

In exploring women's practices and experiences, feminist cultural theory begins by examining aspects of the broader dominant cultural ideology surrounding women's situations, specifically gendered meanings and forms. While recognizing that women exist within unique contexts formed through various individualized factors which help shape their experiences, it is assumed that there are certain broader meanings and values from which most people are not entirely removed (Bryson, 1990). Thus dominant cultural ideology refers to meanings, values and definitions that are most recognizable and widely accepted in contemporary North American culture.

Dominant constructions of gender are formed and defined through a mode of interpretation which separates male/masculine and female/feminine into hierarchical and dichotomous categories (Pyke, 1988). As a result, numerous traits, expectations, behaviours, deportment, appearances and symbolic values become associated with the category of 'male' and what it is to 'be male'. The opposite and negative values of these become associated with 'female' and 'being female'. Thus the meanings and values associated with masculine in dominant cultural ideology become the norm and superior, while feminine is the other and inferior (Pyke, 1988). Cultural feminists often analyse practices and beliefs as operating within gendered

contexts, or contexts which re-create the dominant values associated with these notions of gender (cf. Bryson, 1990; Davis, 1990; Pyke, 1988).

Feminist cultural theory and explorations of gender often appropriate the body as one central area of meaning. The reason for this is that many of the values, norms, practices, expectations, ideologies, images and institutions regarding the body are linked to cultural constructions of gender. With the development of post-war industrial society in which women entered the public arena and began eroding male dominance, the body gained more importance as a symbolic realm indicating physical 'difference' by gender, and hence an area of male superiority and control (White, Young & Gillett, 1995). Many feminists thus believe that both women's oppression, as well as their potential empowerment, is intimately connected to their bodily experiences in the world (cf. Hall, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Markula, 1993; Obel, 1996; Theberge, 1987; Vertinksy, 1994). It is argued that women's bodily experiences are often grounded in a sense of inferiority and vulnerability, and yet can also be a basis for resistance through aspects of their bodily or athletic practices (Castelnuova & Guthrie, 1994).

Feminist analyses of the body involve examining how both the status of the body within gender constructions and ways in which different aspects of the body, for example muscularity or athleticism, are given significance in dominant cultural ideology or contribute to women's inequality (Scott & Morgan, 1993). In addition, feminists are concerned with relationships between gender role and body meanings, links between power and muscularity or physicality in resisting hegemonic control of women's bodies, the role of physical activity in the social reproduction of gender, and women's empowerment through their bodies (cf. Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Horden, 1993; Rail & Harvey, 1995; Willis, 1990). One assumption here is that women's body images, and ways of interpreting their body, influence their individual experience and behaviour. It is also argued that personal bodily experience and subjectivity are sources of reality, and are vital for naming sources of oppression and for validating alternative views to male-constructed reality (Castelnuova & Guthrie, 1994). Thus by listening to women's interpretations of their bodies, and specifically of their muscularity, one can inform an understanding of women's potential bodily empowerment through their re-appropriation of

dominant cultural meanings and active involvement in shaping, challenging, negotiating or expanding meanings as they define themselves (Frank, 1990; Scott et al., 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

Thus 'bodily practice' refers to social and disciplinary practices involving the body which can be understood as a complex network of production, reproduction and/or resistance to cultural norms (Harvey, 1986). Merged with feminist cultural theory, the concept of bodily practice is analysed in terms of its connection to dominant notions of what is 'natural' and the maintenance of patriarchal gender relations, as well as to women's ability to form discourses of bodily empowerment via these bodily practices (Davis, 1990).

Hence it follows that feminist cultural theory can be used to analyse women's experiences in relation to cultural constructions of gender using values, meanings and practices of the body. One way of exploring women's issues and experiences of the body has been by investigating their involvement in athleticism (which refers to any modern form of sport or fitness-related practices) (cf. Bordo, 1993; Hall, 1990; MacNeill, 1988; Messner & Sabo, 1990).

The body has become increasingly promoted and emphasized through commercial interests and media images over the last two decades, thus the meanings surrounding sport and fitness have evolved along gendered lines (cf. Bartky, 1993; Ewan, 1988; Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 1996; MacNeill, 1988; Poulton, 1996). The physical ideals of Western culture have merged with health ideals emphasizing numerous combinations of slimness and muscularity for both men and women. In addition, athleticism has become strongly symbolically aligned with patriarchal values of muscularity, male strength and domination, and the naturalization of gender differences (Hall, 1990). As the body became increasingly promoted and portrayed as a commodity, a stronger emphasis on fitness, discipline and youthfulness, as well as increasing sexualization of women's physical activity occurred, which stressed body image, heterosexual attraction, and a white, upper class, able-bodied image of the athletic woman (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1982). Finally, it is argued that during times of economic and political change or upheaval, themes of self-control, willpower and

personal restraint became culturally valued and promoted, and the body emerges as one of few sites for individual control (White et al., 1995).

It appears that the impact on women of contemporary values surrounding the body has been especially problematic because of the relationship these values have to gender constructions (Bordo, 1990; Fallon, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 1996). While women's entry into various sports and their attainment of physical strength can be viewed as challenges to the patriarchal values which uphold these practices and as empowering for women, meanings associated with women's bodies and athletic pursuits have been said to remain related to broader systems of domination (Hargreaves, 1986; Nelson, 1994; Whitson, 1990). This is because sport has its roots in structures and ideologies of masculinity based on male physical domination and power over women, leaving it a site for women's oppression and hence contributory to patriarchal forms (Theberge, 1987).

Female body ideals of the last few decades were no longer defined through notions of fertility and material abundance, but instead evolved according to values of discipline, regulation, slimness and control (Ewan, 1988; Poulton, 1996). What emerged was a contemporary quest for lean, tight, thin bodies carried out through various body disciplines such as exercise, weight training, diet and plastic surgery (Bordo, 1993). Objectives of perfecting the body through disciplinary practices, for example in bodybuilding, became understood as meaningful and normal activities, and discourses of the 'naturally healthy female body' involved themes of beauty and freedom through willing subjection to regimes of exercise, diet, make-up, and bodily behaviour (Spitzack, 1990). Thus health has become symbolically aligned with slimness, fitness, attractiveness and liberation (i.e., a 'healthy' body is a possible route towards freedom, control and happiness). The result is contradictions between various meanings of women's health, exercise, body image and gender ideals, which appear to contain possibilities for both the constraint and bodily empowerment of women (White et al., 1995).

Bodily practices of sport and exercise can be complex political processes which are neither equally available nor meaningful for all women (White et al., 1995). In addition, women's constructions, deployments and practices of the body are not simply products of cultural

ideology, but relate to their active involvement in shaping these constructions as they define and potentially empower themselves (Scott et al., 1993). Women's experiences with bodily practices can therefore be interpreted in many ways. For example, they can refer to various themes of bodily empowerment involving re-definition of gender and the self through bodily expression, and freedom to choose one's subjectivity (Ewan, 1988; Spitzack, 1990). Hence, if cultural constructions of sport, fitness and the body are related to broader ideologies in North American society, then a feminist analysis may involve exploring women's interpretations of their bodies and bodily practices, and how they negotiate and re-appropriate dominant cultural meanings surrounding them.

Women cannot be seen as merely objects of power structures and bodily oppression, nor are they subjects completely free from dominant ideological meanings of femininity and the body. Instead, it has been stated that women's voices can reveal mediation between these two, and their potential function to replace normative meanings which are embedded in discourses of the body (which can work to maintain women's inferior positions in society), thereby indicating women's potential empowerment through the body (Markula, 1993). For example, women who break conventional boundaries of gender by participating in bodily practices traditionally associated with male strength, power and dominance, such as bodybuilding, martial arts, running, boxing and high contact sports, may be re-defining gender (for example, by including strength, power, aggressiveness and muscularity in their definitions of themselves as women, and by resisting the traditional demands of feminine behaviour and bodily deportment), thereby creating multiple interpretations of gender which empower them (for example, by allowing them to feel freedom, expression and power through this self-definition). An exploration of women's individual experiences with their bodies can help reveal how gender ideology and issues are interpreted and re-defined in women's lived experiences; as well as how such re-definition relates to the notion of women's bodily empowerment. To accomplish this, Willis (1990, p. 3) suggested that,

> (t)o understand how male domination intersects today with women's bodily articulation of selfhood, I would shift the analysis from the unmediated forms of domination ... to the amorphous, highly mediated realm of daily life in consumer society, where I would begin by looking at women's exercise programs.

Female bodybuilding is a physical pursuit which can offer insight into interpretations of gender constructions and potential empowerment through the muscular body. While bodybuilding is both promoted and referred to as a fitness related activity and as a competitive sport, in either case it is a bodily/athletic practice. Bodybuilding appears to encapsulate what sport and fitness have in common: the notion of bodily discipline. It is an activity concerned with a specific appearance and deployment of the body based on the development and display of muscle, specifically the size and development of muscle (Scott et al., 1993). Thus in female bodybuilding, muscularity, (i.e., one's muscular size, development and display) can be seen as the visible manifestation of the bodily discipline involved in bodybuilding. Exploring women's experiences and interpretations of their muscularity leads to potential explorations into issues of gender and bodily empowerment.

Much of the literature regarding women's experiences of bodily practices, such as bodybuilding, has focused on (a) psychological measures of body image (cf. Bain, Wilson & Chaikind, 1989; Balogun, 1987; Sabo, 1988; Salusso-Deonier & Schwarzkopf, 1991; Seggar, McCammon & Cannon, 1988; Skrinar, Williams, Bullen, McArthur & Mihok, 1992; Warrick & Tinning, 1989); (b) theoretical analyses of body image and oppression (cf. Bordo, 1993; Kenen, 1987; Morgan, 1977; Poulton, 1996; Wooley, Wooley, & Dyrenforth, 1979), (c) media representations of active women (cf. Duquin, 1989; MacNeill, 1990; Shaw, 1989; Shaw, 1991) and (d) the ambiguity of judging criteria in female bodybuilding (cf. Cahn, 1994; Coakley, 1994; Gaines & Butler, 1983; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993). As stated by Theberge (1991, p. 133) in an essay on possible research directions on the body,

> ...(t)he research discussed previously on ... women's bodybuilding is an explicit invitation to a more developed and detailed analysis of gender..., and that explorations into the meanings of physical activity in the lives of various women, ...would expand our understanding and enrich our appreciation of the connection between physicality, embodiment, gender and ontology.

Bodily practices are commonly understood using the notion of discipline because the values assigned to many fitness and athletic pursuits are rooted in the concepts of self-control (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Bodybuilding has been said to promote notions of self-control and discipline over the body, which are both cultural constructions stemming from ideals of femininity, liberation and health (Bordo, 1993; Spitzack, 1990). Dominant culture establishes conceptions of normatively acceptable bodies, renders problematic deviations from these standards and interprets bodily form as symbolic of one's moral character. In this sense, bodily practices such as bodybuilding can appear to be tools for bodily empowerment as well as reinforcing elements of social control (Fallon, 1990).

For women, the ethic of self-control is especially emphasized because a lean, toned body and tight regulation of bodily appearance, behaviour and space-taking are considered part of the requirements of femininity (Bartky, 1993). Also, social definitions of men as more dominant and powerful than women are symbolically translated in body images of large muscles, size and an aggressive bodily stance and posture (Conell, 1987). Thus when women engage in a bodily discipline which produces muscular size and strength, the act of such discipline can be argued to involve various readings of it as constraining to women, as they comply to dominant expectations of femininity, and as empowering in that they allow women to experience their bodies as physically authoritative, skillful and powerful rather than as sources of vulnerability, weakness and inferiority to men's (Bordo, 1989; Castelnuova & Guthrie, 1994).

Women who participate in bodily discipline through sport or fitness often receive a sense of authority and competence from their athletic activities and resulting physical strength, and are therefore seen as potentially challenging the gender balance of power (Hall, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Markula, 1993; Nelson, 1994). Women are seen as the weaker sex because patriarchal structures have denied them opportunities to build strength while promoting ideal/sexual images of weaker women and the idea that female muscle is unattractive (Nelson, 1994; Vertinsky, 1994). In this sense, women's attainment of muscular size can be seen as a salient, symbolic power that offers possibilities for bodily empowerment (Nelson, 1994). Also, a surface construction of the body which rebels against cultural notions of female attractiveness,

such as the large, dominating or heavily muscled woman, is "...a bold act when one considers that much of a woman's worth in society is determined by her external appearance." (Spitzack, 1990, p. 25). Some feminists have even argued that women who are deprived of athleticism have no faith in body forces and are thus prone to docility and resignation (de Beauvoir, 1974; Rich, 1977). Hence the very desire to change the conditions of women's lives is seen as traceable to women's sense of physical power and the repossession of their bodies.

It has been claimed that the discourse of the female body in contemporary society is part of complex power arrangements which one can question (Markula, 1995). Although much research examines cultural discourses surrounding the female body, less focuses on how women re-define their bodies to suit their own needs - or "...how women encounter and sense the body ideal in a potentially oppressive female activity..." (Markula, 1995, p. 425). Personal experiences must be considered to fully grasp the lived issues of female and feminine bodies, as what may seem oppressive to theorists may actually serve as a means for power for women involved (Markula, 1995).

Dominant meanings and practices can work to shape women's experiences with their 'exercising body' and interpretations others make of them. Yet individuals play a part in determining the significance of their practices and can use alternative channels to replace normative meanings with their own. Wearing (1992, p. 327) called for research which focuses on the meanings women attach to their athleticism and bodies in relation to gender identity using individual interpretation, subjectivity and perspective as research tools.

By looking at women's interpretations of their muscularity one may begin to gain a clearer idea as to how muscular women, who appear to resist certain dominant notions of gender, re-define gender and body ideologies in meaningful and empowering ways. To explore such concepts, it is not enough to look at the structure and forms of women's involvement - one must explore women's meanings, motivations, interpretations and the associations between them (Theberge, 1984). Hence as stated by Bordo (1989, p. 27):

> ...the study of cultural "representations" of the female body has flourished, and it has often been brilliantly illuminating and instrumental to a feminist reading of culture. But the study of cultural representations alone, divorced from consideration of their relation to the practical lives of bodies can obscure and mislead.

Muscularity is one approach to the athletic practice of female bodybuilding because it is a visible result of this bodily discipline, it raises issues of gender, and it is experienced to a certain degree by all women who participate in bodybuilding. Hearing women's experience with and interpretations of large and/or developed muscles in relation to their interpretations of gender and potential empowerment through their bodies is the focus of this study. These meanings inform us as to how some women experience 'body' and 'gender' through lived reality, and contribute to understandings of how cultural meanings of gender intersect with muscularity at the personal level. Much of the literature on female bodybuilding lacks explorations into such issues using women's interpretations of muscularity in terms of bodily empowerment (cf. Bordo, 1993; Coakley, 1994; Gaines & Butler, 1983; Klein, 1993; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Miller & Penz, 1991; Obel, 1996; Schulze, 1990). An exploration of this kind is valuable because of the potential connections between aspects of athleticism (i.e., in this case muscularity), notions of gender as individuals re-interpret meanings of cultural discourse, and bodily empowerment as experienced through women's embodied experiences.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how personal interpretations of muscularity by competitive female bodybuilders contributed to their definitions of gender and potential empowerment through the body.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

(1) Are the women's interpretations of their muscularity associated with re-definitions of gender?

(2) What does bodily empowerment mean to competitive women bodybuilders?

(3) How does bodily empowerment relate to their interpretations of muscularity and gender?

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Feminist Cultural Theory

Feminist cultural theory is based on an analysis of both gender relations and cultural forms in contemporary society. The focus is on the cultural meanings and ideology of events, institutions and practices in society and how these interact and negotiate with people's individual meanings and interpretations of experience (Bryson, 1990). Feminist cultural theory examines sites for the reproduction of dominance in relation to traditional gender constructs - such as notions of the body and sport, while recognizing that interactions of race, class and gender form the unique contexts of people's experiences and lives (Bryson, 1990; Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Hall, 1990). Thus individuals can resist or re-appropriate meaning from the broader ideological considerations of their society. Subsequently, they potentially form realms of bodily empowerment, along with the authority to define and speak for their situations.

Cultural feminism embraces a social constructionist approach to gender while criticizing essentialist arguments. Social constructionism is defined by the notion that traits and behaviours normally associated with males and females are negotiated by humans in various social contexts, rather than existing as innate qualities which form the basis of the esssentialist argument (Bohan 1993). People's interactions are termed feminine and masculine by social constructionism if they contribute to normative or dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity. Yet essentialism categorizes masculinity and femininity as universal and fixed, failing to recognize the contextuality of behaviour and issues of domination, as well as the social, historical and political location of what is deemed 'feminine' or 'masculine' (Bohan, 1993).

Normative social constructions of gender are formed from a particular mode of interpreting the world based on binary thinking, or hierarchically organized dichotomous constructs (Pyke, 1988). This line of thought creates a sex dichotomy in which small sex differences are translated into broader categories which define male, female, masculine and feminine. Here, numerous traits and behaviours are ascribed as traditionally or typically male

and symbolic of 'maleness' (e.g., strong, rational, intellectual, unemotional, aggressive, logical, powerful, disciplined, suited to occupy the political, economic, corporate and sports arenas) (Brittan, 1989). What is deemed male is also categorized as the norm and thereby superior. What is female becomes the 'not-male', the opposite, the 'other', and thereby inferior (for example, emotional, weak, nurturing, passive, soft, in need of protection/control, illogical, irrational, suited to the private realm of dependence). Women become defined in relation to men and understood within the boundaries of masculinist/patriarchal ideology.

Feminist cultural research aims to avoid dichotomous and reductionist categories, and instead examine interactions between categories while recognizing ideology, context, validity of experience and diversity (Pyke, 1988). By not treating gender as comprised of polar categories of masculinity and femininity, it has been said that feminist cultural theory avoids the dichotomy where masculinity assumes a privileged/normalized position and femininity is its inferior opposite/other (Pyke, 1988). From this, it is possible to explore ambiguity and flexibility between gender constructs, recognize individual agency and ability to re-construct and negotiate meanings, assume validity of individual experience, and expand deterministic explanations of gender relations to encompass various reproductions of, and challenges to, distributions of power (Gavey, 1989; Pyke, 1988).

By valuing women's experiences, an alternative conception of women's place in society is formed. Thus, "...the effort to validate the intrinsic worth of "feminine" qualities arguably contributes importantly to the feminist goal of liberating women from oppression grounded in devaluation" (Bohan, 1993, p. 6).

Feminist cultural theory highlights relationships between gender, the body and athleticism (i.e., sport and fitness) and therefore serves as one approach for examining women's experiences of muscularity (Costa & Guthrie, 1994). This is because values and meanings associated with gender can contribute to personal interpretations of muscularity and body images, standards of physical appearance and self-evaluations based on these standards (Jackson et al., 1988). It is also claimed that sports contribute and reconstruct accounts of gender - the realm of sport

embodies and re-creates male power, domination and social relations between males and females all of which are based on gender ideology (Hall, 1990; Theberge, 1991).

A feminist cultural studies paradigm approaches sport and bodily discipline as social practices whose meanings are connected to the making and re-making of ourselves as agents in society, as forms of cultural production with the potential to be transformed (Hall, 1990). As men and women actively respond within specific contexts to the conditions of their social existence in the sport and body realms, they can both reproduce and transform the dominant culture.

Thus major themes involved in a feminist approach to sport and the body have been highlighted as: the examination of practices that are connected to the struggle over and exercise of power (cf. Brittan, 1989; Cahn, 1994; Ewan, 1988; McNay, 1992; Vertinsky, 1994); possibilities for transformation of practices that contribute to the subordination of women (cf. Markula, 1993; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Spitzack, 1990; Theberge, 1984); and the role of physicality in the social reproduction of gender (cf. Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1996; MacNeill, 1988; Willis, 1990). Sport and fitness have also been explored as cultural spheres where meanings of masculinity and femininity are produced, presented and acted upon (cf. Hargreaves, 1986; Messner, 1988); where there exists potential for various strategies of resistance and opposition (cf. Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Hall, 1990; Hargreaves, 1986; Messner, 1988); and where there are opportunities for women's bodily empowerment through resistance, re-definition, and the empowerment of their bodies (cf. Hordin, 1993; Markula, 1993; Nelson, 1994; Wearing, 1992). In this sense, an exploration of female bodybuilding in relation to meanings surrounding muscularity and notions of gender relates to the theme of re-appropriation of cultural meanings and women's empowerment through women's bodies.

Sociological Discourse and the Body

In outlining feminist cultural discourses of the body, one starting point is to identify meanings and values surrounding the body in general. To construct any bodily behaviour or to

emphasize a certain aspect of the body is to exercise some degree of control or constraint. This is especially the case in the gendered or 'healthy' body, for example, what is often promoted as the athletic, fit and toned/slim body. Social situations place demands on the body with respect to its deployment and appearance, thus the body becomes a surface upon which we ascribe numerous and varied social and cultural meanings including those which reflect the political and social order of the times (Scott & Morgan, 1993; Barkan, 1975).

Feminist sociological inquiries of the body have their roots in Foucault's idea of self-surveillance of the body (the panoptic system) and regimes which produce useful, disciplined and docile bodies (Rail & Harvey, 1995). The claim is that the modern state and growth of civilization depend on both de-centralized practices of regulation over bodies (for example prison and military systems), as well as that people learn internal techniques of self-mastery and restraint for social control (Foucault, 1979).

More recent notions of the body in contemporary society combined with feminist contributions to social theory have led to theoretical inquiries regarding the political status of the body (Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1989; Markula, 1995; Spitzack, 1990; Vertinsky, 1994). Also, commercial and consumer interests in the body over the last two decades strengthened the value placed on body images and promotions of youthfulness, fitness and the body beautiful (Featherstone, 1982; Poulton, 1996). Hence, increased sensitivity to gender relations in feminist scholarship raised debates regarding women's relationship to the world via their body, issues of dominance and control over the female body, and the status of the body in relation to nature and culture (cf. Bordo, 1993; Theberge, 1989; Turner, 1991; Willis, 1990; Wolf, 1990).

Social and feminist thought focus on social impositions and manipulations of the body and its representations, as well as the body as a place of communication with the social environment on different levels of ritual and expression. With regards to the body, the individual is both object and subject, structure and meaning (Berthelot, 1991). As a source of analysis, the body's status in sociology is not that of just a physical entity, but also a text where the social is inscribed and re-appropriated on the individual, both a product and producer of many meanings (Berthelot, 1991).

Cultural Significations of the Body

Feminist cultural theory expands on the sociology of the body by treating it as a site of investigation because of its ability to "...provide explanations for women's social subordination and as a pathway into understanding women's attempts to transform and transfigure historical conditions of confinement and constraint" (Vertinsky, 1994, p. 148). In this sense it is necessary to unravel cultural paradigms surrounding the female body and their implications for women: for example how they may impact interpretations of femininity or gendered practices of sport and fitness.

Contemporary society places certain values on various forms and the deportment of both male and female bodies. Yet with regards to women, the female body is often ascribed to a particular realm of beauty, appearance and proper behaviour which coincides with broader cultural meanings surrounding gender role and the body (Bartky, 1993). Slenderness, tone and a tightly managed body are often symbolic of competence, self-control, autonomy, will, conquest of desire, transcendence of the body and moral worth; while 'thinness' is also symbolic of the valued ideals of beauty, health, class, status, sexuality, and goodness (Kissling, 1991). An overweight, large or un-toned woman is stigmatized as lazy, incompetent, lacking control, unintelligent and inferior (Bordo, 1993; Poulton, 1996). Although individual women experience these meanings differently as they are mediated through elements of race, socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, location, family and age, these meanings result from broader ideological parameters embedded in dominant cultural and gender ideals.

Cultural significations of ideal (i.e., disciplined, regulated, toned/slim) female bodies include the promise of admission to the public world where notions of will, autonomy and rigour are valued. The ideals can also represent a re-circumscription of women's limited 'place' in the world (women must take up limited or tightly controlled space in the public sphere). Here, body disciplining practices such as food refusal, weight loss, intensive exercise, and the toleration of bodily pain are seen as cultural metaphors for self-determination, will and moral strength (valued concepts in capitalist culture) (Bordo, 1993). These cultural significations of body images

converge in ways that influence social relations and personal experience often in less than positive ways. Yet, at the same time, it has been argued that women can interact with their own physical aesthetics to create empowering meanings and significance of the body (Cash et al., 1990).

The Politics of Body Size/Shape

Cultural significations of the body have also been discussed in terms of the politics of body shape and size. Capitalist and patriarchal social structures result in economic and social interests that have contributed to the mind/body dualism in Western thought (Hesse-Biber, 1996; Thompson et al., 1995). Symbolically, men have often been aligned with both the role of the mind (in terms of the expert, the economist, the scientist, the voice of reason) and the role of strong aggressor. They are therefore valued on how powerful, ambitious, aggressive, and dominant they are in thought and action. Symbolic associations of women's bodies become based on appearance, attractiveness, grace and poise. The dualism can therefore contribute to certain gender/body expectations.

Capitalism has also created a business promoting female pre-occupations with their bodies using the media and advertising in food, diet, health and exercise industries (Hesse-Biber, 1996; MacNeill, 1988, 1990). Women's body shape has come to symbolize important meanings about personal worth, control over one's life and bodily empowerment (Thompson et al., 1995). These notions combine to form, not one female body ideal, but rather a set of values and moral worth placed on thin/slim/toned/tight bodies. The messages are that these bodies are sacred, beautiful, healthy, attaining them will allow women happiness, freedom, romance and success, and that relentless pursuit of them is a normal and moral imperative (Thompson et al., 1995; Warrick, 1989). Given that most women's bodies do not naturally fit these images, the value assigned to them can be destructive to women's identity and self-worth, as well as to their economic and social advancement in society (Bordo, 1993; Poulton, 1996; Sabo, 1988).

Given these dichotomies, obesity, slenderness and muscularity in women can be seen as feminist topics that have political dimensions in Western culture. Slenderness and fitness are valued so that fat, loose or un-managed flesh become ethical problems, (i.e., the large, imposing, overweight woman is considered 'wrong', and morally required to transform into a healthy/good person), as well as political problems, leading some feminists to see a need for more diverse attitudes towards the treatment of women's body size/shape in North American society (Bordo, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Kissling, 1991; Poulton, 1996; Spitzack, 1990; Thompson et al., 1995; Wolf, 1990; Wooley et al., 1979).

Women tend to view their body with less positive evaluations than men view their bodies (Cash et al., 1986; Hart et al., 1989; Wooley et al., 1979). As a result, stigmas associated with the politics of the body are also perpetuated and imposed by women themselves. In the patriarchal context, space-taking (i.e., the amount of one's bodily size, stature and stance) by women is seen as unattractive. One claim is that the smaller, more fragile and less physically aggressive a woman presents herself to be, the more she is 'allowed' to inhabit her space/place in the world. The larger and more aggressive a woman's body is, the less she is culturally valued and encouraged to inhabit her physical space (Morgan, 1977). With these kinds of body associations, women can at once feel disempowered and alienated from their bodies, as well as develop increased freedom and liberation through bodily practices and the meanings they attach to them.

Participation in body disciplining has been said to be objectifying and moralistic: it can encourage anxiety and guilt in women who recognize that they have deviated from the disciplinary norm (Thompson et al., 1995). In addition, women who conform to assigned female/bodily roles have been seen as channeling time, money and energy into bodily practices (for example diet and exercise), while little energy is devoted towards questioning the meanings that define female bodily inadequacy to begin with (Bordo, 1993; Poulton, 1996; Wolf, 1990). This has been viewed as disempowering to women, because it is argued that cultural dictates measure self-worth when one assumes that patriarchal/capitalist standards define female attractiveness and behaviour in general (Redican et al., 1988; Wooley et al., 1979). In addition,

women who cannot conform have been seen as restricted because they lack the choice to embrace or re-define dominant standards of female/bodily roles. Women who actively choose not to conform can be seen as potentially creating a space of their own for empowerment, in which they can re-interpret female/bodily roles.

Femininity and Body Discipline

Given gender discourses surrounding the body in contemporary Western culture, feminist cultural theory can be drawn upon to approach issues of the female body by exploring the link between femininity, the female body and bodily discipline (Bordo, 1989; Bordo 1993; Frank, 1990; Vertinsky, 1994; Willis, 1990; White et al., 1995). Also, it has been said that discourses of feminism, the sociology of the body and the sociology of sport have been intertwined through the themes of disciplinary bodily practices, gender, sport and power (Theberge, 1991). Bodily discipline is described as a function of the cultural construction of femininity. Here, the ideologies (the values, doctrines and dominant opinions of a group) and imagery (dominant images of women in the media) of contemporary culture mediate notions of gender which accept and value disciplinary practices that improve, decorate or enhance women's physical image and appearance (Bordo, 1993).

The cultural axes surrounding the disciplined body are claimed to stem from contemporary values assigned to the body, consumer culture and definitions of femininity (Bordo, 1993). Here, a disciplined body represents triumph over that which is out of control (which is symbolic of the female/nature realm), so that the rigours of exercise, weight lifting and diet symbolize control and mastery over the body and stem from common cultural fantasies of will, perfection, accomplishment, or liberation. Finally, body discipline represents attainment of the freedom, independence and power normally associated with masculinity (Bordo, 1993). These paradigms of femininity and bodily discipline have been analysed several ways, such as restrictive and oppressive for women, beneficial to women's freedom and identity, empowering, and as related to the demands of femininity or the myth of female frailty.

i. Female Bodily Discipline as Oppression

It has been argued that the body is not just a text of culture, but a centre of practical and direct control. The development and promotion of cultural beliefs around health and the body stem from, and reproduce, structures of inequality and relations of dominance. Here, health is seen as embodied through fitness and sport practices, shapes and is shaped by gender and class relations, and is used in the formation and display of the self as virtuous (White et al., 1995). It is also argued that a regulated body habituated to cultural values of gender can undermine women's political commitments because discipline produces docility in that one's energies are directed by external regulation, subjection and transformation (Bordo, 1989). Diet, exercise, make-up and dress codes for women are normalizing disciplines which exist as avenues through which women conform to values and rewards assigned to the female body and femininity. Thus it has been claimed that women are rendered less socially oriented and more focused on self-modification, self-criticism and feelings of insufficiency (Hesse-Biber, 1996). This process works to uphold elements of the dominant patriarchal order (e.g., the network of practices, institutions and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination within particular domains) (Bordo, 1989; 1993; Poulton, 1996).

Along the lines of this argument, social control constituted through the female body is seen as paradoxical (Bordo, 1993; Markula, 1993; White et al., 1995). While constraining conditions are said to be experienced as liberating or transforming, they can also contribute to the reproduction of traditional gender norms. For example, while exercise is claimed to increase women's self-esteem, the effort needed to maintain a fit/slim body often requires critical attention towards outer appearance and self-regulation. In addition, self-regulation by women can be aligned with the cultural conception of women's limited 'place' in the world and the need to constrain and control her. In this sense, women's attempts to resist these mechanisms become used in the maintenance of existing power relations, and the aura of liberation felt through disciplinary practices of the body becomes deceiving (Bordo, 1989).

In contemporary society, femininity has been partly defined by visual images of body appearance and deployment. Femininity has therefore increasingly come to mean the

construction of the appropriate surface presentation of the self through the body, expression, gesture, movements and behaviour (Bartky, 1993). In addition, it has been noted that with women's occupation of the professional/public sphere, they entered a traditionally 'masculine-only' realm (Bordo, 1993). Thus femininity became conceived as also involving values and traits traditionally associated with masculinity, such as control, calculation and action. Thus with these expanded cultural conceptions of femininity in Western societies comes further demands on women to live up to; femininity now requires emotional and bodily discipline and suppressed needs (Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1993). An emphasis on discipline became a normative standard associated with women 'being' feminine. Hence, it is argued that the ideals of women's bodies are considered feminine, not only in the display of a slim or graceful body, but also through a 'hard', toned body which partakes in rigorous exercise, diets or weight training. Discipline is therefore not only accepted as part of female behaviours and 'feminine bodies', but also expected of them (Bordo, 1993). From this it is argued that destructive practices such as anorexia and weight pre-occupation are logical, extreme extensions of the cultural sex-role stereotype for women (Bordo, 1989).

Along these lines any empowering potential of body discipline, such as in the development of muscles, is argued to be lost as women remain tied to the feminine role of reproducer of a docile body, working within the norms of beauty and appearance (Bordo, 1993). Those who advocate this position claim that while disciplinary practices of the body such as weight lifting and building muscle can appear as routes to success and bodily empowerment for women in our culture, they actually reassert existing gender configurations, ultimately operate under the constraints of conventional femininity, and leave women distracted, depressed or physically ill (Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1993; White et al., 1995; Willis, 1990).

ii. Female Bodily Discipline as Freedom

Another approach to female bodily discipline involves the idea that reclaiming one's physicality can be a way for women to repossess themselves and intervene on their own behalf to counter restrictive practices (Birrell & Theberge, 1994). If freedom can mean becoming familiar

with one's body, linking the body with a more assured self, gaining selfhood by taking control of the body and using the body as a site for self-definition, then women's bodily practices and discipline can be seen as potentially liberating (Willis, 1990). In addition, it has been argued that women who embrace cultural values of the regulated or feminine body often reap benefits by gaining access to important resources: feelings of power, control, self-confidence and pride in one's femininity (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Disciplines related to physical fitness and strength, such as muscular development, are also said to offer women increased energy and both a more positive self-esteem and body consciousness (Cash et al., 1986; Skrinar et al., 1992).

Bodily practices have also been analysed as providing or constructing new frameworks for envisioning femininity and personal power based on control, self-expression and overcoming, rather than perpetuating body insecurity. This view can be extended further by seeing the potential in bodily discipline to form oppositional discourses and resistance to traditional definitions of femininity. Women engaged in weight lifting, martial arts, hockey, aerobics or running for example, are seen as having opportunities to work towards a new femininity based on personal power, defeating self-doubt, strengthening the inner self, discovering one's physical capacities, self-definition, autonomy, and changing/expanding dominant representations of femininity and female physiology (Hesse-Biber, 1996; Horden, 1993; Theberge, 1995). It is here that the notion of women's empowerment through the body becomes one way of analysing women's interpretations of the practices and experiences of muscularity.

Empowerment and the Body

The literature on women's experiences with both athleticism (i.e., various sport and fitness-related practices, including the pursuit of muscularity) and with bodybuilding in particular, has discussed themes surrounding the issue of women's possible empowerment through the body (cf. Blinde et al., 1994; Hall, 1990; Hall, 1996; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Horden, 1993; Klein, 1993; Mackinnon, 1982; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Markula, 1993; Nelson, 1994; Obel, 1996; Spitzack, 1990; Theberge, 1987; White et al., 1995; Willis,

1990). Although one finds variations in what women's bodily empowerment involves, it is grounded in possibilities for self-definition through bodily practices and re-definition of normative gender constructions. For example, bodily empowerment may involve women's abilities, through various athletic pursuits, to gain increased control over the surface presentation, behaviour and deportment of the body through practices and forms of the body which resist certain culturally defined notions of gender (some of which are limiting for women). Bodily empowerment can also be viewed as involving women's re-appropriation of sport/fitness practices traditionally dominated and defined by men (such as sports which involve aggressiveness, injury, muscularity, skill, toughness or strength) and women's abilities, through athleticism, to create new images of femininity and of identities surrounding the active, athletic or muscular woman (new in the sense of 'shifted from' or challenging to normative images and meanings of femininity and the female body). In this sense, women's bodily empowerment includes re-defining notions of gender through aspects of athleticism (such as muscularity) and the construction of the body to suit one's own needs. The assumption here is that sport/fitness practices and women's meanings surrounding their bodies, play a role in the social reproduction and re-definition of gender and gender relations. In other words, bodily practices (for example women's bodybuilding) are cultural spheres where the meanings of gender are produced and potentially resisted. This resistance can be seen as one route to potential empowerment through the body (Hall, 1990).

Along these lines, one can define women's empowerment through the body as follows: sport, fitness or physical activities are empowering to women if the processes of participation involve any attempt to re-define notions of gender to suit women's own needs, challenge the objectification of women's bodies, gain a sense of self-definition, power, and autonomy through the surface construction of the body; and/or resist the cultural processes which tend to define or control the female body (Hall, 1990). These cultural processes include, for example, media portrayals of women's bodies and behaviours, the myth of female frailty, and culturally constructed, normative notions of gender, bodies, and behaviours. Thus it can be argued that there is the potential, in women's experiences with muscularity, for resistance and opposition to

gendered meanings and hence empowerment through the body (Hall, 1990). Although the notion of bodily empowerment or empowerment through the body has been discussed in various ways (which are outlined in this section), when referring to these terms, this study relied most heavily on this preceding definition.

This theme of women's empowerment through the body is discussed in the literature in various ways. One approach is the idea that aspects of athleticism, such as muscularity, help women to overcome body/weight preoccupation, and achieve a sense of bodily confidence and self-esteem by providing or constructing a new framework for envisioning femininity (Hesse-Biber, 1996). This allows women's sense of personal power to assist in overcoming body insecurities, gaining a sense of control, self-expression through the body, and power through the achievement of athletic strength, skill and/or muscularity. The claim here is that bodily empowerment lies in women's abilities to forge an identity that is not bound by traditional definitions of what it 'means to be' female, and to work for a new femininity that is not defined by normative beauty or body ideals, but rather by the qualities attained through athleticism (such as skill, strength, self-esteem, power, self-expression).

Another area that has been highlighted through the literature on women's potential empowerment through the body, is the notion that, through participation in sport or physical activities, women often attain an enhanced subjectivity and sense of emancipation which can have significant effects on their lives (White et al., 1995). Female athletic bodies, such as the female bodybuilder, can be seen as potentially resistant to patriarchal standards of both femininity and sport, and contributory to more powerful images or definitions of women, women in sport, and women's place in society. Hence, as stated by White et al. (1995, p. 175),

> If naturalizing masculinity and restraining femininity have been the cornerstones of patriarchal sport, then we find in (certain women's) athletic sites, new forms of empowerment for women. Crucially, they precipitate bolder discourses and "ways of seeing" (Berger, 1972) which link female bodies to more assured selves, and may ultimately help reconstitute women's physical, social, and political lives.

Empowerment through the body therefore involves the feminist perspective that the body is a crucial element in one's self-identity, and selfhood emerges through one's control over and definition of the body (Willis, 1990). Here, it can be claimed that women's liberation involves becoming familiar with one's body and seizing it as the site for self-definition and the bodily expression of self-hood. Mackinnon (1982) argued that when women reclaim their physical power or physicality, they take significant steps towards reclaiming power and control over their lives, sense of selves and sense of physical beings. The implication is that women's experiences with muscularity, for example, can have broad personal and social implications because reclaiming power over the body and self works back into reclaiming social and political power (Mackinnon, 1982). Along these lines, Rich (1977) argued that the repossession by women of their bodies will bring important change to society.

Another element in the discussion surrounding bodily empowerment is the notion that women's entrance into the traditionally male realm of strength/muscles conveys authority, a belief in changing gender relations, and an expansion of traditional representations of femininity and women's capacities (Horden, 1993). This process is said to allow women to redefine concepts of women's sports (for example, women in sports which involve injury, aggressiveness, muscularity), blur traditional ideas of gender, and therefore project and experience radical or reinterpreted images of femininity while rejecting traditional notions of gender, body and/or sport which can be limiting for women (Hargreaves, 1994; Theberge, 1995). These images of the fit/athletic woman produce powerful notions of aggressive femininity which can influence the production of feminine identities in sport.

For example, Hargreaves (1994) claims that female bodybuilding represents a form of female power which can be interpreted as a positive act by women to take control of their bodies and occupy this male dominated arena of strength and muscularity. The creation of a muscular female body is said to represent a challenge to normative meanings of masculinity (for example, because strength and muscularity are traditionally symbolic of male power) and femininity (for example, because women are often relegated to the myth of female frailty and passivity). Thus in

the female bodybuilder, bodily empowerment is possible because power is actually and symbolically invested in the body.

Yet according to Hargreaves (1994), unfortunately these elements of female bodybuilding which stress muscularity and symbolize women's bodily empowerment are subservient to aspects of the sport which emphasize idealized femininity, sexuality and contrived femininity. For example, female bodybuilders often display elements of this contrived femininity in competition (by wearing bikinis, make-up, painted nails and styled hair), while media promotion of the sport in fitness/bodybuilding magazines often includes sexualized depictions of women bodybuilders. Yet these aspects of the sport which emphasize sexuality and idealized femininity are closely tied to standards of competition and commercial promotion of the sport, and are not necessarily reflective of individual women's motivations, interpretations of muscularity and gender, and self-presentation outside of competition. Observations of women bodybuilders in training may more accurately reveal whether these aspects which emphasize contrived femininity and sexuality truly play such a dominant role in this sport. If hair, make-up, bikinis, long painted nails, and the sexual poses of women bodybuilders seen in magazines are not evident in training and do not exist in conjunction with women's interpretations of what muscularity and bodily empowerment means to them, then the claim that women's bodily empowerment through the sport is subservient to these other elements, may be questionable.

This notion of empowerment through the body appears to involve overlapping discourses of women's fitness, sports and muscularity. Nelson (1994) outlined a link between women's physical strength and personal power, whereby bodily empowerment is possible because, by experiencing muscularity in the context of bodybuilding, women implicitly challenge the association between masculinity and sport/strength while refuting the traditional feminine role of passivity and subservience. Women's bodybuilding and other athletic experiences are seen as a 'declaration of independence' in that women prioritize the pleasure they receive from their involvement and reject patriarchal constraints on their behaviour and bodily appearance. In turn, the muscular or athletic woman has been said to become empowered as she changes and defines her experience with herself and the images others have of her, thereby potentially altering

common notions of gender. Here, bodily empowerment is seen as the declaration of the right to make one's own decisions and appropriation of the freedom involved in athleticism or muscularity, (i.e., unrestricted physical expression, strength, power, and ease of mobility) (Nelson, 1994). The act of taking control over one's body is viewed as radical in a society where female bodies tend to be devalued and controlled by male standards and institutions. Making a commitment to athleticism is therefore seen as making a commitment to female bodily empowerment, as it contradicts traditional female socialization to claim a public space as one's own through the body while using the body aggressively or instrumentally. Hence for Nelson (1994), female muscularity is empowering in the sense that it involves replacing past notions of femininity with new images of women's bodies, behaviours and femininity unconstrained by traditional cultural demands of gender.

Thus the literature on women's athleticism has referred to this connection between muscularity and women's empowerment through their bodies (cf. Hall, 1996; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Obel, 1996; Spitzack, 1990). The rhetoric of the muscular or 'fit' woman embodies the notion that women can choose their own destiny and subjectivity. This is said to be because the athletic, muscular, or strong female body (such as in the case of bodybuilders) often rebels against cultural norms of femininity and attractiveness, a bold act of independence considering that much of women's worth in society is determined by her external appearance (Spitzack, 1990).

The female bodybuilder, in relation to this notion of bodily empowerment, raises issues of muscularity and femininity, and how women can resist or subvert normative gender constructs and meanings centred on the body (Mansfield & McGinn, 1993). One may approach female bodybuilding as empowering in that it can be seen as an attempt by women to re-appropriate attributes of strength, stamina and muscularity in a mode of defiance to cultural constructions of women as physically weak and subordinate, while threatening the system of sexual difference (Markula, 1993; Schulze, 1990). Thus it has been stated that bodybuilding gives women the opportunity to claim their equality, and it exists as a powerful feminist expression (Weider, 1990). On the other hand, one can argue that, while female bodybuilders create new images of

women's bodies and identities at the personal level, they are ultimately not operating in a realm of bodily empowerment because they do not oppose, challenge or critique the dominant, cultural, masculine structures or ideologies upon which the sport (and most sports) is formed (Blinde et al., 1994; Klein, 1993). In this sense, women's bodly empowerment through the muscular body in the context of bodybuilding is defined as requiring, not just the creation of new images of gender and female identity, but critiques of dominant cultural constructions of gender and sport (Klein, 1993). These various perspectives involving the notion of women's empowerment through the body can be identified within the literature on women's involvement in both fitness and sport.

Fitness and Femininity

The fitness 'boom' over the last two decades in North American society has involved a surge of new activities geared towards women, such as aerobics classes, and increased participation in jogging, walking, weight training, bodybuilding and health clubs (MacNeill, 1988; Shaw, 1991). Muscular size and development by female bodybuilders can be considered to exist in the realm of fitness as it is often promoted as part of the health and fitness industry. This trend has been analysed as encapsulating many contradictions. While improving one's health through exercise can lead to positive benefits, women pursuing this goal are often operating within the realm of a weight and appearance pre-occupation, poor body image and feelings of insufficiency (Balogun, 1987; Redican et al., 1988; Warrick 1989). Yet, while health often improves with regular exercise, it is not clear that women's psychological well-being, self-esteem, and satisfaction with weight or body image are improved through physical activity (Melnick et al., 1988; Sabo, 1988; Seggar et al., 1988; Netz et al., 1988; Salusso et al., 1991; Shaw, 1991). Thus fitness for women appears to be tied to issues of weight control and fashion, often emphasizing image and aesthetics over health (MacNeill, 1990).

Exploring the complexities of fitness and the female body can involve recognizing the contradiction between fitness promotion which relies on ideas of health, success and liberation, and fitness/body images which reinforce notions of beauty, slimness and perfection, thereby

linking body appearance and sense of self (Kenen, 1987; Shaw, 1989). The workout itself has been said to transform women's positive desires for strength, agility and physical affirmation or bodily empowerment into achieving gendered body 'looks'. It has also been seen to promote the deconstruction of the body into parts to be improved upon and as such, encourages a structure of fragmentation and objectification of the female body (Duquin, 1989; Mansfield et al., 1993; Willis, 1990).

Contrary to the notion of fitness for women as a gendered and disempowering activity, it can also be viewed as a practice which leads to freedom from the constraints of sedentary lifestyles, work and domesticity and as a construction of feminine identities which resist the traditional female concepts of nurturance, passivity, gentleness and dependence. It has also been seen as opportunities for participation in the traditionally male domain of athletics and an arena of autonomy (Blinde et al., 1994; MacNeill, 1988; Wearing, 1992; Willis, 1990). Women's muscular size and development can be examined as part of this phenomenon of physical activity among women. Engagement in fitness activities can create a body which is a visual display of opposition to dominant norms, embodying the male physical values of 'faster, higher, stronger'. It is argued that women in fitness simultaneously operate under both the rubric of personal freedom and health, and that which reaffirms traditional female pre-occupation of beauty and 'bodywork' (such as to lose weight or improve sex appeal) (MacNeill, 1988). Thus fitness has been analysed as a place of opportunities symbolic of both constraint and freedom; existing in the realms of emancipation and health, yet with underlying forms of domination and exploitation; a place where social and sexual categories are revealed and resisted; where new and empowering subjectivities are formed (Turner, 1984; Wearing, 1992). The image-oriented ideology of fitness for women has therefore been claimed to reinforce dominant hegemonic relations and ideologies, while these are also challenged and re-defined through women's participation. (MacNeill, 1988).

Sport and the Female Athlete

A link has been made between feminism and women's participation in body disciplining not only through fitness and exercise, but also in sport. Sport has been explored as a medium for

conveying messages of gender domination because it is an area which links social power and physical force (Bryson, 1990; Theberge, 1987). While sport has been described as a cultural space where gender relations that favour men are produced and publicly celebrated, women's involvement in sport and development of physical skill, strength and/or muscularity can be seen as a form of resistance that disturbs the meanings of male supremacy (Birrell & Theberge, 1994). Thus sport is viewed as a central site for both constructing oppressive gender relations and for resistance to or transformation of these relations. Bodybuilding can be seen as also operating under this rhetoric of sport.

Viewing muscularity as a form of potential bodily empowerment in sport includes the notions of women gaining the opportunity to be disciplined in an assertive, goal-oriented mode which counters traditional sex-stereotyped behaviour, gaining access to a traditional male realm, and developing power over their bodies and themselves. Some have suggested that these gains can be channeled into a feminist agenda for social change and the re-claiming of social and political power (Theberge, 1984). Still others view women's athletic experiences, such as with muscularity, as not only avenues for gaining pleasure out of physical competence, taking physical risks and creating female role models, but also for creating a woman's sporting ethic (Nelson, 1991; Theberge, 1987).

Sport is a central site for the social production of masculinity and reproduction of male hegemony; it is argued to be a primary institutional means for bolstering the ideology of male superiority; it is analysed by feminists to uncover its role in the reproduction or transformation of contemporary relations between the sexes (Messner, 1988; Whitson, 1990). This is because sport is a male-dominated institution in the values and behavioural norms it promotes, thereby confirming patterns of male privilege and structures of domination. The connection between sport and women's subordination has been described through the myth of female frailty and the demands involved in cultural standards of femininity, both of which discourage women from attaining powerful, large, muscular and aggressive bodies through athletic and bodily practices, and instead encourage a sexual, aesthetic and slim image of women's physicality (Birrell & Theberge, 1994). Sport often uses the body in forceful and space-occupying ways and this

behaviour is associated with being a man; hence sport also contributes to expectations of the male body and men in social relationships (Whitson, 1990).

One approach to women's participation in sport has involved a focus on women who reject aspects of stereotypical femininity and simultaneously take on notions of traditional masculinity and power and privilege based on gender. Assertiveness and confidence are seen as embodied through the development of skill and muscularity in sport. Thus women's development of muscles in bodybuilding can be seen as potentially empowering in the sense that it breaks down masculinist meanings surrounding sport and threatens dominant affirmations of differences between men and women (Theberge, 1989; Whitson, 1990). Thus women's attainment of muscularity may challenge associations between masculinity, sports and domination, thereby creating space for interpreting bodily practices in meaningful and empowering ways (Nelson, 1994).

Along these lines, aspects of athleticism (for example, elements of physicality, skill, assertiveness, and muscularity) pursued by women can be interpreted as feminist acts. Feminism is seen as freedom; women's individual and collective liberty to make their own decisions (Nelson, 1994). Claiming an outer appearance based on muscles, strength and a larger public space as one's own, and using the body aggressively, instrumentally and with authority has been said to contradict traditional images of women as passive, submissive and dependent on men (Nelson, 1994).

A contrary view of women in sport involves the idea that while women may be self-empowered through the impact of sport participation at the personal level, women's involvement is problematic and ambiguous because of the broader social relations on which sport is formed. Because female athletic activities, such as bodybuilding and the experience of muscularity, are seen as ultimately defined and judged according to dominant male values, women's participation has been argued to enhance hegemonic masculinity, and therefore be disempowering through reinforcing women's inferior status via processes that trivialize women's achievements (Bryson, 1990). For this argument, muscularity in women's bodybuilding has been analysed and defined

in terms of its contribution to the construction of traditional femininity and reproduction of patriarchal social relations (Hall, 1984).

The Literature on Bodybuilding

Research on bodybuilding has been approached in the following ways: as part of the male defined and male dominated sub-culture of bodybuilding; in terms of competition, judging and debates around female aesthetics; through male controlled media framing; in terms of women's access to and re-appropriation of athleticism; in relation to female body discipline and broader gender ideology; and at the personal level. Each of these approaches are briefly reviewed to help situate this study.

i. Female Bodybuilding as Part of a Male Subculture

This approach investigates the social and political relations of bodybuilding as a male-dominated pursuit, and explores the gym dynamics and pressures faced by participants. Klein's ethnographic study on bodybuilding, entitled Little Big Men, reflects this focus on male subculture and the psychocultural elements of male bodybuilding (Klein, 1993). Klein argued that this subculture is built on elements of excessive masculinity, and he thereby offers a critique of masculinity in contemporary American culture.

Klein's chapter in this book on women bodybuilders investigated how women both resist and conform to the male dominated elements of the subculture. Klein critiqued the argument that women's bodybuilding is simply a female controlled form of cultural resistance and bodily empowerment by arguing that it does not constitute a substantial reaction to this male-controlled realm. He stated that while women bodybuilders view bodybuilding differently than men in terms of their ability to express control of self, attain self-mastery and repudiate normative notions of what women 'ought' to look like, women's muscularity does not form empowering oppositional discourses that move beyond the boundaries of gender norms which limit women's behaviour. Instead, female bodybuilders remain framed within gender perspectives by

uncritically adopting and replicating conventional male practices formed on male terms (such as destructive practices of steroid use, male-defined competition and excessive muscular bulk), without questioning, critiquing or re-defining them. According to Klein (1993), because of this, female bodybuilding is not always empowering.

For Klein, it is through social bonding among women, limiting the effects of intense male competition, reducing the objectification of their bodies and promoting sharing that women can develop their own bodily empowerment through the sport. Female 'hardbodies', while denying female conventions, are therefore seen as more docile than revolutionary. Thus the power and autonomy achieved through muscularity are seen as overlaid by cultural constraints related to fitness ideology, for example cultural anxieties of body image, moral pressures to be disciplined and regulated, and the promotion of a fractured body (Featherstone, 1982). Thus, at the individual level, female bodybuilding is seen to reject convention by women's desire for physically imposing bodies. At the cultural level, while women distance themselves from societal norms of the female body, they do not challenge traditional notions of objectification of women. Hence Klein sees women's bodybuilding as not empowering, in that it exists within a male institution that obscures women's issues and meanings assigned to their bodies, and it replicates masculinity rather than opposes it.

The criticisms of Klein's analysis is that he defined what a challenge to gender ideology within women's bodybuilding and bodily empowerment should be, without obtaining interpretations of bodily empowerment from the women themselves. Instead, Klein's definitions are based on male bodybuilding and its agenda and meanings, relegating women's bodybuilding as the opposite of men's.

ii. Competition and Judging in Women's bodybuilding

The article "Iron Sisters: Today's Muscular Women Mirror Important Changes in our Society" by Gaines and Butler (1983), examined one competitive event in female bodybuilding and focused on the attitudes of judges and competitors regarding parameters of muscular size in women. The authors interpreted debates in the bodybuilding world as revolving around issues of

female muscularity, what it represents, and what its limits (if any) should be. Although the authors saw images of active, lean and muscular women as more progressive than weak, soft images, they argued that these images are often limited by measures and requirements of heterosexual attractiveness in women. The question remains whether muscle-building fits with feminist aims for bodily empowerment through self-actualization and definition.

Attempts were made to answer this by looking at debates around whether women should be judged on athletic principles of strength and muscle size or on traditional aesthetic principles of shapeliness and muscular curvaceousness. The conclusion was that, while unhindered development of muscle may be threatening to commercial aspects of the sport, it may also provide unique and empowering images of the female body, and hence be judged on the same terms as male bodybuilders. Female bodybuilders are seen as entering a traditionally male sphere and challenging sexual differentiation standards, and in this sense, they are non-conformists to dominant feminine images of women. While this article interviewed female bodybuilders regarding debates around judging and competition, it does not do so to the extent of uncovering women's voices regarding potential feminist aims of bodily empowerment within the sport.

In "Women Bodybuilders: The Sideshow of American Sport?", Coakley (1994) also saw the challenges posed by female bodybuilders as being limited by standards for judging competitions. Coakley claimed that women's bodybuilding is constrained by dominant definitions of femininity and that this is evident in the judging controversies and in the women's self-presentation in competition. While judging criteria often aim to limit women's development of muscle size, women also present themselves within standards of female beauty in an effort to avoid social stigmas associated with female athleticism. For Coakley, the hard body is ultimately transformed into the 'sexy body' and 'fit' comes to mean 'attractive' for women. While this idea is promoted through the media, female bodybuilders are seen as doing little to oppose this image. Coakley concluded that women who bodybuild fail to change definitions of femininity. Coakley did not, however, base this conclusion on women's interpretations of their muscularity or how they interpret these standards of appearance and judging in competition.

iii. The Media Framing of the Female Bodybuilder

Another approach to the topic of female bodybuilding focuses on the media's portrayal and handling of the muscled female body. In the chapter "Pumping Irony: The Muscular and the Feminine" (Mansfield & McGinn, 1993), the discourse of bodybuilding was examined through images and portrayals of female bodybuilders in relation to gender discourse. The body is seen as objectified through bodybuilding, fragmented through muscle isolation with the aim of fighting against soft, loose images of the female form. Here, it was claimed that women's choice to bodybuild rather than, for example, to do aerobics, is more than choosing a way to get 'fit', but a choice between perceived masculine or feminine processes of altering one's body image. It was argued that both of these routes involve potential for bodily empowerment which is limited by images of women's bodies and elements of 'ultra-femininity' (such as exaggerated hair and make-up).

In Schulze's article "On the Muscle" (1990), bodybuilding for women is seen as an alternative practice of sport with potential to be consistent with a feminist vision of power, involving self definition and reclaiming the body. Because the female bodybuilder appears to threaten conventional constructions of gender and sexual differentiation, the women involved have opportunities to revise and re-define the politics of gender and sexuality. Yet it was argued that female bodybuilding is ultimately placed along conventional constructions of femininity and masculinity, not by the women involved or their interpretations, but by the media's framing of them which emphasizes sexual, feminine and/or heterosexual images to coincide with patriarchal and commercial interests (Schulze, 1990).

iv. Female Bodybuilding as Access to Athleticism

Miller and Penz (1991) conducted interviews with female bodybuilders in an effort to uncover these women's assertions for the right to occupy the culturally contested area of bodybuilding. The aim was to explore the ways in which women's culturally derived expertise in bodywork (i.e., the ability to organize one's appearance by working on the body through, for

example, exercise, diet, make-up, bodybuilding, plastic surgery) can be used as a tool for the colonization of traditionally male arenas of athleticism (Miller & Penz, 1991).

The authors stated that men and women are taught to view women's bodies as either passive sites for intervention or as sexual spectacle. Female bodybuilding appears to challenge this prevailing ideology, and offer new social significance to the meaning of bodywork. Thus bodywork can be used to challenge and reaffirm dominant body meanings. Through the interviews, the researchers suggested that female bodybuilders reject conventional standards of feminine beauty, while attempting to attain self-actualization through bodily discipline. Yet they concluded that this is done in conformity with the traditional feminine norm which designates bodywork as the site of female corrective action (Miller & Penz, 1991).

This study by Miller and Penz also argued that women used bodywork to colonize bodybuilding and define it in a way that serves their interests. By linking rationality (i.e., the body categorized into parts and systematically re-built; the step-by-step achievement of goals) to bodywork in the interests of female mastery and control, bodybuilding by women can be seen as a source of cultural resistance and bodily empowerment. Yet in general, female bodybuilding was positioned within the rhetoric of traditional femininity (involving, for example, nutrition, health, beauty) (Miller & Penz, 1991).

What Miller and Penz's study revealed is the connection between bodywork by women, dominant notions of gender, and concepts of femininity. It highlighted the potential for disciplinary practices of the body to both challenge and conform to dominant ideology. Yet the study also leaned heavily on bodywork as women's work, implying that working on outer appearance is a feminine and thereby submissive act, hence confining bodily empowerment or self-definition through bodybuilding to norms of femininity.

v. Female Bodybuilding and Cultural Ideology

Bordo's theories on female bodybuilding did not result from direct studies with women, but rather from theoretical analyses of body disciplining, gender and North American culture (Bordo, 1989; 1993). Bordo used elements of feminist cultural theory to argue that all forms of

women's body discipline, such as building muscle, are constraining because they are extensions of the cultural demands and regulation of the female body which are rooted in dominant constructions of femininity. The various cultural significations of the tightly managed female body make women's pursuit and attainment of muscularity limiting, constraining and representative of their accommodation to dominant femininity. Bordo claimed the need for more research which analyses the experiences of women who embrace any variation of the slim or muscular body in an effort to interpret various cultural significations of women's bodies (Bordo, 1989; 1993).

The main point which arises from Bordo's argument is this claim for research which explores women's experiences with their bodies in relation to cultural constructions of the female body. Empowerment and control experienced by women involved in athleticism were seen by Bordo (1993) as superficial, thereby eliminating women's abilities to re-define or expand meanings of muscularity. Potentially destructive bodily practices, such as eating disorders, are aligned by Bordo closely with athletic practices such as bodybuilding, rather than the latter creating meanings apart from women's self-destruction and distraction.

Obel (1996) followed a different approach when analyzing bodybuilding and gender. She discussed conceptualizations of gender, sexuality and the body in bodybuilding, and how its pursuit produces complex social practices. The author suggested that while female bodybuilders can threaten traditional understandings of gender, it is the aspects of ambivalence and contradiction in bodybuilding that need to be seen as potentials for developments of new identities and bodily empowerment. Obel views ambiguities regarding what the bodies of bodybuilders represent in terms of gender, and claims there is a need for analyses which aim to depict such ambiguity rather than favour certain readings of women's bodies over others.

Obel (1996) set out to challenge Foucault's notion of control and domination of bodies in modern societies identified in self-discipline and surveillance. The focus instead was on Foucault's idea that gender and power relations are characterized as complex sets of processes which constantly encounter resistance. Obel questioned the feminist view that gender is primarily produced and encouraged to control bodies, and instead considered gender as

collectively produced in action. Obel (1996) argued for a study of bodybuilding grounded in ethnographic research, sensitive to contradiction, interested in aspects of resistance rather than just control, and open to a multiplicity of readings of gender representations. The claim is that through the attainment of muscularity, female bodybuilders may resist, challenge, shift or support understandings of gender, thus forming several understandings of empowerment through the body.

Obel (1996) claimed that readings of this sport should take into account the experiences of women, the language and practices which attempt to resolve ambiguity or create compatibility with 'attractive and acceptable femininity'. For Obel, the notion of female bodybuilders producing both empowering and traditional feminine images indicates how the politics of gender are constituted within different contexts through negotiation and articulation by practitioners.

vi. Female Bodybuilding at the Personal Level

Approaching female bodybuilding at a personal level through interviews with participants is evident in Rosen's book Strong and Sexy (1984). Rosen conducted interviews with several female bodybuilders to uncover the pleasure and pride they gain from the sport and how it helps them in other aspects of their lives. It is a celebration of women's muscular strength and development which highlights the ways in which they serve as outlets for women's expression, individuality, confidence and resistance to feminine stereotypes. Rosen's book is premised on the notion that 'working out' and muscularity empowers women by raising their self-image and helping them overcome life challenges. For example, Rosen described one woman who uses bodybuilding to gain a strong sense of self and purpose, which helps her deal with the challenges of being a single mother. These female bodybuilders are portrayed as gaining the right to define what is beautiful and strong for them, and bodybuilding is described as a beneficial feminist pursuit that opens avenues and contributes to women's self-realization.

Summary

While there is a growing body of literature on women's bodybuilding, what appears to be lacking are explorations of women's interpretations of both their muscularity and women's empowerment via the body. While significant work has been done on cultural interpretations of women's bodies and gender in contemporary Western culture, specific analyses of female bodybuilding are often confined by their position in relation to male bodybuilding (cf. Coakley, 1994; Klein, 1993; Miller & Penz, 1991). One can expand on these studies through analyses of female bodybuilding which use women's meanings of their muscularity to explain women's potential for reinterpreting aspects of femininity in ways that suit their needs and are not entirely dependent on dominant definitions of gender. A feminist cultural studies approach will ground this study because it views athleticism as cultural products which are created and recreated, both reproducing the dominant culture and transforming it as women actively respond in the sporting context to the conditions of their social existence (Costa & Guthrie, 1994). The relevant literature indicates that bodybuilding is a form of athleticism which intersects with various discourses of gender, bodily empowerment, sport, fitness and the body. This study uses female bodybuilding as a vehicle to explore women's muscularity in an effort to explain how women's interpretations of it relate to their notions of gender and sense of bodily empowerment.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Qualitative research methods were employed in this study because this approach was suited for exploring individuals' perspectives and for identifying themes and important issues within a participant's dynamic world (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These methods were also suited for research which involves a small number of cases and aims to explore the meanings participants bring to specific issues (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Ethnographic techniques were used in order to uncover the women's voices, to explore events in their natural setting and to maintain awareness of context (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Finally, these methods were guided by feminist theory, which considers women's experiences as sources of social awareness, questioning or insight (Harper, 1994).

Sample Selection

The sample was three women bodybuilders. Sampling was done by contacting the B.C. Amateur Bodybuilding Association (B.C.A.B.B.A.) by letter, and requesting that an administrator act as a liaison between the researcher and women who bodybuild in the Vancouver area.

Thus permission from the B.C.A.B.B.A was obtained by a contact letter explaining the study and its general goals. A woman named Lynea Brehm, the secretary/treasurer of the B.C.A.B.B.A and a competitive bodybuilder herself, telephoned me and expressed interest and enthusiasm for the study, claiming that bodybuilding is too often written about in ways that misrepresent the sport by people who are in no way involved in it. She was therefore drawn to the focus of this study and its aim to hear from women who are actively involved in bodybuilding. Lynea agreed to perform the role of liaison in order to help locate volunteers for the study and also offered to be a participant in it herself.

Lynea gave members of the B.C.A.B.B.A. information about the study via 'word of mouth'. In doing so, she passed on information on the volunteer requirements along with my

telephone number to call should they be interested in participating. Two women respondents, Desiree Ellis and Renata Turko, participated in this study. The third woman in the study was Lynea. The women were given the option of having their real names or pseudonyms used in the study, and all three preferred to have their real names identified.

The criteria for sample selection included: women between the ages of 20 and 40 years old, who had participated in bodybuilding for at least two years, who had participated in more than one local or provincial bodybuilding competition. Originally it was also planned that at least one woman would be entering a competition in 1997 so that I could observe the competition. Instead, at the time of the first interviews, the competitive season had ended for Renata, while the other two women both had one final competition in 1997 which took place in North Carolina, U.S.A. Thus it was not feasible to observe any of the participants in competition. Instead, to gather a sense of what they entailed, I attended two bodybuilding competitions which did not involve the participants. In April I attended the 1997 B.C. Provincial Bodybuilding & Fitness Championships in Burnaby, B.C., and in November, I attended the 1997 Gator's Classic Bodybuilding and Fitness Championships in Vancouver. As a member of the audience, I gained a clearer understanding of what competitions were like for the women in my study and learned more about the sport in general.

Rationale for the sample selection criteria was that bodybuilders commonly fall within this age range, two years appeared to be a minimum amount of time for bodybuilders to become familiar and well versed in the practice and experience the physical adaptation resulting from the training demands. Also, the criteria placed no distinction between whether the women had competed at the local, provincial or inter/national levels of competition, as it was assumed that this provided participants with the experiences and knowledge needed to contribute to this study.

The women's age range ended up falling between 25 and 33 years, and all three had competed for more than two years (ranging from five to seven). Renata was a competitive bodybuilder at the amateur, national level of competition. Both Desiree and Lynea had reached the international, elite, professional level of competitive bodybuilding. Becoming a professional bodybuilder was termed by the women as attaining their 'pro card', which meant becoming a

member of the I.F.B.B.A. (International Federation of Bodybuilding Association) Pro Elite. This involved competing internationally against bodybuilders from all over the world, rather than just from North America. It also meant competing professionally, where the winners receive money, and at the elite level, or highest category of rank.

Volunteer requirements for respondents originally included participation in three to four in-depth interviews, and allowing direct observation of two to three of their training sessions. In the actual study, Lynea was interviewed twice (two long interviews rather than three to four shorter ones), Renata was interviewed three times, and Desiree was interviewed four times. These interviews varied from one to three hours each, the total time spent with each woman being approximately the same. Observations were done after the interviews had taken place due to the women's schedules, and lasted for the duration of the sessions (one to two hours). Renata and Desiree were both observed in training twice. Lynea was not observed in training because of difficulties arranging the observations due to her busy schedule and the fact that she did not reside in the Vancouver area.

The time involved with participants was meant to take place over a two to three month period. Ultimately, the women were involved in the study from approximately July until November, 1997 (five months in total) because, by arranging interviews and observations around their schedules, there were often several weeks between them (for example during August and November there was little contact between volunteers and myself due to their training and competitive schedules). As planned, the women devoted anywhere from four to six hours of their time during the months of data collection.

Accessing the Setting

The setting for most of this study was fitness centres which catered to bodybuilding in the Vancouver Lower Mainland. Once volunteers had participated in the interviews, they contacted the managers of the fitness centres in person on my behalf, gave them information about the study and asked them to sign a consent form agreeing to allow myself to enter the facility to observe the women in training. Because the women both trained and worked in these facilities,

they interacted with these managers on a daily basis. It was therefore convenient for them to inform the managers of the observations. When I arrived at the centres to conduct the first observation, participants introduced me to the manager, at which time he/she gave me my copy of the signed consent form. I found the managers to be friendly and they were very willing to allow me into the facility to conduct the observations.

Observations of training sessions took place in the facilities where the women trained (they did not train at the same ones). The interviews were held at quiet coffee shops and restaurants off site in the Vancouver, Burnaby and Victoria areas, such as Starbuck's, Bino's Restaurant and the Knight and Day Restaurant. These sites were chosen because they were close to where the women lived and were convenient for them.

Data Collection Methods

The three primary methods of data collection in this study were: (i) in-depth interviewing; (ii) direct observation; and (iii) fieldnotes.

In Depth Interviews

Interviews included several in-depth interviews, a validation interview, and informal conversations with participants during the observations and throughout the data collection process. The purpose of the in-depth interviews was to gain insight into the participants' meanings of muscular size and development in terms of notions of gender and bodily empowerment. The interviews were designed to explore how the women felt about their muscular size, how muscular development had impacted them, and how these interpretations related to their definitions of gender and potential sense of bodily empowerment. This was the prime data collection tool in this study because it allowed insight into the participants' meanings. Interviews were tape recorded (with the women's consent) and transcribed into computer files.

As planned, the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended in that the questions served as a guide, but individual responses triggered further questions. Topics, such as body perception, and the meanings of muscularity, strength, femininity and bodily empowerment were

explored to uncover the women's views. The series of interviews were structured so that I began by asking the women how they interpreted their muscularity and what developing and displaying muscles meant to them. These questions were followed by inquiries into the women's definitions of notions of gender, and finally questions on how they defined bodily empowerment (see Appendix A for sample interview questions). Once these topics were explored, participants were asked more questions regarding relationships between their interpretations of muscularity, notions of gender and bodily empowerment, given what they had stated in the previous interviews. Clarification was employed in the interviews to ensure reliability of answers. In addition, occasional informal conversations with participants took place so that I kept in touch with them between interviews and could ask any additional questions which arose throughout the data collection process. The women were a pleasure to get to know and all showed enthusiasm and thoughtfulness in their participation. I found these interviews and conversations both informative and enjoyable.

Validation Interviews

Validation interviews were conducted with participants once all the data was collected and initial analysis had begun. The women all agreed that they were willing to meet as a group to participate in this interview. They were informed that it would be a chance for them to hear my initial themes which had formed from the data and add any additional changes and feedback. Due to the women's differing schedules, it was possible to only meet with two of them together. This interview was done with Desiree and Lynea, while I later conducted a separate validation interview over the phone with Renata.

In both validation interviews, themes that had emerged from initial analysis of the qualitative data were shared with participants and verified for accuracy. Participants were therefore able to correct, eliminate or add to anything that they previously discussed. In the group interview, the women also had a chance to hear what each other had said in the interviews and share additional ideas with me and each other. This meeting appeared to be a form of reciprocity, as they had a chance to socialize with each other, share training information, tips and

common ideas, as well as discover that they shared common perspectives on the issues of this study. This interview lasted approximately two hours in length, while the telephone validation interview lasted for 40 minutes. Generally, all of the women confirmed and agreed with the themes I shared with them. They added to and reiterated some of the ideas they had previously expressed in the interviews.

Direct Observations

The focus of this study was how the women interpreted their muscularity, notions of gender and sense of bodily empowerment through their bodily practices. Because muscularity involves, not just the size or appearance of one's muscles, but also their development, observing the women developing their muscles in training sessions helped address the research questions of the study. This involved looking at aspects of the context and setting of muscular development and how they related to what the women had said in the interviews regarding notions of gender and bodily empowerment. Thus the direct observations involved becoming familiar with participants' weight training routine, and examining the practices of muscular development by observing their behaviours, and interactions. I followed the women through their typical workouts, and engaged in informal conversation with them during the session. I followed-up by asking the participants questions arising from observations later during casual conversations and in the validation interviews (see Appendix B for a description of the observations).

Most of what was noted in the observations appeared to confirm and elaborate on the sentiments expressed by the women in the interviews. When conducting these observations, I did not feel that I was disrupting or intruding on the natural flow of the session. The women appeared to be relaxed and at ease in my presence. I let them guide the conversations and chose when to interact with me. They tended to alternate between explaining something to me, and training in a focused, silent manner as if I were not present.

During these observations, recording of data was made in the form of notes which included details about the participants and their training routine. I specifically observed and recorded how the participants conducted themselves in the training session, how they dressed,

how they moved, how they carried their bodies, their gestures, what kinds of interactions they engaged in, and how they developed their muscularity. After the observations, I added more detail to these notes, such as in-depth descriptions of the setting and events along with my subjective thoughts, impressions, questions and reactions to the observations. Thus these fieldnotes consisted of what I recorded both during and after the training sessions.

The value of these observations was that they provided data that resulted in recurring patterns that complemented what was said in the interviews. They provided opportunities to gain insight into details which were not described in interviews and for comparison between the participants' statements and bodily deportment (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). They were also useful in that they triggered further questions and points of discussion raised during casual conversations with the women after the observations and in the validation interviews. After observing the women in training, I felt that I had a much clearer understanding of how muscularity impacts their lives. I later told the women that I thought one could only fully understand bodybuilding by observing how training takes place, and they agreed with this assessment.

Fieldnotes

The third main data collection technique was the recording of fieldnotes throughout the research project. These documented observations, subjective impressions, and the evolution of the research process in a research journal. Thus the fieldnotes included:

(a) Observational notes, including aspects of setting, behaviour, and all details which arose during the observations and interviews were recorded.

(b) In addition, subjective thoughts including personal questions, possible explanations, searching for alternatives, issues and opinions were kept in the journal throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

(c) All step-by-step methodological procedures, decisions, rationale and unexpected events were recorded so that details of each stage of the research were noted (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Managing and Recording Data

During the data collection phase of the research, certain steps were taken to manage the data and allow for better analysis. Firstly, following each interview, subjective notes regarding the interview were recorded. From this, conceptually intriguing phrases and those which connected to issues in the literature review were identified and written in the research journal. The interview data was preserved on tape, along with the preliminary analysis in the journal, before formal analysis was done on the computer.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis strategy involved bringing order and meaning to the collected data by organizing it into categories. The aim was to discover themes, potential relationships between themes, explanations surrounding the issues of the study, and the links to the literature (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The analysis entailed the use of the computer software program NUD.IST so that further meaning and organization were brought to the material.

The first aspect to the analytic procedures was organizing the data. This involved reading over the collected data in an effort to become familiar with it. In doing so, several theme maps were created in order to form an initial understanding of the themes, sub-themes and the relationships between them. The main themes and sub-themes emerged according to issues on which the interview questions were based, as well as on topics emphasized by the women in their responses. Thus the themes represented a combination of issues the interviews aimed to uncover (e.g., the women were asked to define femininity), as well as those identified in the analysis of the interviews (e.g., the women emphasized increased independence as an outcome of muscularity). The theme maps (five versions were made) proved to be a valuable exercise in initial data analysis by providing a clear visual display of the data, common themes, and potential links between them (see Appendix C for the final version of the theme map). Copies of a theme map were also given to the participants in the group validation interview in order to give them a clearer understanding of how I had chosen to organize their meanings. The data, including all

interview transcriptions and fieldnotes, was then entered into the computer program for data management and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The second analytic procedure was to organize the data according to the recurring ideas and themes from the interview and observational material through the NUD.IST program. This program was useful in categorizing the data, where initially 102 nodes were created. From this, the program was used to compare and merge themes, as well as collapse similar themes into one another. Eventually, the nodes were reduced down to 27, from which a smaller theme map was made (see Appendix C for the Data Analysis Index Tree). Thus the goal was to form categories of meaning from the women's voices and their practices (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The next step was to test out emergent explanations. As categories and patterns emerged, the plausibility of them contributing to explanations to guide the analysis was evaluated. This entailed reading and searching through the data for information which challenged the emergent explanations, thereby making adjustments accordingly and raising further possible explanations (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

A large amount of data was collected and the results included in the next chapter contains approximately half of the total material. This was because in exploring issues of muscularity, gender and bodily empowerment, the women had inevitably provided much information regarding training, competition and the sport in general. Although all data was inputted into the NUD.IST program, a portion of it was left out of the final analysis. I chose to leave out the data which reflected bodybuilding in general (such as information on rules, judging, media, politics, competition, training, and organization of the sport), rather than the women's specific interpretations of their bodies and notions of gender and bodily empowerment. Most of this data arose from my introductory interview questions which were designed to allow the women to speak generally about the sport, their involvement in it, and what they liked/disliked about competition and training. These questions were asked so that the women could become more comfortable with the interview setting and to provide me with details of the sport necessary for my understanding of it. In addition, throughout data collection, I occasionally asked the women further details of the sport in order to clarify a point they were making at the time. This was due

to the fact that I was not an insider to bodybuilding and therefore did not know certain details of the sport. Finally, because notions of muscularity intersect with one's involvement in bodybuilding, the women inevitably referred to the sport in their responses to certain interview questions. I included some of the women's quotations which reflect this intersection of both muscularity and bodybuilding in the proceeding chapter. Ultimately, although this resulted in an over-abundance of data, it proved useful in the sense that it gave me a broader and clearer understanding of the sport, which I felt was important when conducting a study of this kind.

Standards for Judging the Quality and Value of the Research

i. Credibility

Credibility refers to the demonstration, within a research study, that the inquiry was conducted in a way which ensured that the participant was accurately identified and described (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In this study, credibility was ensured by stating the parameters of the setting, participants and theoretical framework, thereby placing clear boundaries around the study. Data was derived only from within these boundaries.

ii. Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to demonstrate the applicability of the study's set of findings to another context (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The data collection and analysis of this study were guided by a specific theoretical framework and focused narrowly on the interpretations of three women. Thus the parameters were framed by theoretical concepts outlined in the literature review and the uniqueness of these specific, individual cases. The parameters and context were described in detail so that others who design research within these same parameters can therefore decide whether these cases potentially apply to new research and new settings.

iii. Dependability

Dependability refers to the attempt to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for the study, and for changes in the design due to a refined understanding of the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This study was based on the assumption that the social world is

continuously changing and constructed. This assumption does not fit with the concept of replication. Thus in this study, any changes found or made throughout the research process were identified.

iv. Confirmability

Confirmability in this case refers to whether the data help confirm the findings and lead to the implications (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). While this study searched the data for themes which formed the results of the study, exploring complex issues always involves some degree of researcher subjectivity. Subjectivity was countered using strategies to balance bias in interpretation. These included: questioning data analysis; searching the data for alternative explanations; confirming findings with the participants through validation interviews; maintaining an awareness of researcher biases; objective note-taking; and keeping notes on all decisions and the rationale for each so that procedures were identifiable.

Ethical Issues

The Role of the Researcher

I attempted to handle my role as the researcher in this study with care, efficiency and consideration as well as employ all appropriate ethical requirements. I informed participants of procedures and avoided diverting from them in any misinformed way. The general goals of the study were explained to the participants so as to eliminate deception. Originally it was planned that, if possible, the three women chosen would not know each other until the validation interview at the end of the data collection period so as to reduce feelings of suspicion. Yet the women did know of each other through competitions (they seemed to be friendly acquaintances rather than close friends). This was unavoidable due to the fact that women's bodybuilding is a very small athletic community. This did not appear to create any feelings of mistrust, as the women all seemed to like and respect one another as fellow athletes.

In terms of entry, access to the participants chosen for this study did not begin until formal approval of the study by the U.B.C. Ethical Committee was granted (see Appendix D for Certificate of Approval), until proper contact and permission was gained through the formal

gatekeepers of the site (see Appendix E for Agency Informed Consent and Appendix F for Facility Informed Consent). No data collection began until all participants signed a formal consent form stating that they agreed to the terms outlined in the study and understood that they could terminate their participation at any time (see Appendix G for Subject Informed Consent). The privacy of the participants was upheld by providing the women with the option of using pseudonyms, unless they preferred otherwise (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The women all authorized the use of their real identities.

As the researcher, I found that the subjective fieldnotes helped maintain awareness of the assumptions brought to the interviews, modes of interaction, and how these related to the research process. This also aided in my understanding of the lived experience, meaning and knowledge offered by participants (Ayers, 1989). Acknowledging whose story was being told, who interpreted it and with what theoretical frameworks it was analysed was also important to data collection. Thus during interviews, careful listening skills and attempts to understand the participant's perspectives accompanying their interpretations were used (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Thus the aim was to avoid implying authority by fostering the unique perspectives that the researcher and participants brought to the work (hooks, 1988).

Researcher/Participant Relations

Relations between myself as the researcher and the volunteers in this study could be described as friendly and positive. Upon initial contact with the woman, each appeared to be enthusiastic about participating in the study. For example, during my first conversation with Renata, she stated that her involvement in the study may provide her with the opportunity to clarify her own thoughts and reasons why she participates in bodybuilding. Also, Lynea claimed that she wanted to be a part of this study because it aimed to hear the voices of female bodybuilders, and she felt that too often, portrayals of bodybuilders have not done this and are instead misleading and critical.

During the interviews, participants were very open and willing to share their thoughts and opinions with me. I felt that some of the interview questions encouraged the women to think

deeply about their responses, for example the questions "what does the word femininity mean to you?", or "are there any aspects of this experience that all women who bodybuild may share?". At times the depth of the questions made me feel slightly uncomfortable when the women took a long time to think about their responses. Yet ultimately, although these questions may have required participants to think more in-depth about their muscularity and bodily practices, they did not seem awkward, leading or overly complex. Judging the women's reactions to the interview questions, they appeared to be appropriate and related to their experiences. The more time I spent with each volunteer, the more comfortable I became with my interview questions. I felt that the interviews were appropriate when, during a validation interview, Lynea told me that the interviews were beneficial because they encouraged her to think deeply about her sport and her body and gave her the chance to express her thoughts on them.

During the observations I never felt like I was imposing or intruding. In fact, I sensed that the women were proud to show me their training routines. They treated me with consideration and in a welcoming manner during the observations. I therefore did not feel awkward or as much as an outsider as I had expected. Instead I felt comfortable and at ease because the women seemed to feel this way.

There is an aspect to these researcher/participant relations that should be noted. Because the focus of this study was generally positive, this may have pleased the women and thereby encouraged them to participate. From this, there is a chance that the women tried to answer the interview questions according to what they thought I wanted to hear (e.g., over emphasizing their positive interpretations and/or leaving out negative ones). This could have influenced the write-up of the study by basing it too heavily on the positive aspects of the women's experiences and resulting in an incomplete or biased analysis of women's muscularity. Thus by the study's positive angle and its possible effect of pleasing the participants, the researcher/participant relations and write-up of the study could be seen as problematic.

Yet it should also be noted that purpose of this study was to explore *how* the women's interpretations of muscularity contributed to their definitions of gender and bodily empowerment. The term bodily empowerment connotes positive or beneficial interpretations. Thus, given this

word and the fact that the women felt empowered through their bodies, a degree of positive meaning was unavoidable. Nevertheless, efforts were made to avoid a one-sided exploration of muscularity. Attempts were made to become aware of my own biases as a researcher and to create open-ended interview questions which were not leading, such as "how does muscularity impact your life?" (as opposed to "what are the positive effects of muscularity?"). Attempts were made to counter positive interpretations by asking the women negative questions, such as "what are the downsides to this bodily practice?", "can you describe what these downsides are like?" and "what do you dislike about your body?". Results were verified with participants in the validation interviews, and the data was searched for alternative explanations or evidence which questioned the analysis. Thus the study explored muscularity in terms of these three women's interpretations of it and was therefore based on what they *felt* they were gaining from it. Ultimately, others may question these interpretations and make alternative judgments about how women experience or interpret muscularity.

Power Differences

A key ethical issue in any study is the notion of power differences. I ultimately had control over the data analysis and wrote the thesis. While the participants' voices were maintained as fully as possible, the research was therefore still guided through a set of research questions which stemmed from the literature and the focus of inquiry. Although this was a difficult issue to overcome, at the very least issues of power differences were acknowledged through the fieldnotes. Thus preconceived bias, issues and subjective feelings brought to the study and arising throughout it were recorded. Attempts were made to acknowledge where power imbalances did or did not occur, note whose voice was being heard and to ensure reciprocity.

Because the women were generally enthusiastic and excited about this study, I felt little power differences. When getting to know these women, it was stated that I considered them to be sources of knowledge and insight and aimed to let their voices come through the written report. I felt uncomfortable only when the interview questions sounded slightly repetitive. Here

I felt that I had more power than the women because I was doing the asking and they had to answer within the confines of similar, specific questions (such as "what does discipline mean to you?", "how would you describe discipline?", "what role does discipline play in your life?"). Attempts were made to counter this by opening up the discussion to what *they* wanted to emphasize, such as asking the women "if you could tell the world anything about bodybuilding, what would it be?", "is there anything else you want me to know about what you just said?", or reiterating back to the women what I thought they had told me and then asking "is that what you meant?" and "is there anything else?".

Reciprocity

In order to maintain appropriate standards of consideration towards the participants, efforts were made to ensure reciprocity. The women were encouraged to join the group validation interview once data collection was completed and initial analysis had begun. The women agreed, and two of the three met with me, where I shared the initial themes and asked them if they wanted to change, eliminate or add to them. This was done over the phone with the third participant who was unable to attend the group session. These validation interviews seemed to give the women more input regarding the analysis of the data, a chance to discuss any missed issues, and in the group session, an opportunity to visit with one another and share common perspectives. During the group session, which occurred over dinner at a restaurant of their choice, the two women appeared to enjoy themselves and confirmed many of the emerging themes. They also took the opportunity to discuss between them, training tips, and talked and laughed about their shared experiences regarding others' reactions towards their physique. At the end of the dinner, both women thanked me and told me that they had enjoyed themselves. In both the group and the telephone validation interviews, I was surprised at how much the women agreed with and confirmed my initial findings.

Thus the goal was not only to emphasize to the women that they were sources of knowledge and insight in this study, but to treat them accordingly. The aim was to work with them to arrive at forms of meaning, thereby promoting collaboration and minimizing researcher

authority and imposition on interpretation (Fine 1994). Here, research was approached as a matter of receptivity, involving listening, respect for the reality and culture of others, and the researcher's responsibility to uphold these (Flinders, 1992).

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The women's interpretations of muscularity referred to what it meant for them to live with large or well-developed muscles, and how this impacted their daily lives and their impressions of themselves, their bodies and their meanings of gender. Exploring the women's interpretations of muscularity did not involve focusing heavily on competitions or training for competitions. Instead the purpose was to examine meanings of muscularity, gender and bodily empowerment in the women's daily lives mainly outside the parameters of competition. The women shared some general information regarding competition and training as they participated in the interviews and conversations, but they focused primarily on their interpretations of the benefits of muscularity. While the women spoke briefly of the health/physical and aesthetic benefits of having a muscular physique, they placed a stronger emphasis on what they termed the inner benefits gained through living with and developing muscularity.

Under the heading of the inner benefits of muscularity, six main themes emerged which form the basis of this chapter. These themes emerged as a result of both topics raised in the interview questions and those identified in the analysis of the interviews and observations. These included: Confidence, Body Image, Discipline, Independence, Inner Strength, and Self Awareness. The theme Self Awareness involved the women's discussions of their opinions and awareness of a number of gender and bodily empowerment issues, thus forming two other main themes: Gender and Bodily Empowerment (see Appendix C for Data Analysis Index Tree). In the interviews, participants were asked specific questions regarding their body image, the meaning and role of discipline in their lives, and their definitions and opinions of certain gender issues and the notion of bodily empowerment. Thus the themes Body Image, Discipline, Gender and Bodily Empowerment were formed as a result of topics explored through the interview questions. Conversely, the themes Confidence, Independence, Inner Strength and Self Awareness arose as a result of what the women emphasized in responding to more general questions such as "what impact does muscularity have on you?".

The Women

The three women recruited to participate in this study brought thoughtful insights to the interviews. In addition, they all consented to having their real names identified in this study. Lynea, Desiree and Renata shared similarities in their lives and their perspectives based on common experiences with bodybuilding and similar interpretations of the impact of muscularity in their lives. They also represented some differences in age and background.

Lynea is a thirty year old, white women who grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan. She now lives in Victoria, B.C. with her husband. She described herself as a strong Christian and has a supportive and loving relationship with her parents, family and husband. She loves animals and someday would like to compete in the equestrian sports she participated in when she was younger. She works full time for the municipal government in the Engineering Department.

Lynea has been involved in bodybuilding for seven years, and started when she was twenty-three years old. She previously competed as a heavyweight in amateur competitions, where she won the Canadian National Championships in 1996, thereby attaining her pro card. She has been a professional bodybuilder for over one year. She also volunteers her time and energy to be the secretary and treasurer for the B.C. Amateur Bodybuilding Association along with her husband who is the president of the association.

Lynea is approximately 5'1", has long, blond, curly hair, and a short, compact, strong build. In the interviews she spoke with a calm confidence that put me at ease. She shed detailed insight into the world of bodybuilding with a relaxed sense of humour, composed nature and courteous manners. She gently reflected on her experiences with personal struggle, her journey as a woman and an athlete, and her goals and self-knowledge in relation to her experiences with bodybuilding.

Desiree is a thirty-three year old black woman who grew up in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has been living in central Vancouver for fourteen years. She is a single mother of a six year old daughter. Her parents and family, who live in Winnipeg, are supportive of her bodybuilding career. Desiree is a Certified Personal Trainer and a Nationally Certified Aerobics Instructor. She has worked as a personal trainer for the last eight years, and previously taught aerobics.

When describing her career in the fitness industry she said "I have found my calling in fitness". Apart from bodybuilding, she spends her time actively involved with her daughter, hiking, reading and participating in martial arts. She is approximately 5'2" tall, she has a petite but very strong build, and a warm, enchanting smile.

Desiree has been a competitive bodybuilder for six years, and started when she was twenty-eight years old. She competed in many amateur competitions as a middleweight, and received her pro card in 1996 by becoming the 1995-1996 North American Physique Champion and the 1996-1997 Canadian Overall Physique Champion. Like Lynea, she now competes at the elite, international level as a professional bodybuilder. Desiree has always been an athletic person. Before she became involved in bodybuilding, she was a competitive track and field runner. Being around Desiree for the interviews and observations was calming. Her knowledge of bodybuilding and of athleticism in general, along with her discipline and work ethic, were inspiring.

Renata is a twenty five year old Canadian woman of Italian ancestry. She grew up in Vancouver, and currently lives in Burnaby, B.C.. Like Desiree, she has pursued a career in the fitness industry, where she works as a personal trainer, aerobics instructor, and in front desk reception and gym maintenance. Her family is supportive of her athletic career. She is approximately 5'6" tall, and has a long, lean figure.

Renata is a competitive bodybuilder at the amateur level and competes in the middleweight class. In 1996 she won the B.C. Provincial Championships in the middleweight category. She is now preparing to compete at the 1998 Canadian National Championships. Renata has been a bodybuilder for four years, and was twenty-one when she started. She was a lot of fun to be around, and is an expressive and energetic person with a sense of humour and a passion for this sport. Her insights and reflections expressed in the interviews were unique, independent, self-assured and sincere.

Muscularity - Benefits

The interview questions focused more on the women's interpretations of their muscularity than on their interpretations of the sport in general. Thus they were asked questions such as: "how does muscular size and strength make you feel?", "what do you like or dislike about your body?" and "what are the benefits and downsides of having and developing muscles?". Due to the women's emphasis, data collected from the interviews and observations centred mainly on the benefits of muscularity in the women's lives. Although the women felt that their involvement in bodybuilding in general has often been positive (especially in relation to their hard work and motivation in training, achievement of their goals, and competitive successes), they mainly discussed the positive impact of muscularity. The women talked about the health/physical and aesthetic benefits of having muscles, but placed most of the emphasis on the inner benefits.

Health/Physical Benefits

All of the women talked about the health and physical rewards of having well-developed muscles. According to Desiree, muscularity helps with many health issues as she explained how it can improve metabolism, bone density, weight loss, recovery from injury, high pain tolerance, and childbirth. She added that "when you are stronger, and you get injured, you recover faster; and you feel stronger and healthier". Lynea also agreed with these health benefits, but placed more emphasis on how they make her feel by describing them as:

> "Your blood is circulating better, your mind is more alert ... you are stronger and can run faster, jump higher". - *Lynea*

Aesthetic Benefits

The women openly expressed their satisfaction with their own muscular, lean figures, yet each woman had a very specific perspective on why muscular development is aesthetically appealing to them. Desiree found muscles on a woman "sexy" and she stated "I like the look". When asked what she likes about the look of her own body, she replied "the physique, the shape, the tone". When asked why, she replied that she had always had a naturally athletic and muscular build and was therefore accustomed to it and comfortable with it.

Renata believed that the aesthetic benefits of her muscularity were grounded in the appearance of her figure, as she stated "it's definitely the look, that's what it is". She described her reasons for finding muscularity appealing as "knowing where I came from, you know, when I started out, and what it's like now". She expressed a distaste for skinny or frail body images, or what she described as "these little models you see in magazines, with these little shoulders". She added, "I don't want to ever look like that". Lynea described the aesthetic appeal of muscularity as:

> "It's beautiful on a woman's body to have muscle ... you can still have a womanly shape, you can still have the hourglass figure and have muscle on there". - *Lynea*

She also placed emphasis on the feelings evoked by this aesthetic appeal:

> "I love the shape ... I mean, we were given these beautiful bodies, and this is how I think mine is for me, this is more beautiful for me to have, than to have a skinny little body, because I've had that. And I just feel so alive with muscles ... I feel more sexy, more feminine when I'm lean and big and ... my muscles are full. I feel more (of a) woman than I've ever felt." - *Lynea*

Inner Benefits

All of the women recognized that most of what they considered to be beneficial about living with muscularity had to do with inner rewards. In fact, pursuing muscular development was considered to be more mentally beneficial than just a physical state of being. Thus living with muscularity entailed not only being mentally prepared and focused for training and competition, but obtaining significant inner effects that helped them deal with daily life and form an enhanced subjectivity. For example, the mental benefits of muscularity were grounded in Renata's belief that in bodybuilding, "success comes from within because it involves how you are willing to push yourself ". Thus the mental benefits of having defined muscles were seen as beneficial because they promoted gaining a sense of focus and self awareness.

> *"Can you describe in more detail these inner benefits you achieve through your muscularity?"*
> "Discipline in every area. Self-worth. Self-confidence. Sacrifices. Goal setting. Goal achieving. There's so many. It just affects all the principles, basically. Who you are, what you stand for. What you want out of life. What is priority. How to manage your time. How to maintain a balance in your life." - *Lynea*

CONFIDENCE

A main inner benefit obtained was having more self confidence. This included the women's notions of self esteem and pride in their personal success, athletic success and their bodies. Lynea stressed that the confidence she has gained through muscularity allowed her to accomplish more. It also allowed her to be more approachable in the sense that, because she exudes a sense of self confidence, people are often drawn to her. When asked how developing her muscles has impacted her, Renata stated:

> "It makes you a lot stronger .. you think you can handle things. It gives you that confidence, confidence from strength". - *Renata*

In addition, when I was observing Desiree in training, a sense of controlled confidence in her bodily movements and execution of strength in the exercises was noted:

> While she lifts the weight, her attitude towards herself was focused, calm, quiet. She does not talk much, but appeared to be completely in her own space, controlled, self-oriented. Before lifting she mentally prepared herself by closing her eyes, breathing and focusing. She seems to really respect herself here by paying close attention to when she is ready to lift the massive amount of weight. Her technique is careful and deliberate. This seems to be her space, her expertise, she ignores what is happening around her - that is the confidence I am seeing. (Observation 2, Thursday October 16, 1997).

The women spoke of their self confidence in relation to their muscularity as involving an increased self esteem. For example, Lynea described the meaning of confidence as follows:

> "I have confidence. I can look somebody in the eye and talk to them. I never could do that before. I am not afraid to be in a group of people, and I always was before. I was afraid that everybody could see all the negative things about me. And, I like who I am now. I mean, there's lots of things I need to ... work on, but I like who I am. And because of bodybuilding, I've been able to work on that part." - *Lynea*

The theme of self confidence was heard and observed throughout data collection and appeared to relate to all of the inner benefits of muscularity. Thus confidence was also connected to the themes outlined in the rest of this chapter.

BODY IMAGE

When elaborating on the theme of self confidence, the women commonly expanded into the area of body image. In addition, some interview questions attempted to uncover the women's perceptions of their bodies. Discussions surrounding body image led to the development of the sub-themes of self definition through the body, 'I am more than my body', femininity, and female beauty. The women all expressed satisfaction with their bodies and were generally proud of their physiques. While each woman expressed slightly different sentiments towards their body image, they all claimed to have chosen muscularity for themselves because it suited their needs and interests.

Renata identified a struggle in her body image in that, sometimes, she yearns to be smaller. When referring to the way women are often socialized to think they should be physically small, she stated: "I still fight with that ... I still want to be somewhere back there, the skinny little thing". But she explained how a muscular body is ultimately the better choice for her because she has learned to become more self-accepting and realistic about her goals. By choosing bodybuilding, she stated:

> "I'm just being realistic because I know that I will never be that (read: small/skinny) and there has to be a point where that is okay, you have to find a sort of happy median". - *Renata*

She concluded that for her, the physique of a middleweight bodybuilder represents this median.

Desiree discussed her body image in relation to the extreme dieting and training required in bodybuilding, which were not seen as oppressive or unreasonable to her because they involved a different mind set than 'regular' dieting. In doing so, she aligned the restriction and dieting involved in bodybuilding with the competitive requirements of the sport, thereby separating them from individual or negative body image perceptions and intentions.

> "Because this is a sport where you have got to look a certain way, and a sport that trains the body to bring out the muscle definition, you have to diet in order to get that. Whereas if somebody's dieting just to be skinny or society wants you to be skinny, I think that it is wrong because they are dieting ... for the wrong reasons, like to please society or by doing something wrong for your health. Whereas bodybuilders understand that it is just a sport we're dieting for, you know, we are dieting just to look a certain way for that one day ... I think bodybuilders are more in tune with the body, I think that body image is not such a big deal for us, I guess because ... in the off season, we are not all paranoid of what we look like, like that we have to look all perfect and be all thin." - *Desiree*

Self-Definition Through the Body

All of the women saw themselves as having gained the ability to use their bodies as a vehicle for self definition and expression. For Desiree, weight training and fitness have allowed her to define her direction and enhance the athletic side of her identity.

In Lynea's case, muscularity helped her define herself because, by making changes and improvements on her outward body, she can assess and improve her inner self or personality. Thus self definition through Lynea's body was done by using the same techniques involved in defining her muscles to define who and what she is as a person:

> "Because I can make those changes, if there is some area inside of me, it's just like an area that's outside of me, I'll just work on that area and change what I don't like. Just like I'll bring up my shoulder, or I'll bring up my back. You can look at your outward body and you can make assessments and you can make changes, so it's made me not afraid to look inside and say, okay, there's a weak point, I will work on that now. And there is something I'd love to change, so I'll work on that ... it's no different than having small biceps." - *Lynea*

Renata also described how her body helped her to define herself. She saw her muscles as an extension of her own choices and what suits her needs. Her muscles express her desire to take control of her body and work towards a physical outline that serves her struggles regarding body image.

Because the women saw the body as a possible outlet for expression, they were all asked what they were specifically expressing through their own muscular physique. In terms of her physical form, Desiree stated "I am expressing good health, total fitness, a strong body and strong mind". Renata stated that her muscles are the "vehicle" through which she conveys the sentiment

"I have finally conquered what I want to look like" and added "it is sort of an expression of 'Yeah, I am Here!' type of thing". In observing Renata train, my fieldnotes appeared to reiterate this notion of expression through the surface presentation of the body and appearance. Here, it seemed that Renata was creating an outward display of herself through her muscles, her movements and her style which formed a unique, creative and firm expression of herself:

> As I watch Renata go through her routine, I am aware of her unique sense of style in the gym. While I can't picture what she would wear outside the gym setting, it seems that in here she has carved out her own look that says who she is and what she stands for. As I look around the gym, I notice that there isn't anyone here who looks or acts like she does. Not only is she the only woman bodybuilder here, but her dress, style and movements are bold and eye-catching. She moves strongly, hurriedly, and with energy from one exercise to the other, without much rest time in between. She appears happy, energized, in her element, and totally unconcerned about who else is around her. Also, her whole look strikes me as unapologetic, stylish, athletic and fit. It seems to suit her, her muscular body, and her driven, focused attitude. She wears gray sweatpants turned inside out, a black and gray hooded sweatshirt with the logo "Bodymax" on the front and back of it, black high top runners and white baggy socks. She also wears large silver hoop earrings, plus several studs on her ears. Her hair is done in one, long braid going all the way down her back. Her nails are long and dark burgundy coloured. The earrings, hair and nails strike me as direct, solid, strong. The colours are loud and bright, the braid points straight and symmetrical down her back. Like her muscles, there is nothing vague or ambivalent about this style. They are both distinctively formed, carved out, and created to form noticeable, clear outlines. She seems so sure that this is how she wants to present herself, this is who she is. I ask her if this is a typical workout outfit and she replies "oh yeah, do you like it? It's my own creation!". (Observation 2, Wednesday October 29, 1997).

I am More Than My Body

Although the women explained how they were defining themselves through their bodies, they also all emphasized that their bodies do not fully represent who they are as people, in part because muscularity can convey inaccurate impressions to others. They reported that people often form the wrong conclusions about them based on this physical image. Desiree explained that:

> "People get intimidated and think you are all mean or that you want to be tough and that is not it at all". - *Desiree*

Renata summarized this by acknowledging how such negative reactions often strike a personal note. In doing so it appeared that she described certain cultural stereotypes surrounding the female athlete as tough, aggressive and hence 'unfeminine'.

> "Generally people find me very intimidating ... And that is okay for keeping out people that you don't want to come near you. Unfortunately, when you are like that ... you also keep the ones that you don't want away from you, away. So uhm, it's different I think for women ... It's deceiving, people think that because they see these muscles that you can sort of handle anything, they can say whatever they want to you, be as mean as they want to you, you know, it's not like that, they are forgetting that there is a person under there, as opposed to this 'bodybuilder chick'." *-Renata*

In general, the women dealt with these negative responses by developing a confident attitude about their bodily practices and rationalizing away others perceptions. When faced with hostile reactions, Desiree explained her attitude as being: "it's what I like but it's not for everybody; it doesn't bother me because I like it", while Lynea stated: "I know what I'm doing, and I'm comfortable with what I'm doing". Renata's rationalized negative reactions as: "it's just ignorance, when somebody doesn't like something or doesn't know about something, they put it down". Finally, Lynea's responses when faced with reactions of this sort involved strong, witty 'come-backs'. When a man approached her and said "my god, are you ever big!" she replied "no, no it's just that you are extremely small". When another man proclaimed "my god, are you a man or a woman?", she answered: "I'm more of a man than you'll ever be, more of a woman than you'll ever have!". The assertiveness and self assurance heard in these responses seemed to encapsulate a positive body image and strong sense of self.

Femininity

Discussions surrounding perceptions of their bodies led to the concept of femininity - how the women defined it and what it meant to them. Desiree described femininity as how one carries herself from within, and linked it to having a high self esteem which shows through the outer self. She defined femininity as "a combination of things" which included "being a woman, sexuality, the nurturing side, motherhood, being a partner to somebody". She also felt that "muscles do not take away from femininity because that is just society's version of it".

Lynea defined femininity as "being a complete woman with all areas of your life developed, your career, your family, your body". For Lynea, to be feminine involved a woman's ability to let others lead while also remaining a strong woman by knowing oneself and standing by that. This definition of femininity appeared to involve knowing one's priorities and needs while not having to "lead", a term she equated with feminists. It was therefore implied that being a feminist involves being strong, and in charge (i.e., "leading"), while femininity means being strong and in control whether a woman chooses to "lead" or not. The inference here was that, while femininity and feminists are not the same thing, they both involve women being strong, in control, and deciding and prioritizing what is important to them.

> "I think a lot of so called feminists are trying so hard to lead, and what I say is, femininity is knowing that you don't have to lead all the time. Sometimes it's okay not to. And yet, sometimes, if it is important to you then yes, you should step ahead and say okay, I've got to take this path. Knowing I guess what is important, *really* important, and what isn't." - *Lynea*

> "What it means to be a strong woman is to know what you want out of life. It is to know where your boundaries lie inside of you. To know what your own principles and values and morals are ... A strong woman has strong principles and values and morals, and there will be nobody that can make her change those except if she wants to change them; that has goals and dreams, and is willing to reach them. And still to be compassionate and loving and giving and understanding and all those characteristics inside. That's a strong woman." - *Lynea*

The women were asked if their muscularity has had any impact on their interpretations of femininity. They all felt that through the development and attainment of muscularity, they were more able to create their own personal version of femininity which did not necessarily coincide with common images in society of what it means to be feminine. I then asked them to describe this personal version of femininity. Their responses included the notions of being independent, self-defined and self-directed people, being comfortable with themselves and who they are on both the inside and outside, and knowing what is right for them.

"What does femininity mean to you? What is your version of it?"
"To me, it's being allowed to be who I am, the person I am. To have my own thoughts, make my own decisions, free to do what I want. Being in control, and at the same time having a nurturing, caring side, being a mother. I don't like to be controlled ... Independent, and at the same time, having that need to be with somebody like a husband, boyfriend, whatever. But knowing that you could still stand on your own." - *Desiree*

"Being in tune and comfortable with myself and being able to lead sometimes and being able to follow. Being comfortable with myself and who I am, with feelings inside, the total package ... If you know who you are and if you are confident in your body as a woman, and if you are empowered by your body, then just like why wouldn't you feel feminine? Because you feel so good about yourself, and you don't need sexy lingerie to make yourself feel like an attractive woman because you just know you are. And you know this for nobody else's reasons, like it doesn't matter if the cute dark guy over there thinks that I am pretty or sexy or feminine, cause I know that for me, I feel good in this body." - *Lynea*

"Femininity is an inner thing ... I know what the general population thinks that femininity is, you know, the skinny little things with the long hair and big boobs, the whole works. But it's an inner thing. I think it's just being comfortable with yourself, doing what you think is right, being how you are going to be." - *Renata*

Female Beauty

In talking about what femininity means to them, the women were asked to define or describe the notion of female beauty. All of them viewed female beauty as related to a woman's individual self esteem, inner happiness and confidence, and believed that when these are attained, beauty is brought out through the body from within.

For example, Desiree described female beauty as "when you are happy and things are well in your life, it brings beauty out". Lynea described beauty as being "one's inner peace and contentment which creates a radiance and a glow about them" because they are comfortable within themselves. Renata agreed that female beauty comes from the inside of women whose personality and how they carry themselves project self knowledge and confidence. She added that "beauty is about being different and being able to stand out with the way a woman carries herself".

DISCIPLINE

The third inner benefit of muscularity was the notion of discipline. The women's discussion of this theme centred mainly on their definitions of discipline and its influence on their lives. The women discussed the sub-themes of goals, control, and the downsides to being disciplined.

Lynea saw discipline as being related to accomplishment and the ability to overcome challenges in life. She explained that the principles one learns through the pursuit of muscularity can be put into other challenges one faces. She added that:

> "That is my ultimate goal, to be able to take all of those principles, the self discipline, the commitment and anything that I put into the gym, and incorporate them into all areas of my life". - *Lynea*

Desiree acknowledged that she loves being disciplined and defined it as:

> "It's a combination of goal setting and self-motivation, commitment, having that commitment to commit yourself to something and being able to stick with it, and willpower". - *Desiree*

> *"What role does discipline play in your life? What does it mean to you?"*
> "Setting goals, learning to set goals and working hard to achieve them ... and having that ability to stick with it and carry it through and knowing that it takes a lot of hard work . And if you know that it takes this and that to get from point A to point B, then, you know, carrying it through. Just being able to stay focused and not letting any outside influences distract you from the goal you have in mind. And being able to overcome whatever obstacles that come along the way." - *Desiree*

In addition, I observed this sense of discipline in Desiree's calculated and solitary training routine. The technique she executed in the routine was precise, grueling, and appeared as an example of focus and discipline. I observed what order she did the exercises, how she adjusted the weights as she went along, how she lifted, which exercises she chose to do and why. I witnessed Desiree's disciplined nature as I watched the careful execution of her routine, done alone without anybody else's input or encouragement.

> Everything has been measured and decided in order to work the muscle a certain way, from a certain angle, and to exhaust it to a certain degree. She sits and pulls a bar downwards to work her back muscles. She explains that this exercise is designed to add width to the back, whereas the previous one was to build thickness. The first set is a warm up set of 100 lbs. and 15 repetitions. The second set is the same. The third one is 120 lbs. and 10 reps., the fourth 120 lbs. and 12 reps., and the fifth set is 100 lbs. of 12 reps. She performs each set rhythmically, exactly, like a pyramid of energy moving up and then down again, going on and on. This takes time, patience and looks exhausting. Each exercise is not completed quickly. In fact, I have noticed that a mere two or three exercises may take her over an hour to get through, and this is without any socializing or 'wandering' time. She rests briefly between sets, breathing and pushing herself to re-focus and continue with the next set, and the next, and the next. Desiree is alone, concentrating, pulling energy up from inside, precise. She is the one pushing herself, it comes from within. There are no coaches, cheer-leaders, personal trainers, or fellow team members urging her onwards, convincing her she can do it! No fans, no flashing lights, no frivolity. (Observation 2, Thursday October 16, 1997).

Goals

An important part of discipline for the women was the role of goal setting and achieving. They discussed how goals were related to having a sense of direction, control and accomplishment. Part of what they liked best about living with and training for muscularity was consistently seeing what improvements they could make and working on them by setting goals. Lynea described this as "to set a goal, to achieve it, to set another one, to achieve it". Goal setting was also linked to choosing their destinies and becoming the person they wanted to be. For Desiree, to have a long term goal and many short term goals in order to get there is to take a direction. One goal stacked up against another begins to create a future, so deciding what those goals will be and using discipline to achieve them was a method for her to take charge of her life.

Through discipline Desiree has become aware of her boundaries and is therefore not afraid to try new experiences, or as she put it, "to move and get out there and do stuff". She also explained how finding her direction has allowed her to be a better mother to her young daughter because by being an athletic and active mother, she has been able to teach her daughter important lessons about focus, discipline, motivation and concentration. Like Desiree, Renata saw the principles she learned through discipline and direction as relevant and helpful to the rest of her life:

> "I'm not wishy-washy at all. It's like yes or no for me. You can't half diet, you can't half train ... You got to put it all together and make them more of a package. You know, life is a package too. When something isn't right, get rid of it so it works together again. I think that's what I've gotten out of it. " - *Renata*

Control

Another aspect of discipline was achieving and maintaining a sense of control. Desiree stated she has learned to be more focused on her goals by consistently reminding herself how much achieving them meant to her. In doing so, she stated that "anything that gets in the way, you just jump over it and keep going". Goal setting and achieving were related to a sense of control over oneself and one's life because for these women, control was seen as an integral part of training for muscular development and of the sport as a whole.

The women all recognized that they like to be in control, but not in a negative or overly aggressive way. Desiree saw herself as in control of herself and her life, but stated that "I don't always have to take charge, but I like to feel that when I need to and want to, I can". Similarly, Lynea said "I like to be in control of myself, but not to control anybody else".

When Lynea was asked what muscular size and strength do for her, she stated that they "make me feel in control of all aspects of my life, how I handle situations and more in tune with what's going on around me". When asked to expand on this she added:

> "When you can change your body and when you can work and you know that it is only you that is doing it, you are not depending on anyone else ... you feel real in control. Now whether that is a false sense of security or whatever it is, if you feel it, that is your life, that is your perception. Whatever you perceive, that is your world. So for me, it is very powerful." - *Lynea*

Lynea also emphasized her first experience with this feeling when she began weight training many years ago:

> "It was an incredible feeling for me that I felt for once in my life, even using a little five pound dumbbell, I felt like I was in control ... Because for so long, for so many years, I felt that I was so out of control, like I didn't have any control out of *any* area of my life, and for once I felt like this is something that *I'm* doing .. for once I just felt like I was in control, again. That's the biggest thing." - *Lynea*

Thus this sense of control also involved the idea that it helped these women achieve a life which suits their needs and experience their bodies in the ways that they want to. According to Lynea, this was because control involved making her own choices and knowing what choices to make.

The Downsides to Discipline

Part of the discussion of this theme included the women's belief that being disciplined and goal-oriented at times can involve less than positive aspects. A certain degree of negatives involved in muscularity were seen as unavoidable due to the sport's required strict training regime and rules. The two main downsides discussed by the women were self-criticism and sacrifices.

Firstly, the women felt that being disciplined requires a certain degree of self-assessment and criticism in order to push oneself both physically and mentally in bodybuilding, and that this can lead to self criticism. Yet they also saw self-criticism as a useful aspect of discipline that leads to self improvement. For example, Desiree stated that being self critical "is about being honest with yourself rather than just leaving things as they are and accepting". Hence such self assessment was viewed as a step towards self improvement and fulfillment.

Secondly, sacrifices and restrictions involved in training, especially leading up to a competition, were also seen as potential disadvantages to being disciplined. These involved, for example, a strict diet, drinking enough water, getting enough sleep, and pushing oneself in the gym. Lynea elaborated on this by saying:

> "Because so much time and energy are required to developing one's physique, if you are with somebody, it takes a lot of patience on that other person's part because a lot of the time you are selfish when you are getting ready for a show". - *Lynea*

When asked how she deals with this, she added:

> "You have to maintain the basic core of who you are so you don't lose sight of the other balance in your life". - *Lynea*

Yet it appeared that the notion of sacrifices were viewed by the women as both challenging and positive. Renata stated that sacrifices make her a stronger person because they require deciding what is important to her in life and that she choose her priorities accordingly. Lynea believed that such sacrifices were neither oppressive or constraining, but rather, they represented the choices made of her own volition:

> "I don't think sacrifices is a negative word ... I don't think of them as restrictions because that is what I choose to do ... For somebody else looking in at my life and saying "well, geez, she can't go out tonight, or she can't go out to eat because she is doing that", that for them would be restrictions, but for me it is something that I have to do. So it is a choice that I have made, and if you're not willing to make those sacrifices, then you choose something else." *-Lynea*

INDEPENDENCE

Being independent was seen as an inner benefit of muscularity for the women in this study. Independence was related to perceptions of being a unique individual, having a sense of personal power and gaining recognition from others. Thus the sub-themes were individualism, personal power, and recognition.

Bodybuilding as a sport, as well as training for and living with muscularity, allowed these women independence because it is an individual sport that, as Desiree stated, "you are in total control of". Thus the sport demands total self direction and encourages an independent spirit in its participants.

Independence was played out in the women's impressions of muscularity and bodybuilding in unique and specific ways. Desiree's independence was seen in the way she trains alone, in the way she likes to "lead and not to follow", and her comments on not liking "taking orders", "being pushed around", "being controlled" or "taken advantage of".

Independence was observed in and discussed by Renata in terms of her strong personality, autonomy and ability to make choices which suit her needs and well being. For example, before she became involved in bodybuilding, she described herself as "the little wifey type", but through attaining and developing her muscularity, she stated:

> "I couldn't even imagine that. I started out that way, but this has changed me completely. I'm so much more independent now". - *Renata*

She also explained that if someone attacked her she could defend herself, and described herself as headstrong and able to go without things. By attaining muscularity, she has learned that "if it's not good for you ... blow it off, get rid of it" and added that she has "no problem doing that in life either any more". Renata explained how this independence is often misperceived by others as aggressiveness, hostility or selfishness. Perhaps this is because independence and autonomy do not coincide with traditional stereotypes and expectations of women as dependent, subservient and supportive of others' needs. Yet Renata accepted these negative perceptions of her because, through independence she has found another avenue for success which prioritizes her own needs and way of doing things:

> "I've got this bad reputation as a bitch (who) does just whatever it takes to get to where she is going, that type of thing. I don't know, maybe that's true. It's my way and I have been successful with that way, so." - *Renata*

Individualism

Another facet of independence was the sense of individualism expressed by the women. Individualism came to mean not caring what others think of you, accomplishing success on your own terms, and not fitting into convention in terms of common or typical notions of women's bodies, behaviours and sporting practices. Thus the women felt that pursuing muscularity had promoted an awareness of being unique individuals in the sense that they are doing something different, independent and challenging.

Personal Power

Independence was also seen as leading to feelings of power among these women. This was explained by the women in slightly different ways.

Renata believed that having strength and muscularity can give her power within herself "when everything is coming together and I have a good frame of mind". Yet she claimed that

there is not always a clear connection between attaining physical strength and personal power because they are two separate things, as she stated:

> "There's physical strength and emotional strength - just because you have one does not mean you have the other". - *Renata*

Desiree saw her own power as formed by independently building her own motivation, determination and discipline. She aligned this sense of power with her awareness of her own strength, skill and ability to protect herself.

> "When you feel physically stronger, it does increase your self esteem when you walk down the street and you know that you have got that power, that ability to carry yourself or defend yourself if you are attacked ... It's like taking martial arts and knowing that you have that skill, that weapon, just knowing that you have that power." - *Desiree*

Recognition

Part of feeling powerful for these women involved the way that muscularity has increased the recognition they receive from others who know of the work and dedication involved in bodybuilding and muscular development. Lynea felt that being strong and muscular was to feel powerful, in control, and unique, and to be known as such was to feel like an accomplished athlete.

> "The more I got into it, I wanted to be known as an athlete. That is what I want to be. I want to be known, when they ask, as an athlete, not just a woman, a big woman, or a woman with muscle ... it is a sport, and it's an athletic sport, and that's what I want." - *Lynea*

These positive reactions from others ranged from respect, to admiration, to recognition both within and outside the bodybuilding world. Lynea described her experiences with positive feedback as not only coming from loved ones, but also from total strangers who view her as a role model and an example of independence, open-mindedness, hard work and motivation. This was confirmed in an observation of Desiree in the gym, where a man approached her and told her that she was a true inspiration for others and to keep up the hard work. They shook hands and

she stated afterwards how nice it was to get this kind of support from people who do not know her, but who recognize her accomplishments.

In explaining these positive reactions towards them, the discussions led into the notion of receiving positive reinforcement from others. Positive reinforcement included social support provided by loved ones, fellow women bodybuilders or training partners, and was an important factor in the women's pursuit of muscular development. This support was seen as functioning in several ways, such as a motivator and a bonding influence. Social support often led to their initial involvement in the sport, fostered the drive to continue to pursue it, while others provided knowledge of the technique to train correctly. This was also noted when I observed Renata in training, where her training partner provided her with feedback, encouragement, support, guidance, and decisions regarding how she would train on that particular day.

Support was also described as filling the important role of helping the women deal with negative reactions from others by fostering a sense of purpose and providing positive reinforcement in them.

> "You learn to phase out what people say by turning to your sounding board, your people who you talk to that you trust. Because it is your sport, you take control about what you let go into your mind and what you just let go out, and then that helps the self-confidence, believing in yourself". - *Lynea*

INNER STRENGTH

Another main benefit derived from muscularity was the notion of, not only physical, but inner strength. The focus of this theme was mainly on the notion of inner or emotional strength, and included the sub-theme 'female power' (e.g., their inner strength as a positive example of women's potential personal power). Being an inwardly strong and resilient person, having determination and a strong mindset were considered by the women as both part of the experience of living with muscles and as an outcome of developing them. Desiree defined inner strength as becoming, through the pursuit of muscularity, more dedicated to the sport and less sensitive to criticism. For Renata, this inner strength was said to allow her to be more decisive and

competent. It was also described as a benefit or outcome of bodybuilding. She defined inner strength as follows:

> "Being a strong person means not being soft or conventional because it does not fit. You have to be able to handle what people say, which not a lot of people have". *-Renata*

> "I think bodybuilding, if you've got it together, does help you find this. And if you can find it, it makes you that much further ahead of the next person ... even for someone whose inner strength is not in the forefront to begin with, bodybuilding will definitely bring that out in you because it involves different priorities than being soft or weak". *-Renata*

Female Power

In discussing their sense of the inner as well as physical strength gained through the development of muscularity, the women all saw them as representative of a form of female power because they are positive examples of women's capabilities. This was the case, not only because the women saw their behaviour in the gym and their physical body as breaking certain gender norms, but because they saw their inner strength as a symbol of the power other women can develop within themselves. This was further explained in distinct ways: Desiree saw strength as enhancing women's survival and independence, Lynea saw her strength as a positive example for women, and Renata saw muscularity as a possible option for women to find power within themselves.

Firstly, the women attained physical and inner strength through training in the gym, a place where they find it hard to think of women as inferior to men. For example, when I asked Renata how training impacts her attitudes on female power, she stated,

> "In a strength sort of way. Men are stronger well, *really?* I put a lot of guys to shame in the gym". *-Renata*

Lynea responded to this question by claiming that muscularity gives women more mental power than men because women have a "stronger mind-body connection and are more emotionally advanced". Lynea also believed that her muscularity could have a positive impact on other women in that the personal power she has gained represents a message for women to:

"... decide in themselves what is going to make them powerful and strong, what's going to make them feel good inside, what's going to be their passion". - *Lynea*

Because women had approached Lynea to say that they admired her body and the hard work she puts into training it, she saw her muscularity as a symbol of strength for other women.

Renata stated that, while muscularity can only give one power within oneself, her developed muscles may send a powerful message to other women. I asked Renata if the inner and physical strength she had gained through her muscularity impacted her views on women's equality, and she felt that, while women are not always treated equally, "all you can do is do your part to help it, and I consider this doing my part". Muscularity was therefore seen as an option for women which may or may not suit their needs. For her, inner and physical strength represented the fact that she has chosen a route according to her own priorities, and by doing so she encourages other women to do the same.

SELF AWARENESS

The sixth inner benefit identified by the women was the sense of self awareness they received as a result of muscularity. Knowledge of potential and self identity emerged as sub-themes of Self Awareness. The women discussed this theme in detail and appeared to link this notion of being self aware to their meanings of gender issues and sense of empowerment through their bodies. Desiree defined self awareness as:

"Knowing who you are and what you want, and being able to discover your inner strength and know what you can achieve". - *Desiree*

One element to the women's discussion of self awareness was the ability to come to terms with who they are as people and accept themselves. Through bodybuilding, Renata gained a sense of self acceptance because it allowed her to use muscularity to overcome her body image issues. Lynea agreed that her experiences with bodybuilding and developing muscularity helped her to be introspective, honest with herself, achieve inner contentment and improve on her weak points. Thus through muscularity she stated:

> "You learn about accepting yourself and all of your failures and all of your accomplishments, and when you are making change to know that each step of the way, that it's okay where you're at". *-Lynea*

In Desiree's case, her self awareness involved, not only having a clear idea of what her interests are and her ability to achieve what she puts her mind to, but also an understanding of her position as a black woman in this sport. A clearer sense of self and strong understanding of her race in this sport were forged through her involvement in it. She stated that, in bodybuilding, "I have not seen any racism, never once been insulted, or at least have never noticed racism", even though it is a very white-dominated sport in Canada. Instead, she saw her experience as a black woman as no different than a white woman's, except in the sense that, for her, success and winning as a minority has felt exceptionally good:

> "Most of the other competitors are white, so you stand out more in that way. And being black and placing in the top, you know, and having a better placement than most other girls. Yeah, it makes you feel good that you're in such a minority here, whereas in the States the sport is much bigger, there's a lot more black girls that compete and stuff like that. Up here it's a lot smaller and there's not a lot of black bodybuilders up here in Canada ... so it makes it even better." - *Desiree*

Self awareness for Renata involved knowing what is good for her and what her priorities are, thereby becoming extremely decisive. This was captured in her statement that:

> "Through bodybuilding, I have gotten to where it's so much easier now just to say do without, cut it out, and it's gone and that's it". - *Renata*

For Lynea, muscularity promotes a sense of becoming aware of what's going on around and inside her. This involves being more in touch with, and in control of, her own feelings and "not just letting things happen but making things happen". She added that she becomes self aware because "in order to know what you have to do to make things happen, you have to put some thought into it". Through bodybuilding she has learned to achieve these things.

> "I guess it's made me look at who I am because for a long time I didn't know who I was, I felt dried up inside. And in bodybuilding, perhaps has made me look at a lot of things internally. Find out and know myself, and who I am through bodybuilding ... It hasn't made who I am inside, but it has allowed me to find out who I am inside, because it's allowed me to look more closely, scrutinize and not be afraid of who I am." - *Lynea*

Knowledge of Potential

Part of the women's sense of self awareness was an awareness of their potential. For all of the women, this knowledge of potential involved the sentiment that if they can do this (i.e., develop their muscularity through the practices of bodybuilding), they can do anything. Like Lynea, Desiree claimed that if she put this kind of effort and dedication into something else, she knows she could do it well.

> "If I am up against a struggle at work or a struggle in my relationship, I can say okay, it can't be any harder than squatting 385 lbs! You know, I mean all I have to do is say okay, I can diet for 20 weeks, surely I can do this in my relationship or do this at work." - *Lynea*

Knowledge of their potential was also described as related to training for muscularity and for competitions, where the women were consistently testing their own limits. This was defined as learning the boundaries and limits of their own inner strength by pushing themselves to be the best they can be.

> "I wasn't quite aware of how strong I am. I never had anything before where I had to ... actually set clear goals and work at something and really go and do it. It was always far at the back of my mind, but you know, bodybuilding brought it out, like made me more aware of it." - *Desiree*

Self-Identity

While the women felt that their muscularity did not fully define who they are as people, they expressed that, through their development of muscularity and increased self awareness, they have gained knowledge of their identities. For example, Renata described her muscularity as linked to her personality traits as a strong and independent type of person. She felt that her muscularity connected to her self identity because:

> "It's just a strength thing. Generally with me it is pretty evident that what you see is what you get. I am a really strong person, sort of a don't-mess-with-me type of person. It's just how I am, and that is what people see when they first see me, and that is what they generally get." - *Renata*

Part of becoming more aware of their identities involved the idea that the women had been transformed through their muscularity. When Renata was asked whether experiencing muscularity through bodybuilding had changed her experience with herself, she stated:

> "It has, because it has given me that control ... and the knowledge to get to where I have always sort of wanted to be". -*Renata*

Another element to the women's sense of their self identity was their sense of having strong opinions. The women identified themselves as individuals who have gotten their 'own thoughts on things' and know where they stand on different issues. This was because, in gaining a firm idea of who they are and what they are capable of, the women also formed clear and independent thoughts and opinions. For example, when asked about gender equality, Lynea described how having and training for muscularity impacted her views on female strength and power as a whole:

> "I feel stronger as a woman. I feel stronger having opinions and stronger as a woman and as a whole since I started bodybuilding. So maybe I'm allowed to feel my opinions stronger than I did before ... It does affect what I think, and it affects my opinions on everything because I feel it is okay to have an opinion. And I do." - *Lynea*

The women all felt that by training for and living with muscles, they possess the right to their own thoughts and stance on things. When asked about their opinions, much of the discussions focused on opinions on gender issues and bodily empowerment. The most noticeable aspect to these discussions was that many of the sentiments expressed regarding gender issues and bodily empowerment related closely to their discussions on the inner benefits of muscularity.

GENDER

With regards to their opinions on gender issues, all participants believed in women's equality and the importance of women's independence. Desiree urged women to be independent

and not rely solely on men for fulfillment by building a life of their own. In addition, Renata felt that, in order for women to strive for equality with men, they need to find their own direction in life to gain a strong sense of themselves.

When asked their opinions regarding women's status in contemporary North American society, the participants stated that they considered women as powerful and, as Desiree stated, "strong enough to stand up and have a voice". Yet they also viewed women's power as not always visible and often subtle. In addition, they felt that while women are not inferior to men, they are not often treated as such. Renata felt that:

> "That's just the way it's been, so all you can do is your part and do your best to stand out in your own right, and hope that is enough. I guess what I do is kind of my way of doing my part". - *Renata*

In terms of gender issues within sport, the women viewed female involvement in sport as a good thing. In terms of the male dominated world of sports, Desiree stressed that women are suited for sport because "we are all born physical beings, so women have the right to be physically active too". She critiqued cultural stereotypes of athletic women accused of being lesbians or of being too masculine, stating that:

> "We can be strong and physical and still be feminine. Just because they are playing in a man's sport, it's totally not true". *-Desiree*

She also linked women's involvement in sport with the expression of female power and strength in society, as she stated:

> "It's the '90's and women are stronger now and getting stronger every day, so if we want to express that and show that, it's our choice. We shouldn't be criticized or put down for it". *-Desiree*

Renata agreed by explaining how female involvement in athleticism is powerful because it is unique and an expression of women's independence and choice. She summarized this by stating:

> "Just like the men, women have lots to offer sports too, maybe just a different interpretation of the sport. Women athletes are doing a good thing because they are doing their own thing". *-Renata*

The discussion of gender issues in sport led to a discussion of gender relations in bodybuilding. The women claimed that, although bodybuilding is a male dominated sport, they do not feel that this has a negative influence on their experiences. Rather, the women reported being treated well by the men because they recognized the dedication and hard work involved in it. They also saw women as having their own standards of competition and creating their own version of the sport which suits their interests.

The women's sense of feeling distinct from male bodybuilders was based on their belief that women bodybuilders, not only compete differently than the men involved, but experience, treat and interpret muscularity differently. Ultimately they saw themselves and other female bodybuilders as unique from male bodybuilders because "the women make it their own" (Desiree). For example, Desiree claimed that women bodybuilders experience their muscularity differently than men, in the sense that for women it is more exciting because it requires more of a physical challenge and personal strength to achieve. It was thought that women treat or approach muscularity differently than men because they are more artistic about it and have less ego involved.

> "Men are genetically built that way. They are used to ... having muscle and being the stronger sex, but with women it is more of an achievement because we are not born with muscles, we have to work to build them. So it is different, men are just used to it, it is part of the way they are made up, but we have to work for this, it is an achievement." - *Desiree*

> "A lot of men, it is about size, being big and being one of the big guys. But with women, we look at it more as an art form ... because you have to create it like you're creating a sculpture. It is not just training, but training right to create that form." - *Desiree*

Because of these unique interpretations, the women saw themselves as redefining or transforming the practice. Desiree saw herself and other women bodybuilders as not imitating men, but forming their own version of the sport by creating a form of muscularity based on shape, balance, symmetry, and on "remaining feminine". Lynea agreed that it is about "looking

for a woman that has everything inside showing on the outside" and, as Renata stated, "for women it's based more on the overall package".

These discussions surrounding gender issues led the women to critique the media for its portrayals of women as overly skinny, weak and passive. They disliked the way these versions of femininity are imposed onto women by encouraging them to look or act accordingly. Desiree stated that "women are trying to get stronger and yet are still portrayed as weak and helpless". She would rather see a variety of images of different sizes, shapes and colours.

The women described media images of women bodybuilders as negative, sexual, geared to men, and governed by marketing. These images therefore do not allow female bodybuilders to be depicted as athletes with integrity.

> "I wish that the media would place more emphasis on the athletic part of it, the work that goes into it, the discipline, the training, rather than just how big their tits are and how tight their asses are!". *-Desiree*

> "Just the marketing, the whole sex issue around it, let it be a sport, let us be athletes, don't try to make it into some sexual fantasy for men. Let it be a bloody sport". *- Lynea*

Topics surrounding the portrayal of women in the media led into issues of gender in terms of women's body image. All of the women felt that society placed too much emphasis on women to be thin and small. Desiree claimed that:

> "People should be made to feel happy with the way they are and accepted for whatever mixtures of looks, as long as they are happy with it". *- Desiree*

With regards to her own chosen design for her body, she added:

> "I like being this way but it is not because of any pressure, it is just because it's me. Society likes to dictate too much what people think they should be. With me, I don't live my life for society, I live it for me, I could not care less what society would think of me". *- Desiree*

While they all agreed that women are judged too heavily on their outward appearance, they did not seem heavily defeated by this perception. For example, both Desiree and Lynea described how women have the power to gain some control over this situation.

> "Even though we have come a long way, society still thinks we should have this certain image, like be really feminine or passive. Even women see these other women getting stronger and it's like, they are seen as stirring up trouble, like sit down and be quiet. A lot of it is just fear, like they don't have the nerve to get up and actually step over the line." - *Desiree*

> "I think sometimes it's a cop out for us women. I think sometimes when we are not happy with ourselves, we want to blame somebody, so we blame society ... If we just took all the blame out of it and took responsibility for ourselves. And if we feel bad about the way we look and wish that we could be thinner, that is not society's fault either, that is us not being happy with who we are, so then change it." - *Lynea*

Women's body image was also explained in terms of using the body as a positive source of self expression through hair, make-up, clothes, body shape and style. This kind of 'bodywork' was not seen as oppressive for women as long as they are doing it for themselves. It was seen as restrictive only if women are doing it to please someone else or are allowing others to decide how they should look or act.

Finally, the women were all asked how they would react to the traditional attitude that women are not supposed to be muscular. They all disagreed, as Desiree claimed "that thinking is so much in the dark ages". Instead, they saw muscularity as possibly having a positive impact on women's body image. For example, Desiree explained that because men are often naturally more muscular than women or the larger sex, having developed muscles is more rewarding for women. When observing Desiree training in the gym, many of the ideas expressed by the women regarding gender issues appeared to be confirmed in terms of breaking with traditional feminine norms, portrayals or expectations regarding women's bodies, behaviours and capabilities:

> I am standing at the very back of the gym watching Desiree. She has just told me that she will be training legs today. I look around the gym, it is a large, plain, drafty warehouse with lots of metal weights, cables and bars. I hear the clanking of weights and benches as a few people slowly move through their lifting routines. It is hushed, industrial, cold. Desiree faces the back mirrored wall of the gym. We are far away from the front entrance of the gym, where most of the activity takes place. She steps up to the squat rack, adjusting her small towel across her shoulders. She slowly takes a huge, round weight plate, which are the size of a large tire, and places it across the bar. She repeats this on both sides with various sized plates. She never looks at me or around the room at anyone else. The bar now holds 250 lbs. All of a sudden her body and stature look tiny in comparison. She steps towards it, and I can't help but think that this bar of weight will hurt her

shoulders as she places it across them. But she lifts the enormous bar off the rack and hoists it on to her with one swift movement and strong exhale. My focus now turns from her back to her legs, as she squats downwards towards the floor, with her eyes straight ahead and her neck and back upright. Slowly she squats, releasing a quick, loud, strong breath, almost a grunt, at the top of the extension, pushing 250 lbs. held up by her 5'2" frame. I don't notice anybody else in the gym who is pressing or lifting a mass this large or concentrated. A few men across the gym turn their heads to see who is exerting a lift like this. It is just her muscles against the weight, nothing else attached, no leverage, no cables or angles to assist her. Just straight up and down - gravity, the weight, and her strength. She controls it, she conquers it, she is the action. (Observation 1, Tuesday October 14, 1997).

BODILY EMPOWERMENT

The women were asked to describe their opinions regarding the notion of bodily empowerment, from which the sub-themes of self actualization and advice to women were formed. They all agreed that bodily empowerment is possible, and were asked how this may occur for other women and how it related to their own interpretations of muscularity. The women's opinions regarding bodily empowerment connected to their discussions on the inner benefits of muscularity in their lives, as the rewards of confidence, a positive body image, discipline, independence, inner strength, and self-awareness were seen as contributors to bodily empowerment. In addition the women defined bodily empowerment, both for others and at the personal level, using similar notions as those used to discuss the inner benefits of muscularity, especially in their discussions surrounding the idea of self-actualization.

For Desiree, bodily empowerment was defined as creating a body which expresses who you are and how you feel about yourself. In doing so, one attains a positive self perception, self acceptance and thereby becomes more self sufficient.

> "If you are happy and feel good and real strong about the way you look and it makes you feel good, then that will empower you". - *Desiree*

When asked when this may occur, she replied:

> "If women decide they are not happy with their body and they want to create a body more about how they feel about themselves mentally, and to express and show who they actually are". - *Desiree*

By gaining a sense of physical strength through athletic pursuits, women may realize that they can be independent from men, and this increases their sense of self sufficiency.

> "Women these days are out on their own and not every woman has got a man to stand guard, so you have to be physical now, and physically stronger". - *Desiree*

Lynea defined bodily empowerment as women's ability to strengthen their mind and attain feelings of inner happiness and power by getting to know their body through athleticism, muscularity or other bodily practices. She believed that bodily empowerment has more to do with the mind than the body, and that bodybuilding strengthens the mind. This was described as a mind-body connection, and Lynea believed that for women to achieve this connection and become empowered in this way, they need to get to know their body.

Renata defined bodily empowerment as women's ability to acquire self confidence, control, and independent thoughts and decisions through their bodily discipline.

> "Empowerment is linked with inner strength and confidence and knowing that you can handle all of this, and the confidence you get from that". - *Renata*

To achieve this, women can use athleticism or weight training as a way to take things into their own hands and reach their goals. Renata saw this as requiring that women stop caring about what other people say, get their own thoughts on the subject of body image, find out what is best for them, and set goals based on this.

The women all agreed that they were personally empowered through their development and attainment of muscularity. They each explained how this occurred at the personal level.

Besides becoming aware of the extent of her inner and outer strength, Desiree believed that she is personally empowered through her muscularity because, like Renata, it helps her feel equal to, and sometimes stronger than, men. Her physical strength was equated with men in the statement:

> "Women are totally equal because I train just as hard if not harder than the other guys out there, as well as being smarter about it and knowing more about it".
> - *Desiree*

Bodily empowerment was also seen as enhanced through muscularity in the sense that it allows her to more clearly define her version of femininity. She described this connection between bodily empowerment and femininity as:

> "Being confident in who you are, you know who you are, you're a strong woman, mentally, physically and you know you're still female, you know who you are - you're a woman, you have got muscles and so everything up here and inside is still all feminine." - *Desiree*

While I observed Desiree train in the gym, these notions of bodily empowerment appeared to surface in my impressions written in the fieldnotes. She appeared to be training 'hard' and 'smart' while exuding a strong sense of self assurance and knowing who she is and why she was doing this. The following excerpt from the fieldnotes elaborates on this:

> When doing a heavy set, she stares straight ahead, never looking down or averting her eyes, with an expression of determination on her face. She is upright, strong and grounded while carrying 250 lbs. across her shoulders or pressing 540 lbs. with her legs. She breathes loudly, forcefully with every press. She concentrates, she is an expert at this. I am struck by this new image of the female figure and gestures. This was direct, unapologetic, and seemed to be saying 'I know what I am doing', 'I do not need anyone's approval for this'. She is without reservation or shyness and very sure of herself, while being unconcerned with others, modest, and elegant in her calm movements. She is smart, assertive and controlled. (Observation 1, Tuesday October 14, 1997).

Renata described her empowerment through her body as involving a coming together of her inner self, becoming aware of herself, her inner strength and confidence, deciding her own direction and following it through. She saw herself as empowered through her body because bodily discipline and muscularity allow her, as she said, "to start out here and get there, and when you get there, being how you *should* be". This direction gained through muscularity was described as connected to her success onstage and winning competitions, as well as her personal success which consisted of achieving a body and lifestyle which fulfill her.

Lynea felt that she was empowered through her body because it allowed her to accomplish what she has set out to, consistently set new goals, become happy with who she is, and to evolve as a person. Thus bodily empowerment for her meant:

> "Being in control, being confident to withstand whatever criticism is out there and whatever obstacles are in your way, to know who you are, to just be you and to be okay with being you". - *Lynea*

When asked how her muscularity has helped promote this, Lynea replied:

> "It allows me to push myself further than I ever thought possible, to continuously become better at what I do, to continually learn, see changes, to be able to persevere and to actually change my body. And that is so empowering". - *Lynea*

She saw her muscles as a symbol of her independence, in that "they show that I am strong-minded, strong-willed and am going somewhere". She also saw bodily empowerment as dependent on one's motivation for pursuing muscularity to begin with, in the sense that:

> "It matters what you are going in for, like your motives and reasons for developing your body. If you're going into the gym to work your ego or to get noticed ... you are going to feel a whole lot different than if you are going into it to be an athlete." - *Lynea*

Lynea concluded that for her, bodily empowerment can be defined as using muscularity and bodily discipline as a way to attain the knowledge of who she is as a person, develop the courage to believe in this, and choose her direction accordingly.

> "Being confident in knowing that this is the course that you have taken, that this is you and that nobody has decided for you what you are to look like, and what you are supposed to do. There is no 'supposed to'. You have decided for yourself that this is who I am, and this is what I want, and for now, this is the course that I am taking. And to be proud of it, to be convicted by it, and standing by your convictions, and to believe in yourself." - *Lynea*

Self Actualization

It appeared that a common idea among the women's descriptions of bodily empowerment was the notion of becoming self actualized through their chosen design for the body. Being self actualized meant having the ability to, not only become aware of the inner benefits of their muscularity, but to actually apply these principles to their lives and structure their identities around them in ways that the women saw as empowering.

This involved the idea that, by training for and living with muscularity, the women have learned certain principles of which they have the potential to successfully apply to other areas of

their lives. Self actualization was therefore seen as the ability to take control of their destiny, decide who they are and act on this, take responsibility for what they want to achieve, and create and express their own version of femininity, strength and independence. Lynea believed that because she knows what it is like to have these principles in her daily life in terms of muscularity and bodybuilding, it is easier to put them into other areas of her life. Thus rather than merely *feeling* the benefits of muscularity, women are empowered when they *become* or *live by* these principles, such as gaining a powerful version of femininity which contrasts notions of the weak, passive female and structuring their lives around this.

For example, according to Desiree, athleticism allows women to become aware of their physical strength, and thereby gain independence and the realization that they do not have to be cared for by a man. Here, being in control of your own body and taking charge of it teaches women to apply these to other areas of life. By developing one's muscles, Desiree felt that one can attain freedom in the sense that:

> "Nobody can tell you how to do it, what to do or what you should look like because you decide your physique according to what suits you". - *Desiree*

Perhaps this translates into women's ability to decide what is right for them and make their own decisions with other things according to what they want and need, rather than by outside doctrines. Also, like Renata, Desiree felt that lifting weights can help women feel powerful in many areas of life. Because building well developed muscles is commonly seen as un-feminine, Desiree felt that "it is power by showing that you are strong enough to do what you want", and by allowing women to be more physically able to doing things or less limited. This decreases women's fears or inhibitions, rendering them more capable of trying new things and deciding what is right for them.

Lynea described self actualization as becoming stronger as a woman and thus attaining the right to feel one's opinions. The benefits and principles behind muscularity therefore cross into other areas of life if women consciously think about the areas they want to apply them to.

> "It also helps you believe that anything that you choose to do, you could do because it is you that is making the choices, and that is a pretty powerful feeling to know that". - *Lynea*

By playing these out through the development and attainment of the muscular body, women can incorporate these ideas into their lives both in and out of the gym. Self actualization is possible in that they can then begin to define themselves and their beliefs based on such notions.

Advice For Women

The women were also asked to offer advice to women who have a poor self image or feel badly about their bodies. This consisted of advising women to be healthy and realistic, to find out what their priorities are concerning their body, to accept themselves and aim to become more self aware. It was added that women should only strive to attain their vision of the ideal body if it is a priority to them that will make them happy.

In terms of what advice they would give to women regarding gaining a sense of empowerment through the body, given their own experiences with muscularity, it was recommended that women work towards finding out what works for them in terms of bodily practices and to strive for some of the principles underlying the development of muscularity. The women did not necessarily recommend bodybuilding to others because, as they all stated, "it is not for everybody". Instead they felt that others may benefit from similar outcomes that they have gained from their own pursuit of muscularity and experiences with bodily discipline and self discovery.

For example, Desiree recommended weight training, the attainment of muscularity, or any athletic pursuit, to women because:

> "... once you start feeling a difference, your self esteem goes right up, so you can actually work on your self esteem". - *Desiree*

She added that while one does not have to participate in bodybuilding to attain this, women may achieve similar rewards through other bodily practices by first accepting themselves,

even if they want to change their body. In doing so, women can decide what is comfortable for them and become more at home with themselves.

According to Lynea, women's involvement in attaining and developing their muscularity is potentially empowering because it teaches one to set goals and realize that anything is possible. She advised women to:

> "know that you are strong and powerful, you have a purpose and you have something that makes you unique. Find out what that is, and work with that."
> - *Lynea*

Renata suggested that women can reach bodily empowerment by finding out what success means to them and how bodily practices impact them. Women must first decide how athletic activities, in particular weight training, make them feel. If one feels a sense of personal success from them, they are potentially empowering because they offer a sense of reality about self image and promote being the best you can be on your own terms.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how personal interpretations of muscularity by competitive female bodybuilders contributed to their definitions of gender and potential empowerment through the body. Hall (1990) viewed the body-as-subject as underlying all human physical activity, including sport, where patriarchal culture has defined woman as 'other' due to male hegemonic control over women's bodies. Hall therefore saw the notion of women's potential empowerment through their bodies as possible if related to women's re-appropriation or re-construction of certain normative cultural notions of gender and the female body.

> Sport, exercise and physical activity can be empowering for women, whether the purpose is to challenge the objectification of their bodies or to resist compulsory heterosexuality. Regardless, we need to understand the processes whereby the female body becomes sexualized, controlled and oppressed, and more importantly, the potential in sport, exercise and physical activity for strategies of resistance and opposition. (1990, p. 235-236).

Because much work has been done to try and understand the processes involved in the oppression of women via their bodies (cf. Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1989 & 1993; Castelnuova & Guthrie, 1994; Ewan, 1988; Fallon, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 1989; Poulton, 1996; Redican et al., 1988; Sabo, 1988; Willis, 1990; Wolf, 1991; Wooley et al., 1979), this study focused on Hall's second point regarding explorations of women's resistance or opposition to normative gender-body meanings. By exploring interpretations of muscularity among three competitive female bodybuilders, it was found that their meanings were related to certain re-definitions of gender and notions of empowerment through the body, with significant impact on their identities and lives.

Research Question #1: Are the Women's Interpretations of their Muscularity Associated with Re-Definitions of Gender?

Before answering this research question, it was first necessary to identify certain normative cultural constructions of gender in contemporary North American society in order to

examine how the women's interpretations of their muscularity echoed or contrasted these. As seen by Bartky (1993), Bordo (1993), Fallon (1990), and Spitzack (1990), cultural notions of gender are primarily made up of the values, norms, practices, images and expectations of the body, in which femininity means the construction of an appropriate surface presentation of the self through body size, movement, and behaviour. Thus it was stated that, within these constructions, women are required to produce docile bodies which fit certain oppressive norms of beauty, appearance and discipline (such as tightness, slimness, small space-taking, suppressed needs, self-monitoring behaviour, passivity and weakness) (Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1993; White et al., 1995; Willis, 1990).

Yet the women in this study interpreted their muscularity through the six main themes of confidence, body image, discipline, independence, strength and self awareness. These themes often contrasted with normative meanings of gender associated with femininity and the female body, especially those identified in the literature as the cultural demands of femininity, such as docility, passivity, frailty and 'smallness' (Bartky, 1993). The most evident example of this was found in the women's discussion of the discipline involved in developing their muscularity. Here, the notion of discipline was an integral part of the women's interpretations of their muscularity. Discipline was not only seen as essential for attaining muscularity, but as beneficial because it is the avenue through which the women discover a more assured sense of self, create powerful images of their femininity, and achieve enhanced direction and control over their lives. Thus, while some feminists have viewed women's bodily discipline as a primary aspect of gender based on oppressive restriction, deprivation and regulation (cf. Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Kissling, 1991; Thompson et al., 1995), the women in this study expanded their interpretations of discipline to mean enhanced lives, success and personal power.

In this sense, the women's interpretations of their muscularity re-defined aspects of gender in terms of dominant meanings of discipline and the female body. According to Bordo (1993) and Hesse-Biber (1996), women's bodily practices such as dieting and exercise, including bodybuilding, reproduce normative notions of gender and uphold elements of the dominant patriarchal order. This is because such practices are grounded in self discipline, which works to

maintain oppressive definitions of femininity. Bodily practices of this sort were therefore considered to be practices of normative femininity. Yet the women in this study revealed that, although discipline incorporates notions of self criticism and being "picky" about their bodies, their experiences with discipline primarily involved notions of goal achieving, direction, control, accomplishment and opportunity. Thus in this case, the women's sense of bodily discipline contains multiple meanings beyond Bordo's (1993, p. 166) description of bodily discipline as a central aspect of dominant gendered ideology which restricts and oppresses:

> Through the pursuit of a ... homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity ... female bodies become docile bodies - bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, "improvement". Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines ... we are rendered less socially oriented and more ... focused on self modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough. At the farthest extremes, the practices of femininity may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death.

While Bordo saw discipline as relegating women to "docility" and becoming "less socially oriented", the women claimed it opened up possibilities for them to gain more control over their lives, to try new things, to overcome other life challenges and have more to offer others. Rather than being "habituated to external regulation" and "self-modification", the women use external self discipline (i.e., disciplining their bodies) for inward introspection, self-knowledge, growth, and self-acceptance, thereby reaping other inner benefits from muscularity. These interpretations resist the claim that women's bodily discipline acts solely to reassert existing gender configurations (White et al., 1995; Willis, 1990).

Thus, bodily discipline, as one notion of gender was re-appropriated to mean an avenue or, as Renata stated , an "option", for achieving muscularity and in turn, the subsequent inner benefits of confidence, a positive body image, independence, strength, self awareness, and all that came with them. This version of discipline was also seen in the observations, where notions of confidence, control, autonomy, bodily expression and strength were noted in the women's methods of training, demeanour, gestures, appearances and interactions in the gym. It was therefore through these interpretations of discipline that the women attained the inner benefits

and formed their opinions of gender issues and bodily empowerment. Because of this emphasis on the inner benefits, discipline was not considered as solely operating within the realm of beauty and appearance. For Bordo, bodily discipline is a requirement of femininity mainly based on confinement. For the women in this study, bodily discipline (even with its downsides) represented a lifestyle choice based on freedom and opportunity.

According to Bordo (1993), dominant notions of femininity demand women to monitor themselves and result in docility and passivity. Yet the women in this study saw their muscularity, and the discipline involved in it, as an opportunity to gain confidence and independence. This included a sense of freedom to think, behave, and look how they want according to their own choices, while creating a sense of achievement and self-improvement. Through the pursuit of muscularity these women felt more free to express their true identities, form their "own thoughts on things" (Renata) and live their lives according to their needs. For example, Desiree claimed that, through her experience with muscularity, "I don't live my life for society, I live it for me, to hell with what anybody else thinks or says".

Thus through their sense of confidence and independence, the women experienced feelings of pride, uniqueness, self esteem, personal power and competence, rather than convictions of, as Bordo stated, "lack" and "insufficiency". As Lynea stated, her "passion for discipline" is what "sets her apart" and forms her own unique version of strength and femininity, allowing her to discover herself, and believe in herself, in new and empowering ways and on her own terms.

By expanding Bordo's conceptions of bodily discipline, the women's interpretations of their muscularity encompassed further re-definitions of gender based on their concept of gaining inner strength. Bordo stated that "the discipline of perfecting the body as an object" is the pursuit of "conventional feminine behaviour" and thus any power women associate with it is "illusory" (1993, p. 179). Yet the women in this study did not discipline their bodies through the pursuit of muscularity "as an object" because their interpretations of their bodies were primarily based on its inner aspects. Thus bodily discipline was not objectifying, but more of an inward process

based on using and gaining inner strength which led them to transform common notions of gender in order to define themselves and their goals.

For example, the gender construct identified by White et al. (1995) whereby the body exists as a symbolic realm indicating physical difference, and hence male superiority and control, was re-defined through the women's interpretations of their muscularity. The women saw men and women as equal in the gym, and felt that they are as strong as, or stronger than men both physically and (even more so) inwardly. In addition, they did not feel physically dominated or controlled by men, because they experienced their muscularity as separate, more creative and better. The women therefore interpreted their muscularity as strong in its own right, i.e., to compare themselves on a physical level to men was futile and meaningless. Muscularity was seen as "their own" and "about different things" than for men because they "do" it for different reasons and experience it differently. Hence muscularity allowed the women to resist the gendered notion of women's bodily experiences being grounded in a sense of vulnerability, inferiority and physical or mental weakness. Instead, they conceptualized their bodily practices to mean strength (physical and mental), uniqueness, creativity, equality to (and perhaps superiority to) male strength (physical and mental).

By resisting traditional notions of male physical dominance and women's physical inferiority by gender, the women's interpretations of their muscularity were related to re-definitions of gendered meanings surrounding female body images. According to Bordo (1993), Fallon (1990) and Hesse-Biber (1996), contemporary values surrounding the body are problematic and oppressive to women because of their relationship to gender constructions. While the women's interpretations of their bodies did parallel the gendered body ideals described by Ewan (1988) as based on regulation, slimness and control, their re-appropriation of the concept of discipline allowed them to attach multiple meanings to what has been described as constraining contradictions between notions of health, body image and gender ideals (MacNeill, 1990; Shaw, 1989, 1991). In doing so, these women appeared to form more positive body images for themselves.

For example, Bartky (1993) identified notions of gender and the female body as involving cultural requirements of femininity which demand that women attain a lean, toned, small body and tight regulation of bodily appearance, behaviour and space-taking. While the women in this study were admittedly pursuing a lean, toned body and regulating their bodily appearance, through their interpretations of muscularity they also opposed the requirements of having a thin, small, weak body, by actively choosing one with more size and a stronger structure, by expressing their distaste for small, thin, skinny images of women, and by incorporating size and strength into their visions of femininity. The women therefore experienced their muscularity as creating a "strong outline" (Desiree's term) for themselves, and as Renata stated, expressing the sentiment "I am here", and "what you see is what you get".

In addition, the women saw their muscularity as providing them with unrestricted physical space taking and mobility. They were unapologetic regarding their physical size and structure, and unconcerned with regulating their bodily behaviour and deportment to fit dominant notions of femininity such as being 'delicate'. This was especially evident in the observations, where the women were powerful, unconcerned with others around them, and in charge of their own bodily behaviour and appearance, all of which appeared far from passive or demure. While the women described themselves as self critical and monitoring towards their bodies, this was mainly related to contest preparation, demands of the sport and achievement of their goals. In terms of interpretations of their muscularity, their bodily stance, size, gesture and chosen design for the body were both said to be, and observed as, unapologetic and authoritative.

Through these interpretations of body image, the women in turn appeared to be expanding certain gendered meanings surrounding social definitions of men as more powerful and dominant than women. The women's interpretations were formed within a sport related context. Sport has its roots in notions of male domination of women, and this, as Theberge stated, "derives from the fact that success in sport is based on physical strength which, in the ideology of masculinity, men have and women do not" (1987, p. 389). Thus, this ideology becomes translated into body images of large muscles, physical size and an aggressive bodily stance and posture (Connell, 1987). Yet through their own muscularity, the women reappropriated these images and meanings

for themselves to suit their own needs and priorities. In doing so, they gained certain convictions which can be seen as re-interpreting social meanings surrounding gender. For example, the women saw developed and/or large muscles on a woman as appealing, well-suited to the female body structure, and able to "help with every aspect of being female" (Desiree). Thus they believed that muscles make sense for women and are not reserved for men only. Through this, the women resist the notion outlined by Nelson (1994) and Vertinsky (1994) that women are the weaker sex because patriarchal structures have denied them opportunities to build strength while promoting ideal/sexual images of physical weakness and the idea that female muscle is unattractive. Instead these women actively seek out muscularity and conceptualize femininity as including muscles, both physical and mental strength, and physical size and power. Thus these interpretations appear to re-construct elements of cultural discourses regarding female attractiveness and behaviour (Spitzack, 1990).

Thus by rejecting the idea that femininity is marked by physically vulnerable, inferior bodies, the women in this study support Castelnuova & Guthrie's (1994) claim that women can use bodily discipline in new and re-interpreted ways. In this sense, the women's muscularity helped them achieve a strong sense of self awareness. For example, the women defined and experienced female physicality for themselves as authoritative, powerful, aggressive and at the same time, as feminine, rather than as sources of vulnerability and inferiority. They also felt that they have better come to know and accept their own potential, identities, and are entitled to "feeling (their) opinions stronger", as Lynea stated, where she "is allowed to have an opinion - and I do". They also have become confident in these opinions, highlighted in Renata's comment that "it's either all or nothing with me". In doing so, they reconstruct and expand typical images of what 'being' feminine and 'being' masculine entail, and thereby appear to promote the idea that women can potentially challenge the gender balance of power through their physicality and resulting behaviour, transformed beliefs and self knowledge (Hall, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Markula, 1993; Nelson, 1994; Theberge, 1987).

Other cultural constructions of gender expanded through the women's interpretations of their muscularity and sense of self awareness are the gendered meanings, outlined by Hall (1990)

and Theberge (1991), surrounding sport and fitness. These include the notion that sport embodies and re-creates male power and domination based on culturally constructed gender ideology. Although the values and imagery surrounding sport and fitness have often developed along gendered lines, aligning athleticism with patriarchal values of muscularity, male domination and the naturalization of gender differences (cf. Bartky, 1993; Ewan, 1988; Featherstone, Hall, 1990; Hepworth & Turner, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 1996; MacNeill, 1988), the women's interpretations of their muscularity often resist such meanings.

For example, as stated by Hargreaves (1986), Nelson (1994) and Whitson (1990), while women's entry into male dominated and controlled sports and their attainment of physical strength may appear as challenges to the values which uphold these practices, the meanings surrounding them remain tied to broader systems of domination. Yet the women's interpretations of their muscularity and involvement in bodybuilding were described as being empowering and separate from men's. Furthermore, the women felt unaffected by men's dominant role in participation and governance of the sport. Instead, their experience with muscularity within the male dominated sport of bodybuilding was described as an expression of individualism, where "everyone gets something different out of it" (Lynea). What they get out of it is an opportunity to be unique as an athlete and unique from male bodybuilders.

These interpretations also resisted traditional sex-role stereotyping associated with female athleticism, as Desiree stressed muscularity on a woman is "not a lesbian thing" in the sense that a woman is not a lesbian *because* she has developed muscles. Also Lynea stated that woman bodybuilders "would never, ever try to be a man", a common stereotype associated with them. Thus, while the women admittedly participate in a male-run, male-dominated sport, it appears that their individualistic meanings associated with it fostered in them a sense of 'rising above' these broader systems of domination. In this sense, their interpretations of muscularity appear to re-define common notions associated with women's athleticism by existing partially outside the boundaries of this traditional ideology. Yet, although the women's interpretations involve a *sense* of being unhindered by male control of their sport and the broader systems surrounding it, the question still remains whether this is actually the case for these women.

Thus the women's expansion of certain meanings of gender through muscularity supports the claim that it contains possibilities for the transformation of practices that contribute to the subordination of women (cf. Markula, 1993; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Spitzack, 1990; Theberge, 1984). It does so by reinforcing the perspective that women's athletic and bodily practices are connected to the struggle over and attainment of power (cf. Brittan, 1989; Cahn, 1994; Ewan, 1988; McNay, 1992; Vertinsky, 1994), and relate to women's ability to reclaim their physicality as a way to move away from restrictive patriarchal practices (Birrell & Theberge, 1994).

Although this study narrowly focused on only three women's interpretations of their muscularity, these interpretations appear to resist the claim that female athletic or bodily practices socially reproduce the traditional notions of gender which work against women (cf. Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1996; MacNeill, 1988; Willis, 1990).

Research Question #2: What Does Bodily Empowerment Mean to Competitive Women Bodybuilders?

For the women in this study, bodily empowerment meant the ability, through their bodily practices (i.e., the development of muscularity in bodybuilding), to gain a sense of confidence, positive body image, discipline, independence, strength and self-awareness, and to become self actualized through such principles. Thus these women viewed bodily empowerment as an inward-focused process involving these six main benefits of muscularity. This definition was particularly tied to the ability to gaining a strong sense of their potential and opinions and the ability to form their "own thoughts on things" (Renata) and be "allowed to be" who they are (Desiree). It was also linked to "doing their own thing" (Renata) with confidence and conviction, and to construct a body and an identity defined by their own individualism. Hence, the women were self-actualized or empowered through their body when their sense of confidence, positive body image, discipline, independence, strength and self awareness derived from their muscularity were applied to their definitions of themselves, their sport and their lives. This was seen in the observations with the women in training, where principles of confidence, independence, authority

and strength appeared to be tangible examples of how the women applied these principles to their movements, behaviours and actions.

The women's conception of bodily empowerment, along with their expansion of certain notions of gender, complement ideas surrounding women's bodily empowerment described by Redican et al. (1988) and Wooley et al. (1979). Here, by actively choosing not to conform to culturally assigned female/body norms, women can potentially create a space of their own for bodily empowerment in which they re-interpret these expectations. The women in this study rejected culturally assigned female/body images of smallness, weakness, frailty, dependence and passivity, and re-interpreted them through their muscularity accordingly. Thus their muscularity allowed them to embody the sense of being a strong, independent woman which excludes notions of being "wishy-washy" (Renata), demure, protected, fragile, skinny, or "caught up in mental or emotional body image issues" (Desiree). Instead, the principles of muscularity allowed for self definition based on inner and outer strength, having strong opinions, capable of achieving what they set their minds to, free to look and behave as they see fit, and proud of their bodies, athleticism and successes. This extended beyond just the personal level, in the sense that it was seen as providing other women with a possible option for achieving bodily empowerment

By re-interpreting normative feminine/body images and expectations through their muscularity, the women achieve a sense of personal power and self-acceptance. This opposes the idea implied by Cash et al. (1986), Hart et al. (1989) and Wooley et al. (1979) that women cannot significantly view their own bodies with positive evaluations through the pursuit of bodily practices because in doing so, they often perpetuate and impose stigmas associated with the politics of the body. Yet the women in this study were proud of their bodies due to the hard work they put into them and resulting rewards, and had no intentions of imposing on others their bodily design or disregarding different body shapes or sizes (with the exception of their criticisms towards skinny, frail models used in the media's portrayals of women).

By seeking out a body which best suits their needs, and reaping the subsequent rewards of muscularity, the women carved out a powerful niche for themselves which fosters personal power and accomplishment. Ultimately, the meanings the women assigned to bodily

empowerment in terms of self actualization appear to question Morgan's (1977) argument that the smaller, less physically aggressive a woman presents herself to be, the more symbolic power she is allotted and the more she can inhabit her place in the world. Instead, they parallel the idea that athletic involvement may provide women with opportunities to develop perceptions of a competent, independent self, to increase their awareness of certain gender issues, and to present assertive, and physically and emotionally strong images of themselves which challenge common societal perceptions of women (Blinde et al., 1994).

The description of bodily empowerment as involving self-actualization through the inner benefits of muscularity can be aligned with Birrell and Theberge's (1994) concept of women becoming self realized through their participation in sport. It also confirms Willis' (1990) theory that bodily empowerment may involve becoming familiar with one's body, linking it with a more assured self, taking control of the body and using it as a site for self-definition. In addition, it resonates with Hesse-Biber's (1996) argument that, while women may embrace cultural values of the regulated or disciplined feminine body, by doing so they can gain access to resources of power, control and self-confidence. This was furthered by what Cash et al. (1986) and Skrinar et al. (1992) identified as women's increased self-esteem and body consciousness promoted through bodily practices.

Thus, the women in this study defined bodily empowerment through the notion of self-actualization based on the inner benefits of muscularity. Their testimonies of how this plays out in their experiences with muscularity and bodybuilding are similar to what Hesse-Biber (1996), Horden (1993) and Theberge (1995) have discussed on this theme. Here, bodily practices were said to provide women with an avenue to construct new frameworks for envisioning femininity based on the same principles of muscularity identified by the women in this study. These exist as an important way to define femininity based on control, aggressiveness, self-expression, overcoming, rather than perpetuating body insecurity, strengthening the inner self, self-definition, autonomy, discovering one's physical capacities, and changed/expanded dominant representations of femininity and female physiology. Bodily practices can thereby shift normative or traditional definitions of femininity. Although the women's interpretations of their

bodies, at times, weaved in and out of certain dominant notions of gender (heard in certain phrases discussing muscularity as "sex appeal" and an alternative to "trying to be skinny"), through their sense of self-actualization via muscularity, the women interpreted their experience with muscularity in this way, thereby re-defining aspects of gender meaning.

Research Question #3: How Does Bodily Empowerment Relate to Their Interpretations of Muscularity and Gender?

The women's sense of bodily empowerment related to their interpretations of muscularity and gender in terms of this ability to re-envision femininity. By defining bodily empowerment as self actualization through confidence, body image, discipline, independence, strength and self awareness, the women related bodily empowerment to these inner benefits of muscularity, and thereby expanded certain normative meanings of gender. This falls in line with the arguments of Hall (1990) and Hesse-Biber (1996), where women's bodily empowerment occurs by their rejection of conventional femininity and re-construction of feminine identities through investing power in the body. In this case, the women invested power in their bodies through their muscularity and the various meanings attached to it.

According to Hall (1990), bodily empowerment occurs when women use muscularity in an attempt to re-define notions of gender to suit their own needs and to oppose culturally constructed expectations of gender and the female body. It can be argued that the women in this study do this, because through their experiences with muscularity, they form a subjectivity which is based on: self-definition, power and autonomy, their entrance into a traditional male realm of strength/sport/muscles, and resistance to cultural processes which define and control them, such as media portrayals of weak, passive women, the myth of female frailty, and some of the beauty-related demands of femininity. Hence, these subjectivities created by the women were seen as formed around the principles of confidence, positive body image, discipline, independence, strength and self awareness.

In doing so, they achieve what Hesse-Biber (1996) saw as women's abilities to form a new framework for envisioning femininity. It can be claimed that the women do this by structuring their lives and forging their identities according to standards which are not bound by traditional definitions of what it means to be female. In this sense, the women's interpretations of bodily empowerment involved striving for this version of femininity which, as Hesse-Biber highlighted, is not defined by normative body ideals, but by qualities attained through their muscularity such as strength, self-esteem, power, self-expression and independence. These interpretations were also aligned with women's entrance into the traditionally masculine realm of sport/strength/muscles, which expands traditional representations of gender and women's capacities (Horden, 1993). This allows women to re-construct concepts of women's sports, blur normative gender meanings and thereby project and experience radical or new identities which are not limiting to women (Hargreaves, 1994).

This was evident in the women's opinions on gender inequality as related to sport, media and body image issues. Their conceptions of gender were expanded to encompass wide-ranging possibilities beyond traditional expectations of femininity and the female physique. For example, through their transformation of the practice of bodybuilding, a belief in women as strong and powerful was attained. They envisioned women as more than entitled to the right to participate in sports and defined them as able to create the body of their choice and achieve their goals through discipline. Thus it becomes evident why the women's advice for other women relied heavily on notions of "spend time on yourself", "get your own thoughts on things", "figure out what works for you", "start accepting yourself", "don't depend on a man" and "create your own life".

These notions of bodily empowerment and the re-defining of normative gender meanings relate to the women's actual muscularity in the sense that, their physique challenges traditional symbols of male dominance and strength, thereby threatening the 'natural' order of gender. This was evident in the women experiences of muscularity as something which "works for them" and "suits them" (Desiree), for example as Renata described it, "this is my formula". They saw female muscularity as normal, appealing, healthy and attractive, while considering men to be

different, and often not well equipped, at handling muscularity. They also saw their muscularity as a unique and distinguishing characteristic from which they can be a role model to others who have "some appreciation for it" (Renata).

Hence the women's bodily empowerment relates to interpretations of muscularity and gender in terms of Nelson's (1994) theory whereby, through muscularity or other forms of athleticism, a women changes and defines her experience with herself and the images others have of her, declaring her right to choose this body, to make her own choices, and to claim a public space of her own through the body while using it aggressively, authoritatively or instrumentally. Nelson sees this as related to gender because by doing so, women contradict and resist traditional female socialization and culturally constructed feminine ideals, thereby creating opportunities to transform them. Thus the women's experience with empowerment through their bodies confirms Nelson's idea where bodily empowerment means dismantling notions of femininity and replacing them with new constructions of women's bodies, behaviours and practices unconstrained by traditional cultural expectations them.

For the women in this study, notions of bodily empowerment also relate to their interpretations of gender and muscularity in the sense that participation in athleticism leads them to an enhanced subjectivity which can have far-reaching effects on their lives (White et al., 1995). Thus bodily empowerment extends beyond just the body. Given this, it is logical that the women's sense of empowerment through the body relates directly to the rewards of muscularity (the inner benefits), their sense of themselves as women and hence their ideas regarding gender. Lynea stated that, given she is empowered via her experience with muscularity and that this involves living with confidence, a positive body image, discipline, independence, strength, self-awareness and thus self acceptance, then, as she stated "why wouldn't you feel feminine?". Here, the word "feminine" referred to her re-appropriated and empowering version of femininity.

In addition, these far-reaching effects appear to extend the notion of bodily empowerment, not only beyond the physical body, but also beyond the personal. Although the women stated that they are empowered on a personal level and cannot guarantee the same experience for other women or even for other women bodybuilders, they discussed how their

experiences may represent symbolic examples and role models of female capability and possibility (Nelson, 1991). This was evident in the discussions of their inner strength as a form of female power and in their advice for other women regarding body image as related to gender issues and bodily empowerment. It was also seen in their views on women's bodybuilding as unique from and even better than male involvement in the sport. They saw themselves as forming a more creative, rewarding and powerful version of muscularity than men based on "mental power", "emotional advancement" (Lynea), and with "not so much ego involved" (Desiree). This was also noted in the observations, where mental focus, control and modesty were seen. Perhaps this hints at this discussion on women's empowerment through sport as involving "a feminist redefinition of power" (Theberge, 1987, p. 387). Here, Theberge stated:

> The liberatory possibility of sport lies in the opportunity for women to experience the creativity and energy of their bodily power and to develop this power in the community of women (1987, p. 393).

Their meanings of muscularity and bodily empowerment thereby offer other women an alternative example or, as Renata put it, an "option" to traditional standards of femininity, the female body, and sport. This was evident in their thoughts on how attaining muscularity may benefit other women by potentially increasing their confidence and self-esteem, thereby giving them more strength and power over men, and anything that "is bad for them" in life or not working for them to "get rid of it" (Renata), to "create a life of their own" and "get out there and do something for themselves" (Desiree).

Like the women in this study implied, Mackinnon (1982), Rich (1977) and Theberge (1984) argued that this can have social implications for women beyond the personal level, because reclaiming power over the body and self may eventually work back into reclaiming social and political power. Although Renata stated that muscularity "will never be big enough" to change male domination completely, "it is an option and a solution which helps". She therefore considered her muscularity as "doing my part".

Conclusion

It must be noted that this study focused on merely three women's interpretations and therefore does not attempt to suggest that one would not encounter more variety of opinion by talking to other women. Nevertheless, if these three women's experiences were to be shared more broadly by others, then similar conclusions may arise. Within the boundaries of this study, the women's re-interpretations of the meaning of discipline and discussions regarding self-actualization through muscularity appear to question aspects of some arguments surrounding women's bodily empowerment and bodybuilding. Such arguments conclude that while women's athleticism and/or bodybuilding may involve gaining a *sense* of empowerment through the body, because this occurs only at the personal level, it is not enough to constitute a form of empowerment for women. This is because personal feelings of empowerment are not enough to help re-define or critique cultural notions of gender and gender relations or to include any broader social implications for women. Ultimately, this is because women's muscularity and other forms of bodily practices remain operating within dominant cultural, masculine structures, standards and ideologies of gender, the female body, beauty and sport, where underlying forms of domination and exploitation exist (cf. Balogun, 1987; Blinde et al., 1994; Bryson, 1990; Coakley, 1994; Duquin, 1989; Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1982; Hargreaves, 1994; Kenen, 1987; Klein, 1993; MacNeill, 1990; Mansfield et al., 1993; Melnick et al., 1988; Miller & Penz, 1991; Netz et al., 1988; Redican et al., 1988; Salusso et al., 1991; Schulze, 1990; Seggar et al., 1988; Shaw, 1991; Warrick, 1989). They are therefore viewed as constraining to women in that, by operating in this way, they produce docility and re-assert oppressive gender configurations (Bartky, 1993; Bordo, 1993; Poulton, 1996; Sabo, 1988; Shaw, 1989; Willis, 1990; Wolfe, 1990).

Instead, the women's interpretations of muscularity and bodily empowerment in this study reinforce elements of the arguments by Gaines and Butler (1983), Obel (1996) Rosen (1984), where women bodybuilders are considered to challenge or negotiate sexual differentiation standards as they attempt to resolve the contradiction of normative definitions of femininity and become self-realized on their own terms. They also parallel the idea that shifting understandings

of gender through muscularity exist as one route to women's empowerment through the body in that they function to replace dominant meanings which work to maintain women's inferior positions in society (Hargreaves, 1994; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Horden, 1993; Markula, 1993; Nelson, 1991, 1994; Theberge, 1995; Willis, 1990).

In this study, bodily empowerment appeared to further expand on these points. Here, it was seen that the women's sense of bodily empowerment involved more than just *feeling* empowered by the confidence, positive body image, discipline, independence, strength and self-awareness gained through muscularity. Instead, these women sought out ways to apply these principles to their identities and lives, and to become self-actualized through them. This was heard most explicitly in Lynea's comments about "applying these principles to every aspect" of her life. Instead of constraint, the women experienced new possibilities and an enhanced subjectivity through this. This challenges Hargreaves' claim that "in the case of female bodybuilding, idealized femininity and sexuality are *prior to* and become *more significant* than muscularity and athleticism" (1994, p. 169). Although bodybuilding as a sport exists within male dominated structures, the women's individual interpretations of their practices also appear to challenge elements of Bordo's conclusions regarding the meaning of muscularity for women, where it was stated:

> To reshape one's body into a male body is not to put on male power and privilege ... (but) to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities ... The "power look" of female bodybuilding is no less determined by a hierarchical, dualistic construction of gender than the conventionally feminine norm (1993, p. 179).

The resulting implications of this self-actualization were seen as possibly reaching beyond the personal realm by providing other women with examples of female capabilities and possibilities in re-defining normative notions of gender, such those relating to female bodies and athleticism. Thus, when asked what one thing she would want all women to know about her experiences, Lynea stated that, through muscularity, one learns to "set goals because the only way to go is higher".

Thus perhaps, in general, bodily empowerment is more than just attaining feelings of personal power and autonomy through the construction of the body, but is a tangible option for women that becomes applied to their lives. While the women in this study were not explicitly claiming that their experiences with muscularity can fully change gender relations for women, their meanings did offer a deeper explanation as to how bodily practices are linked to this principle, thereby hinting at Nelson's arguments:

> By reserving time in their life for athletic pursuits, women are changing themselves and society. Feminism is rarely an individual's motivating force, but always the result: a woman's athletic training, regardless of the factors that lead to her involvement, implicitly challenges patriarchal constraints on her behaviour. Sports for women changes the woman's experience of herself and other's experience of her. It thereby alters the balance of power between the sexes (1994, p. 30).

Thus women's muscularity goes beyond the personal in that, as Markula (1993) and Schulze (1990) have stated, it is an attempt to re-appropriate gender ideology in a mode of defiance to cultural ideas of women as weak and subordinate. This threatens the system of sexual difference, or, according to Birrell and Theberge (1994), disturbs the logic of male dominance. Also, by perceiving women's muscularity and bodybuilding as (in Desiree's words) "separate", "totally different from", as well as "never trying to imitate men" and "smarter" about the development of muscularity, the notion that the potential to challenge traditional ideologies of gender through muscularity is not significantly diminished by the fact that the sport is both a traditionally male defined one and symbolically aligned with masculine strength and dominance was reinforced (Theberge, 1987).

Hence, while muscularity cannot overturn this system of sexual difference, it does, as the women here have indicated, exist as an option which can impact and improve women's lived experiences in the world. And, as Lynea pointed out, "your life is what you perceive it to be". Ultimately, Lynea's words resonate with those of Theberge (1987, p. 392):

> It is likely that the main contribution of sport to feminist change at the institutional level ... occurs through related changes at the personal and group levels. The struggle for women's advancement takes place in all social arenas. ... Although the contribution of sport to change at the institutional level is largely indirect, it is no less critical to the wider struggle.

Recommendations For Future Research

Given the results of this study, it is recommended that further research is done on the area of bodily empowerment through various fitness or sport activities. The main point here is that this notion of bodily empowerment appears to be undeveloped in the literature, and there is a need to look at women's meanings of bodily empowerment in relation to various athletic contexts. The value in this, as explained by Costa and Guthrie (1994), is that a feminist cultural studies approach views various forms of athleticism as cultural spheres which both reproduce the dominant culture and transform it as women actively respond in the sporting context to the conditions of their social existence. Thus women can potentially re-shape or expand dominant cultural ideologies of gender, the body, and sport (Frank, 1990; Scott et al., 1993; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

This is especially so in terms of women's participation in traditionally male or masculine sports, such as those involving muscularity, injury, aggressiveness, strength, size or toughness. The idea is to examine how women involved in such sports negotiate meanings of gender and femininity in the context of a bodily practice. Examples of such sports may include women's boxing, rowing, football, wrestling or rugby.

Yet I feel it would also be relevant to examine these issues in athletic pursuits which are typically geared to more traditional feminine identities and bodies, such as figure skating, gymnastics, dance, aerobics, or synchronized swimming. An interesting endeavour would be to conduct comparative analyses between interpretations from different types of women's sports. This may involve examining values attached to notions of gender, femininity, and bodily empowerment by women, paying particular attention to continuity and contradiction among meanings from different groups.

This could give us a clearer idea, not only how these meanings are influenced by the gendered values assigned to various sporting contexts, but also to what extent women's active participation in defining themselves through their sport can support or shift such meanings. This could also shed light on the extent to which women can use their personal interpretations of bodily empowerment to challenge the conventional constructions of femininity and masculinity the sport may ultimately be placed on in terms of, as highlighted by Schulze (1990), media influences and the sexual, feminine, white, and/or heterosexual images which have been aligned with it due to the patriarchal and commercial interests in the sport. This would reveal how bodily empowerment may occur through women's participation in athletic sites not traditionally dominated by men, versus the occurrence of this through their entry into male-defined sports such as hockey and rugby.

In addition, given the methodology of this study, a small, unique and personal examination of the issues at hand was conducted. Future research should investigate themes of sport, gender and bodily empowerment using larger and more varied sample sizes. Not only do these issues require further exploration among many women in various athletic pursuits, they demand the need for women of diverse backgrounds, upbringing, location, class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, and life context in order to, as Theberge wisely stated, "expand our understanding and enrich our appreciation of the connection between physicality, embodiment, gender and ontology" (1991, p. 133). This is especially important given that this study involved a small sample in exploring how the outcomes of muscularity expand the view of women's bodies as sites of oppression. To more fully examine whether this is happening through women's athleticism or muscularity, and to avoid dichotomous readings of these as either oppressive or liberating, employing larger, more diverse samples is necessary to uncover further contradictions, ambiguities and multiple readings of the issues in this study.

In terms of research on bodybuilding, not only is there a need for explorations of empowerment through athleticism and the body in larger, more diverse groups of women, but perhaps ones which focus more specifically on selected elements of this issue. For example, the women in this study placed a strong emphasis on their self discipline and perceptions of body

image when discussing issues of gender and bodily empowerment. Future research may benefit from more in-depth explorations of the role of discipline and women's perceptions of body image within bodybuilding. Although much work has been done on theoretical analyses of female body image, less has examined body image within the context of female bodybuilding. Hence, perhaps future research could also concentrate on issues surrounding relationships or contradictions between women's definitions of bodily empowerment and their more detailed interpretations of body image.

Finally, interesting gains in the areas of bodily empowerment, muscularity and notions of gender may be made through explorations of these issues in both male and female bodybuilders. Comparative studies exploring such issues could further reveal intersections of various discourses of gender and bodily empowerment as revealed through both male and female interpretations and practices of muscularity. Ultimately, this could reveal both similarities and differences in how men and women interpret gender and bodily empowerment, a deeper analysis of the impact of cultural notions of gender and body meaning on female bodybuilders and the specific contexts in which they resist or reinterpret them, possibly opening up further research questions in this area.

Such research endeavours are crucial because, according to Obel (1996, p. 196), bodybuilding can "challenge and potentially bring about changes in perceptions of the 'nature' of bodies, masculinity and femininity" and thereby "facilitate new readings of how subjectivities can be negotiated through bodywork". Even more importantly are the implications of this for all women, not just female bodybuilders, in that "perhaps women's greatest potential for changing the gender balance of power lies in our strength" (Nelson, 1994, p. 44).

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Appendix A Sample Interview Questions

(I) Introductory Questions:

How did you become involved in bodybuilding?
What motivated you to pursue it?
What do you like/dislike about bodybuilding?
What do you like/dislike about competing?
How is bodybuilding unique from other sports?

(II) Questions Regarding Subject's Interpretations of Their Muscularity:

What appeals to you about your muscles?
How does you muscular size and strength make you feel?
What impact, if any, would you say that bodybuilding has had on your identity?
Are you different in any way than before you practiced bodybuilding?
What do you like or dislike about your body and why?
Why do you think you have chosen to have a muscular body?
What are the benefits that you derive from developing your muscles?
Are there any downsides to this bodily practice?
Do you think expression through the body is possible?
Are you expressing yourself through your muscular body? If so, what are you expressing?
Do your experiences with bodybuilding contribute to your identity or how your define yourself, and if so, in what ways?
Are you a disciplined person? If so, what role does discipline play in your daily life?

(III) Questions Regarding Interpretations of Notions of Gender:

What types of reactions do you get from other people (both men and women) regarding your muscularity and how do you deal with them?
What is your reaction to the attitude that women 'should' not look too muscular/bulky?
What does being an athletic woman entail in your opinion?
How would you describe what it means to be a strong woman?
How do you think women are treated in our society?
Does your body reflect you as an individual? If so, how?
What does the word femininity mean to you?
How would you describe your femininity in yourself or in your self-identity?
Any thoughts on the media's portrayal of women?
What about how the media portrays bodybuilding?
How would you describe female beauty? Why?
Is the experience of having developed muscles different for each individual woman who takes it up?
Are there any aspects of this experience that all women who bodybuild may share?
Do you think there any similarities or differences in how men and women experience having a strong, muscular body?
How do you feel about the attitude that women are inferior to men? Does having developed muscles, or does training for muscular development in the sport of bodybuilding, relate at all to your feelings on this? If so, how?

(IV) Questions Regarding Empowerment:

How does bodybuilding influence other areas of your life?
Some say that bodybuilding leads to bodily empowerment. Do you agree?
What does bodily empowerment mean to you? How does this connect with what you had to say about femininity?
Would you have any advice for women who feel badly about their bodies (i.e., have a poor body image or are not satisfied with their bodily appearance)?
Do you think women should pursue their visions of an 'ideal' body? Why or why not?
What is your advice to any woman who is considering taking up weight training or bodybuilding? Would you recommend it?
Do you feel is it possible for other women to feel empowered through their bodies? If so, what kinds of things might have to happen for this to occur?
Tell me about a recent competition you were involved in. Tell me about the training and preparation that went into it. Tell me about the struggles and strategies involved onstage and about your performance. How did you feel about the outcome or final placement of the competition?
How do you feel when you are onstage?

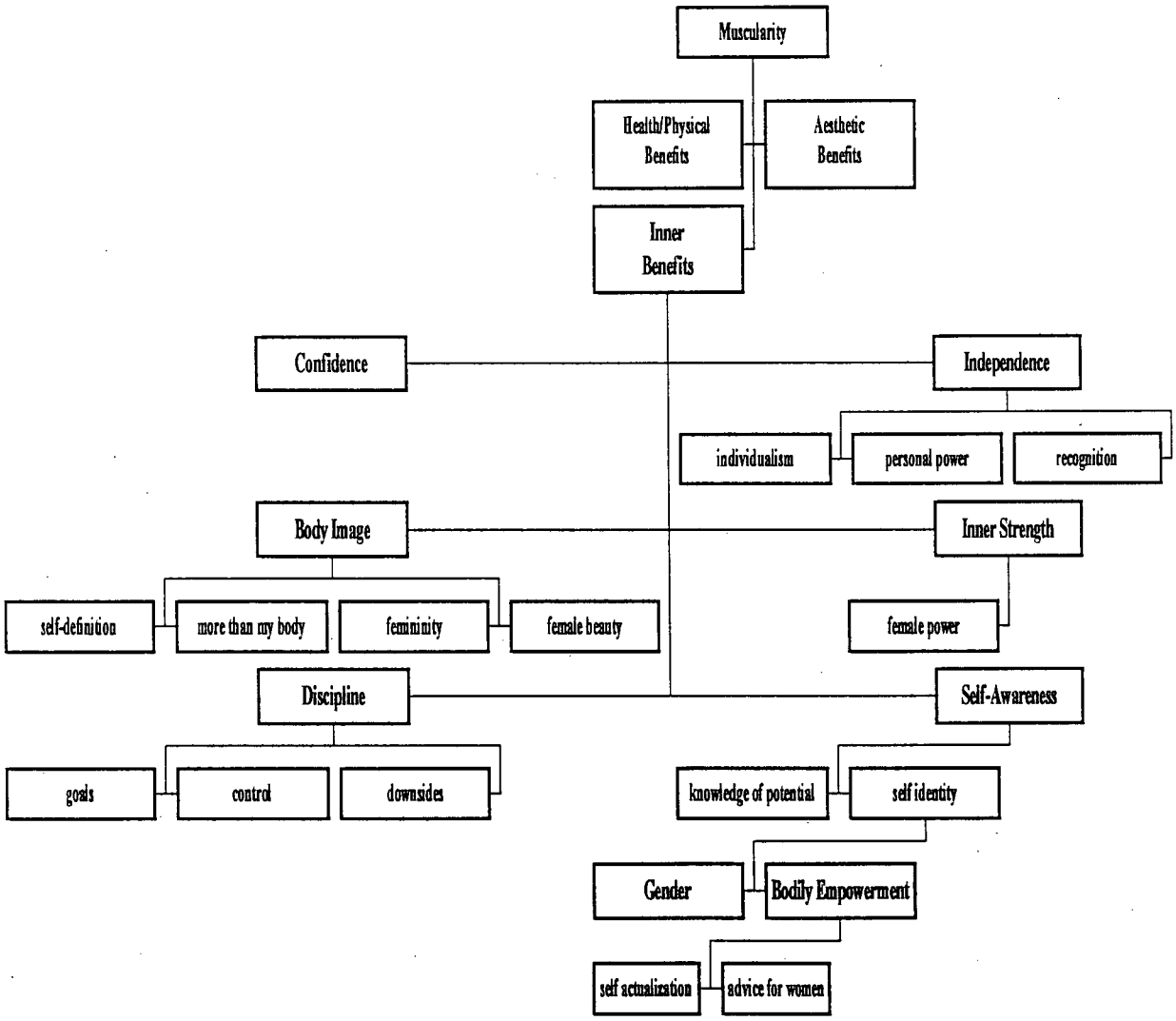
(V) Questions Asked Towards the End of Data Collection:

If you could tell the world one thing about bodybuilding, what would it be? What would you want people to know about it?
Is there anything about your background, your childhood, your upbringing that you think may have contributed to you involvement in bodybuilding?
Is there anything about training or competing that you would want to change?

Appendix B Description of Observations

Observations will take place with the participants separately. The researcher will observe participants in the gym setting where they regularly train. The researcher will follow the participant through their training routine. They will be asked to carry on as normal throughout this routine, and the researcher will do little to interrupt the training session, except engaging in casual conversation with the participant, if appropriate. The researcher will write field notes, recording the volunteers' behaviour, interactions and descriptive details of the context of the individual's training session. The researcher will be specifically looking at how the individual behaves in the session towards herself, her body and others she may interact with during the routine. Specifically, the researcher will be looking to see whether any of these behaviours or interactions appear to be aligned with a sense of power, control, self-actualization and definition, confidence in the body and oneself, or with new, strong, or powerful images of women's behaviour, gesture and bodily deportment. For example, notes will be made on how the participant dresses, moves her body, looks at herself in the mirror, what she does with her muscles, how she interacts with others around her, what she says and what her attitudes towards herself and her environment appear to be. The observation session will last for the duration of the training session (approximately 1-2 hours). During the period of data collection for this study, two direct observations of the participants in the gym will be done. In the interviews and conversations which follow the observations, participants will be asked about what the researcher observed in order to expand on what was noted. In general, the observations will be used in this study as a way for the researcher to become familiar with the context of muscular development and to gain clues for further interview questions.

Appendix C
Data Analysis Index Tree



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Human Kinetics
210, War Memorial Gym
6081 University Boulevard
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1
Tel: (604) 822-3838 Fax: (604) 822-6842

Lynea Brehm, Secretary & Treasurer, B.C. Amateur Bodybuilding Association:

I am a graduate student in the School of Human Kinetics working on a Master's thesis involving women bodybuilders and their experiences. The title of the research project is *Female Bodybuilders: Exploring Muscularity, Femininity and Bodily Empowerment*. I am particularly interested in exploring women's individual interpretations of their muscularity, their definitions of femininity and their experience of empowerment through bodily practice. With society's and media's images often emphasizing slenderness, muscular tone, health and fitness, it seems important to understand how these are experienced in the everyday lives of women who embrace fitness practices.

In order to obtain information for this study I am looking for three women who participate in bodybuilding to volunteer for this study. I will be asking these volunteers to participate in three interviews at a time and location convenient to each volunteer. Interviews will be based on issues such as what their muscular size means for them, what motivates them to achieve it and how they feel they benefit from it. I will also be asking volunteers to allow observation of 2-3 of their work-out sessions in the facility where they train; and, where possible, one competition. The total amount of time that will be required of each subject will be approximately 10 hours.

The purpose of this letter is to request that you be a liaison between potential volunteers for this study and your organization, the B.C. Amateur Bodybuilding Association, in an effort to locate three volunteers. This would involve you informing several women members of the B.C.A.B.B.A. of the study and volunteer requirements. You would then inform the researcher of those women who wish to be involved in the study and who have agreed to allow the researcher to then contact them.

I have read the attached letter of consent and I understand what is required of my agency and subjects from my agency in the study entitled *Female Bodybuilders: Exploring Muscularity, Femininity and Empowerment.*

I CONSENT to assisting in the recruitment of volunteers for this study.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in this study.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix F Facility Informed Consent

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Human Kinetics
210, War Memorial Gym
6081 University Boulevard
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1
Tel: (604) 822-3838 Fax: (604) 822-6842

Dear Manager,

I am a graduate student in the School of Human Kinetics working on a Master's thesis involving women bodybuilders and their experiences. The title of the research project is *Female Bodybuilders: Exploring Muscularity, Femininity and Bodily Empowerment*. I am particularly interested in exploring women's individual interpretations of their muscularity, their definitions of femininity and their experience of bodily empowerment. With society's and media's images often emphasizing slenderness, muscular tone, health and fitness, it seems important to understand how these are experienced in the everyday lives of women who embrace fitness practices.

In order to obtain information for this study I am looking for three women who participate in bodybuilding to volunteer for this study. I will be asking these volunteers to participate in three interviews at a time and location convenient to each volunteer. Interviews will be based on issues such as what their muscular size means for them, what motivates them to achieve it and how they feel they benefit from it. I will also be asking volunteers to allow observation of at least 2 of their work-out sessions in the facility where they train; and, where possible, one competition. The total amount of time that will be required of each subject will be approximately 10 hours.

The purpose of this letter is to obtain your permission to enter your facility in order to observe the volunteer's training sessions, once volunteers have agreed to participate. This means I will be following alongside the individual as she goes through the training routine in order to get a feel for the dynamics of the workout. For example, I will be interested in how the individual behaves and her interactions with others in the gym. Each observation will last for the duration of their training session (approximately 1-2 hours).

I have received the attached letter of introduction for my files and I understand what is required of participation in the study entitled *Female Bodybuilders: Exploring Muscularity, Femininity and Bodily Empowerment.*

I CONSENT to allowing the researcher into my facility to conduct observations.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in this study.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix G Subject Informed Consent

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Human Kinetics
210, War Memorial Gym
6081 University Boulevard
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1
Tel: (604) 822-3838 Fax: (604) 822-6842

Dear Subject:

I am a graduate student in the School of Human Kinetics working on a Master's thesis involving women bodybuilders and their experiences. The title of my research project is *Female Bodybuilders: Exploring Muscularity, Femininity and Bodily Empowerment.* I am particularly interested in exploring women's individual interpretations of their muscularity, their definitions of femininity and their experience of bodily empowerment. With society's and media's images often emphasizing slenderness, muscular tone, health and fitness, it seems important to understand how these are experienced in the everyday lives of women who embrace bodily and fitness practices.

In order to obtain information for this study I am looking for three women who participate in competitive bodybuilding to volunteer for this study. I will be asking volunteers to participate in three interviews at a time and location convenient to the each volunteer. Interviews will be based on specific body and gender related issues such as what muscular size and development means for them, what motivates them, how they feel they benefit from bodybuilding and what it means to them to be a strong woman. Volunteers will be asked to participate in 2-3 informal telephone calls; to allow observation of 2-3 work-out sessions; and, where possible, one competition. Interviews will be 1-2 hours in length and will be spread over a period of about 8-10 weeks; informal conversation will total approximately 45 minutes; observations will be 1-2 two hours long. The total time commitment is approximately 10 hours over 10-12 weeks.

I have read the attached letter of consent and I understand what is required of participants in the study entitled *Female Bodybuilders: Exploring Muscularity, Femininity and Bodily Empowerment.*

I **CONSENT** to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date:_____