

Why do you even lift: The reasons for men attempting to gain muscular physiques through working out in gyms in the North East of England

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Abstract

This research was conducted from August 2012 to February 2013 in order to discover the reasons why men try to gain muscle, and why different groups use gym space in differing ways. It was largely informed by focus groups, interviews and observations, as well as through participants' self-reports which mapped their use of space within gyms. The research questions are as follows. The first was, "how do men view masculinity and do they attempt to gain muscle in order to acquire a masculine identity?" The second was, "do men attempt to gain muscle for functional or aesthetic reasons?" The third was, "to what extent are men influenced by the media or role models in wanting to gain muscle?" The final research question was, "how do men interact with the space at the gym?" Through analysis, the author discovered that most of the data produced was socially constructed, with participants' opinions reflecting what the literature described as the views from society; for example, their views on masculinity mirrored what the literature claimed was Western society's view on masculinity. Men gained muscle due to their perception of related rewards – a perception that is reinforced by media focus on sport and sport star role models. Use of space in gyms appeared to be determined by dominant societal views on those spaces. For example, men avoided the cardiovascular equipment due to its association with femininity in popular perception.

Keywords

Masculinity, Gym, Muscle, Space Mapping, Media, Role Models, Geographies of the Body.

Author Profile

The author is a Northumbria University graduate with a 2:1 degree in BA Geography. For his dissertation (for which he received a 1:1) he studied the geography of the body due to his interest in the subject, gym culture, and the reasons why he and his friends regularly attended the gym. He chose to conduct research into the issue, knowing that through his own involvement in the culture he already had potential participants available.

Introduction

This research is about the reasons why men attempt to gain muscle and the use of space within gyms by various groups of people. It examines theories from relevant literature to analyse the ways in which space is used in gyms and the reasons for men gaining muscle. The research into use of space within gyms was conducted using the author's observations, interviews with personal trainers, and participants mapping their use of space in their gym. The research into why men attempt to gain muscle was conducted through interviews and focus groups with males aged between eighteen and fifty nine, who lived in the North East of England and were attempting to gain muscle. The group of participants was a diverse mix of the author's friends and volunteers unknown to the author prior to the research.

The research was conducted from August 2012 to February 2013 in Teesside, Darlington and Newcastle. The research questions arose from the gaps in the literature, as shall be elaborated upon within the literature review.

This work contains a literature review, a description of data-gathering methods, a results section describing the data produced, a discussion section which relates the data to theories from the literature, and a summary of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the research.

Literature Review

The way the body is viewed has changed dramatically. Woodward (1997) outlined Elias' claims that the body in medieval times was not civilised, with fewer behavioural norms used to regulate behaviour; peoples could try and instantly satisfy their body's desires. This changed during the Renaissance when status was given

based on favourable appearance, and the body therefore became increasingly regulated and civilised. The socialisation of bodies means that they become the “location for and expression of codes of behaviour” – (pg. 97, Woodward 1997) something which could be a precursor of building muscular physiques to reflect identity.

Two different schools of thought exist on the body, which advocate the social view and the medical view respectively. The medical approach is illustrated by Jackson (2001), who talks about how Men’s Health magazine views the body as a tool, discussing ways to make it healthier and stronger, with no mention of emotional desires. Others, such as Wiegiers (2004) view the body in a social manner, as something reflecting personality or emotions.

Woodward (1997) also wrote about Bourdieu who claimed that the body is the materialisation of class taste, and there are also socially learned mannerisms which are known as the habitus. For example, one can learn to act in a masculine manner through social learning. Bourdieu also claimed that deliberate changes to the body can act as social markers. For example tattoos can be used to show what you identify with. A body can also alter society’s view of the person, with a well-groomed, muscular body looked upon as a sign of moral uprightness, and a poorly-groomed, overweight body as a sign that a person has let themselves go. Bourdieu suggested that people change their body so that it is something they identify with, or because doing so could result in a reward, such as a job offer following interview.

However, Bourdieu was criticised by King, (2002) who claimed that the idea of the habitus does not make sense. If the habitus is determined by objective conditions as Bourdieu claims, deciding an appropriate reaction to an individual situation, and a habitus is “unconsciously internalized dispositions and categories,” (pg. 427) then social change is not possible, as individuals would act consistently when faced with a social situation. King adds that if everybody in society had a habitus as Bourdieu claimed, then everybody would simply repeat the same action, and no new situations would ever arise.

Bourdieu’s theory of physical and social capital (Woodward, 1997), suggests that some bodies are more highly valued by society. For example, sportspeople are paid large amounts of money for their bodies. Furthermore bodybuilders can receive payment for working as bouncers, and prostitutes sell their bodies for money. The body is viewed differently by different classes; the working class view it largely as a means of making money, whilst the richer classes view it as a project, and generally aim for it to be aesthetically pleasing.

Woodward (1997) also wrote about Foucault and power. Foucault claimed that power disciplined or controlled the body. For example the army shave the hair of new recruits. Foucault believed that power relations are the reason for modification of the body.

Similarly, Longhurst (2001) wrote about how the body is tamed to show power and to project an image appropriate for a work environment. She described how a firm male body can display power, specifically in the workplace. She claimed the unbroken lines of a business suit convey firmness of the body and project power, which is considered desirable in the workplace. She also claimed that business suits are designed to be slimming due to the lack of respect given to overweight bodies, and the perception that such bodies are undesirable in the work place.

Longhurst (2000) also found, in a study of New Zealand gyms, that weight lifting itself was seen as a masculine activity and was linked to typically masculine behaviours such as violence. Indeed, the name of one of the weight lifting rooms as the (pg. 441), “black and blue room” demonstrates that the process of gaining muscle can be seen as a masculine activity. Therefore a muscular physique may result in a masculine identity due to the activity required to achieve it. Also Baghurst and Lirgg (2009) cite Peoples, (2001) who claimed that men built muscle due to the cultural shift from occupational identity to physical identity. This would tie into the theory of building muscle creating a masculine identity rather than jobs which would previously have given a masculine identity to men.

Orzeck (2007) mentioned that the body reflects the social characteristics of the person, such as sexuality, and that, as a result, the body is a reflection of self. Therefore, because the body reflects the person, it could be argued that a muscular body is a reflection of how the person wishes to be seen or identified as.

Wiegers (2004) believed that men attempt to build muscular physiques in order to identify with their body in a masculine manner, citing Klein (1993) as saying that bodybuilders are attempting to build a masculine identity for themselves and that having a muscular physique is a way of appearing masculine. Wiegers continued to say that it is impossible to act in a masculine manner because of the social norms and practicalities of modern life. Fighting, for example, is no longer a socially acceptable activity. Going back to pre-history, men no longer have to hunt for food to survive, another activity which would be seen as masculine. Furthermore, there is an increased amount of role reversal since pre-history. For example, there is an increasing number of male homemakers – traditionally a feminine role. Wiegers conducted a study on bodybuilders and 84 per cent of them claimed to feel more masculine because of their

bodies. However, this may not be particularly relevant as the gap between bodybuilders and “regular” people who go to the gym to gain muscle is very large and they may have differing reasons for doing so.

Further journal articles proposed similar ideas to Wiegers, such as Andrews et al. (2005) who claimed that bodybuilders felt more masculine, and talked about a hierarchy of bodies at gyms, with the most muscular being judged the most masculine and able to dominate the less muscular men. Probert et al. (2007) also talked about the role of identifying with the body through building muscle. According to this study, bodybuilders saw themselves as different to non-bodybuilders and saw bodybuilding as a (pg.17), “a long-term and defining component of their self-identity.”

Baertson (2003) wrote about a crisis in masculinity, as traditionally masculine interests such as rock music become increasingly feminised. This suggests that masculinity needs to be achieved in other ways; potentially through the body. Baertson also talked of masculinity as a performance which can be learnt. A muscular physique would add to this performance and help a man appear masculine.

Connell (2005) summarised gay and feminist theories which suggest that masculinity is linked to power in advanced capitalist countries. Connell also believed that for many men, their bodies are their primary economic assets, and their body can be used to gain money through offering power.

Whilst the articles above such as Andrews et al. (2005) and Connell (2005) claim that muscular bodies can symbolise masculinity, and therefore power, overweight bodies must also be taken into account. Coll and Evans (2014) claim that fat bodies are seen as a symbol of laziness, lack of motivation, lack of competence and a lack of self-discipline. In other words, fat bodies project the opposite of power and masculinity. They further claim that while overweight bodies themselves are not problematic, the wider environment can make them a problem.

The articles so far discussed give the impression that men go to the gym in order to create a masculine identity, yet Steinfeldt et al. (2011) found that some men work out at the gym for reasons besides this. Whilst conducting a study with college American football players (who have a high chance of playing professionally in the NFL), they found that these athletes attempted to gain muscle not to gain a masculine identity, or to be aesthetically pleasing, but to increase the functionality of their bodies. Their bodies were seen as tools first and foremost, crafted to fulfil a purpose, rather than something to identify with.

Other articles suggest further reasons for going to the gym besides creating a masculine identity. Smith and Hale (2004), for example, emphasise addiction; men become dependent on going to the gym due to feeling that their physiques would shrink if they did not, or they become dependent on being in the gym due to the social environment.

Alternative articles suggest yet more reasons for men going to the gym to create muscular physiques other than to create a masculine identity. Halliwell et al. (2007) cited Stanford and McCabe (2002) as saying that the media had put forward the idea that the ideal male body was muscular, v-shaped and toned. This implies that role models could be the reason for men going to the gym. For example, Wiegers (2004) briefly mentions the influence of role models such as Arnold Schwarzenegger coinciding with the increased popularity of men attempting to gain muscle. Morrison et al. (2003) claimed that the mass media was responsible for men seeing their bodies as objects and believing that bodies which weren't v-shaped or muscular were imperfect and unattractive, making them more likely to go to the gym to transform their bodies.

Jackson and Brookes (1999) found that these two ideas could be almost combined. Whilst not focussing on building muscle, they found that men's magazines promoted masculinity and helped men identify as masculine. Therefore, if the idea of a muscular physique producing a masculine identity is correct, as suggested in other journal articles, it could be argued that role models and the media add further impetus for men to visit the gym. Tivers (2011) also mentioned the importance of role models in making men want to build muscle, citing the 1977 release of the bodybuilding documentary "Pumping the Iron," featuring star names such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno, as a significant influence on making muscular physiques acceptable and desirable. However, Tivers' article is based on studies around strong man competitions, which whilst related, is not the same as wanting to build muscle, and Jackson and Brookes' article refers only to masculinity and how role models can encourage it, and has nothing at all to do with gaining muscle. Another article which relates slightly to role models is Parr (2002) who states that the internet has increased the awareness of one's own body. This relates to gaining muscle through the rise of forums, websites, and human role models who have become famous via the internet. All of this can act as encouragement for men to gain muscle. Another example of role models having an effect on men attempting to gain musculature is mentioned in Hatoum and Belle (2004). They write about how action figures such as GI Joe became unrealistically muscular over time, which led to the view that a muscular body was the perfect male body. They also found that men who

read men's magazines were more likely to have taken muscle building supplements, suggesting that role models play an important part in men wanting to be muscular. Hurst et al. (2000) talked about how men may develop muscular dysmorphia – whereby men have a disturbed body image and see themselves as less muscular than they actually are - or social physique anxiety – a fear of appearing weak or thin to others, which can lead to attempts to build muscle. Martin and Govender (2011) talk about how body discrepancies and self-esteem issues or a need to improve at sport can cause men to attempt to gain musculature.

Ralph (2012) also talks about the effect role models can have. His article blames men's magazines and music videos (as well as pressure from sports coaches) for tempting young men into using steroids in order to emulate the role models presented in such mediums.

Jackson et al. (2001) argue that men's magazines offer role models for males, acting as one of the driving forces behind the "lad culture" and a challenge to the rise of feminism which has catapulted masculinity into crisis. It can be argued that these magazines are one way of promoting masculinity and a muscular physique would be an alternative. Jackson et al. also claim that the body has become the new masculine area, so the physique reflects that, whereas prior to feminism and the increase of working women, it was the workplace.

Overall, the literature refers to the building of a masculine identity a lot, but the studies are often carried out on bodybuilders or athletes, rather than the average males in employment or education, which means there is a gap in the knowledge which should be filled with research. The use of space in gyms has also been researched by many authors. Andrews et al. (2005) and Craig and Liberti (2007) both write that communities at the gym attract individuals to join, as both men and women seek out gyms where they feel they fit in. Andrews et al. state that people will change their gym if they do not fit into the culture and community there. Craig and Liberti (2007) go as far as to say that people may choose to not even enter a gym if they feel intimidated by the community within.

With regards to the use of space within the gym, Andrews et al. (2005) write that larger men, due to a hierarchy of bodies, have more influence than smaller men, and can exclude them from using "their" machines; therefore less muscular men may avoid the chest and leg areas of the gym where they are made to feel unwelcome due to large amounts of muscular males in those areas. They also write that use of space in the gym changes through time. In the morning and afternoon gyms are used by less muscular males, but during the evening, larger males use the space. Andrews et al.

(2005) also write that larger males tended to monopolise some equipment, spending excessive amounts of time on them.

Salvatore and Marecek (2010) write that some people avoided some free weight sections in the gym due to evaluation concern – fear of judgement for not lifting enough, intimidation, or the fear of not knowing what to do. Some men were also concerned with being compared with people who lift more than them, so avoided free weight areas. They also found weight lifting was rated as a male activity and cardio as a female one, so women were more likely to use equipment in cardio areas than risk negative evaluation for entering the masculine free weight area. Craig and Liberti (2007) also claimed that women avoided free weight areas due to fears of being evaluated on their physique and their physical attractiveness by the men there.

Based on the existing literature, four research questions have been identified which, if answered, could help to fill gaps in existing knowledge. The literature regularly refers to the creation of a masculine identity, but does not discuss what a masculine identity consists of. Therefore the first research question tackled here is: “how do men view masculinity, and do men attempt to gain muscle in order to acquire a masculine identity?”

The second research question is: “do men attempt to gain muscle for functional or aesthetic reasons?” This was chosen as the literature referred to both function and aesthetics as reasons for men gaining muscle, yet the studies conducted were on differing groups of people such as college athletes. Also, Longhurst (2001), claimed that most work on the body was not on “white, able bodied males,” so the author conducted his research on this group, with all but one participant fulfilling these criteria (Frank was black).

The third research question is, “to what extent are men influenced by the media or role models in wanting to gain muscle?” The literature refers to role models influencing men through the media, but further investigation is needed to discover whether other factors had a larger on influence on men gaining muscle than the media and role models.

The final research question is, “how do men interact with the space at the gym?” Most of the literature refers to women, or is based on research which took place in gyms containing professional bodybuilders. It has never yet been established if the results of such research could be applied to gyms containing ordinary men who were not bodybuilders.

Methods

This research was conducted between August 2012 and February 2013, through the interviewing of twelve men, aged between eighteen and fifty nine, who were attempting to gain muscle whilst living across the Teesside and Newcastle area. The author used observations of gyms, as well as interviews and focus groups to conduct this research; also asking participants in focus groups to draw their own maps of the gym, in order to inform an understanding of how space in the gym is used. To find these participants, the author interviewed existing friends and also used snowballing because, according to Valentine (1997), being recommended to a participant through a mutual friend instantly creates trust - something which would be needed as the questions used were potentially very personal.

As the interviewees were chosen via snowballing, they are not representative of the entire population. Representativeness would be almost impossible due to the personal nature of the questions. The author was unable to approach and question large numbers of people on the street for example. This was why snowballing was used, in order to create a list of interviewees who would be willing to be interviewed about personal subjects such as their masculine identity; people were able to (and did) refuse to participate in the research when asked. Snowballing also provided access to hidden populations, such as Frank who was found through the author's grandfather, a benefit mentioned by Phillips and Johns (2012). The result of using the snowballing method was a group of twelve interviewees who were assigned pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity, as stated on the consent forms signed prior to the interviews taking place. Therefore, the subjects were referred to as Callum, Frank, Keith, Jason, Kurt, Lionel, Michael, Neil, Ricky, Richard, Steven and Tom. (For a more full biography of the participants, refer to figure one.)

Prior to conducting interviews, a pilot study was conducted to iron out flaws in the interviewing process, as Parfitt (2005) claimed pilot studies can be used to check if questions are understood properly and to remove questions that produce ambiguous responses. Interviews were used for various reasons. Mason (2002) claimed that interviews are excellent for gathering the subjective opinions of others. As this is what the author was researching, it was decided that interviews were the best method to use. Mason also noted that interviews give participants freedom to discuss what they want, which can lead to more detailed information. Valentine (1997) further highlighted the fact that interviews allow interviewees to bring up issues the researcher may not have considered, and can eliminate the problem of forcing participants into categories which may not accurately reflect their feelings – a common problem with questionnaires. The research involved semi structured interviews, described by

Clifford et al. (2010) as an interview where questions are specifically ordered, but which open possibilities for further questions to be added if more detail is required. Valentine (1997) believed that interviews should take place in areas where interviewees feel comfortable, as they are more likely to talk freely, so the author conducted interviews in interviewees' houses or pubs which they frequent in order to achieve this, using a tape recorder to record answers given. Interviews do have some disadvantages, such as potential for interviewer bias according to McLafferty (2010), but Valentine (1997) argued that the humanistic approach would say all social science research contains bias. According to Phillips and Johns (2012) interviews are not representative of the whole population, therefore the author used twelve participants for the in depth interviews.

The author also used focus groups of three people. Powell et al. (1996) described focus groups as groups of individuals, chosen by the researcher, who discuss and give opinions on the topic given by said researcher. The author used focus groups for a variety of reasons. Matthews and Ross (2010) suggested people are more likely to speak freely in focus groups as they provide a relaxing environment, reducing inhibition, and also because membership of a group can be liberating. The author tried to create focus groups with people who knew each other to produce a relaxing environment. The author also used focus groups because they are effective at capturing socially constructed knowledge as they involve discussions in a social manner according to Phillips and Johns (2012), and opinions on the body and masculinity are socially constructed. However, Phillips and Johns (2012) criticised focus groups as being difficult to coordinate and on occasion a participant might not be willing to talk. These are both unavoidable problems, as even in a relaxed environment; some such as Tom might be unwilling to openly discuss the body, a problem which existed in both interviews and focus groups, with some interviewees finding it hard to discuss their body openly, despite the authors pre-existing relationships with them, or attempts to build trust with them.

For the research into the use of space in gyms, the author used observations because Parfitt (2005) claimed that they are simple to perform and do not require resources. Also, because the author had knowledge of what he was observing, the author's views would be insightful, Laurier (2010). The author had previously been to the gyms in question, and had attempted to gain muscle in the past, and therefore felt that observations were a good method to choose. The author conducted the observations at Sport Central Gym in Newcastle, and the Dolphin Centre gym in Darlington, spending a day at each. Both gyms had previously been frequented by the author in an attempt to gain muscle; thus his experiences could help to inform his conclusions. During his

time at each gym, the author sat inconspicuously in a corner or an office, observing approximately sixty members per gym. Notes were taken on the author's phone in order to avoid making members feel self-conscious, which could make them deviate from their usual routine. The author observed every third person entering the gym in order to try and produce a random sample of gym members. The author also asked interviewees about their use of space in gyms, then returned months later to ask them to map their use of space in gyms, making sure that their answers had remained the same. The author also questioned staff from the gyms for their perspective on the use of space. The use of various methods (triangulation) was a way of making sure that the data was accurate, as recommended by Valentine (1997) who claimed that triangulation can make data more reliable. (Figure 2 offers further justification for the methods used.)

According to Smith (2010), the author's positionality must be taken into account, as the researcher cannot be unbiased and his presence will have an influence on results. Phillips and Johns (2012) say that knowledge is produced in specific circumstances, and that this knowledge is shaped by those circumstances. The author's circumstances shape the knowledge produced. The author was a twenty-one year old student, so naturally his initial contact points were often similar people, determining the eventual interviewees, and impacting on the knowledge produced. The author also had pre-existing relationships with some interviewees which influenced the data collected. For example, the author and Keith had a close relationship where topics such as the gym and body dysmorphia had been discussed previously, so Keith felt comfortable discussing this in the interview. Conversely, Tom and the author, whilst being close did not discuss intimate subjects such as the body, which appeared to lead to Tom feeling unable to give his true feelings on some issues during the interview and focus group session. Another example of the author's positionality having an effect on the research would be the interview with Frank. Frank was a lot older than the author and, as a result, it was difficult to build up trust and a relationship with him, which led to him providing guarded answers. Also, the author had his own opinions which may have subconsciously biased the questions either through wording or even body language and pointed interviewees towards giving a certain answer. Furthermore, as the author is male, it also has to be taken into account that other males may not have wished to discuss their bodies with him, meaning that the maximum amount of data may not have been gained, or even false data collected. Finally, the research reflects the opinions of a small cross section of people in the North East of England from 2012 to 2013, and cannot be generalised further. However, as Valentine (1997) says, all humanistic research has this flaw, and though it must be acknowledged, it must also be accepted.

The author transcribed all interviews and focus groups in order to make the data easier to analyse. Following the recommendation of Kitchin and Tate (2000) the author then used quantitative analysis, putting the data into categories taken from the literature he had read prior to commencing the research, as well as creating new categories as interviewees put new ideas forward. The author then looked at the categorised data in order to see if the data could be used to support or criticise theories from the literature. Mason (2002) claims that the ontological position of the author is important. As the author had previously gone to the gym himself, he already has opinions on the subject which influences this position. However, as previously stated, Valentine (1997) claims that all humanistic research contains bias meaning this is unavoidable.

Results

Do men attempt to gain muscle for functional or aesthetic reasons?

Sexual Attraction

Many of the interviewees discussed mentioned that they lifted to attract girls, with Jason and Neil (brothers) saying: “girls are always going to prefer somebody who looks muscly to somebody who is...fat,” and “The ladies like some good pecs,” respectively. As large pectorals accentuate a v-shaped torso, the latter quote supports Stanford and McCabe (2002), who claimed that a v-shaped torso is seen as ideal. As brothers, Jason and Neil had much in common; both attended university in Newcastle, enjoyed attending nightclubs, viewed notorious womaniser Gaz from *Geordie Shore* as a role model, and were single. However, Keith, who was also single and into the nightclub scene, but attended university in a different city and did not view Gaz as a role model, also mentioned that attracting girls was a big reason for him attempting to gain muscle. Keith reported that “getting the attention off the girls” is “what you train for essentially - yeah – to get the girls.” Through the author’s close relationship with Keith, he knew that Keith was attempting to sleep with as many girls as possible to get over a recent break up. It may be concluded that this gave Keith his motivation, as he was the most dedicated of all participants to lifting weights.

Frank, a married man, also gave women as of the reasons for him going to the gym, stating: “my wife likes me looking good.” Combined with other comments from interviewees such as Lionel and Tom (both single) who each admitted that attracting girls was a major reason for them lifting weights, and that compliments from girls are a reason for lifting shows that a large amount of the interviewees gain muscle in order to increase their attractiveness to the opposite sex.

Self Esteem

Self-esteem was also mentioned as a reason for men attempting to gain weight, by extroverts and introverts alike. Keith claimed that he gained muscle “to affect my self-esteem,” and through the authors own knowledge and relationship with Keith, he could definitely see that Keith had visibly gained in confidence since he started building muscle, after having it dented following his break up with his girlfriend. Neil had confidence prior to attending the gym according to Tom, his snowballing contact, but claimed that gaining muscle helped him, “feel better about himself.”

Lionel and Ricky (both introverted individuals) claimed: “It does help my self-esteem,” and: “it’s a confidence thing as well, because if you look a bit bigger, a bit bulkier, people can tell, have opinions on you, a bit different to what they would otherwise,” respectively.

Every interviewee reported that they gained muscle to become more aesthetic, with Ricky stating that: “it’s an appearance thing,” Keith claiming: “I wanted to look bigger and bigger and bigger.” Furthermore, Callum stated during his interview that he believed “first impressions are very important, especially with coming to get jobs and stuff as well. I think if you look good, you look in shape, then they’re more inclined to take you on.” This final quote about muscle improving your chances in the job market along with the views previously stated by other interviewees suggest that whilst gaining an aesthetic physique is important to them, this is because of the societal rewards that this provides. This supports Bourdieu’s theory of social capital as discussed by Woodward (1997), which suggests that some bodies are more highly valued than others.

Sport

Only two of the interviewees regularly played sport, but both of them considered gaining muscle or losing fat at the gym important to their success. Frank had played golf for the past fifteen years, and during the offseason would aim to improve his swing strength by using weights to build muscle; “an hour weights, which I use for my golf.” Lionel was the most active participant in sports of all the interviewees, having run a half marathon in the months prior to being interviewed. He also regularly competed in kickboxing competitions and played football. This could be due to his upbringing, during which he regularly competed in sports with his brother Keith, and

had a father who was a coach of a local Sunday league football team, promoting his interest in sport. Interestingly, whilst originally using the gym to improve his performance at the sports he competed in he also stated: “If I’m below the top of the bracket for weight category, I’ll try and gain as much weights as I can. If I’m just above the weight category below, I’ll adapt my training a little bit – try burn some fat,” showing how he manipulated his body to improve his chances at kickboxing, not through improving performance but through changing his body composition to choose his weight class.

Health

Tom, Jason, Callum, Steven, Keith and Frank all mentioned health as a reason for lifting. However, Tom, Frank, and Steven were some of the participants who were least willing to talk openly in the interview, and Tom in particular seemed worried about how his answers would be judged. It is therefore possible that he and others mentioned health as a socially acceptable answer, less ego-driven answer than other reasons such as attracting girls or increasing respect. Frank, as the eldest participant at the age of fifty-nine, was the most health conscious, performing cardiovascular work the most regularly due to the health benefits. He also seemed the most aware of his own mortality, saying: “If you’re healthy you prolong your life.” Steven, who was extremely introverted according to his snowballing contact, and did not engage in the nightclub lifestyle, often found at university or attempting to attract girls, also focussed more on his health. This is due to bad health news he had received from his doctor: “Tendons in my hamstring are very tight; just mainly my legs I’d say for the health side of it, rather than, more than anything else.” Therefore he tailored his workout around his health.

Finally, Keith also briefly mentioned his health but it is obviously not an important part of the reason for him going to the gym, saying: “part of it is to be fit and healthy, but I’m always down the gym, even with my friends we joke, ‘oh we’re going to go out on weekends, going to look the best...’” This, along with him claiming not to do any cardiovascular work, shows that whilst vaguely aware of the health benefits, he did not seem to care about them or focus his training on obtaining them, possibly due to his youth and excellent health, something which Frank and Steven did not have respectively.

Masculinity

Callum and Michael claimed that building muscle helped them feel masculine. This is notable as Michael claimed to feel intimidated in the gym by more muscular males who he appeared to consider more masculine than him. By building more muscle he felt he would increase his masculinity and presumably be less likely to be intimidated. This is supported by his view that increasing his muscle mass would mean he is viewed as more masculine by trouble-makers at work. Ricky believed that a masculine identity would be achieved as a result of having a muscular physique, despite the differing views of masculinity; “I do think people have different...perceptions of the idea nowadays, though I think the idea of being...muscular and well built...remains throughout that.” Ricky was introverted and did not display many typical “masculine” characteristics, so he may have been building a muscular body in order to identify himself as masculine (as suggested by Wieggers 2004) to make up for these deficiencies in his other masculine characteristics. It is also worth noting that many of the participants who built muscle to attract girls viewed attracting girls as a masculine behaviour, so indirectly built muscle in order to build a masculine identity.

Due to the discussion of acquiring a masculine identity through building muscle it was pertinent to find out quite what participants believed constituted a masculine identity:

How do men view masculinity and do men gain muscle in order to acquire a masculine identity?

Attracting girls

Five interviewees claimed that attracting girls was part of a masculine identity. Indeed, Keith reported that a masculine identity involved, “getting attention off the girls.” Keith did seem to receive a large amount of attention from girls, and by claiming this was masculine he may have been trying to convince himself of his masculinity as, whilst he seemed to engage with some facets of masculine culture, he simultaneously spoke of it as if he considered himself an outsider. For example, he described others as “meatheads,” during an interview, which he considered masculine, but at the same time believed that, whilst others perceived him as a “meathead,” he was like that in appearance only; he was only performing the role of “meathead” and masculinity, possibly showing some underlying insecurity. This supports Baertson (2003), who claimed that masculinity is a performance which can be learnt.

Lionel also claimed that masculine people “tended to chase girls,” though it is possible that his opinions are influenced by Keith, his twin brother. The other interviewees who claimed that attracting girls was part of a masculine identity tended to engage in “lad” culture, typically involving nightclubs.

Appearance

Frank, Callum and Michael claimed that building muscle helped them feel masculine. This is notable because while Michael claimed he would feel more masculine if he had more muscle, he self-identified as, “a weedy guy,” and claimed that he felt uncomfortable using certain areas of the gym due to more muscular males there, who he considered intimidating. He therefore felt that if he had more muscle he would be more masculine and not intimidated by the more muscular males.

Brothers Neil and Jason shared similar opinions, both mentioning appearance as part of a masculine identity, but considered it just one part of masculinity, with Neil claiming that a masculine appearance with a feminine personality “wouldn’t fit,” showing their joint belief that both personality and appearance are important aspects of a masculine identity.

Personality

Furthermore, other participants such as Lionel and Callum also believed that personality was an important part of a masculine identity. Callum claimed that “[being] reliable, behaving with respect towards other people, basically being a good person helps make you a man, rather than just looking the part.” However this is contradictory on his part, as he also claimed that having muscle made him feel masculine, in part due to the effect it had on others, which again links with Bourdieu’s theory of social capital as discussed by Woodward (1997). Tom was one of the other participants who claimed that personality was important in a masculine identity saying: “in the olden days men had to be bigger for the work that they do. Nowadays you can be quite masculine because you have a really good job, dress smart, think it might be more your personality, the type of job you’ve got rather than actually appearing big.” This however could be because Tom did not seem comfortable discussing building muscle and his body with the researcher, due to the nature of their prior friendship, which could mean he felt he had to downplay the importance of muscle. However, he did mention another important aspect of a masculine identity through his discussion of how masculinity has changed throughout time: society.

Social Construction

Despite Tom briefly touching upon this and Lionel concurring during the focus group, Keith was perhaps the most aware of social construction, possibly due to having studied sociology both at college and in his free time through personal interest. Therefore, he had thought more deeply than others about the social construction of masculinity, saying: “If you’re a woman and you’re from a low working class background, you probably look at a builder as being more masculine than an office CEO of a company, though if you’re from a middle class background, you might see a CEO as more masculine.” Indeed, it is interesting to note how interviewees more involved in the nightclub, “lad” culture such as Richard focussed more on attracting girls as a vital part of masculinity, whereas others such as Steven who did not associate with these types of people, and was therefore uninfluenced by them, had a completely different view of what constituted masculinity. Steven believed it involved “being a gentleman,” and “helping people.”

To what extent are men influenced by the media or role models in wanting to gain muscle?

Sport

Eight participants claimed to have been influenced by sports stars, with Steven mentioning that “someone like Chris Hoy” or “generally people at the Olympics,” were role models to him. However Steven was not a big sports fan, and his response may have been an effect of the recent London 2012 Olympics, as his interview was carried out in August 2012. Callum, a noted cricket fan and amateur player, who didn’t claim to lift weights to improve his cricket performance, stated: “I play cricket, so when I look at when Andrew Flintoff played cricket, he’s a big guy, so I look at him and think, ‘yeah that’s a good shape, I wouldn’t mind being in that shape.’”

Tom, an amateur tennis player and fan also mentioned tennis players such as Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal as role models, in part due to them being “athletic,” more than muscular, something which he claimed he desired to be. Again, this may be because he did not wish to discuss his body with the author and said something which he believed to be socially acceptable.

Television

The participants who enjoyed going to nightclubs the most, Richard, Jason and Neil all mentioned Gaz from the television show *Geordie Shore* as a role model for both building muscle, and behaviour. Gaz is arguably the most famous character from the show, and lives the lifestyle that these interviewees identified with, making it clear why he was a role model for them. Furthermore *Geordie Shore* is a television show aimed almost exclusively at a younger adult audience, which may be why they identified with the character.

Lionel, Michael, Neil, Jason and Keith all mentioned Arnold Schwarzenegger as a role model who made them want to build muscle, demonstrating that Tivers (2011) and Wiegers (2004) may be correct when they claimed that Arnold was one of the most notable role models for males building muscle.

Lionel said, whilst talking about movies featuring Schwarzenegger, “I didn’t grow up watching *Ted*, where a teddy bear is the main character; it was big guys who went round hitting people, which has probably influenced my view on masculinity.” His brother Keith, who grew up watching the same movies as Lionel added to this, saying: “When I was younger I would look at his body and say I want to look like that one day.”

Brothers Jason and Neil, as well as Michael also shared a similar role model from television: wrestlers, more specifically, the Rock. Neil and Jason being brothers with a similar upbringing and interest may demonstrate why both they viewed wrestlers as role models, as well as wrestling typically being aimed at males.

Regular Life

Richard, in attending nightclubs has found many role models there, as shown by his statement regarding his Magaluf holiday; “I went on holiday...and [saw] everyone with six packs and tattooed up and me just being average, I was just like, ‘naw’...it’s kind of like jealousy of people who are...ripped...so I thought I’ll do it myself.” This is in addition to his other role model of Gaz from *Geordie Shore*, who also frequents nightclubs, suggesting that Richard picks role models from scenes he himself frequents.

Michael also found role models in his everyday life, saying “Mainly university, because that’s more like my age, so that’s the better...but anywhere really.” As

mentioned, he compared himself to others at the gym (which was at his university) and, feeling inferior, tried to emulate them.

No Role Model

Frank, the eldest participant claimed that he had no role models at all, from any sort of medium when asked. This could be due to him being older than the majority of men on television or in sport who lift weights, or he may be at the stage in his life where he no longer has any role models.

Furthermore, men's magazines were unanimously rejected by the participants as being any sort of influence on their behaviour or wanting to gain muscle. This suggests that Jackson and Brookes (1999) and Hatoum and Belle (2004) who claimed men's magazines had an effect on men wanting to build muscle and their views on masculinity were now outdated, replaced by other influences such as TV. For example, *Geordie Shore* was frequently mentioned and was broadcast for the first time in 2011 after these studies. Sport has also become steadily more ubiquitous since 1999.

How do men interact with the space of the gym?

Intimidation

In a comment not recorded during the interview, but one which he later gave the author permission to use, Michael claimed that he avoided the areas of the gym which "meatheads" use due to intimidation. The area where he felt uncomfortable going was the free weight area. Indeed, whilst mapping his use of space in the gym (figure 5), he did not know what was in the free weight area, adding another additional comment on the map which said he stayed out of the area because he was not strong enough to lift the weights. Therefore Michael, due to being intimidated by others (which he felt was due to his lack of muscle) stayed in the machine and cardio areas. This supported Andrews et al. (2005) who claimed non-muscular males may avoid the free weights section due to a "hierarchy," with muscular males making less muscular males feel uncomfortable.

Introverted Ricky also used the gym differently due to the other people in there, selecting his gym based upon the atmosphere. He stated that "I would have less in common with the clientele," when asked why he did not go to the gym closest to his

home. This also supported Andrews et al. (2005), who claimed that men chose their gym based on the culture and community within. Interestingly, the gym that Ricky (who was not involved in the university nightclub, “lad” lifestyle) chose to avoid was the gym which other interviewees “lad” role model – Gaz from *Geordie Shore* – had attended.

Keith however used whatever space he wished to in the gym according to his self-mapping (figure 7), possibly because he, “used to be in with...these Polish meatheads. I used to have great banter.” This meant that he felt part of their group and did not feel intimidation like Michael did, thus he used the free weight liberally whilst at the gym.

Upper body and t-shirt muscles

All interviewees apart from Steven mentioned that they focussed on their upper bodies when lifting weights, suggesting they spent time in areas of the gym where this is possible, such as the free weight areas. Keith claimed that, “I don’t do cardio, it’s got to be weights, and when its weights, it’s heavy, big weights.” Keith claimed that he had suffered from body dysmorphia, which meant that he was obsessive about gaining muscle, viewing himself as smaller than he really was. This could be yet another reason for him working with weights and being the most dedicated of all the participants to gaining muscle. Whilst Keith was an extreme example in terms for the reasoning for his consistently working with heavy weights, many other participants claimed to avoid cardio and just work on their upper body using weights.

During an interview with a personal trainer at the Dolphin Centre gym in Darlington (which Keith and Lionel had trained at), he claimed that he had noticed that most males focussed on the “t-shirt muscles,” in the free weight and machine section (“t-shirt muscles,” meaning muscles which are easily visible when wearing t-shirts, and are viewed as most important to appearance – usually the chest and arms). This could link in with reasons for men gaining muscle such as attracting girls, as participants such as Neil and Jason built these muscles for this reason, and spent their time at the gym doing upper body exercises with no cardio.

Lower Body

The only participant who put most of his effort into building his leg muscles was Steven. He was told by his doctor that he had problems with his knees and that he should work on building his leg strength. Therefore he spent half of his time doing

cardio and the other half doing leg exercises, which would both lead to health benefits for him. Steven was the most health-focussed participant in his early twenties due to the pre-existing problems with his legs. The only other participant who focussed mainly on his health was fifty-nine year old Frank, who spent a lot of time doing cardio vascular exercise.

Cardio

Frank said that he does “about half an hour CV work,” due to his focus on prolonging his life, which could be due to his age. Lionel also did small amounts of cardio for his sport where appropriate. For example, whilst training for a half marathon or preparing for a kick boxing tournament, but when he was not preparing for a sporting event he concentrated on weights.

Many participants did no cardio work, which as Jason explained thusly: “People can notice [upper body improvements] more than say if you do your legs or your cardio,” which again links to his claim that girls give attention to males with muscle.

Discussion

De Visser et al. (2009) wrote of masculine behaviours as being socially constructed by showing strength both emotionally and physically, having a muscular physique, risk-taking, being good at sports, and showcasing heterosexuality. All but one interviewee agreed that a muscular physique was masculine, and all but Jason and Frank agreed masculine behaviours encompassed personality such as bravery or leadership, supporting this study. Lionel, Tom and Keith also agreed with De Visser et al. (2009) that society constructs ideas of masculinity. Keith believed that masculinity differs across geographies, with different societies and social classes having different ideas of what constituted masculinity. Tom agreed with this view. This could be offered as a criticism of De Visser et al. (2009), as they did not consider non-British masculinities and did not take into account differing views of masculinities across geographies.

Probert et al. (2007) and Wiegers (2004) wrote that men gained muscle in order to identify their bodies as masculine, with muscle an important part of their self-identity. Of the twelve interviewees, Keith, Jason, Kurt, Tom, Michael, Neil and Richard claimed that they gained muscle in order to create their own masculine identity, supporting these ideas. These interviewees were all aged eighteen to twenty-one, originally from Teesside, and single. All but Richard were also students. Their claims

correspond with Woodward (1997), who described Bourdieu's theory that people change their body so they can identify with it. In this case, they viewed muscle as masculine, wished to feel and look masculine and so changed their bodies in order to achieve this. Lionel, Keith, Richard and other interviewees claimed that masculine men attempted to attract girls which supports De Visser et al. (2009)'s claim that masculinity involved showcasing heterosexuality.

Attracting females was frequently mentioned as a reason for gaining muscle with Keith, Neil, Callum, Lionel, Jason, Richard and Frank all referring to attracting girls either explicitly or through implication as a reason for gaining muscle. Therefore it could also be assumed that these males are building muscle in order to gain a masculine identity due to the "attracting girls" portion of a masculine personality. It should be noted that the subject of attracting girls could be considered personal, so others may not have felt comfortable sharing if this was a reason for gaining muscle, either due to their shy behaviour or prior relationship with the author. It is also worth considering that those who referred to attracting girls were single, (apart from Frank who is married) so it may be that single males consider attracting females an important reason for gaining muscle, whilst those in a relationship do not, supporting McCreary and Sasse (2000), who claimed that men perceive women as preferring muscular males, and attempt to gain muscle because of this. They also wrote that women preferred men with large pectoral muscles, which could be the reason why Callum, Keith Jason, Neil, Michael, Ricky, Richard and Tom all trained their chests the most.

Steven and Callum claimed that they already had masculine identities, though gaining muscle enhanced them, with Callum explaining that he gained muscle to make society view him as masculine, rather than to affect his self-identification. This supports Orzeck (2007), who wrote that people crafted their body in order to adjust what they were identified as by others, thus slightly disagreeing with Woodward (2007), writing about Bourdieu's theory that people change their body for self-identity purposes. As such, Steven and Callum agreed with Baertson (2003), who claimed that muscle could help with the "performance" of masculinity. Performance of masculinity would involve giving the impression of masculinity through behaviour or appearance, such as a muscular physique. They also agreed with Hubbard et al. (2002) who claimed that identities are socially constructed, with society viewing various body types differently. However, Frank and Ricky disagreed with these theories, stating that they gained muscle for health reasons, which were in the case of Steven, to overcome problems with his "bad knees," and were in Frank's case to prolong life.

Every interviewee claimed that they gain muscle in order to improve their appearance. This can be linked with Woodward's (1997) descriptions of Elias and Bourdieu, as they may feel that an improved appearance would give them more social or physical capital. For example Richard said he believed respect would be more forthcoming if he was muscular, as he claimed that he had always looked younger than his age (and therefore not masculine). He believed that if he had more muscle, which would make others view him as more masculine, then he would gain respect – one example of social capital. It therefore stands to reason that Richard believed a masculine appearance and personality was seen as highly desirable and rewarded by society. This was a hugely prevalent feature in the interviews with Michael, Neil, Keith, Callum, Richard, Ricky, Lionel, Jason, Frank and Kurt all referring to society or others making them want to gain muscle, for reasons as varied as the aforementioned respect, better opportunities on the job market, being able to intimidate drunk trouble-makers at work, attention from girls and favourable first impressions all examples of social capital participants believed they would receive through gaining muscle.

Martin and Govender (2011) wrote that men gained muscle to increase their self-esteem, partially due to their unhappiness with their bodies. Obviously, if a man is constantly getting compliments, being rewarded with things such as respect, attention from girls, or even improved prospects in the job market (as Callum mentioned), then self-esteem is likely to improve. Keith, Neil, Jason, Kurt, Lionel, Richard and Ricky all claimed that they gained muscle in order to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem, supporting Martin and Govender's theory. In the author's opinion these interviewees were the most willing to openly discuss themselves; thus it could be a universal opinion; in this case, other participants may have felt uncomfortable admitting this. It is worth noting that all the participants who voiced this opinion were single and of similar age, which could influence their opinions. Salvatore and Marecek (2010) claimed that males often compared themselves to more muscular males (comparison concerns). Keith, Kurt and Michael all talked about comparing themselves to other more muscular males, and that being a factor in making them want to gain muscle, therefore supporting Salvatore and Marecek's argument. Michael in particular compared himself to other males, which had a huge effect on his self-esteem. After comparing himself to more muscular males in the gym, he felt so out of shape in comparison that he actually avoided going into the area of the gym they were lifting weights.

Tom, Frank, Steven, Jason, Callum and Keith talked about how they attempted to gain muscle for health reasons. It could be noted that Tom, Steven and Callum all claimed to have suffered some sort of health issue in the past or present which could show the

increased importance of health for them, whilst Frank is the eldest interviewee at fifty-nine, and it is possible that health becomes a renewed priority for someone of his age. Their aim of improving their health through gaining muscle supports Steinfeldt et al. (2011), who claimed that men gain muscle for functional reasons such as this, though his study group did not lend support to the idea that all men did so, as he studied only college athletes. Steinfeldt et al. (2011) also suggested that men gain muscle for sporting reasons. Frank and Lionel both referred to sport as being a reason for them gaining muscle. These two interviewees were the only two who regularly took part in sport, suggesting that males who did so gained muscle in order to aid their performance and improve their chances of winning (for example, Lionel moving up or down in weight class).

Sport did make participants attempt to gain muscle through a less obvious avenue however. Despite only Lionel participating in sport, Steven, Tom, Neil, Callum, Ricky, Jason, Michael and Lionel all claimed to have been influenced by sports stars. This supported Smolak et al. (2005), who claimed that sports stars were a major factor in males wanting to gain muscle. Possible reasons for them all being influenced by sport vary, though one reason could be that they were all aged eighteen to twenty-one and as such grew up through the Sky TV revolution (football gained increasing exposure through the launch, and subsequent growth and marketing power of Sky TV's dedicated sports channels beginning in the early-1990s) as sport and football in particular became increasingly prominent. Indeed, many of the participants mentioned footballers as role models who made them want to go to the gym. Frank grew up before football and sport was commonplace on TV, which could be the reason for him not viewing sports stars as role models.

Role models from non-sporting environments were another factor in men wanting to gain muscle, with all participants apart from Frank agreeing with Tivers (2011) that role models in general were factors in them wanting to gain muscle. Wieggers (2004) mentioned Arnold Schwarzenegger was a role model for males building muscle, which Keith, Lionel, Michael, Neil and Jason agreed with, claiming they had grown up with his movies. Tom disagreed however, which could be because he is not muscular and does not feel comfortable admitting that he is not succeeding in gaining muscle, or simply because he prefers to view sports stars such as tennis players as role models as he admitted in a focus group. Smolak et al. (2005) claimed that friends or people met in everyday life can be seen as role models. Kurt supported this theory as he started going to the gym with friends and family, thus he was arguably influenced through their actions. Also, Michael felt less muscular than others he saw around him at university, making him attempt to gain muscle in order to more resemble them.

Members of the infamous “lad culture” were often mentioned as role models by interviewees. Jackson (2001) talks about men’s magazines offering masculine role models, mentioning “lad culture.” Richard (a nineteen year old engineer living in Teesside, who engaged more fully with “lad culture” than other interviewees in the authors opinion, possibly due to him being part of separate social groups to other interviewees) considers such “lad culture” to be masculine, as he ties it in with having a masculine physique. Neil refers to lad culture as masculine, and as both consider muscularity as masculine, it can be inferred that lad culture’s promotion of masculinity is a reason for men gaining muscle. However, due to participants not reading men’s magazines, but instead mentioning other “lad culture” role models such as those in *Geordie Shore*, it can be inferred that lad culture now comes from media sources other than magazines as it did in 2001, such as sport or TV.

Whilst not a role model in the strictest sense of the word, Halliwell et al. (2007) cited Stanford and McCabe (2002) as saying that the media put forward the v-shaped torso as the ideal physique (physiques which can be found on the many role models the participants mentioned). All but Frank cited some media influence in their desire to gain muscle. This, again, could be due to their age (eighteen to twenty-three at the time of the interviews) and the fact that they were more easily influenced than Frank who was fifty-nine, and may not see people his own age in the media offering role models for muscle building.

Keith gave a unique reason for his attempts to gain muscle, which was not discussed by any other participant: addiction and muscular dysmorphia (whereby somebody views their body as less muscular than it really is, increasing the sufferer’s desire to build muscle). Smith and Hale (2004) referred to males becoming addicted both due to the social environment in the gym and also the addiction to building a muscular appearance. Keith claims that he continually went to the gym due to the social environment, and also suffered from both addiction and muscular dysmorphia, which according to McCreary and Sasse (2000) and Hurst et al. (2000) is a significant factor in making young males attempt to gain muscle, as they constantly feel the need to be bigger. Keith was the most muscular participant and also had the most reasons for wanting to build muscle, which could be the reason he had built more muscle. Finally, Keith’s frame of reference for a muscular physique –the “meatheads” he interacted with in the gym –might explain why he had more muscle than other participants.

“Meatheads” were one of the factors which influenced the participants’ use of space within the gyms. Michael, who had little muscle, claimed that he did not go into the free weight section of the gym, as that was the “meatheads” area. Indeed, he was unable to accurately map this area of the gym due to never entering it. However, no

other interviewee mentioned this, so it could be that Michael just had exceptionally low confidence, which would be supported by some quotations in his interview, such as: “I’m a weedy guy and I’m small.” This supported Salvatore and Marecek (2010), who claimed that women and less muscular males avoid areas of the gym due to factors such as intimidation, This is also suggested by the author’s further observations and Michael’s self-reports (figures three, four and five). In contrast, Keith’s self-mapping of use of space within his gym (figure seven) indicates that due to his friendship with the “meathead” group, he felt comfortable using the free weight section.

Salvatore and Marecek (2010) claimed that weight lifting was perceived as a male activity and cardio as a female activity, so females would be less likely to lift weights due to fear of being evaluated negatively. This theory is supported by the author’s observations, as he saw the cardio areas being female-dominant, and weight lifting area being male dominant (figures three and four).

Personal trainers mentioned in non-participant interviews that they also noticed a gender gap, where females and non-muscular males were more likely to do cardio based activities, with muscular males in the free weight section. This is supported by the author’s observations (figures three and four) which showed that females spent their time in the cardio areas, rarely moving into the free weight sections. Craig and Liberti (2007) claimed that this could be because females fear being evaluated on their physical attractiveness by the males in the weight section. Andrews et al. (2005) claimed that non-muscular males may avoid the free weights section due to a “hierarchy,” with muscular males making less muscular males feel uncomfortable, and even denying them the use of machines through their monopolising the use of them, something which the author observed. The author’s observations (figure six) also found that less muscular males moved from machine to machine more often, which also supports Andrews et al. (2005) idea that muscular men monopolise machines whilst less muscular men do not. This could be because they do not require as much time to train muscles as muscular men do.

The personal trainers also mentioned in their interviews that males spent the most amount of time in the chest and arms areas of the gym, supporting McCreary and Sasse (2000) who claimed that men know women prefer men with muscular chests and visible musculature. This was also supported by the author’s observations and self-mapping from participants such as Keith, Neil and Jason (figures seven, eight and nine). All three of these maps show that a significant amount of time is spent in the dumbbell and bench press area, which is categorised as both free weight, and chest and arms areas. The author’s research suggests that single males spend most their time

in these areas, whereas participants in a relationship such as Frank did not, further supporting the theory that men gain muscle to attract girls.

Use of space within gyms was also influenced by the atmosphere. Keith, Tom, Jason, Ricky and Neil all referred to the atmosphere or other clientele of the gym as the reason for choosing the gym they went to. Keith, the most muscular male, preferred a gym with other large males, whilst the others preferred gyms which were either quiet or did not have many muscular males. This could be due to intimidation, or people preferring homogenous gyms. Andrews et al. (2005) supported this, claiming that people will seek out gyms with an atmosphere they like and feel they fit into, giving the example of men changing gyms if they did not like the atmosphere, something Ricky actually did.

However, it should be noted that the atmosphere of a gym can change through time. Andrews et al. (2005) also suggested that gyms were places for anybody during the day and that they became places for more muscular males during the evening. A personal trainer supported this during an interview as he claimed that in the evening more “heavy lifters” arrived at the gym. This could be due to heavy lifters preferring the atmosphere of similar people, again supporting Andrews et al. theory that men choose gyms based on the atmosphere.

Conclusion

How do men view masculinity and do men attempt to gain muscle in order to acquire a masculine identity?

Nine of twelve interviewees claimed that they built muscle to create or enhance a masculine identity, with muscularity helping them achieve goals that they associate with masculinity. This supported Probert et al. (2007) and Wieggers (2004), who believed that men gained a muscular physique in order to have a masculine identity. Orzeck (2007) is also supported by this, as he claimed that the body is moulded to reflect personality. However, the two who claimed that building muscle merely enhances their masculine identity, and the three who claimed that their masculine identity was nothing to do with a muscular physique can be used to criticise Orzeck (2007), Wieggers (2004), and Prober et al. (2007), as they believed that their body did not reflect their identity or personality and merely influenced society’s view on them.

Five interviewees believed that attracting women was one masculine characteristic, with a muscular physique being another. Lionel and Keith also both claimed that

masculinity was socially constructed. This all supports De Visser et al. (2009), who mentioned strength and displaying heterosexuality as socially constructed aspects of masculinity.

Overall, it appears that males do gain muscle to acquire a masculine identity, or at least enhance it, and that men classify masculinity as whatever society deems it, with the current ideas of masculinity being the ideas of typical Western masculinity put forward by De Visser et al. (2009).

Do men attempt to gain muscle for functional or aesthetic reasons?

Six of the interviewees claimed that they gained muscle to attract females, supporting the theory put forward by McCreary and Sasse (2000) that men believe women prefer muscular males. Six interviewees did not mention females, but this could be because they did not wish to discuss a relatively personal subject, rather than them explicitly saying gaining muscle had nothing to do with females.

Woodward (1997) wrote about Bourdieu's theory of social capital, which received large amounts of support from interviewees, mentioning extrinsic rewards from society for having muscle, with every interviewee offering at least one way in which society treats muscular people better. Elias (also written about by Woodward 1997) similarly believed that some bodies were more highly valued by society, which was also supported by interviewees. For instance, Callum's belief that he would be more successful at a job interview if he was muscular.

Only two interviewees claimed that they gained muscle for sport, which appears to discredit the ideas of Steinfeldt et al. (2011), who found that many of their participants gained muscle for sport. However, Steinfeldt et al. (2011) conducted their research on only college athletes.

It would appear that most males appear to gain muscle due to extrinsic rewards from society, as suggested by Bourdieu and Elias, with every interviewee also mentioning improved appearance as a reason for gaining muscle, so the author concludes that these are the main two reasons for males gaining muscle.

To what extent are men influenced by the media or role models in wanting to gain muscle?

Eight interviewees mentioned sports stars as role models, supporting Smolak et al. (2005) who claimed that sports stars influence men in wanting to gain muscle. Tivers (2011) was supported by eleven interviewees who claimed that they were influenced by role models. As the participants younger than twenty-three mentioned role models, whilst the fifty-nine year old participant did not, Tivers (2011) could be elaborated upon suggesting that “younger” males may be more likely to have role models than older males.

Jackson (2001), who claimed magazines offered role models could be criticised however, as six interviewees claimed that they did not read magazines or view them as offering role models. With sport becoming increasingly prominent with more Premier League games being shown on television than 2001, and the Olympics still fresh in the memory of participants when interviews were conducted, it could be suggested that sports stars have become increasingly prominent as magazines have faded.

Overall, it appears that role models are still extremely relevant to men wanting to gain muscle, with sports stars being the most popular choice, replacing role models from other mediums from magazines which no longer appear as popular.

How do men interact with the space of the gym?

Salvatore and Marecek (2010) believed that less muscular males and females avoided areas of the gym where there were muscular males, due to intimidation. This was supported by Michael, who drew a map showing he did not go into such areas, as well as admitting his intimidation. However, no other interviewee mentioned this. This does not support Salvatore and Marecek, but the author did not interview females about their use of space, which could have produced data in support of Salvatore and Marecek.

Another theory by Salvatore and Marecek (2010) was supported by the author’s research. They believed that women would do more cardio-based exercise, and men would do more weight lifting-based exercise due to the gender perceptions around those exercises, which was supported by the data produced, with men doing more weight lifting, and women doing more cardio.

It appears that the use of space in gyms is influenced by social perceptions of space or exercises, and social factors such as intimidation. This suggests that if perceptions of exercises have changed since 2012/2013, then use of space in the gym may have also

changed. For example, a brand of “masculine” cardio involving weights called Crossfit has risen to prominence since the research was conducted.

In conclusion, all four research questions appear to have answers which are socially constructed. Whilst the research conducted produced answers for the research questions, it is entirely possible that, if the research was to be conducted today, different conclusions could be reached. This is because society and its attitudes may have changed, producing different opinions and emotions in the participants resulting in different answers.

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