Professional Female Bodybuilding: Self-Determination Theory Approach.

ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: Female professional bodybuilders have received a substantial amount of scholarly and media attention. However, investigations have largely been conducted from a pathologizing perspective. This exploratory research investigated the female bodybuilding community from a positive development perspective.

METHOD: Thematic analysis was applied to twenty-four publicly available online videos of female professional bodybuilders ranging in age from 29 to 49 years to understand the reasons why females take up the sport of bodybuilding, and to identify factors that contribute towards continued participation. Identified themes were framed within Self-Determination Theory.

FINDINGS: The findings indicate that pursuing bodybuilding can provide mechanisms that link the activity to psychological well-being by enhancing autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

CONCLUSION: It is a worthwhile endeavor for researchers to further examine the sport of female bodybuilding from a positive functioning perspective. Further research can provide a better understanding of how active engagement in bodybuilding can positively impact psychological health and subjective well-being.

PROCEUDRE

• Utilized and analyzed publicly available online videos.
• Video interviews were retrieved over a five day period (n=96) by searching Google and YouTube with the term “interview with professional female bodybuilder.”
• Interview met the following criteria: Contained the question, why did you become involved with competitive bodybuilding?
• Interviewee explicitly stated being a professional bodybuilder
• Interviews all took place indoors in a formal interview setting. Interviews were not included that were conducted outdoors, backstage at a bodybuilding competition, inside a gym, or broadcast on mainstream television.

FROM THE ORIGINAL SET OF OVER 90 VIDEOS, 24 INTERVIEWS BETWEEN 5 MINUTES AND 14 MINUTES IN LENGTH MET THESE CRITERIA AND FORMED THE DATA FOR THIS STUDY.

ANALYSIS AND THEMES

• Theoretical thematic analysis.
• Identified themes at a purely semantic level.
• Interpret the broader meaning within an existing theoretical framework.
• Tentative coding template was developed a priori.

PARTICIPANTS

24 female professional bodybuilders ranged in age from 29 to 49 years (M = 36.2, SD = 5.8). Nineteen of the sample were Caucasian and five African American, and all currently reside in the USA. Sixteen were born in the USA and eight in Europe.

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

The theory states that humans have three fundamental psychological needs that are found universally across different cultures, autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
• Autonomy: the freedom of choice. In effect, be the agent of one’s life.
• Competence, the need to feel confident in one’s ability.
• Relatedness: the need to have social connections that are close, whilst respecting autonomy and encouraging competence.

EXAMPLE QUOTES

[Video 8] “I used to be fat. In fact I was obese. I took up bodybuilding to lose weight. Now look.”

[Video 4] “I walked past the newsstand and saw Penny on the cover of a magazine. That was it, I started weight-training and from that moment I wanted to look just like her.”

[Video 3] “I love training. Even on vacation we train. People say why train when on vacation. Well why would I stop doing what I love? Right.”

[Video 20] “The fans, are the sweetest, sweetest people I have ever come across in my life.”


[Video 3] “I love training. Even on vacation we train. People say why train when on vacation. Well why would I stop doing what I love? Right.”

[Video 14] “I just love it, I feel so strong.”

CONCLUSION

✓ Participating in bodybuilding can provide mechanisms that link the activity to psychological well-being.
✓ Framing the data within a SDT framework offers some support for the notion that bodybuilding can enhance perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
✓ Worthwhile endeavor for researchers to examine the sport of female bodybuilding from a positive functioning perspective to recast behaviors and identities previously pathologized due to their gender nonconformity as potentially health beneficial.

REFERENCES