



**Big,** Bad & Stupid  
or  
**Big,** Good & Smart?

*A three-year participant observational field study  
of the male bodybuilder stereotype and its consequences*

**Roland S Persson**





Jönköping University Press, Sweden

---

© Roland S Persson 2004

Sättning: [www.ordforradet.nu](http://www.ordforradet.nu)

Tryckning: NRS Tryckeri AB

ISBN 91-974953-2-8



# Abstract

This research aims at exploring the male bodybuilder stereotype by establishing whether there indeed exists a stereotypical response pattern in being confronted with this type of athlete. If so, which is the content of this stereotype? Is there also a cross-cultural fit to such a pattern? The study is socio-biologically oriented and designed mainly as a participant-observation field study in varying Swedish settings over a period of three years. An international sample proper of bodybuilders ( $N = 22$ ) from four Western countries for comparison participated by means of a questionnaire derived from the observational data (average age  $M = 36.6$ ,  $SD = 6.9$ ; average weight  $M = 113.6$  kilos,  $SD = 12.4$  kilos and average height  $M = 177.6$  cm,  $SD = 3.7$  cm). The data were subjected to a content analysis focusing on categorising in accordance with socio-biological assumptions as well as by the responses' assumed intent and type. Results suggest a distinctive pattern to responses which, in addition, appear cross-culturally valid (the agreement index was .84). The male bodybuilder stereotype may be outlined as a series of dichotomous dimensions, which vary by emphasis in accordance with culture but apparently not in nature: 1) Someone to envy or someone to admire; 2) Someone to be afraid of or someone to make friends with; 3) Someone unintelligent or someone determined and skilled; 4) Someone to harass or someone to desire; and 5) Someone embarrassing or someone to be proud of. A sub-sample of Swedish participants only ( $n = 13$ ) is dealt with separately, since the Swedish research context appears to have several unique features. Possible implications of the study are discussed as well as future research.

---

**KEYWORDS:** Social Psychology, Sociology, Socio-Biology, Body Perception, Stereotyping, Prejudice, Marginalisation, Sub-cultures, Discrimination, Gender Studies, Masculinity, Bodybuilding, Insider research.



# Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my gratitude to Rainer Stratkotter, Canadian bio-social scientist whose insights and encouragement have been priceless. I also need to convey my gratitude to Magnus Branzén of *B & K Sports Magazine*, for assistance in spreading my questionnaire to Swedish bodybuilders as well as to the Swedish branch of the International Federation of Body Builders (IFBB/SKKF) and its judges Arne Persson and Jörgen Nilsson for showing an interest in the project and also helping to disseminate my questionnaire in the community of Swedish bodybuilders. I am also indebted to my learned colleagues Hans Albin Larsson and Mari-Ann Berg of Jönköping University Press for taking an interest in this work and for editorial suggestions as well as proof reading.

Others have helped too, foremost I am thankful to the participants from different parts of the world taking their time to answering my questions, sometimes conveying profound insights and sharing their considerable experience. Thank you!

Jönköping, Sweden, 4 October 2004

*Roland S Persson*

Associate Professor  
School of Education & Communication  
Jönköping University, Sweden

---

Welcome to Roland S Perssons cyberhome: [www.geocities.com/bodybuilder\\_se](http://www.geocities.com/bodybuilder_se)

# Index

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	9
What is bodybuilding? .....	11
Purpose, assumptions and constraints .....	14
A bio-socially oriented framework .....	14
Focusing on the male, not the female .....	15
A word on sport and drug use .....	17
Research questions .....	18
<b>2. Bias and insufficient facts: sub-cultures not interacting</b> .....	21
Previous research and literature .....	22
Abnormal behaviour .....	24
Culture-specific behaviour .....	24
Situation-specific behaviour .....	27
<b>3. Method</b> .....	31
Background, stimulus and context .....	32
Settings .....	34
The nature of the data and manner of analysis .....	34
Participants and safeguards of research quality .....	36
A note on ethics .....	44

<b>4. Results</b> .....	49
Response categories .....	49
The disassociative response .....	49
The associative responses .....	52
The offensive response .....	53
The provocative response .....	60
The potential danger response .....	61
<i>If you can't beat them, join them!</i> .....	64
The projective response .....	65
<i>Big, bad and stupid also</i> .....	67
The reactive formation response .....	68
The sexually oriented response .....	71
The admiration response .....	74
The Swedish sub-sample .....	79
The male bodybuilder stereotype .....	86
<b>5. General discussion</b> .....	89
Answering the research questions .....	90
Research implications and further study .....	93
The media, policy-making and the potential of discrimination .....	93
Personal prejudices affect research quality! .....	95
Enforced gender equality or increased tolerance and acceptance? .....	96
<b>References</b> .....	101
<b>Appendix I</b> .....	111



# I. Introduction

“I can certainly understand, that people in general think that Bodybuilding is disgusting. I think so too sometimes, when it is pursued in excess”, someone argues on an Internet-based Swedish General Discussion Forum (SDTS Forum, 2003). A second participant comments: “But it must not be very comfortable to look like that. How does he find clothes that fit? He must be very cold prancing around in such silly underwear”. “It is *all* disgusting”, a third individual chimes in, and yet another participant completes the responses to having seen a picture of the reigning Mr Olympia: champion bodybuilder Ronnie Coleman, posted on the forum, by saying: “He can go to Hell. Is this a disease or what? I mean there is also something called Anorexia right? How can anyone even *want* to look like that?”

In a discussion on current Swedish economy Klamberg (2003), then Deputy Chairman of Liberal Youth, likens Swedish economical policy to that of a “swollen bodybuilder on steroids.” Furthermore, a male columnist in a regional Swedish newspaper, reflecting on California’s then newly elected Governor: former bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger, comments that (Nilsson, 2003), “finally they got a Governor they deserve: an Austrian inarticulate bodybuilder. Don’t tell me God has no sense of humour!” Another Swedish columnist, female, reflects at length on male muscle building (Welin, 2004):

Relaxed in the city park yesterday, on a lawn. It was crowded with men, teens, boys, well, call yourselves what you will ... I noticed that all of you walked about as if carrying heavy buckets. You kept flexing your well-built, pumped-up and testosterone-loaded bodies ... I have to ask myself *why* do you indulge in this hype? ... Of course, it is beautiful with fit bodies. But I react [positively, only] if I meet a man with a “normal body” in the street; one who looks at me, more than if I meet a man who has bigger breasts than I have and looks as if he is carrying something heavy under each arm. Where is *Moderation Man*; who doesn’t feed on excess?!

Headlines in the daily press sometimes focus on bodybuilders also: “Muscles or brains?”, writes sports journalist Niclas Johansson (2001) in the sports section of one of the larger Swedish newspapers in reporting from an international Bodybuilding contest in Budapest, Hungary. He writes further: “The biggest, the best and the most handsome, some say. Pumped-up monsters with an infe-

rriority complex others argue. Clearly, the stars in the world of Bodybuilding cause a stir wherever they show up ... Why do [these monsters] even want to look like this? Are they attractive or are they, in fact, monsters? You be the judge.”

The quotes above are the result of a serendipitous search on the Internet demonstrating that there exists a fascination with male bodybuilders and their sport; an attraction, involuntary it seems, that many feel more or less compelled to express in public. Interestingly, this fascination is often expressed as dislike or disapproval. At least this appears to be the case in Sweden. I also searched a few other European media sites for comparison, but could not find the same press and media interest for bodybuilders and Bodybuilding. Nevertheless, it is likely that certain aspects of how people react to male bodybuilders are pervasive and cross-cultural. Canadian bodybuilder Claude Groulx (in Rosenthal, 2002), for example, comments in an interview that the most undesirable aspect of his sport is “dealing with the misguided perception that bodybuilders are stupid. I take offence to that stereotype.” Margery Eagan (2003), columnist for *The Boston Herald*, exemplifies Groulx’ apprehension as she somewhat sarcastically reflects on Arnold Schwarzenegger as the newly elected Governor of California: “Bodybuilders aren’t necessarily stupid either, I’m told, despite 2-plus hours a day staring at their sublime selves.” Such a remark is prejudiced at best, and almost begs the question how much time perchance Ms Eagan might need for her own make-up and to dress for work and other more festive events? The remark made by the columnist is invariably a derogatory value statement.

Meeting, seeing or interacting with a male bodybuilder obviously has an extraordinary impact. People in general seem curiously preoccupied with this kind of athlete. A simple comparison on Google search engine hits on the Internet shows that Bodybuilding is a sizeable social phenomenon, given that the Internet indeed reflects the real world (Table 1). Reactions, spontaneous or premeditated, favourable or disapproving, raise a number of interesting questions regarding the nature of and the possible reasons for these reactions to male bodybuilders. The key to understanding them would seem to hinge upon knowing the contents and dynamics of the male bodybuilder stereotype.

*Table 1. A comparison of hit frequencies on the Internet (www.google.com) between different sports and famous individuals as points of reference. Search was done on 23 June, 2004.*

SEARCH WORD	COMMENT	NUMBER OF HITS
Arnold Schwarzenegger	The most famous bodybuilder Actor; Entrepreneur Governor of California (2003–)	722.000
George Bush Jr.	U. S. President (2000–)	1.390.000
Brad Pitt	U. S. Actor	1.140.000
Emma Thompson	U. K. Actress	585.000
<b>Bodybuilding</b>		<b>2.890.000</b>
Curling	IOC sport	1.680.000
Tennis	IOC sport	25.000.000
Wrestling	IOC sport	9.390.000

## What is Bodybuilding?

The idea of men training for muscular size and strength is by no means new. Milos of Croton (600 B.C.) was, according to legend, an Olympic wrestler considered to be one of the strongest men in Ancient Greece. He is said to have applied progressive resistance training by lifting a growing calf daily. After four years Milos carried it the length of the Olympian stadium. His daily consumption of meat was recorded at approximately nine kilos (20 lbs) a day. However, the considerable interest in – not to say the more systematic social construction of the male muscular body as an ideal in Western society – has been traced by historians mainly to the Era of Enlightenment (Hersey, 1996; Mosse, 1996), whereas Bodybuilding came of age as The International Federation of Bodybuilders was founded in 1946. But until the 1970s as Austrian bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger emerged on the world stage, it is fair to say the Bodybuilding was mainly, though not exclusively, an American phenomenon and to some extent also part of “The American Dream” (Johansson, 1997).

Few have had as great an impact on any sport, or indeed an entire world in various ways, as Schwarzenegger. Who, irrespective of the many derogatory remarks made of him from everywhere, inevitably and by almost any definition must be regarded as a highly gifted individual. He knew better than most how to make the best of every opportunity (cf. Andrews, 2004). This has prompted

researchers Krasniewicz and Blitz (2002) to refer to him as a “great meme-machine”, where *memes* are defined as the basic units of culture, which are transmitted by imitation and shared in the form of cultural knowledge. They are the plans, instructions or blueprints for creating, sharing and dispersing what have been called “memorable units” that human beings feel compelled to pass on to others. The researchers write that: “Arnold Schwarzenegger is clearly a prototype for a number of concepts in our culture: fitness, power, strength, excellence, uniqueness, success, influence, positive action, violence and destruction among others. On radio, in television, at congressional hearings, in magazines and newspapers, in children’s videos and cartoons, public lectures, and court rooms, he helps categorize and construct our perceptions ... He helps define what can count as experience, what can be seen as valuable, what can be allowed as truthful, and what can be acceptable as real.” This observation has an immediate appeal. I cannot think of any specialised magazine devoted to Bodybuilding, for example, that does not also feature a column with “Arnold gossip”, although Schwarzenegger has not competed in the sport for many years.

Bodybuilding more specifically defined then, and in a contemporary fashion, is the sport of intentionally changing the human body by increase in muscle mass through systematic and progressive weight training; by constructing shape and by applying definition. Constructing shape means to create a certain aesthetic symmetry considered ideal at the time by giving priority to developing certain groups of muscle more than others, thus prompting increased size by muscular adaptation. Applying definition means to remove enough subcutaneous body fat to the extent that the fascia of the muscle becomes apparent, which makes individual muscle groups visible to the eye. This occurs at approximately 5–6 % of body fat, which should be compared to the body fat level of a non-bodybuilding average male: 10–25 % (Whitney & Rolfes, 1996); a range considered clinically normal. A body fat level at 5–6 % is also the lowest recommended level for male athletes without endangering their health (Stone, 1994).

The competitive element of the sport consists of a free and time-limited presentation to music in which the athlete presents himself in a way he feels best shows his strengths as a bodybuilder. In addition, there are a variety of standardised comparisons between all competing athletes, who are scored on pre-determined criteria by an adjudication panel (see IFBB, 2001). The athlete best fulfilling these criteria as based on judges’ submitted scores wins.

There is, in fact, no official definition of the sport. Not even its leading and internationally most widely spread organisation: The International Federation

of Bodybuilders (IFBB), outlines an exact definition. This is a problem considering its long-standing efforts to be fully recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IFBB, 2003). The formalised definition provided here is therefore mine.

It is important definition-wise, I think, to make a distinction between Bodybuilding as an increasingly more science-based sport with very knowledgeable athletes and the “Bodybuilding Lifestyle” being more a part of the American Dream (see, for example, Matzer Rose, 2001). In my opinion the two are not necessarily the same.

A reasonable question is to also ask: who is “formally” a bodybuilder? Any gym-goer or the competitors of the sport only? This is hotly debated amongst the bodybuilders themselves. Klein (1993) makes the correct observation that there is usually a social divide between the competing and the non-competing bodybuilders. Often only the competitors are seen as “real” bodybuilders. There is also a division between bodybuilders and the athletes of Athletic Fitness, which is somewhat problematic. Athletic Fitness contains more elements than Bodybuilding; a sort of decathlon including aspects of Bodybuilding also. Athletes are in addition to physique comparisons also tried for strength and stamina. In my experience, bodybuilders often regard Athletic Fitness athletes as “bodybuilders-to-be” and that their sport is not really a unique sport on its own terms. This is of course a sensitive issue to Athletic Fitness athletes. This notion, however, may have some merit nevertheless if considering that it is not uncommon for such athletes to eventually compete as bodybuilders instead. Some even do both. I have often heard Athletic Fitness contestants say they are not yet “big enough” to compete in Bodybuilding proper. So, for the time being they “settle with Athletic Fitness”. Judges of Athletic Fitness, especially for women athletes, also seem to have apparent problems with dividing between that which is typical for Athletic Fitness and that which is typical for Bodybuilding. It is stipulated that they must deduct points from fitness athletes who “look too much like bodybuilders” (IFBB, 2001), by which is meant vascularity and definition. This is surely a vague criterion, since it does not consider naturally occurring leanness. The logic of this stipulation suggests that an untrained individual who happens to be extraordinarily lean and vascular anyway, could also be considered to be a “bodybuilder”!

Therefore, a bodybuilder, by logical necessity and definition, is simply one who “builds his or her body” with a view to increase muscle mass, apply definition and construct shape irrespective of whether he competes or not. However,

to complicate the matter further, we do not recognise a bodybuilder in everyday life until they have attained a certain *perceived* height and lean muscle mass ratio. There is a limit apparently at having achieved about 20 % more muscle mass than one's height beyond one metre. This will be discussed further below. It has considerable significance for the present study.

### **Purpose, assumptions and constraints**

The main aim of this study was to chart the male bodybuilder stereotype by investigating response patterns as individuals in a variety of settings were exposed to a male bodybuilder. It was assumed that responses would vary due to several socially and biologically determined factors.

### **A bio-socially oriented framework**

To argue that a response is socially constructed is by no means controversial. Such learning is an obvious and empirically verifiable part of the socialisation processes. Since cultures differ as to norms and traditions, the content of the socialisation process will also vary from one culture to another, even if the nature of the learning process is much the same everywhere.

However, to argue that a response is *biologically* determined is surprisingly controversial in the Social Sciences (see for example the so-called Bell Curve Controversy: Herrnstein & Murray, 1996). By biological I mean sources of variation that are genetically pre-programmed by evolution (cf. Sternberg, 1993). In contrast, most social constructivists would argue "non-essentialism". As Burr (1997) puts it: "Since the social world, including ourselves as people, is the product of social processes, it follows that there cannot be any given determined nature to the world or people. There are no 'essences' inside things or people, that make them what they are" (p. 5). This statement is not tenable! Social constructivism may well be *one* way of understanding cultural variation and the development of certain aspects of social behaviour, but we cannot ignore our biological heritage and the dynamics of evolutionary adaptation (Barrett, Dunbar & Lycett, 2002. Kenrick & Trost, 1993; Wilson, 2000). This research, therefore, is inspired by the notion that first impressions tend to yield reactions which follow a distinctive pattern of dominant dimensions, namely Evaluative, Potency and Activity (cf. Pierce *et al.*, 2003). This notion is derived from the work on perceived meaning as expressed by *semantic differentials* by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957), and has an inevitable socio-biological

appeal. The understanding is that reaction patterns to stimuli are “pre-wired” by evolution, which of course does not exclude the influence of social learning, but includes the possibility of “essential impact” also. That is, the biological foundation for behaviour is part of the whole. Hence, if searching for reactions (ie. perceived meaning in the semantic differential sense) we should also expect there is a reaction dimension, presumably dichotomous and expressing opposites.

While biological determinants for a variety of human behaviours may well be complex and not yet fully understood, it is foolishness to underplay their inescapable reality. We may perhaps not be its predetermined drones, but we cannot ignore our genetic blueprints. Testosterone, for example, decides the cognitive architecture of the brain (Halpern, 1992) ; it usually triggers sexual development in either a male or female direction, and it has been suggested to be responsible for the development and structures of the entire human social reality (Kemper, 1990). Freund (1988) even suggests we need to bring “society into the body”, and align our understanding of societal processes with how the body works and functions.

Failing to do so, he argues, would lead to blind Social Constructivism that exaggerates the processes of society and mentality without seeing some of the real processes governing the interplay between society and the body. It is essential, therefore, “that we are aware of the more primitive action and reaction patterns that determine our behaviour, and to not pretend as if they did not exist. It is especially in the area of social behaviour that we are less free to act than we generally assume” (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989, p. 3).

So, the epistemological basis of this study is one of a socio-biological reality, in which interplay between genetics (forwarded to us by evolution), biochemical processes (such as hormones and neurotransmitters) and the adaptive behavioural space (influenced by social learning) takes place. The impact of these three vary between individuals.

### **Focusing on the male, not the female**

This is a study of the *male* bodybuilder stereotype and its response pattern. I argue that Bodybuilding is instrumental in enhancing or indeed changing aspects of human behaviour and appearance afforded by the *biological* sex. By this I mean, for example, that bodybuilding men strengthen their inherent biological potential into making them even more different than women. They become *hypermasculine* in a physiological sense. It has interestingly been pro-

posed that men's increasing need for this is related to women's increasing social ascendancy (Gillett & White, 1992). One might perhaps argue that the lesser the differences are between men and women in society, potentially also the greater the psychological need of the male to assert his masculinity. Failing to achieve such assertion, it has been observed, may lead to distress or a "gender role strain" as Pleck (1995) terms it. In other words, men appear to be distressed if they somehow cannot perceive themselves as being clearly different from women.

Men usually have a greater percentage of lean muscle mass than do women. One reason for this is that men's and women's hormonal ratios are different (Elliot & Goldberg, 2000). Men's much higher testosterone level (appr. 600 ng/ml for an adult man and 0.25–0.35 ng/ml for an adult woman) favours the development of a larger percentage of lean muscle tissue in men. Women's hormonal set-up also entails a higher degree of body fat as compared to men. A normal weight man carries between 10–25 % of body fat, whereas for a normal weight woman the relative weight of body fat is 18–32% (Whitney & Rolfes, 1996). Note also that for a women to keep the reproduction cycle intact a body fat level of 17–22 % appears necessary (Burke, 1994). It could be argued therefore, on biological bases, that while men devote themselves to Bodybuilding (or similar sports which relies mainly on physical strength and muscle size) they develop from masculinity towards hypermasculinity. Women, on the other hand, deciding to pursue these sports also rather develop from various degrees of femininity towards masculinity, especially so if they also decide to enhance this development with the use of Anabolic-Androgen Steroids (AAS), in which case they actually become physiologically "transgendered". These will literally prompt them to develop physiologically and irreversibly into males (Elliot & Goldberg, 2000). The term "superwomen" has been proposed for the end result of this development (Fisher, 1997), but I consider this a misnomer. It may well be that this is the way some would construe their identity in relation to a pursuit of Bodybuilding. But it is not correct on biological grounds to use the term superwoman if by this is meant "hyperfeminine" in analogy to men and Bodybuilding.

Generally, I find it very difficult to by-pass the biological foundations of gender, even though phenotypes vary greatly also within sexes. Such a stance, however, has not gone unnoticed and left without being criticised by feminist research. Gill (1994), for example, argues for a feminist bio-psychosocial perspective on women's sport and exercise. Lipsitz Bem (1993), however, well

known for her many years of research on the nature of psychological gender, understands biological essentialism as yet another way of perpetuating undue male hegemony. In my view, this makes her claim political rather than science-based. It is interesting to note that in studying six professional female bodybuilders Fisher (1997) found that for three of them, to be a bodybuilder ranked higher than being a woman, although all six also found it difficult at some level to separate their sport from the female identity. This suggests perhaps a certain conflict between “body gender” (my body looks typically masculine) and psychological gender (but I feel like a woman) (cf. Hassler, 1990). In addition, female bodybuilders are usually perceived differently than other women, which could of course contribute to a possible gender identity conflict. White (2004) found that women bodybuilders are viewed as having more masculine and fewer feminine interests. They are less likely to be good mothers, and are seen as less intelligent, less socially popular and less and attractive than other women.

One reason, therefore, for limiting this study to the male bodybuilder stereotype is that it is feasible to assume that both motives for taking up a sport like Bodybuilding and the way people respond to meeting, seeing or interacting with one, would differ whether the bodybuilder is a male or a female (cf. Franck, 1984; Freeman, 1988; Moore, 1997). Also, the design of the study and its framework did not allow for investigating the female bodybuilder stereotype.

### **A word on sport and drug use**

In this study I do not intend to address the issue of ergogenical agents, most of which are listed by the International Olympic Committee as prohibited because of their performance enhancing effects. Policies, the legal and medical issues of sports and drug use are major fields of study in their own right and not fully relevant for this study. However, there may exist a relationship between particularly a nation's stated policies, legal issues in sports and certain social behaviours, which is why I need to bring to attention the problem of bias in relation to press and media coverage of sport events in general and in relation to Bodybuilding and bodybuilders in particular.

It is my observation that the focus on athletes' drug use in media and literature is clearly skewed in one direction. They tend to emphasise drug use in power sports (of which Bodybuilding is one) and underestimate, or even ignore, their use in all other sports. In spite of the fact that we know, with some degree of certainty, that illicit drug use is widely spread amongst virtually *all*

sports – from Track and Field, Tennis, Swimming and Basketball to Weight Lifting, Power Lifting and Bodybuilding (see Yesalis *et al.*, 2000 for an overview, but see also the astounding compilation of facts regarding performance enhancement and the deception of athletes and an entire world revealed as STASI Archives in the former German Democratic Republic were made public after the fall of the Berlin Wall: Berendonck, 1991). There have been several scandals reported regarding Olympic athletes when testing has been tampered with officially, and on many levels in the hierarchy far above the athletes themselves at that (Ferstle, 2000). But such incidents tend to be quickly forgotten. Track and Field athletes, for example, are rarely portrayed in the media as “drug users” whereas bodybuilders invariably are.

To further clarify this common bias, and the double standard often being part of it, it is worth noting how a standard sponsor contract looks like. Some clauses vary needless to say from one sponsor to another, and from one athlete and to another, but there will be one or several clauses focusing illicit drug use as defined by the IOC. The following is a quote from such a contract presented to myself by a well-respected enterprise related to Bodybuilding:

... If NN is found to be tested positive for drug use, in breach of IOC rules on doping, in breach of any other agreed-upon stipulation contained in this contract, or otherwise causes damage to the Company, the Company has the right to terminate this contract immediately and cancel any further association with the contract holder...

Note how it is written. The contract does not actually argue against drug use as you might suspect. The sponsored athlete is in trouble *only* if it somehow becomes public knowledge that he or she is using IOC-prohibited substances!

So, while this is a study of the male bodybuilder stereotype, and not one of drug use in Bodybuilding, there is a general sentiment present in society, which is likely to have some impact on response patterns to the male bodybuilder.

## Research questions

The research questions then are as follow:

- 1) Does there exist a stereotypical response pattern in being confronted with a male bodybuilder?;
- 2) which is the likely content of such a stereotype? and
- 3) is there a cross-cultural fit to such a response pattern?



Note that in this study I am inclined to understand a stereotype as a collective norm, which is taught more or less implicitly and governs individual behaviour unaware (cf. Stangor & Schaller, 1996). Given the socio-biological orientation of the study, however, a stereotype must also include behaviours that are to some extent beyond learning, namely behaviours prompted by genetic pre-programming such as behaviours resulting from “the animal passions”, to use Vincent’s (1990) term: desire, pleasure and pain, hunger and thirst, love, sex and power.

The relevance of these questions and their answers may also potentially contribute important aspects of gender role identity in the Western World and the foundations for policy-making regarding equal rights between the sexes.



## 2. Bias and insufficient facts: sub-cultures not interacting

Bodybuilding has been focused by media researchers, sociologists, anthropologists, gender scholars, physiologists, sports scientists and more lately also by psychiatrists. Our fascination with the unique or the extreme is by no means limited to the general population. It is often also true of scientists and their research (Sternberg, 1989). Too often, perhaps, the temptation is to go for the sensational rather than the neutral and not as glamorous and marketable a stance, which Science is supposedly based on. Partly depending on where reports come from efforts to research Bodybuilding are often either plagued by personal value-laden biases or haunted by interpretational shortcomings due to limited knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. I will provide examples of this in the following. This situation, however, leaves the traditional positioning of a new study into the already existing body of knowledge with a delicate dilemma. If previous research is seen as somewhat dubious, one has to ask why. It is rare that scholars compromise their scientific creed intentionally, so presumably the explanation needs to be sought elsewhere.

I am convinced the problem in most cases is fairly straightforward and that it has to do with sub-cultural constraints and simple group dynamics. Scholars of cultural dynamics and differences would term the problem *ethnocentrism*, which could be defined as “to use our own culture as the standard and judge other cultures by the extent ‘they meet the standard’ ” (Triandis, 1990).

In order to make sense of previous research, therefore, it is necessary to put the literature through a cultural analysis to demonstrate how and why different fields of study and their respective scholars often represent different sub-cultures. And also to show that ethnocentrism is indeed an issue not only between cultures and nations, but between academic disciplines as well. A worse case scenario is when a subculture (here that of a certain science or discipline) does not essentially understand what participants representative of the phenomenon of study are saying (and presumably as a group making up another sub-culture).

The number of larger investigations into Bodybuilding is relatively limited, I account for these in the following.

## Previous research and literature

It is not uncommon that athletes function and behave in ways that not only fascinate non-athletes but at times also make people wonder whether they are perhaps out of their minds. They train so much and hard that people in general marvel. Athletes may say no to an abundance of spirited nightlife and parties because they prioritise sleep and habits more conducive to achieving well in their chosen sport. They may also have eating habits unlike anything most people have ever considered. The bodybuilder is probably the most obvious example, and by virtue of being extreme bodybuilders are potentially understood as somehow deviant.

The case of “Muscle Dysmorphia” (also termed “Bigorexia”) amongst bodybuilders is one recent example of this (Pope *et al.*, 1997). The term, somewhat simplified, is defined as a preoccupation with becoming physically large. Suffice to say here, that a set objective to increase lean muscle weight beyond a more or less tacit “norm” of what is regarded as acceptable is looked upon as being everything but normal. This is what one Harvard University-based research team says: “Men with Muscle Dysmorphia often risk physical self-destruction. Frequently [bodybuilders] persist in compulsive exercising despite pain and injuries, or continue on ultra low-fat, high-protein diets even when they are desperately hungry” (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000. p. 11). These researchers focus on extreme training as being somehow wrong, and forget – or perhaps choose to ignore – that a highly skilled individual in any human pursuit has a similar history of “obsession”. It goes for outstanding wrestlers, power lifters, martial artists, chess players, singers, negotiators, medical doctors, any artist and so on also, not to mention gifted scientists (see, for example, Ericsson & Smith, 1991 and Howe, 1990). In addition, the researchers state that bodybuilders favour a low-fat, high protein diet, when getting into shape. This is maybe the case with *some* bodybuilders, but by no means with all. The recommended ratio between the different macronutrients of carbohydrates, fats and proteins in a diet or eating plan differs substantially from one nutrition expert to another and between competing athletes as well. Pope and his associates may be well-intending in their effort, but their errors (by pure mistakes or over-generalisations) give away the fact that they obviously do not actually know significant aspects of the group of individuals they study. More seriously, however, is that on such an insufficient basis they even suggest a psychiatric diagnosis for this group of “extreme” individuals!

Compare what the Harvard research team say with what Arnold Schwarzenegger writes, being one of the foremost proponents of Bodybuilding, and no

doubt the most famous and successful one at that (Schwarzenegger/Dobbins, 1998):

Whenever you hear of anyone performing unbelievable feats – Tiger Woods in golf, Michael Jordan in basketball, Michael Johnson in track, Herman Maier in skiing, and so many more athletes – it is because of the power of their minds, not just technical, mechanical skill. And you can be sure you will never perform at that level unless you can match that inner drive as well as their physical abilities ... People ... can endure the rigors of Navy Seal training. They can cross vast deserts, dogsled across arctic wastes, climb Mount Everest, swim the English Channel, bicycle around the world, lift incredible amounts of weight. They perform in spite of terrible pain, despite being ill, no matter the odds or the obstacles (p. 229).

It is obvious from what the researchers argue, in comparison to what Schwarzenegger claims, that they fail to grasp the prerequisites of outstanding achievement in sports. As a result claims made are vague at best, perhaps even faulty. That is not to say though, that the team has not actually discovered that there sometimes are phenomena specific to a particular sport in need of studying. The problem here is likely to be, that there is a major breach in communication between research team and participants, and therefore also of understanding between two sub-cultures.

Athletes and scientists more often than not have different values, understandings, and ways of expressing themselves. In the case presented above, I doubt that the research team had much knowledge about Bodybuilding in general and I suspect that bodybuilders part-taking in their research to some extent also failed (or refused) to communicate *their* experiences to the researchers, convinced “they would not understand anyway”. It has been suggested, particularly in reference to athletes, that even if volunteering to participate in various studies, they may still be reluctant to disclose certain aspects of their athletic pursuit. Needless to say, this diminishes the reliability and validity of research involving athletes’ personal and private information (Yesalis, *et al.*, 2000).

Therefore, in analysing the research literature in the current field of study with respect to sub-cultural differences, a distinction needed to be made between the notions of *abnormal behaviour*, *culture-specific behaviour* and *situation-based behaviour*. This distinction is necessary to understand in part why some aspects of Bodybuilding might be considered strange, extreme or even disordered by some but perfectly normal and even desirable to others.

## Abnormal behaviour

*Abnormal behaviour* signifies something pathological; that is, a *disabling* behaviour showing identifiable patterns extending over time. It is surprisingly difficult to define psychological pathology accurately, and it is a matter of an ongoing and often heated debate over what qualifies as disordered (or pathological) behaviour and not (Roth & Kroll, 1987; Szasz, 1960). However, it is more or less agreed at present, that a psychological disorder is a syndrome. It consists of specific patterns of behaviours, which are related to distress, feeling a significant loss of freedom, not functioning as usual in everyday-life, and pose an increased risk of suffering pain or disability (DSM IV). Generally, an individual suffering from such disorders needs professional help.

## Culture-specific behaviours

Behaviours typical of a certain culture, perhaps even signifying that culture, will be termed culture-specific. Culture is best defined as a relatively organised system of shared meanings (Smith & Bond, 1998). Anthropologists have found, for example, that infanticide is permissible amongst the Yanomami tribe of the Amazonian jungle during certain circumstances (Chagnon, 1976). This would be unthinkable behaviour in most other cultures, and would be regarded as extreme criminal behaviour. But to the Yanomami it is understood as regretful, though sometimes necessary for the sake of the tribe's survival. Also, in terms of eating, certain traditions tend to follow existential belief systems where the same foods are considered acceptable in one faith and abominable in another (Rozin, 1996).

Note that the behaviour of one culture will often be subject to evaluation and often also the prejudice of the other as the two cultures interact. Ethnocentric thought patterns are forceful and inevitable in all societal groups! That is, we usually consider ourselves belonging to the "better group" or "the more civilised, advanced, and progressive culture", and from that taken-for-granted perspective other cultures or groups are compared and evaluated in various ways (Brewer & Campbell, 1976).

There is differentiation within a culture too. A society consists of a large variety of sub-cultures held together by shared traditions, pursuits, goals, ideals, values, dress codes and so on. Members of a certain sub-culture tend to think along similar lines, act and dress in much the same way. They like and dislike largely the same things. Any particular profession or sport could well be understood as a sub-culture, and so could scientific disciplines or schools of thought.

There is a shared identity in such groups of individuals; often with a particular jargon or vocabulary, which is well known to its members but not necessarily known and understood outside of it. Note that competition between sub-cultures in sports does not necessarily lead to the “strengthening of character and understanding between nations and cultures”, which is more or less the philosophical foundation of the Olympic Games. It may well lead to hostility instead (eg. Berkowitz, 1973). Just as between large national cultures delimited by a language or a specific geographical area, the athletes of a certain sport may regard themselves as proponents of the “the more prestigious, skilled, and appealing sport” or “the best team” quite irrespective of scores and wins! The same is often true also between academic disciplines or different groups within an academic discipline. The group dynamics of the academic world has been brilliantly charted by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984). How we respond to and behave in different groups, large or small, is simply a matter of fairly universal group dynamics.

Alan M. Klein (1993) of Northeastern University, who has spent a great deal of time studying bodybuilders, somewhat derogatory defines Bodybuilding as a sub-culture in which “the men and women ... are in some ways consciously the creators of their world, but for the most part their culture is formed unintentionally. What they wear, what they believe, and the way they act are all mythologized in the pages of Bodybuilding magazines” (pp. 29–30). Klein’s study of Bodybuilding is a perfect example of the point I am making on culture-specific behaviour. He also argues, that “Bodybuilding is very much a sport phenomenon whose roots lie in intrapsychological conflict,” (p. 110) and that “[my] data strongly point to the widespread (albeit not universal) feeling among males at Olympic Gym that they are psychologically insignificant. The construction of a large imposing looking physique is somehow (directly or indirectly) an attempt to overcome such feelings. The shocked reaction of the public is almost as good as looks of admiration” (p. 203).

Klein studied 25 male elite bodybuilders confined to a few well-known California gyms, in the study lumped together and called “Olympia Gym”. Klein’s research seems to point towards the evaluating clash of different sub-cultures, rather than to demonstrate the traditionally neutral stance of observational (or any) research effort. Bodybuilding behaviour appears very exotic to Klein and also to many others who have focused on Bodybuilding as a societal phenomenon (eg. Luciano, 2001; Moore, 1997; Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000). Klein, however, even argues that Bodybuilding is bordering on being pathological.

Canadian researchers Caroline Davis and Lori Scott-Robertson of York University go one step further and do indeed term several aspects of Bodybuilding as being pathological. They argue that male bodybuilders show much the same behaviour as do female patients suffering from Anorexia Nervosa. One studied group of male bodybuilders and another of women suffering from Anorexia were both found to be more obsessive, perfectionistic, anhedonic (ie. having problems experiencing pleasure), and pathologically narcissistic (among other things to be blatantly exhibitionistic and craving the approval of others), than the general population. The researchers further suggest that while anorectics generally have low Self-esteem, they unexpectedly found that bodybuilders have high Self-esteem. This, however, is explained by the fact that while both groups scored high also on Narcissicism, the bodybuilders try to compensate their alleged intra-personal vulnerability – which according to the research motivated them to take on Bodybuilding in the first place – with size and by taking on the appearance of high Self-esteem (Davis & Scott-Robertson, 2000).

While this study appears on the surface to have been done according to the rules of acceptable research practice, it fails to appreciate one very important aspect threatening its validity. Researchers take behaviours in the sport of Bodybuilding, perfectly accepted by bodybuilders as normal, and uncritically term them “excessive” and “maladaptive” in comparison with other groups, who know very little or nothing of bodybuilders and Bodybuilding. They argue in a sense that it is unfair that society considers thinness-seeking women as “disordered” but not men, who seek to be more muscular: “...We view the pursuit of excessive thinness in women [as disordered, but] extreme muscle building is not viewed as a psychiatric disorder despite potentially injurious dietary exercise, and drug practices that are required to achieve this state ... On the contrary, the competitively successful bodybuilder is mostly glorified in the media as the epitome of health, fitness, and sex appeal. He is the mythical Adonis personified” (p. 35). This statement is normative and exemplifies perfectly the clash between culture-specific behaviours at its worse, namely when ignorance leads to prejudice. In addition, the two researchers are also not correct when saying that bodybuilders are glorified in the media. Bodybuilders tend to be stereotyped by media (see a few examples above as I introduce this study). The content of this stereotype is very often negative; even derogatory, rather than glorifying.

It would seem that these researchers hold personal grudges against bodybuilders. What they write can hardly be characterised as anything else than

prejudice in an ethnocentric sense. Interestingly they do recognise there is a cultural issue at stake here involving different values and perspectives, but they fall short of realising that they, too, represent certain values and perspectives. On this basis the study could well be considered invalid and meaningless.

The same problem seems to undermine Klein's (1993) much more comprehensive study at Olympia Gym. To a bodybuilder most of the behaviours that he observed and documented are, by and large, common everyday behaviour. That which is normal or "abnormal", therefore, easily becomes a matter of values and ideals. General social acceptance is an important variable in concluding whether or not something is deemed "normal" or not – for good and for worse (Wootton, 1959).

### **Situation-specific behaviour**

Situation-specific behaviour in this context is likely to be more or less extreme if viewed by someone belonging to another sub-culture, since it is tied to the demands of particular tasks or events of another sub-culture. Extreme behaviour is prompted by the demands of a specific situation or event within a culture or a sub-culture. It is probably unanticipated at first. But it may over time establish a recurring pattern which an individual, or indeed an entire sub-culture, begins to see as signifying the sport or group of individuals in much the same situation. For example, it is likely that individuals who have a personality prone to taking risks – so-called sensation seekers – would be more disposed towards making a habit of facing extreme situations regularly (Zuckerman, 1994). Sensation-seekers are well represented in sports, though it is not clear whether it is the actual risk-taking, the competitiveness, or the perfecting of skills that are the most attractive to these athletes. If, in addition, the extreme behaviour is performed and preferred by a very successful individual, other males especially are prone to emulate certain aspects of their "hero's" strategies or behaviours (Smith, 1976; Bredemeier *et al.*, 1986; Van der Velden, 1986).

It is not difficult to see how certain eating habits, unique approaches to training and so on, could be elevated to almost cult status in a certain sport. When particularly power sport athletes and bodybuilders devise eating and dieting regimens, these do usually not signify the fact that the measures taken are prompted by psychological or physiological disorders and should be looked upon as "abnormal". But, in comparison to most other groups in modern society their training, eating, and dieting, occasionally appear extreme. Athletes have to be able to comply with the demands of successfully pursuing their sport. This is

not to say, of course, that extreme eating, dieting or any other extreme, but situation-specific, behaviours are always conducive to athletes' health and safety. But they tend to be logical and intentional and serve a certain purpose in a specific context.

The point I am making is that as soon as a habit, a tradition, a particular procedure, known to work in a certain situation, is too different from those in groups other than your own, they are almost automatically understood as "abnormal". The principle of ethnocentric prejudice is that "they do not do as we do (or as we say is best), therefore they are strange (or abnormal)".

One account of Bodybuilding, though not a study but rather a sometimes astute journalistic effort of outlining one bodybuilder's own experience, is worth mentioning here also. Not only because it has been much cited, but because it is an account of an individual who decides "to change sides" from being in favour of Bodybuilding to becoming its adversary.

As a young man, being a graduate of Oxford University and the son of two Professors of English, next in line to take up the academic mantle and carry the family tradition on, Sam Wilson Fussel (1991) moved to New York City to study. But he soon finds himself becoming more and more interested in Bodybuilding rather than in American Literature – his chosen field of academic study. His autobiographical book is an account of his experiences from having been an academic, to becoming a competitive bodybuilder. Then abandoning Bodybuilding with considerable distaste returning again to academia: "I became a bodybuilder to become a caricature. The inflated cartoon I became relieved me from the responsibility of being human ... as painful and humiliating it is to be human being subhuman or superhuman is far worse". (p. 249). This is a remarkable statement because it virtually outlines Bodybuilding as almost a kind of affliction. The entire account demonstrates clearly how the original interest becomes increasingly construed as a societal malady being inflicted upon Wilson Fussel; and not only upon the author but on his bodybuilding friends as well.

In the context of my own study I find Wilson Fussel's biographical account very interesting. He represents what might be called "The Prodigious Son Effect": He came from a settled and comfortable background where his potentially brilliant future was more or less set. But he rebelled. The craving for adventure lead him "astray", which is how his immediate social context viewed his choices in life. But in the end the prodigious son returns, regrets his way-

ward choices and paradoxically denounces everything that had previously provided him with satisfaction – at least for a while. In other words, his experiences were systematically reconstrued for a better fit into the social context to which he returned.

This is of course not unique to Sam Wilson Fussel. It is common enough amongst bodybuilders, however, to raise the suspicion that there is more at stake than simply discovering that a certain interest or lifestyle turned out to be less than suitable for a certain individual. Rather than recognising this fact, leave it behind and do something else, the reaction against their former pursuits is very potent and above all it is reacted to *in public*. Sam Wilson Fussel wrote a book, others denounced their formerly “wayward existence” differently. Swedish former bodybuilder Lance Gille went through much the same process (Christi, 1993). He did not write a biography, but he took upon himself to visit schools and community assembly halls to lecture on his experiences and warn everyone else from doing the same mistakes he felt that he had done.

Note that while these argue that their pursuit of Bodybuilding as such, or certain aspects of the sport, destroyed their lives, there are accounts also of the very opposite, where Bodybuilding is construed as major contributor to life quality and success (eg. Preston, undated; Schwarzenegger/Hall, 1993; Wheeler & Pearlman, 2003)

Finally, in this overview of literature and research focusing on Bodybuilding and bodybuilders a longitudinal study by Johansson (1996; 1997) needs to be mentioned. He and his associates also trained in a variety of gyms twice a week, to observe and later also to interview a number of individuals in the gyms. Unlike the better known study of Klein (1993), however, Johansson remains a sound observer with the intent on understanding “the gym not only as a place for physical training, but also one construing gender identities” (p. 12). It is to my knowledge the only major behavioural study of Bodybuilding as a cultural phenomenon, which does not fall prey to a variety of unqualified judgements and conclusions.



### 3. Method

The current study could be construed in a sense as “critical incident” research: an unanticipated event not possible to foresee. In order to make some sense of an incident, it has to be studied as it occurs and on its own terms. There are few opportunities to control variables at the time of the event, and data are gathered at the discretion of serendipity.

To study the male bodybuilder stereotype and its response patterns is a serendipitous endeavour. Where does one look for response patterns and how can one collect data that would make sense? A completely controlled situation in a laboratory would weaken response reliability: are they contrived and perhaps more prompted by anticipation than by the stimuli presented to participants by the investigator? A field setting is probably better in which everyday social encounters and interactions take place (Burgess, 1984). It is certainly more likely that reactions to any particular stimuli introduced by a researcher would prompt reactions that are spontaneous and non-contrived, and therefore also scientifically more valid and descriptive of whichever social phenomenon is under study. This “Candid Camera Principle” (Funt, 1952), however, is interestingly more in use by the media entertainment industry than by researchers. Media condones as pure entertainment to present people’s reactions to often absurd behaviours acted out on purpose by members of the production crew or actors. However, research ethics would have problems with this, since there is no potential and societal benefit other than the entertainment sought. In addition, reactions are often sought by intentionally confusing, intimidating, frightening or even disgusting unsuspecting passers-by. Even if most of us laugh enthusiastically at the antics of our fellow-humans in situations like these as conveyed on TV worldwide by Allan Funt (1994) and his associates, the situation as such: in various ways offensive behaviour followed by a dramatic reaction, would nevertheless be more or less unthinkable as research out of scientists’ sworn respect for human integrity and dignity.

But to be a participant observer, however, making yourself the stimulus to which individuals react whilst also being part of the setting’s daily life would solve this ethical dilemma. To view a group of passers-by in hiding, premeditated interventions by social manipulation for the sake of entertainment is very

different from being an “insider”. The participant observer stance is rather to be part of and try to “melt in”; as succinctly defined by Becker (1958):

The participant observer fathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organization he studies. He watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers the interpretations of the events he has observed” (p. 652).

Observation in a “natural context” is also considered the main methodological tool for studying human behaviour in relation to its possible biological determinants (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989).

In this specific study, however, this effort proved to be not an easy task. I did not anticipate that reactions to a male bodybuilder at times would be so strong. This will be further discussed below. There is a need to also focus on research ethics not only involving what possible direct impact a research effort has on participants but also at what cost to the researcher!

However, the methodological frame for the current study is “insider research” by participant observation of response patterns in a natural context, their nature rather than their frequency, and thereby to provide critical incidence data.

## **Background, stimulus and context**

I have been active in Bodybuilding myself for many years and have held an IFBB Personal Trainer’s License since 1987. When I first set foot in a gym at age 23, it was something I had always wanted to do. Even from the start I noticed that the word “gym” had social potency, and being associated with one, irrespective of how I looked at the time, evoked a degree of respect in some and suspicion in others. This was entirely unanticipated. As far as I know, and I have given this much thought over the years, I did not seek out a suitable gym because I felt somehow inadequate. I simply felt attracted to this kind of physical exercise. Needless to say, I was also impressed by the inevitable appearance that this kind of training yields if pursued systematically and over time. I can also honestly say, after much consideration, that there was no aware cognition of wishing to achieve a greater attractiveness to others. Such cognitions emerged much later when I became aware that as I made good progress and it

clearly showed, so did the respect given to me especially by other men. I was a studious and gifted pupil in school and had many academic skills, none of which gave me respect with anyone, not even my teachers, all of whom were oblivious of the special needs of gifted children and teenagers (see Persson, Joswig & Balogh, 2000). Discovering that physical size and prowess provided respect was a revelation to me (cf. Fisher, 1986). However, considering Klein's (1993) claim that bodybuilders are often "psychologically inadequate", I think it crucial to point out that I did not seek respect. I found it and I liked it! Anyone would. Be they "psychologically inadequate" or not. This discovery has triggered a life-long curiosity regarding social interaction and social perception. Rarely is this seen more clearly – and is attached to so many different behaviours – as with bodies: large, small, obese, thin, stocky, tall, muscular and so on.

I continued my pursuit arduously until the day I entered the Academic world as an Assistant professor of psychology with a freshly earned PhD-degree. I convinced myself that a very muscular and large frame was not for an academic to have. I did not set foot in a gym for four years! After this time I began again to feel the need for exercise, and resolutely returned to a gym. It took me two years to return to my former physical status. Again, it became very obvious I was muscular and fit rather than overweight and unfit. Now familiar with the respect that a large frame may provide, I did not return to training for lack of respect. I had sufficient professional recognition and had gained the respect of my peers internationally. I longed again for the sport itself; its physical sensations, and now also as something to counter balance my very stressful everyday work. Much to my surprise, this time I was not met by respect at all. I was met by suspicion and was frequently given rude remarks from colleagues at work, who knew me very well both personally and professionally. I was intrigued rather than hurt. Obviously there is more to social response patterns when confronting, meeting or interacting with a male bodybuilder than meets the eye.

From this grew the current study. I set out to learn more systematically what the stereotype contained and wanted to understand why and how individuals react.

For the research at hand, I was myself the provided stimulus; a male bodybuilder, 43 years of age as the study was launched, shaved head and a moustache, 178 cm (5'10") tall weighing about 115–120 kilos (253–265 lbs) for as long as the study lasted.

## Settings

The study was done between 2001–2003 and in various settings. I chose Stockholm, Sweden's capital as being a large international city and a smaller medium-sized town in the North of Sweden, with a university in which I also worked at the time. The choice was made simply because it fitted in with my own everyday life and work, and also suited my research purposes. I thought the comparison was necessary to be able to say whether response patterns were local or more general in nature.

During three summers I chose public places: pedestrian districts, out-door cafés, ice-cream bars and lunch restaurants without a dress code, promenades along beaches or waterways, using public transport buses, trains, a bicycle or walking. My place of everyday work during this period is of course also an essential location.

Depending on weather and temperatures I usually wore shorts (showing thighs), often t-shirts with or without sleeves (showing arms), and more rarely nothing at all on top exposing my entire upper body. When the occasion demanded it I always wore more formal clothes like trousers, a shirt and a tie. Much to my surprise, however, it is not only exposure that triggers a response. The attributes of perceived size and fitness do too, but perhaps not as frequently.

## The nature of the data and manner of analysis

Data consist of qualitative observations and of statements as provided by participants in response to a questionnaire made available to bodybuilders worldwide. I was more interested in the nature and content of responses than in their frequencies. Note that where needed, statements and comments have been translated into English following idiom and language function as closely as possible. This means that statements have been retained unaltered leaving language to be at times harsh and coarse in comparison to traditional academic writing.

While respondents' written answers are available as documents, the observational data have been gathered somewhat differently. As a participant observer relying on critical incidents it is not always possible to take notes. You are simply not prepared for events that take place. Most experiences were therefore committed to memory. I took notes only at intervals when I felt a need to process impressions and observations more thoroughly in writing. These notes contained analytical comments, some of which were revised as exposure to re-

actions increased in variety and frequency. As I finally was ready to compile the observational data, incidents were recalled with ease on relatively scarce notes and written comments. Most encounters with people have been unique and their responses tied to particular locations and environments.

Considering memory's constructive properties have I then to some extent fabricated data? I think not, since one of the main attributes of experience (or skill) is an effective memory (Howe, 1990). The accuracy of observations is also related to the observer and his knowledge of the field studied. Considering I was myself the stimulus in the research setting the so-called Self-reference effect would have been in operation. We tend to remember much better the events that have personal relevance to us (Rogers, Kuipers & Kirker, 1977). Variables such as motivation, saliency, emotional tone and frequency are essential for memory retrieval (Baddeley, 1997). However unlikely memory failure in this research setting is, safeguards were nevertheless employed to discover possible errors and whether these had influenced my data. The resulting response pattern was therefore submitted to an international peer-validation. This will be discussed below.

The manner of analysis was straightforward: one of searching for patterns in the material (Patton, 1990). Analysis was performed in two stages. At first I took the raw data and looked for apparent differences and similarities in content as well as the communicated purpose of given statements where such was identifiable. This content analysis provided the tools by which to construct a first classification of response categories representing what appeared to be the nature of the male bodybuilder stereotype.

As is clear from the research objectives, however, the analysis was based on a fundamental assumption, which had a considerable influence on the analysis. The observations made (mine and participants') would be of two basic kinds: some responses would invariably be the result of social learning processes, but presumably others would have a different origin and be genetically determined, although, at some level, evolution affects both (eg. Lumsden & Wilson, 1981). At a second stage, therefore, I divided the resulting response pattern into three categories: social, biological and a combination of both. These categories are not mutually exclusive in a socio-biological and system-theoretical perspective. They are highly likely to be interdependent at some level. At present there is no consensus on how, which of course echoes the age-old Nature or Nurture Problem, even though progress is slowly being made in understanding how nature really interacts with learning (Plomin, 1994). Evidence are convincing

enough, however, in socio-biological research and related disciplines that we are behaving within constraints set by evolution, to make above all the division of responses in this study into socially learnt and biologically prompted responses meaningful.

The third category is the weakest in this perspective, but perhaps the most interesting, being one of convenience, where I could not tease out which emphasis it represented: actions prompted by evolutionary mechanisms or actions imposed by societal norms or cultural dynamics. To include a category termed Combination made sense, and it seems to me this category often entailed responses being telltale of a conflict as if individuals responded on at least two levels simultaneously: Biology prompted a definite response, but societal norms or personally chosen ideals simultaneously demanded another response. This is a notion, of course, which Sigmund Freud (1933) in his time well could have identified with. The ongoing conflict between a need for immediate physical satisfaction (provided by the Id), the constraints imposed by societal norms (represented by the Superego) and the individual caught in the middle trying to balance between the two demanding forces (the mediating Ego).

### **Participants and safeguards of research quality**

Since I argue that research on Bodybuilding as a societal phenomenon or, as of late at times even as a psychological disorder of sorts, is frequently and negatively biased, one might also ask the question if the current research has the opposite problem, namely to be positively biased. I obviously have a vested interest in this particular sport.

First, to be active in Bodybuilding does not mean that I have automatically taken an uncritical and all-accepting stance towards everything associated with it. In fact, there are many issues in Bodybuilding I could, and have indeed, put critically under scrutiny (see Persson, 2004). In addition, I am to the best of my ability, imposing the criticisms raised against other scientists' research in this field on myself also. I am aware of possible bias, and have therefore consistently been in contact with others, scientists and bodybuilders, using them as soundboards.

Second, to in fact be a bodybuilder with more than 20 years of experience invariably strengthens understanding through an insider perspective, which is simply not available to someone "on the outside" (eg. Adler, 1985). All research done on Bodybuilding in the Social Sciences, as far as I know, is based

on an outsider perspective. I do not consider Klein's (1993) six years as a gym member at "Olympic Gym" in California nor Johansson's (1996; 1997) and his associates' training twice a week at several Swedish gyms during a number of years to be insider research. They were accepted by the environment as gym-going fitness enthusiasts, but were probably not given access to the inner sanctum of the sub-culture and its social and behavioural patterns. Even if such information was made available to them, their own lack of Bodybuilding experience is likely to have created communication problems preventing crucial aspects of understanding. Put simply, it becomes a matter of group dynamics: to be "one of us" and completely accepted or "one of them" and merely tolerated.

I have seen this dilemma at work in another large research project, where I studied a variety of social and learning processes in a prestigious Music Department at a British University during three years time (Persson, 1993). I was introduced by its staff as a behavioural scientist. This caused a majority of people in the Department to view me with some suspicion. I have a background as a musician, and have trained and toured to some extent as a concert pianist, so I was well aware that performing musicians often viewed Science in general as the direct opposite to Art. Art is subjective, experiential, passionate and based on "feeling". Science in their view, is rather considered objective, theoretical, dispassionate and based on rationality. It is therefore considered incompatible with "True Art". Large enough a number of individuals in the research setting took this view implicitly. So, in order to actually reach them and be able to gather reliable and valid data, without risking to be provided with data especially prepared for me on the basis of "tolerance", thus having important issues withheld from me because of my initial outsider status, I had to gain the confidence of the research population as "one of them". I joined the choir and acted accompanist to a great number of performance students and singers. I effectively became known as a competent pianist and also participated in Student Recitals as accompanist. I knew I had succeeded when one student finally commented: "I am glad you are a musician, because you know what I am actually saying!". She was correct. I did know and it was my duty as a scientist to translate that insider knowledge into a language that would make sense to another sub-culture!

The same probably applies to any kind of behaviourally oriented study of sports, and perhaps Bodybuilding in particular considering the "mystique" that is often said to surround this particular sport. Bodybuilding has often been

conveyed as a life style rather than a sport (Weider/Reynolds, 1988; Matzer Rose, 2001), though this is changing in my experience. Bodybuilding has become a science-based sport. Probably no other category of athletes is as knowledgeable of nutrition and physiology as the modern, average Bodybuilder!

The insider perspective does not mean, however, that a footballer always must study Football, and that swimmers always have to study the various aspects of Swimming. But, I am suggesting that research outcomes are likely to be different between the insider and the outsider researcher even if their objectives happen to be exactly the same. It is particularly important for the outsider researcher not to over-generalise and not to be tempted to draw conclusions on mere suspicions, which may well be flawed for lack of an insider understanding. The opposite might be true too: the outsider might actually make discoveries, which the insider never thought of. So, both perspectives have merit, and can probably not be separated from each other!

The insider perspective is a powerful research tool, but it is not one without pitfalls. The most common problem is likely to be the researcher losing his or her neutral stance as a scientist and “go native”. He or she is expected to take a stance in certain questions and perhaps to even take sides in a possible conflict which, needless to say, puts the entire study at risk (Bryman, 1988). This was not a problem in the current study, since response patterns to a specific stimulus was the research objective. There was never a reason to “go native” or any particular group to side-in with.

The insider perspective in this research has had two significant functions: To be able to position this research in the already existing literature and to be able to muster the participation of other bodybuilders world-wide. The notion of being “one of us”, which I proved by photographs and Internet discussions when not having met a participant in person, clearly made a number of them decide to be part.

Third, to validate my findings and make sure that my observations were not chance incidents, not specific to chosen geographical locations, nor that I had projected desirable outcomes unaware onto the understanding of the gathered data, I engaged a number of other bodybuilders world-wide to validate the nature and content of the response pattern found by means of a questionnaire (Appendix I).

*Table 2. Well-established Internet discussion forums focusing on Bodybuilding as used to cull participants for this research.*

<b>NAME (and URL)</b>	<b>COUNTRY/COUNTRIES</b>
<b>Exhale all sports forum</b> www.exhalemag.com/forum/	Sweden Scandinavia
<b>Kolozeum</b> www.kolozeum.com/kolozeum/	Sweden Scandinavia
<b>B&amp;K Sports Magazine Forum</b> www.bahnhof.se/~bksport/cgi-bin/dcforum/dcboard.cgi	Sweden Scandinavia
<b>Bodybuilding Szene</b> www.bbszene.de/board/	Germany International
<b>Bodybuilders, Inc.</b> http://p202.ezboard.com/bbodybuildersinc	Australia International

These participants were chosen in a first stage out of convenience: I asked bodybuilders whom I knew personally in different countries, who I believed were generally suitable to participate and would act as observant safeguards of research quality also. I then also turned to the Internet to increase the number of participants somewhat. The Internet features several excellent moderated and seriously intended discussion forums devoted to Bodybuilding (see Table 2). The result of this search was an increased number of Swedish participants.

The selection criterion presented to participants was to be an “advanced bodybuilder”, defined as someone who has accumulated an increased lean muscle mass over several years of training, and to such an extent that their physiques provided the unmistakable signs of their chosen sport. I did not use competition experience as a criterion, since this would effectively have excluded a large number of athletes who do indeed have all the attributes of a competitive bodybuilder, but who for a variety of reasons have chosen not to compete. As questionnaires were returned to me, I soon realised considering the way respondents had replied to the questions, that there was a need for a cut-off criterion by which to divide the respondents into athletes who seemed to be responded to mainly by their physical size and athletes who were responded to for mainly other reasons such as shape and/or definition.

There seems to exist a relationship between an individual's height and the size of their acquired muscle mass in regard to how participants were reacted to: The greater the muscle mass relative to height the more likely there would be negative responses, and the lesser the muscle mass relative to height the more likely there would be positive responses. I have therefore, arbitrarily, but guided by respondents' answers and their personal data, set such a cut-off point at a need for 20 % more muscle mass than height as applied to participants' height beyond one metre. This is calculated as follows (in metrics), where H is height (cm), W is weight (kilos) and rMM is the relative Muscle Mass of the athlete:

$$\mathbf{H-100/W = rMM}$$

There are most likely other factors at play too, which decide how individuals react to a bodybuilder, such as definition (degree of body fat) and degree and kind of body exposure. It is also probable that height in itself may be a significant variable (cf. Wilson, 1968; Kurz, 1969). An educated guess is that the Height-Muscle Mass Ratio to some extent is dynamic: the shorter the athlete the greater the acquired relative muscle mass would need to be and the taller the athlete, a lesser relative muscle mass would be required to have a similar impact. In all likelihood, however, the interaction of variables is complex and presumably non-linear. For the purpose of this study it will suffice to abide by the somewhat crude, but apparently important, cut-off criterion at 20 % or more acquired muscle mass relative to height. Note that size matters when establishing social dominance (Barnard & Burk, 1979). Barnard (2004) significantly comments that "dominance is not equivalent of aggression. Dominants may not be the more aggressive individuals, indeed, aggression may be more characteristic of the middle-ranking individuals where relative competitive abilities are often less clear-cut ... what matters is that dominants tend to 'win' encounters, even though this may be due to passive, sometimes barely discernible deference by lower rankers" (p. 431).

The application off the cut-off criterion had the curious effect of dismissing most of the Swedish participants (Table 3). Only four Swedish participants of 17, including myself, remained. There are possible reasons for this suggesting that the Swedish setting may have a number of unique features affecting how the Swedish participants act in general and in relation to Bodybuilding in their cultural context in particular. The Swedish bodybuilders not up to par with the suggested criterion will be dealt with separately.

*Table 3. All participants and their demographic data. Note that given weights are off-season were such was specified, and in accordance with the employed Height – Relative Muscle Mass ratio a cut-off point was set at rMM >.80. Participants making this criterion are marked (\*).*

Code	Age	Occupation	Height (cm)	Weight (kilos)	rMM
A1-SE	45	Associate professor	5'10" (178)	265 lbs (120)	.65*
A2-SE	41	Private trainer	5'10" (178)	220 lbs (95)	.82
A3-SE	25	Graphical artist	5'11" (181)	209 lbs (100)	.81
A4-SE	33	R&D engineer	5'8" (173)	214 lbs (97)	.75*
A5-SE	37	Computer programmer	5'9" (175)	189 lbs (86)	.87
A6-SE	20	Student (Civil Engineering)	5'7" (172)	176 lbs (80)	.90
A7-SE	23	Civil engineer	6'0" (182)	202 lbs (92)	.89
A8-SE	23	Student (Economy)	6'6" (197)	265 lbs (120)	.81
A9-SE	29	No information	6'2" (189)	196 lbs (89)	1.00
A10-SE	23	Mechanic	6'1" (184)	187 lbs (85)	.99
A11-SE	23	Student (Computer Science)	6'1" (185)	207 lbs (94)	.90
A12-SE	40	Manager (Social Services)	5'2" (158)	161 lbs (73)	.80
A13-SE	24	Civil engineer	5'10" (178)	187 lbs (85)	.92
A14-SE	28	Maths teacher (Secondary)	6'2" (182)	194 lbs (88)	.93
A15-SE	22	Student (Biology/Education)	5'11" (180)	216 lbs (98)	.82
A16-SE	29	Computer programmer	5'10" (178)	223 lbs (101)	.77*
A17-SE	26	Operations technician	5'9" (176)	265 lbs (120)	.63*
B1-USA	45	Budget analyst	5'9" (175)	235 lbs (107)	.70*
B2-USA	37	Police officer	5'9" (175)	297 lbs (135)	.55*
C1-CAN	39	Case manager	6'0" (183)	265 lbs (120)	.69*
C2-CAN	41	Scientist	6'2" (190)	195 lbs (88.5)	1.02
D1-UK	39	Forensic psychiatrist	6'0" (183)	240 lbs (109)	.76*

The remaining participants then (seven males with average age  $M = 36.6$ ,  $SD = 6.9$ ; average weight  $M = 113.6$  kilos,  $SD = 12.4$  kilos and average height  $M = 177.6$  cm,  $SD = 3.7$  cm) participated in two ways: 1) to validate the response pattern to the male bodybuilder as determined by my own field studies, and 2) to contribute with remembered incidents which they were certain were related to people's reactions to them, thus contributing to giving the male bodybuilder stereotype a content by either reinforcing the proposed content or diversifying it.

One interesting aspect of the total sample is that participants, as a rule, are highly educated professionals or are in the process of becoming. In fact, I would even say that a few could be regarded as gifted in various ways. This is much in accordance with my own experience of bodybuilders over the years.

Athletes come from all walks of life of course, with different backgrounds and with different motivations to pursue their sport, but it has struck me many times that bodybuilders with the intention to compete, or being engaged in the sport on the same terms as competitors, often are highly qualified professionals with university degrees or other types of training with either an ongoing successful career or with a potentially very successful career ahead of them. So, also in this the sample of the current study deviates considerably from that of Klein's (1993), who outlines his 25 male participants at "Olympic Gym" as "...overwhelmingly from blue-collar backgrounds ... 72 % had parents with blue-collar occupations. Even though these men were on the whole better educated than their parents, they were not so well educated as other populations of athletes ... Only four men had a Bachelor Degree from college, ten had less than two years of college education, whereas nine had high-school diplomas. Two had not graduated high school. This accounts in part, for the high proportion of unskilled labour performed by men in the sample" (p. 113). This difference between the samples suggests that "Olympic Gym", while worth studying for its own inherent cultural pattern, is not sufficient in making general statements about Bodybuilding and bodybuilders everywhere.

Of interest at this stage is above all to establish the validity of the response pattern as derived by content analysing the observational and the provided data (Table 4). Such a validation can easily be done by, for example, finding out the relative agreement between the participants on each proposed variable. In addition, participants' averaged agreements can be calculated as indicating the degree of cross-cultural fit of the entire model. This in turn is essential in deciding whether a response is mainly biological or socially (and locally) constructed. A criterion is also needed here, however, in order to decide when a proposed category in the pattern should be retained or relinquished. A feasible such criterion is that half of the participants should agree by means of having experienced the type of response that the assessed category outlines.

Following this line of reasoning the entire model turns out to have an average fit of .84, with a complete fit of 1.00 for categories I, II, Xa and XI, and with an acceptable fit for other categories proposed (Table 5). Hence, the response pattern appears to hold reasonably well and must therefore be considered valid.

*Table 4. Response pattern resulting from exposure to the male bodybuilder where  $rMM > 80$ .*

Category	Proposed label (signifying part content of the stereotype)	Origin
I	Disassociative response	Biological
II	Associative response	Combination
III	Offensive response	Social
IV	Provocative response	Biological
V	Potential danger response	Biological
VI	Posturing response	Biological
VII	Projective response	Combination
VIII	Reactive formation response	Combination
IX	Removed as irrelevant	–
Xa	Sexually oriented response (towards men)	Biological
Xb	Sexually oriented response (towards women)	Biological
XII	Admiration response	Combination

Note that one category was removed in spite of being acceptable on the set criterion, namely The Celebrity Response. After analysing the data I did not find that this contributed anything substantive to the content of the male bodybuilder stereotype. It was therefore removed. Category numbers, however (in Roman numerals) have remained unchanged.

*Table 5. Validation matrix featuring the relative agreement over all participants variable by variable. Complete agreement equals 1.0 whereas no agreement equals 0.0 ( $n = 8$ ).*

RESPONSE CATEGORIES										
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Xa	Xb	XI
1.00	1.00	0.88	0.75	0.88	0.63	0.88	0.75	1.00	0.88	1.00

**N.B.** Arbitrary set cut-off point for acceptable validity per category  $< 0.50$

## A note on ethics

Research ethics considering design and operationalisation have already been discussed, but there is one aspect of research ethics that is rarely reported in science but needs to be addressed here, namely the impact of the research process *on the scientist*. To put it somewhat dramatically: at what personal cost has research been pursued?

There is an ongoing discussion in the Social Sciences on the risk-benefits issue: is the knowledge desired worth the risk that needs to be taken? A few examples of much-discussed projects are charting male homosexual behaviour – where such are legally prohibited – by taking on the role of a so-called “watch-queen” (Humphreys, 1970); to decide to go under cover even to the extent of changing appearances by cosmetic surgery in a military “boot camp” setting (Sullivan, Queen, & Patrick, 1958) or acting mentally ill in order to investigate the social nature of a psychiatric diagnosis and its consequences (Rosenhahn, 1973). In the first instance the researcher actually committed a felony. In the second example, one member of the research team would have to continue looking like a 10-year younger version of himself as the project was terminated. Today this would perhaps be seen as even a “perk” by some, but it still raises the question how far a researcher is willing to go without compromising his or her own personal values and convictions. The third example is no doubt the most famous of the three. A team of psychologists and psychiatrists pretended to suffer from a variety of psychiatric disorders. They wished to be admitted to psychiatric wards just to be able to study such them from the inside, experiencing what patients proper also have to experience. Once admitted they ceased pretending and openly started taking notes of what they observed. While patients proper recognised their scheme and realised that they were not patients, hospital staff refused to recognise the researchers as healthy even when told that they were in fact pretending for the sake of research. For some of the researchers it took several years before they succeeded in convincing hospital staff they were who they said they were and that they were in perfect health.

As far as my study of the bodybuilder stereotype is concerned, I could not anticipate the severity of some of the responses I would encounter. It would be untrue to argue that I have pursued this research unscathed. As fascinating as it has been, and it has taught me a great deal of human social behaviour in particular contexts, it has also been frightening. It is very clear to me that my physical characteristics, as perceived by others, and the personal characteristics construed by others and projected onto me, with body perception as a basis, by

far outweighs any other previous knowledge of me. Individuals in my surrounding, colleagues and friends outside of the gym knowing me for years automatically construed me as having become “someone else” who just happened to have the same face. Because my body had changed, so had my character!

I am fully convinced that this has cost me at least one prestigious research fellowship. I had been given several probing questions for some time regarding such a fellowship. But when I finally met the representative who wished to convey the inviting university’s interest personally, and was seen, I never again heard a word in the matter, except for receiving a message from another committee member wishing me well “in my new endeavours”. Clearly, for me to return to Bodybuilding for my own enjoyment was the same as “bidding farewell to a continued academic career” for many of my peers; many of whom are of considerable international stature in their field.

I noticed too, that my word did not always count for as much anymore. I appeared to have lost the respect of a number of colleagues world-wide without, as far as I know, having said, done or published anything professionally or otherwise that could somehow reflect badly upon me or anyone else. My only “mistake”, as it appears, was that of engaging in Bodybuilding and accordingly taking on the appearance that inevitably follows. Not everyone of my colleagues have reacted this way. I noted a relationship between academic status and their level of suspicion, if not in some cases even contempt. The higher in the academic hierarchy the greater often the suspicion and the lower in the hierarchy the easier the acceptance, though ambivalence was nevertheless always apparent in the Swedish research setting. Lower-stratum individuals were more prepared to acceptance than were higher-stratum individuals.

Interestingly enough, most university students did not react negatively. For a number of them, and particularly for male students, I am inclined to believe that my physical size and being fit (as opposed to being obese and unfit), have improved even more their interest in attending my lectures and seminars. However, I have had indications also that female students to some extent have been more ambivalent and a few seem even to have felt intimidated to the extent they did not dare to come to my office. This bothered me greatly, since all students, at all times, are more than welcome to visit. I have made a point of always inviting students to pay me a visit either because they need to for the sake of their studies or if only to come by and say hello. Male students did this frequently, but never female students. I asked myself whether I should leave my chosen sport behind again to spare the few female students their experience of



intimidation, but I reached the conclusion that this would be highly unwise. One of the philosophical foundations for teaching in the Department was that of tolerance towards anyone who is somehow different and that equal rights for all irrespective of creed, race and background apply. It would be strange indeed were students not to also incorporate someone muscular and large-framed into their democratic worldview.

The apparent upset of an entire community was also unanticipated. When I heard myself mentioned as “the huge man in skimpy shorts” from secondary sources, I knew I was talked about everywhere and even discussed in unknown people’s homes. An e-mail from a student confirmed that my public behaviour was sometimes subject to scrutiny by my own students. This, to some extent, made me feel ill at ease, since I could not identify with what I experienced as accusations. I had committed no heinous act nor broken any generally agreed moral codes or norms that I was aware of. Also, my manner of physical exposure was hardly unique for warm summer days. The only difference, as far as I can tell, was that of my physical appearance. However, exposure often also creates accommodation. I noticed that reactions lessened somewhat as the project proceeded.

The result of this research is to some extent embarrassing particularly to parts of the academic community, since this is where knowledge about human behaviour, human conditions and the prerequisites for human life is being generated and studied. I have always held the obviously somewhat naive view, that while positions vary and arguments and theories may well be the focus of heated debate, scientists would nevertheless be humbled by their knowledge through Self-reflection. But fellow behavioural scientists, above all, became suspicious towards me having retaken former shapes as an ardent bodybuilder. I have been given the impression by several colleagues world-wide, that my interest is an embarrassment. If this impression is in any way correct it raises the rather intriguing question: how much do behavioural scientists actually know of their own behaviour? If they too project personality characteristics as based on appearance alone, and act on it with no reflection, it either suggests that Self-knowledge is not well developed, which would seem an essential ingredient in most scientists’ psychological make-up if only to be able to reflect on possible biases in their own research. Alternatively, it would suggest that Self-understanding has little or no priority, which is good ground for prejudice.

I have indeed pursued this research at a personal cost. Would I have done it had I known beforehand at what personal cost? From being a successful, though somewhat overweight and fairly unfit academic, because of my physical appearance, I suddenly became more or less regarded as an outcast with few rights, limited say, often treated patronisingly and all too often insulted for no apparent reason other than to have taken on the appearance of a bodybuilder. Yes, I would have done it! The level of understanding that this experience has rendered me I could have gained in no other way.



## 4. Results

Results consist of events, encounters, statements, and observations which have been categorised according to apparent differences and similarities in content as well as the communicated purposes of given statements, where these could be identified. The classification of responses into categories, resulting from the analysis, was proven to have a fair degree of cross-cultural fit. Hence, the male bodybuilder stereotype has a similar structure in the countries represented in this study, which in turn suggests that the stereotype on some level is related to genetically imprinted response patterns. The question at this stage is therefore to explore what this stereotype contains; what reactions to a male bodybuilder filling the above-stated criterion are the bases for categorising the data?

The following account will provide typical events and responses. They will all be coded by an identifying label (See Table 3 page 41) to make it possible to trace from whom and from where the data are derived. Note that only data from participants making the Height – Relative Muscle Mass ratio are included at this stage (these are termed “the sample proper”). Participants failing to meet the essential criterion will be analysed and discussed separately. That are interestingly all Swedish participants (termed “the sub-sample” below).

### Response categories

#### Disassociative responses

“Oh, look dad! He has such big muscles,” was a comment I frequently heard from boys aged approximately 6–11 years of age and always in a public setting. When parents were accompanying their children, and boys marvelled and wanted to take a good look, parents invariably and very firmly grabbed the child by the hand and pulled him away. When on occasion I passed boys playing together without their parents attending, they made sure to settle their curiosity, ask questions or make comments spontaneously:

Why can't you walk properly? (as asked by a group of four boys, approximately 10 years of age, outside the local supermarket. They were commenting the swaggering walk typical of a male bodybuilder as hypertrophied leg muscles prevents a more traditional way of walking).

Look at his legs! (commented by another group of boys, also about 10 years of age. They were playing with a ball in the alley. Their game was interrupted temporarily as they all discovered I was passing by).

The fact that the appearance of a bodybuilder mainly attracted the attention of boys is also the experience of the participants:

A4-SE: Especially boys think its “awesome”. They want to feel my “bubbles” and always ask me to flex them.

A17-SE: Well, children that age rather show fear, which goes away after a while.

C1-CAN: Mostly but physical reaction, big eyes and so on. They all want to climb on me.

B2-USA: They usually ask if I am a wrestler or how did I get so big and just rub me while asking.

D1-UK: They commented on my “big muscles” and wanted to play fight.

During the entire three-year period only one girl made a spontaneous remark: “Hello Mr Strong! We are going to beach to swim” – an unknown toddler in a group of five others said. They were heading for the beach accompanied by presumably their nursery teacher.

This spontaneous comment is particularly interesting. Children are handled with stereotypical expectations on gender roles even from birth, and are therefore socialised into traditional roles differing for boys and girls quite effectively (Lewis, 1986). As they grow up they more or less learn to fulfil expectations of what boys and girls should be or do as valued by their culture. American boys and girls for example, aged 7–11, have already developed interests consistent with stereotypical (American) gender roles. Boys tend to be interested in guns, boxing, wrestling and karate, team sports, and fixing and making things more than girls, whereas American girls in contrast prefer dolls, sewing, cooking, dancing, and looking after younger children more than do boys (Zill, 1986). While these interests reflect exposure to current ideals and values, it is nevertheless interesting to compare them to known gender-characteristic universals: Men tend to be more aggressive than women, men are also more socially dominant and more prone to have several sexual partners than women do. In selecting partners women show a relative preference for wealth, social status and seniority, whereas men rather aim for youth and attractiveness (Kenrick & Trost, 1993; Mazur & Booth, 1998).

In an era of women empowerment in the Western World it might not always be politically correct to term boys “strong, rough and goal-oriented” and girls as “beautiful, caring and supportive”. But it seems to me that children, yet not understanding of intricate cultural ideals and values due to their age, by their spontaneous reactions, may have some impact on the Nature-Nurture issue. It might be difficult, for biological reasons, to get away from the notion of women as caring and men as strong, even though this does of course not apply to every man and woman. Needless to say there are caring men and strong women also. I do not see, however, how social learning can entirely explain why boys particularly are so fascinated by someone large-framed and muscular and how the relationship “big muscles = strength” appears obvious to them. One must consider that someone fully socialised responds automatically; and offers a ready-made social script to be acted upon without much thought (cf. Berry, 1990). This is beautifully demonstrated by children accompanied by their parents. Children below a certain age are fascinated, but parents pull them away harshly communicating physically to their children they did something inappropriate.

I am inclined to propose that young children’s response to a large-framed and muscular male is not usually a learnt response but one genetically prompted. They are “hardwired” to make a connection between muscle size and strength. In addition, boys, though perhaps not all, are also genetically imprinted to assess and appreciate the value of potential strength.

There is another aspect of this, which to some extent strengthens this suggestion by demonstrating that if anything, social learning in a certain cultural context rather helps to reconstrue an instinctive understanding into something more socially acceptable. I noticed that marginalised individuals; people who live in society but not really are part of it for a variety of reasons, reacted to me just as young children did. Especially alcoholics, who in the research settings gathered in groups at certain places for socialising and drinking, reacted consistently. The men could spontaneously say things like “Good work, mate” or “You’re one helluva big and strong man”. Their spontaneous comments, irrespective of whether drunk or not, was almost always positive and, in a sense, admiring. It was the same in the city as in the town. It needs to be said here, that reactions from non-marginalised adults in Swedish research context were overwhelmingly negative. Needless to say, the alcoholics were likely to be fully socialised into current values and norms, but somehow their situation had

prompted them to relinquish certain aspects of acquired norms. They were often treated as outcasts, so why bother “keeping up appearances”? In meeting a male bodybuilder they appear to have reacted with no or limited cultural bias. Like young children they too reacted on quite a fundamental level.

This type of response, therefore, is disassociative. That is, reactions are spontaneous and largely unaffected by cultural bias and prompted, I believe, by genetically imprinted scripts.

### Associative response

The associative type of response is akin to the disassociative. I asked participants in the study whether they had observed reactions from somewhat older children also; or pre-teenagers and early teenagers as I phrased it in the questionnaire:

A4-SE: Yes, but the older children's questions are more concerned with strength.

A16-SE: Those are big muscles: How strong are you?

A17-SE: Yes, either they are impressed or they say you are an idiot.

B1-USA: Particularly the boys, and favourably!

B2-USA: Usually with amazement. Especially the boys.

C1-CAN: Yea - mainly the boys. They are like.... WOW!

D1-UK: Again, commented on size. Shown curiosity about size and strength. Asked about what sort of things I could lift.

These comments much echo my own experience. However, the reason for separating younger children from older was an effort to possibly check on the effects of the socialisation process, and to see whether societal norms had had an impact relevant to the male bodybuilder stereotype. Participants could make no such distinction. Some noted a shift in the interest of children from fascination with appearance and to application: that is, “so you are big, but what can you actually use that size for?” I, however, clearly noted the progress of socialisation in the Swedish research context. On several occasions I had responses from unknown children in this age group typically shouting the following at me from a distance:

Hey, anabolics man! (as said by two giggling boys as they passed me on a town square riding one bicycle together)

Anabolics are bad for you! (as shouted from the opened window of a rapidly passing car by a female teenager. There were several other teenagers in the car with her).

This type of statement demonstrates that the children have somehow learnt, without probably knowing anything about Anabolic-Androgen Steroids (AAS), their spread and use in sports, their legal implications and so on, that a) anyone with larger-than-average muscles must be using them; b) their use entails something bad and c) it is acceptable to reprimand, insult or taunt whoever has a muscular large frame for their alleged use of “anabolics”. Such statements were always made from a distance. This is significant considering that physical size signals potential danger.

The older children are in error needless to say. Not everyone with a large muscular frame uses AAS. Also, I do not see how such a public display could in anyway be morally or ethically defended no matter what issue is concerned. They are already prejudiced! But the teenagers are not likely to be mature enough to realise the implications of their behaviour. They are presumably parroting what they have heard others say as well as trying their own strength by employing challenging behaviour.

The fact that offensive behaviour is being construed as acceptable behaviour in relation to a particular category of individuals is alarming. There will be several reasons to return to this below. Associative responses, therefore, in this context means that a response is immature in the sense that complex cultural norms are not fully internalised. Responses are experimental, which means that children would try different responses for a variety of reasons rather than specific ones. In the examples given, responses were presented as a kind of challenge “to see what would happen when delivered”. In case something would happen, responses were premeditated and tried out from a safe distance. So, their responses are associated with the cultural context but not yet fully internalised and part of their established response array.

### **The offensive response**

In adulthood social norms and values have been internalised. Depending on acquired knowledge, ability to Self-reflect, perhaps to a degree also personality, some have also construed their own unique values, opinions and preferences. Responses to a male bodybuilder then, should feasibly be more complex and reasons for reacting be more diversified. This is what appeared to happen. A number of events and incidents provide ample examples of this. The first of

these more complex responses concerns very offensive responses, which would presumably have been unthinkable in other social contexts and in encountering individuals other than bodybuilders. This response category is also the largest one in terms of frequency. There were events almost daily! Such responses could for example be the following:

Stop it immediately, stop showing off! (a very agitated woman, approximately in her 70ies screamed at me as I walked leisurely heading for home after training. The woman rode a bicycle and was accompanied by husband, who remained silent).

Hey Roland, watch the women shot-putters on TV! Any one of them could be your mother! (As said by a male senior university administrator in his 60s, in the Faculty Lounge, when a major international sports event was being broadcast. Present staff joined in and laughed).

Why can't you be like you were before? You look disgusting! (A comment made at work by a female colleague in her mid-40s. She made the comment repeatedly during the research period. I often wondered what would have happened if I had made similar remarks to her?)

In bringing an American colleague with me to a waterfront bar on a sweltering summer's eve, when everyone in the vicinity, as well as in the bar, including myself, were lightly dressed, my guest and I were very rudely treated. It was made very clear to me that I should leave. My American colleague was shocked, considering the fact we were not much differently dressed than others. Only one obvious difference existed: I was a bodybuilder.

Going to the campus surgery, casually dressed, to seek treatment for a stubborn sinus infection, I had an appointment with a physician I had not met before. While the doctor was in no way rude, he showed minimal interest in me and my condition. After a while he asked me about my work, since he observed I looked "like that". When I told him I was an associate professor of psychology in the university his interest livened up immensely. "In that case", he said, "choose your own medication!" He gave me a list of suitable antibiotics after which he asked "anything else you would need prescribed?" My appearance placed me in one category of individuals of whom the good doctor obviously had little regard, but my admitted profession suddenly placed me in a different category of individuals for whom he obviously gave privileges.

"Hey you! Can I ask you something?" and I was assessed from top to bottom by a relatively short man in his mid-50s, much shorter than I, dressed in a stylish suit, in the Stockholm Central Railway Station. He stepped in front of

me effectively blocking my passage. He scrutinised me with an expression that left little doubt it was one of contempt and disgust: “What on earth possessed you to want become like that?”

In a conversation over the Internet with an unknown male I encountered a very offensive verbal assault. I decided to point out to him that I felt he was actually being quite out of order insulting me just because I represented a certain sport, which he obviously did not like. The response was immediate: “You’re entitled to your opinion if you think I insulted you, but I think that all men devoting so much time to their body are complete idiots and brainless. Besides they also all spell as badly as you do, meit” (note that the respondent was no spell-marvel himself! I left his misspelling of “mate” intact. Though Swedish, he did use the English word).

Finally, in this tirade of remarkable statements and incidents occurring during the research period, I also had negative reactions from the most unexpected of locations, namely the gym of which I was a member. After some two years of training in the gym, I was summoned after a workout to come and see the Business Manager. He was a man in a business suit, about 35 years old, fairly unfit. This is relevant since the Gym Manager was not liked by members and was sometimes referred to as “Chubby”. He was well aware of this. During our meeting he interestingly commenced by excusing himself for being “overweight”. His business was the following:

We do not want you here, and I make this quite clear: by looking like you do, you scare people away who could potentially become new gym members! The only reason we have not barred you from this gym is that your behaviour is impeccable. You are helpful, polite. Staff and members generally like you!

I was shocked. I was a member of a *gym* and was not wanted just because I had been very successful in reclaiming my former size and shape. I was too big for the gym to want me around! It was such a paradox. What was a gym for, I asked myself, trying to understand from his point of view.

This anti-bodybuilder sentiment is widespread amongst gyms in Sweden; especially in franchised gyms and health clubs marketing themselves as Fitness Centres. This tacit but closely followed anti-bodybuilder policy resulted in unusual membership rules such as “you may not bare your shoulders in the gym for hygienic reasons”. Needless to say, rules like these were ignored by most gym members. The reason for trying to enforce them were probably not “hygienic” in nature. This was very obvious from comments sometimes made by staff; as told to me by various members:

- You are too strong to fit into this gym.
- Members built like you should not be seen around here.
- Since you are a bodybuilder, your personality is in doubt. If you wish to join this gym we need first to see written evidence of your good behaviour.

One interesting aspect of this; one of many, is that staff only appeared to keep an eye on male members. They were told off when wearing a tanktop or a cap, and when “making sounds” as they put effort into their training. As far as I could observe, women were never told off or “corrected”, and the gym has a wide-spread reputation for being a spot where women go to “show off”, leaving little left for the imagination of heterosexual men. So, there was clearly a gender bias, which could be exemplified also by signs posted over the dumbbell racks, saying “all you men, big and strong, replace equipment after use”. Also women putting an effort into their training made sounds of exhaustion. Women, too, more often than men in my experience, ignored to replace equipment after use.

I had a chance at a later stage to discuss this tacit anti-bodybuilder policy with two Finnish Managers (both male and in their mid-30s), who together owned a large Fitness Centre in Helsinki, belonging to one of the major international fitness franchises in Scandinavia. “We do not want to admit bodybuilders as members, but rather try to prevent them from joining,” one of them told me confidently after having seen a large poster of myself hanging on the wall in a Stockholm gym. I asked them how they knew that bodybuilders were “bad for business”. Had there been any reliable market research? They said no, and then went on to outline how they had succeeded in barring bodybuilders from their own establishment: They removed the heaviest sets of dumbbells for a month and during that time, the number of bodybuilders training in their gym decreased. This was taken as “hard evidence” that their strategy was a success. I offered the two gym owners to perform a scientifically stringent study for them to find out whether bodybuilders were, in fact, bad for business. They took my business card and were never heard from again.

Insults or derogatory treatment is also the experience of the participating bodybuilders, though their statements show less severity, and one participant particularly (C1-CAN) claims never to have had encounters that somehow reflected negatively on him as a bodybuilder. He writes:

C1-CAN: Never! Lots of respect. Lots of jokes, like “hey man, wanna arm wrestle”, and “wouldn’t want to get on your bad side” and so on.

While the Canadian bodybuilder obviously is respected, remarks made about him could nevertheless be interpreted to some extent as derogatory. They do suggest his size automatically makes individuals see him as a violent person too. However, that which constitutes an insult or not is of course often a matter of personal interpretation and social context. This has particular relevance for the Swedish sub-sample, which will be discussed later. There are cultural differences between Europe and North America when it comes to how to construe encounters with bodybuilders and Bodybuilding. It is more likely to receive appreciation and admiration for one’s training effort and resulting appearance in North America than it is in Europe, but offensive and derogatory remarks are certainly cross-continental:

A4-SE: People have said stupid things to me, but usually this is done behind my back, which is picked up by my wife and friends, not by me. But I get insulting gestures and faces that shows distaste and disapproval.

A17-SE: Many times. They say your are stupid and unable to comprehend. Other simply stare at you and it is easy to see what they are thinking: “Damn, he is revolting”. Especially if you shop for clothes you can hear people talk about you in the background.

B2-USA: Yes, people look at me as if I am a Science project or just assume that I am dumb.

D1-UK: Once I was told that I couldn’t train at a gym because they didn’t want any of “my sort” (ie. bodybuilders) there.

It would seem that my own experience in the Swedish research setting is the most negative one amongst participants. Although the participants have been insulted as based on their appearance alone, they seem not to have been put through the same extent of blatant hatred and mockery that I was put through:

Bloody pill-popping muscle freak! (as shouted to me across the street by an unknown lady in her mid-50s, in company of four inebriated men).

Ah, are you guzzling anabolics again?! (which was a comment made at work as I was pouring myself a so-called protein shake: a milk-based beverage with a very high protein content).

However, I am convinced that all the participants, though perhaps to varying degrees, are very aware of people’s potentially hostile remarks and reactions.

But the latent hostility is generally coped with and very often rationalised. The British participant is a good example (D1-UK). He is a Forensic Psychiatrist by profession:

For years I've been sort of uncomfortable and embarrassed about my size with colleagues. Almost as if by being big I was subverting the serious business of trying to help people (even though I do take my job very seriously). But about 18 months ago I thought "fuck it". Since age 15 I've been training regularly and wanting to be massive. So, I decided there was no point in holding back. If I was going to get to be the size I've always wanted to be, it's now or never. Feeling secure in my position also helps I think (I've been a consultant now for 5 years). So I bought some bigger shirts and here I am (although I haven't got round to telling colleagues that I also work as a doorman at the weekend...).

I discovered that offensive remarks sometimes carry a normative content; as if some untold standard had been broken and I had failed to abide by it. Such remarks could range from subtle to very rude, or I could be met by a very telling silence or simply be ignored suggesting I was an embarrassment. Above all, such norms appear to exist in the European academic world.

In being asked to write for a newsletter published by a well-respected international scholarly society. I was also requested to hand in a photograph of myself to accompany the publication of my article. The Editor did not stipulate what kind of photograph, so I decided to put to the test how she would react to a tasteful photograph making it very obvious I was a bodybuilder. The article was duly printed but without the picture. This intrigued me. If the Editor had found the submitted picture in anyway unsuitable, it would have seem only natural to say so and request another more to her liking. But instead the matter was silenced; which presumably means the matter was perceived as embarrassing and associated with shame on my behalf.

The same newsletter, a year earlier, asked a number of regular contributors to write their own brief biography for the benefit of the readers. I decided to add "Personal Trainer, Licensed by the International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB)" to my list of merits; a correct entry, I do have the license. But it is also a piece of information that I for years have chosen not to include in my CV, correctly suspecting it would affect my professional status negatively. The reaction to the published biography was swift. Only a few days after its world-wide publication, I received e-mails commenting on the added, and rather inconspicuous, entry. A very well-known scholar from England (female, in her mid-60ies) wrote that this was "indeed a colourful background. But I wish you well in your new endeavours". I had nowhere said I was leaving my profession seek-

ing “another career”. But for some reason being a bodybuilder seemed to indicate to academics that I was leaving Science behind, or alternatively that Bodybuilding is not compatible with an academic pursuit at all. The second e-mail, however, came from Continental Europe and a Sport Psychologist, himself a former athlete. He was more intrigued than shocked, and refrained from evaluating my rekindled interests.

Other comments made to me by European academics also show surprise, hinting that I was to some extent out of bounds:

Oh my God! Have you become a bouncer!

(Commented by an academic administrator and scholar; a male in his 50s, Germany).

You did not look quite like this before, did you?

(A Chair, male in his mid-50s, prior to a public PhD examination, Sweden).

In comparison, to demonstrate cultural differences, an American well known Professor, the Head of the university institution in which he worked, once spontaneously wrote me having seen photographs of me in contest shape (ie. with a lower than usual percentage of body fat) and said, after a few exchanges of letters:

I would hire you instantly to this university and to this department, since by seeing how you look physically, I can tell the amount of work that has gone into it; the effort and the determination. Those are qualities I need in this department. Alas! you are not an engineer, but a psychologist.

Needless to say, academic qualifications would have been very important, but the mere fact that first impressions meant so much to this academic makes an interesting comparison to how my European colleagues have dealt with the fact that one of their peers “have become a muscle man”.

Outside of the academic world, however, displeasure was also expressed through non-verbal vocalisations such as hissing, very obvious body language or taken actions. Offensive responses then are mainly socially constructed in that at some level they tend to involve norms and values.

## The provocative response

Reactions intended to provoke or challenge for the purpose of evaluation; presumably of physical prowess and level of perceived danger were also part of the response array. It seems more common to be provoked because of your physical size in certain places rather than in others, so whether or not submitted to provocations depended to some extent on habits and chosen venues. Several participants experienced this in relation to pubs and clubs:

A4-SE: Yes, once in a pub by a man who had had too much to drink.

B2-USA: Always. Especially when they are drunk. We [police officers] call that “having beer muscles” They can be 120 lbs (55 kilos), but once beer goes in, they are 310 lbs (141 kilos)!

One of the Canadian bodybuilders had obviously quite intentionally established his dominance by virtue of his considerable size. With some confidence he answered:

C1-CAN: No, I am too big, and look pretty mean. No one has wanted to fight me in over 10 years.

My own experience in the field was somewhat different, and I had a very unexpected such provocation, not in a bar by someone inebriated, but by university staff during the normal course of a working day:

I wonder what would happen if I punched you hard in the stomach (as said by a male in the Faculty Lounge, in his 50s, for no apparent reason)

I wouldn't want to even attempt to hit you (male, in his mid-60s, academic staff)

I see myself, and I believe anyone who knows me well, as a completely non-violent individual. In spite of this the perception of a large-framed muscular body evoked, even in my colleagues, thoughts of violence and aggression. On some level a number of them appeared to have an inherent desire to test their assumption that size is dangerous and how they would fare if their challenge really resulted in a fight! One staff member obviously wanted to try, whereas the other had already assessed me and decided there would be no use in trying. Quite a few male colleagues (and others in the research setting) shared the assessment of the deferent one, which makes a case for recognising another separate response category, namely the potential danger response.

## The potential danger response

Size, without being construed as overweight appears to signal potential danger. This was very obvious one evening walking alone in the city centre of Stockholm. I was crossing a bridge and walking towards me was a large group of boisterous and overly refreshed males in their late teens. I felt uncomfortable being alone with some 15 male teenagers with their impulse control system affected by alcohol. I therefore assessed the situation as possibly becoming one of provocation: adolescents wanting to “try their luck” with someone who could possibly boost their ego should they succeed. I decided to posture, and headed straight towards them. Little did I realise that they had assessed me in much the same way. To posture is an intra-species behaviour in which two animals of the same species evaluate one another in trying to look as imposing and convincingly dangerous as possible, with the intention of intimidating but not resorting to violent aggression (Grossman, 1995).

When the inevitable encounter took place midway on the bridge, the group of adolescents divided into two providing me with free passage. Leaving them behind I could hear the following being said: “Bloody hell, did you see the size of him!” Their previous (automatic and unaware) assessment of me had obviously made them decide that they had no intention whatsoever to pick a fight with me.

At a bus stop awaiting the bus home after training, I passed a group of alcoholics huddling in one of the bus shelters to avoid the cold drizzle. No one said a word as I passed, but obviously comments were made as I got out of reach to hear. One of them (a young male in his 20s and unlike the others in the group, he was sober) came running after me. As I sat down on a bench he approached me and said: “You’re not one to knock down. You are huge! Who would dare?” As it turned out, he had himself trained until a few years ago. An accident forced him to quit and the healing process had prevented his return to the gym. He wanted to know what to consider especially as he returned to training again, or as he put it, “what to consider to become big”. He offered his hand three times as a token of bonding before he returned to his group of friends. When he walked off he repeated, mumbling audibly: “No one would hit you, you are so huge”.

Participants B2-USA and A4-SE had both experienced similar situations. The British bodybuilder, however, provided an especially insightful answer in his professional capacities as both psychiatrist and doorman (“bouncer”):

D1-UK: I work as a doorman. If there is confrontation I am often able to get an aggressive individual to back down by making sure that he sees my size. I think it is my size he is responding to because they usually “size me up”; ie. look up and down and then become more compliant. It doesn't always work but does happen regularly.

It is well known in the study of body language and human heterosexual and homosexual mating behaviour that we emphasise certain aspects of our bodies unaware to become particularly attractive to one another (see Argyle, 1990 and Buss, 1994 for overviews). If we pass someone by chance whom we find attractive on a beach, most men and women will automatically straighten their backs. Women will also emphasise their breasts and men will usually do chest out and belly in (Schefflen, 1972). This, however, is associated with human mating behaviour. Does such unaware body behaviour apply in other situations? What if two male bodybuilders, being strangers to one another, were to meet by chance, say, in the street? Will they do something similar?

Over the years I have seen innumerable times how particularly young men behave when training. They often seek to impress each other in various ways. I was no exception myself! I have been amazed on occasion at my own training behaviour in gyms. When training near a new gym member, who is also an advanced bodybuilder, I am suddenly able to increase strength and stamina because, without consciously deciding to make a good impression, I am already set on proving myself. It has fascinated me how such a situation, like a light switch, can psychologically switch on physical resources I did not know I had. I have also been introduced by friends to other fellow bodybuilders whom I did not know at the time, and I have found that before we have managed to establish a level of understanding and friendship, the situation as such constituted a period of *mutual* assessment; a moment's unaware comparison. Is this the behaviour of individuals with low Self-esteem, who have to convince themselves they are in some way “better” than the other if they are to feel good about themselves which perhaps Kline (1993) would have argued? It could be of course, not everyone displays similar behaviour for exactly the same reason. But I think the explanation more often is another one. This is evolution-mediated posturing; an automatically triggered response to establish dominance (cf. Barnard, 2004).

I therefore asked participants the following question: When you pass another unfamiliar male bodybuilder in the street, on the beach, or spot a new member to your gym for the first time, also an advanced bodybuilder, do you

try to impress him discretely by for example doing a few more reps, lift heavier than usual and/or trying to look your best, hiding your flaws as a bodybuilder?

It would take a considerable Self-knowledge to be able to answer this question. Two answered no (B1-USA and A16-SE) but a few participants recognised this behaviour:

A4-SE: I guess many years ago I was like that but not anymore.  
Maybe I have grown up?

A17-SE: When I was young perhaps I did it, but not now.

B2-USA: No, I am so not like that, if anything, they try to impress me, it ends up being embarrassment on their part as I pay no attention to them when they start doing that.

D1-UK: Yes, for example holding stomach in, standing upright and not slouching.

Participants make a good point when they suggest there was a time they were concerned with posturing but that they are no more. However, they do probably not realise why. It is not likely to be a question of having “grown up”. Given that posturing is applicable here, it is dominance behaviour. If being the largest or most merited and famous bodybuilder in their gym they are less likely to need to strive to maintain this status in that territory. They are so out of everyone else’s league that comparisons cannot be made. I venture to suggest though, that if someone else came along, unfamiliar and of perceived equal status, posturing would again be triggered (Barnard, 2004). However, the force of this response probably varies with personal disposition. Some might be able to over-ride it by choice others not so successfully. One Canadian participant demonstrated the situation in part:

C1-CAN: Depends. If he is walking around calm, quiet, I either leave him alone, or say hi and strike up a conversation with him ... If he comes in and thinks he owns the place, I show him he is wrong. For example, one cocky asshole in my gym tells everyone he is the biggest and strongest bodybuilder in the gym. Not. He was trying to deadlift 405 lbs (184 kilos). He took it off the rack, it never came up again. Came back to try it four times. I casually walked over, lifted it onto the rack and said “there you go” and walked away laughing my head off. Cocky ass holes need to be put in their place.

### ***If you can't beat them join them!***

A large-framed male muscular body signals potential danger and is apparently a part of the complex male bodybuilder stereotype. In addition, posturing is an evolutionary remnant we need to deal with in everyday life. However, one question in regard to reacting to potential danger remains. If we unaware recognise this potential danger, what options do we have to react? There are probably four choices. The most frequently discussed of these in mainstream psychology is the so-called “flight or fight response”: You either try to destroy the perceived threat or you try to escape it. But, there are two more alternatives rarely mentioned, namely to *posture*, which has been discussed extensively above, and *submission* (Grossmann, 1996).

In encountering danger we can meet it aggressively intent on violence and try to get rid of it. But we can also, after some kind of assessment of the situation, choose to try to run away from it. We may also opt for posturing. If so we endeavour to impress whoever represents the danger that an assault will probably have severe consequences. However, we may also submit; or surrender even before any aggressive displays have even begun. In the context of this study submission is best understood as giving the impression of making friends. We decide it is better to make an ally out of what appears to be a formidable potential aggressor than to trigger violence which may be to the detriment of the challenger.

One way of expressing such submission (or perhaps a type of bonding) is likely to be through touch. Note that there is also a sexually oriented touch (see the sexually oriented response below). Two participating bodybuilders in the study made the following observations on touch presumably intended as an offer of being an ally rather than a challenger and an adversary (ie. a submission):

A16-SE: It happens that young men humorously have commented parts of my body and at the same time touched and pinched me. Often at the same time as they pose their own muscles for comparison.

D1-UK: Men frequently ... make physical contact, for example touch triceps or shoulders during course of normal interactions. I get the feeling that as well as being meant as a gesture of friendliness, there is also an element of curiosity how it feels to touch me. It's almost as if the touch is exploratory. This usually does not feel sexual in any way but rather an expression on interest, curiosity, admiration, friendliness.

The result of recognising the potential danger as represented by male bodybuilder, when not avoiding it (like a few of my female students did), appeared in the research setting to be to make friends (which particularly a number of male stu-

dents made a special effort of becoming). The young alcoholic described above is one example, another was a large part of the corps of bus drivers in the medium-sized town. Everyone seemed to know who I was, and they were all unusually friendly. The drivers often made well-intending humorous remarks. One driver especially (a Danish male, in his late 50s), always laughed when I embarked his bus. He usually said, loudly for all to hear, "Lille mand!" (in Danish, meaning "tiny man") then laughing cordially. Another bus driver (Assyrian, in his early 20s, once shocked fellow passengers as I was coming on board. Seeing me he shouted: "We do not accept men as big as you on board this bus. You are just too large!" This was followed by a roaring laughter.

### The projective response

"I wouldn't want to meet you on any of the back streets downtown at night", as spontaneously commented by a male academic at work, in his mid-50s. Similar comments were frequent throughout the research period. Comments were not meant to be in anyway insulting, at least that is not how I understood them. Such comments suggested an altogether different aspect of encountering a male bodybuilder, namely one of unaware and spontaneous *projection*. Body characteristics are "magically" attributed with a certain personality. The interesting aspect here is that this appeared to override previous knowledge of an individual. What is seen is also what is believed. This is by no means unknown in human behaviour. Psychological theory has previously tried to make sense of the body's influence on the mind (or vice versa). Ernst Kretschmer (1921) sought to establish a connection between body types and mental disorders, and for this purpose he devised a classification system of body types. Needless to say, Kretschmer's theory failed miserably. Psychopathologies are not confined to certain types of physical characteristics, just as IQ-level is not determined by the form and size of one's skull.

It was Sheldon (1951), however, who evoked the more general interest in body perception. In a now classical study he described the male body on a continuum ranging from ectomorphic (tall and thin), to mesomorphic (athletic and muscular) and to endomorphic (heavy and rotund). Sheldon also ran into trouble and became severely criticised by the scientific community when attaching specific traits of personality to each body type. The endomorph would typically be one who loves to eat, seeks physical satisfactions and is generally

happy and out-going. The mesomorph would rather be energetic and direct in his manner, whereas the ectomorph would be a fearful and sensitive individual. Needless to say, this conjecture did not hold either. Body characteristics have nevertheless continued to fascinate social psychologists irrespective of Sheldon's suggestion. Brodsky (1954) presented 150 male college students with basic sketches outlining Sheldon's proposed three main body types. Students were asked, for example, which one of the three would be the most or the least aggressive? Most students believed the endomorph to be the least aggressive (and make the worst athlete), while the mesomorph was considered the most aggressive, the best suited leader, and interestingly also the one most desired as a friend. DeJong and Kleck (1984) reviewed this line of research and concluded that people regard endomorphs as being old-fashioned, physically weak, talkative, warm-hearted, sympathetic, good-natured, agreeable, trusting, needy, people-oriented, loves to eat, loves physical satisfaction. Mesomorphic individuals are viewed as masculine, Self-reliant, adventurous, energetic, competitive, liking exercise and are bold. Finally, the ectomorph is viewed as ambitious, tense, nervous, stubborn, quiet, liking privacy and sensitive to pain. In addition, Butler and Ryckman (1993) found that both children and adults strongly prefer mesomorphic body types and attribute more positive traits to persons with mesomorphic bodies than to people with other body types.

Translated into this research project it would have meant that had I been overweight instead (ie. endomorph), I would have been considered by many as approachable, friendly and social, which sounds more or less ideal in an educational setting. But I was male, large and muscular (ie. mesomorph even a hypermesomorph), therefore an entirely other set of rules applied how to understand me and how to behave towards me. I was unconsciously perceived as a risk, a potential danger and assessed as aggressive. I must assume I was also regarded as unreliable and unpredictable. Clearly the basis of these responses is very likely to be biological. We are always unwittingly alert to certain cues in the environment, in essence, to secure the transmission of genes to future generations. In order to optimise success we have presumably been programmed by evolution to scan for dangers to that transmission.

### ***Big, bad and stupid also***

One tangent of this, unique to large-framed muscular males, is that of construing him as always “unintelligent”. Intelligence, in spite of numerous theories and definitions, is perhaps generally best defined as the ability to adapt successfully to the environment by whatever means, thereby optimising survival and make gene transmission possible (cf. Ceci, 1996). Having appeared on national television as expert on gifted children, comments from gym members and others knowing me mainly as a bodybuilder, dealt with their surprise to finding out that a bodybuilder could be “clever” too.

In a general Internet chat room, I suddenly received a message from an unknown man, 50 years of age (age and chosen name of discussants always accompany sent messages) after having seen a picture of me on the Internet. The message read:

So, how high is your IQ? Or don't you have one; only little bodybuilders in your head perhaps? I'd say IQ 70–80. And probably your cock is very small too.  
But if you like all that, enjoy your inferiority complexes and continue training.

I confronted him and wrote him back asking why he would say such a thing, and to a complete stranger at that? I received the following very telling apology back:

I am sorry, I don't know why I wrote what I did. I suppose some bodybuilders are stupid. I can't understand why they have to become like that. A built body is nice, but why like that; why so much? To impress men and women? Moderation is best! But if you like looking like that and invest that much hard work into it, it is OK. I suppose you could be a nice person even though you are a bodybuilder. Maybe I have said a stupid thing.

I put the question of a large-framed muscular body and its alleged relationship to a simpleton mind to the participants of the study. Most of them had similar experiences:

A16-SE: People are often surprised them I tell them which my profession is [I am a computer programmer and Systems developer].

A17-SE: Absolutely, this is the most common insult.

B1-USA: Yes, I think people generally expect me to be fairly stupid, and are surprised to to discover that I am rather articulate and very well-educated.

D1-UK: Frequently. People assume I am less intelligent at times when I look bigger (which depends on the stage of training cycle or the clothes I am wearing). When I am looking bigger and I speak they look noticeably more surprised (I am reasonably articulate) than when looking smaller. I can almost observe the change in attitude towards me in their faces.

While I am convinced that the projection of personality traits is genetically prompted, I think that the construal of male bodybuilders particularly as stupid or less intelligent and assumed incapable of advanced skills and complex reasoning, is mainly and originally a defence mechanism in operation to protect Self-esteem. To find, or in this case: to project a flaw onto someone else regarding a characteristic or an attribute, that tends to be valued by society makes an otherwise unreachable individual “more human”. That is, such an attribution makes him “more like myself”, which may award the projecting individual a certain sense of both safety and satisfaction. One participant had observed this kind of behaviour between advanced bodybuilders and less advanced bodybuilders:

A4-SE: You hear from others, never face to face, that some “wannabes” have negative opinions of what you look like as a bodybuilder. Obviously it is not enough for me to be civil and courteous.

However, this notion is now so widely spread in the Western World that it has become part of the male bodybuilder stereotype. Someone huge and muscular is automatically seen as void of greater intellectual abilities. No surprise then, that bodybuilders are frowned upon particularly in the academic world! The same could not be said of a golfer or a tennis player.

### **The reactive formation response**

A response following the cultural norm but does not agree with it; a desire to emulate a certain behaviour, a way of being, or expressing a want on one level but that is not recognised at another resulting in saying or doing something you do not really vouch for is commonly termed reaction formation. For as long as I have been a gym member myself I have heard a great number of bodybuilders explain insulting behaviour against them as envy. Were they correct? I had this in mind as I walked or travelled through the research settings. I encountered the following:

Just too much muscle! I wouldn't want to be like that (said by an unknown male, approximate age 20, in a group of other similarly aged males standing beside the beach promenade as I walked by).

Bloody, pumped-up packet of beef! (as conveyed by a male, in his 30s, having stopped by traffic lights. Lowering one car window he shouted at me. I was out walking a dog)

Fucking, pill-popper! You can't get legs like that without munching pills (said spontaneously by an agitated man on a local bus, approximately in his 50s).

I found this type of response too amongst academics, who did not know how to handle their impression of me. One male colleague came to a sudden halt in a corridor to observe me from top and down. Pointing to his head he said, with some sarcasm: "Well, what you have in your body I have in here!" My colleague (in his 60s) started to walk away, but suddenly turned around again and said: "Well, I ride my bicycle for exercise and I do a damn good job of it too!" The participating bodybuilders had similar experiences, though apparently not usually as forceful as the ones I experienced in the Swedish research setting:

B2-USA: Too many to explain. One person who saw me years later after I started bodybuilding said. "So, you stuck to it and are now huge. I was actually hoping you were going to fail. No offence though." They actually said that to my face. Sad.

D1-UK: People sometimes make snide remarks about my size and how they wouldn't want to look like me because it looks "overdone" (and thereby make the assumption that they could look like me if they wanted to but that they chose not to, rather than being open to the possibility that they may never be able to achieve the same even if they wanted to).

It is difficult to understand these responses in any other way than as prompted by some internal conflict. On one level the desire to be "alpha male". This seems to be the way that many men reluctantly appear to perceive a bodybuilder. But on another level, they simultaneously have to cope with perhaps forbidding societal norms and maybe, as the participating British bodybuilder pointed out, consider whether they actually have what it takes by means of determination and effort to achieve what the bodybuilder has achieved. The resulting behaviour often becomes paradoxical: appreciation becomes loathing and admiration turns to contempt.

My experience in the field was that this type of response came exclusively from men. A few women reacted similarly, but I am convinced their reasons for reacting may be different. A few times I overheard groups of girls discuss amongst themselves as I passed them: "Disgusting! Utterly disgusting!" (as uttered by a female, about 20 years old). One individual in the research setting, also a bodybuilder (in his late 20s), told me that "when women see you, they nudge their boyfriends and tell them how disgusting it looks with that much muscle. But then, if you meet these women alone, they want you and rather *because* you look the way you do". These women could have reacted simply be-

cause of preference, or they could have reacted because they felt very strongly that I and other bodybuilders had broken some tacit code we were unaware of. However, since such reactions often were very intensely communicated, a fair guess is that, unlike for most of the men reacting similarly but not as dramatically, women's response was more or less sexual in nature. But the encounter with a male bodybuilder also triggered a process of reaction formation. They may well have expressed disgust instead of what they really thought, just to remain within the tacit norms of the cultural or sub-cultural context.

Famed bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger had much the same experience and rather took advantage of women's fascination for him. While still living in Austria, he comments: "The strangest thing was how my new body struck girls. There were a certain number of girls who were knocked out by it and a certain number who found it repulsive. There was absolutely no in-between" (Schwarzenegger/Hall, 1993, p. 26). However, Schwarzenegger decided to pursue one of the girls who regarded him as loathsome because, as she told him, "I wouldn't go out with you in a million years. You're in love with yourself. You're in love with your own body. You look at yourself all the time. You pose in front of the mirror" (p. 27). Schwarzenegger did not manage to convince her and win her over, which was a considerable blow to his Self-esteem. Some time after ceasing the pursuit he returned to his hometown and had more or less forgotten about the experience. The girl, however, had not forgotten him. She rang him up a number of times, declaring she was divorced and available and wanted to "get together".

So, even if reactions vary by content and nature, perhaps the basic and genetically prompted need makes itself known more often than we are prepared to admit, or indeed able to admit?

The strongest reaction I had from any woman during the three years of research was surprisingly and very unexpectedly at work: "Do you think you are sexy or what?!" a female colleague screamed at me in a very agitated voice (a woman in her mid-40s). She came bursting into my office uninvited on a hot summer's day in June, delivered her message and then turned around angrily and left. Term was over, no one else was around but myself, or at least so I thought. In my stuffy office I took my shirt off. This was obviously observed by my colleague from the corridor outside. Prior to this very unexpected eruption of annoyance, she had several times, and very openly, expressed her distaste for my looks. Every time she did, I always wondered what the reaction would be if I had said the exact same to her but adapted it for a woman. Need-

less to say, normal decency and research ethics would not allow such an experiment no matter how interesting. I have no other suggestion to make, than that this was a display of considerable sexual frustration, perhaps unaware to my colleague. The behaviour it prompted has the telltale signs of reaction formation, though probably not based on evolutionary domination desires.

To better understand how women react, I think a female researcher would have been more suited. I do recognise my shortcomings in this respect. However, responses that are sexually oriented towards the male bodybuilder cannot be overlooked, though they are not all expressed through reaction formation. I therefore propose these to form a separate response category.

### **The sexually oriented response**

A good friend and I were walking around amidst a crowd of late summer tourists in the Old City of Stockholm. It was very warm. I walked with no shirt as we headed for ice cream stands by the waterfront. I was spotted by a female acquaintance of my then present company. She did not make herself known at the time, but rang my acquaintance the same evening at his home to enquire who I was. With some fervour, and much to his amusement, she told him very earnestly: “I want that man to be the father of my children!”

The sexually oriented response in the research setting, however, was rarely verbal, and almost always involved touching. Sometimes permission was sought to touch. If told no, the touching would be made anyway:

Can I, please, touch your arm? (question politely posed by a male waiter, approximately 40 years of age, in a restaurant car on the Bonn–Frankfurt am Main train, Germany)

May I touch you? (A teenage girl, who came running across the street from a group of other girls. I declined, but she did not care. She squeezed my arm resolutely and ran off).

Touching was occasionally much less subtle and could quite clearly have been characterised as blatant sexual harassment. During the entire research period of three years one woman at work, approximately 50 years old, would discretely slide up behind me on days of staff conferences and touch me in ways that could not be considered a mere “friendly pat” (see Gerrity, 2000). To my considerable surprise, she finally did this very openly in the Faculty Lounge in front of three other women colleagues and one woman administrator. She

came up behind me and grabbed my chest quite provocatively. I decided to confront her about this. I did not approve. With four witnesses watching and listening I asked her: “Do you realise what you are doing? If I, as a man, had done to you what you just did to me, I would most likely be dismissed from campus after having faced a disciplinary hearing, the end-result being that I probably would lose my job!?” The response was as unexpected as her clearly sexually oriented provocation. She laughed and chimed: “Yes, isn’t it wonderful!” Even more surprising was that three of the other colleagues witnessing this laughed with her, whereas the administrator on the other hand was perturbed and told me so afterwards.

When waiting for a train to pass, the bicycle lock fell to the ground without me noticing it. A woman (approximately in her mid-60s) was kind enough to pick it up and handed it to me. This was almost certainly a spontaneous act of altruistic behaviour. But, in the process from triggering the response to be of assistance and then carrying it out, the intent of her action changed. Having handed me the lock, she took every opportunity to touch and feel me. She caressed my arm, pinched it, moved her hand back and forth on my back. She was apparently hard of hearing, so I said “thank you” as clearly as possible to make it possible for her to lip-read and make her understand that her fondling was not appreciated. I wished to leave as soon as possible, but we were trapped in a crowd of people; all crossing the rails. I tried to indicate my disapproval by shying away the best I could. She ignored me and continued. Finally out of the crowd, I could again mount my bicycle and leave. I said “thanks” again, and heard her say, in a very slurred way: “Strong!”, as she pinched me again before I was out of reach and on my way.

Waiting for the bus at around 9 pm after training two men, somewhat drunk, were sitting on a bench in one of the shelters. Both were in their mid-50s. The larger one of them shouted for all to hear all over the bus station: “Now there is a big man! Come over here!” Wondering what he wanted, I walked over. But instead of receiving an answer to what the matter was, he grabbed me forcefully and tried to squeeze and feel me as much as he possibly could from his seated position. I had to use force to break free and walk away, with all other waiting bus passengers around watching the incident.

In asking the participants of this study whether they had had similar experiences, I made sure to ask about both female (a) and male (b) sexually oriented responses:

A4-SE(a): Yes, drunken girls/women in bars (before I was married and had children).

A4-SE(b): None.

A17-SE (a): This happens frequently and I enjoy it! Usually when you are out amongst slightly over-refreshed people many are quick to feel my arm or put a hand on my butt. Some ask if they can first. This usually makes me feel good, but people can over-do it too.

B1-USA(a): Often women will ask if they can touch me or feel my arm

B1-USA(b): Yes, usually gay men at a club or a bar for example.

B2-USA(a): Yes. Too many to list. Airports, grocery stores, post offices and so on. Some [women] just walk right up and do it.

B2-USA(b): Yes, too many to list. [And like with women] some just walk right up and do it.

C1-CAN(a): I was at a power-pull contest and a girl stopped dead in her tracks, came up to feel my arms. I made her breakfast the next morning.

I encourage women to touch whatever they want.

C1-CAN(b): I had to go to a birthday party at a gay bar. every freakin' guy in the place. Most just ask what I bench and so on, most never touch.

D1-UK(a): When working doors [in a club], groups of women sometimes ask to feel my biceps.

As already demonstrated, touching may have several functions one of which is sexual. In addition, there may well be a diversity of sexually oriented touches as well, from a subtle invitation to foreplay and mating to frottage, where someone seeks out strategies to be able to rub against others for sexual gratification (Franzini & Grossberg, 1994). The picture becomes even more complicated if also including sexual preferences whether the one who touches is homosexual or heterosexual (Derlega, Catanzaro, & Lewis, 2001). Suffice to say, given the frames of this research, that sexually oriented responses towards male bodybuilders are common, and such are made by both men and women, often with little respect for the bodybuilder as a person with his own and preferences.

## The admiration response

Considering the variety of responses to a male bodybuilder, many of which seem related to perceiving him on a very basic level as a kind of “alpha male”, it is feasible to also ask the question whether *admiration* is part of the male bodybuilder stereotype? Is a bodybuilder or what he represents related to something positive, which people would willingly admit as something desirable? I asked participants especially if they had such positive responses in other places than in the gym. To emphasise reactions from other sub-cultures in society is important, since there will inevitably exist within-group loyalty and appreciation in the gym. The shared interest of the sport will prompt responses not representative of out-group members’ stereotypical reactions. This is what the participants replied:

A4-SE: Yes, and the nice thing about it is that I am experiencing a change of attitude for the better.

A17-SE: It does happen but not as often as I would wish it, It is motivating to be encouraged and appreciated, and it makes you want to probe even further in the gym.

B1-USA: The odd comment I often get though is “I used to look like that”. The positive comments come more often from other Black men and women. I also get positive comments from non-Black teen boys. Once in an airport a teen boy said I looked like Ronnie Coleman [the current top-ranked male bodybuilder champion in the world]... As I was walking to the studio to train my client I stopped at the corner and a (Black) woman said to me. “You don’t even need to wear that (Gold’s Gym) shirt. You’re advertisement enough. Thanks for making the neighbourhood more attractive.” Quite a compliment! But you know, it’s almost always a Black woman who will say such things - others may be thinking it (I hope), but then American Black women tend to be very outspoken ... In general, reactions are somewhat less favourable in Washington, D.C., where I live, than in other cities. Body conscious cities like LA and Miami tend to have many favourable reactions. Reactions are more favourable in NYC as well from all types of people (men, women, young, old, black, white, etc.). When I’ve travelled abroad, reactions have been generally favourable – perhaps more because it’s apparent that I’m an American ... The cultural difference is very significant ... here in the US, reaction to bodybuilders has a good deal to do with race, which tends to parallel body image in general. Black and Hispanic women I find are much more receptive to extremely muscular men than white women in general. Interestingly, Black and Hispanic men also tend to prefer larger women (i.e. carrying more body fat).

B2-USA: Just spontaneous people tell me this. Usually random persons.

D1-UK: Young men often comment positively on my size although older men also do the same. Young men have more insight into the training effort involved.

For myself as the field researcher, the admiration response puzzled me the most. Note that the Swedish bodybuilder above (A4-SE) has noted a change in attitude implying that approving of a male bodybuilder has been rare, if at all occurring. This was, in fact, my experience for the entire research period. I received very few positive reactions as a whole, but the ones I did receive formed a very distinct pattern.

Admiration mainly came from three groups: Male students at the university marginalised (Swedish-born) individuals and Middle Eastern immigrants. A majority of male students appeared intrigued by finding out that their psychology professor was a bodybuilder. Male students frequently stopped by my office to discuss training and nutrition as well as to hand me humorous articles they had found in the media on training, work and eating, or simply to stop by my office to say hello. At the beginning of term I was once greeted by the Student Union President Elect (male, 24 years old) with “Hail Roland, Professor, Bodybuilder, Legend!” Furthermore, by the end of the research period the following headline appeared in the Student Union Magazine: “The Heavyweight Professor Who Dares To Challenge!” I had been asked by its editor for an interview after having demonstrated Manfred Clynes’ Theory of Senticity to second-year Psychology students. Trying to convey emotional patterns according to the theory, I ventured, not very successfully, to dance a mystifying version of “The Dying Swan” in front of 100 students. My glorious effort (or so I thought) rather left students roaring with laughter, including myself realising what it must have looked like to see a 265-lbs (120 kilos) bodybuilding professor having a go at ballet. No nimble feet at all!

The second-year psychology students were also the only ones on campus, who expressed their suspicions I was “up to something” referring to the study of the male bodybuilder stereotype. One of them (male, in his early 20s), for example, on finally hearing about this research project, wrote me an e-mail saying:

I have to comment the interesting fact you now have revealed. During the entire year I have suspected that you were researching something. Since you stand out so much in the university (being built) and tend to be somewhat provocative (I have heard on the grapevine that you walk around in the town centre without a shirt), I have had a feeling, and therefore even defended you in discussions about your public behaviour, arguing that you were actually performing a study. So, during this academic year I have learnt many things, but above all never to trust a social psychologist’s behaviours. They are always up to something; scheming some clever study. I am glad to hear it was a study after all.

The female student population appeared much more reserved. I experienced several times that some female students appeared intimidated. This bothered me and I discussed it with a trusted female colleague, who spontaneously remarked: “But look at you! You are huge! No wonder they feel frightened to go and see you in your office!”

Note that my “public behaviour” outside the university was occasionally discussed amongst students. To be a bodybuilding male professor was acceptable according to male students at least, but to be a male bodybuilder off-campus was not quite as acceptable. I believe students to some extent - and particularly the brighter ones - suspended general Swedish cultural norms on my behalf, because I often seem to stand out as a role model and a mentor of sorts fulfilling many of the teaching criteria that are particularly appreciated by gifted students (Persson, in press; see Baldwin, 1993, for an overview). The context-dependent suspension of certain cultural norms made some of the male students explore their own masculine identity in a way they were not used to. Some more than others presumably felt a need to do so. Hence, their need for bonding by discussing training with me.

Clearly, there are definite cultural and sub-cultural variations in how to respond to a male bodybuilder. To investigate cultural differences more directly, I decided to perform a field experiment. During summer time I walked leisurely along the Beach Promenade. Like so many others I wore shorts and no shirt. The comparison between cultures was easy to make, since the beach is divided into East and West. For some reason native Swedes choose West Beach whereas immigrant Swedes (mainly Middle Eastern and African immigrants) choose East Beach, which has rendered it the unofficial name of “The Persian Gulf”.

Walking along East Beach quite a few men consistently gave me “thumbs-up” accompanied by, for example, “You have trained a lot” or “I want to look like you!” Male teenagers very often approached me and asked questions on training, or just to say they liked what they saw. Not everyone of course responded this way, but fact remains, I have never had a negative comment from any immigrant Swede during the entire duration of this project!

Walking along West Beach, however, was altogether a different experience. I noticed there was a very specific style of looking used to observe me: Most people on the beach seemed to want to appear disinterested but, in fact, the interest was enormous. This impression has been corroborated by people whom I knew and who happened to be on the beach as I passed. The Gym Business Manager of my own gym, who would prefer that I left the gym, was there too.

He told me, as one reason for this wish, that he had been on West Beach as I had walked by on the Promenade. He said: “if you only knew how people stared at you and what they said about you. So, to have a member like *you* cannot possibly be good for my business” ... I sometimes over-heard what people said when the wind was favourable, Comments were always derogatory and of various response types. However, their way of observation was the following: As soon as I was spotted, the men locked their heads in one position away from me, so as to appear as if looking somewhere else. But they were at the same time fixing their eyes on me anyway, following my every movement for as long as possible. When they were certain I could not see them, they felt more free to watch uninhibitedly and often invited everyone around them, who hadn't spotted me already, to watch too. Having experienced this several times, I decided to see what would happen if I suddenly turned around, as if looking for someone on the beach. I tried it and caught large numbers staring at me. It appeared to have embarrassed them tremendously that they were “caught” staring. They quickly turned around and looked as if they were doing something else.

In my experience the difference in reaction between native Swedes, fully socialised into typical Swedish norms and values and immigrant Swedes, bringing the values and norms of their native culture with them, was very distinctive.

I presented a draft of this research to Rainer Stratkotter, a Canadian colleague and a bio-social scientist. He shares with me a life-long interest in Bodybuilding. His immediate comment was this: “I definitely think the Swedish people are generally much more rude towards bodybuilders than over here. The rude comments you have received astound me – most people, unless maybe very drunk or otherwise having serious problems with inhibition – just wouldn't say those things ... I think the Swedes tend to channel their aggressive impulses verbally rather than physically. In the U.S. rude comments you received might easily lead to gunfire!!!! People have been shot for less rude comments or other slights.” (Personal communication, 16 July 2004). I agree. In my own experience, both within the constraints of this research and otherwise, there is an amazing resistance against Bodybuilding and bodybuilders in Sweden I have never encountered anywhere else.

As is obvious from the participants from other parts of the world no response category charted in this research is unique to any of the participating countries, but unique to Sweden seems to be the intensity and frequency by which negative remarks are being made. A few voices I have heard relevant to this are the following:

I heard Swedish former professional bodybuilder Mats Kardell once say in a seminar (Autumn, 1999), that “coming to the United States as a bodybuilder was an incredible difference. Suddenly I was appreciated rather than hated for pursuing Bodybuilding. I was liked for the way I looked, and they admired the amount of effort I had put into it”.

Also, one bodybuilder in the research setting had this experience when visiting North America: “I love it here. Girls are all over me like flies to honey, especially the Puerto Rican babes. God, I love this!” (as said by a 25-year old Swedish male bodybuilder: 5’7” 170cm, 220 lbs/100 kilos).

That the male ideal is different in different cultures is obvious and well known. Perhaps the best known male ideal in the Western World is “machismo” of the Hispanic cultures. Machismo demands a “real man” to be strong, forceful, to be provider, protector and withhold affectionate emotions (Ramirez, 1989). It has also been suggested that this notion includes the construal of danger, aggression and sexual prowess as typically manly virtues (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). In comparison, some research has outlined Sweden generally (and Norway, Denmark, and The Netherlands as well) as “low masculinity” cultures, meaning among other things that main values are concerned with group-orientation and that such a culture is less achievement-oriented (Hofstede, 1984). But while the typical Hispanic man presumably is very well aware of his masculine identity, I am not convinced that the typical Swedish man is. Researchers who have looked into this – all social constructivists – focus on historical events and facts, studying more or less what the official *duty* of the male gender role has been and currently is in its societal context (Berggren, 1999). No mention is ever made of personal identity and the psychological needs prompted by it. Note also that a very intentional effort is made to deconstruct differences between gender identities. The Swedish compulsory educational system for example is instrumental in this. One of the curricular documents reads: “Many [educational settings] are gender-bound. It is therefore essential that both girls’ and boys’ interests are provided for. However, staff are also to intentionally *break* traditional gender role patterns” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2000; p. 17, my italics).

This demands a need to scrutinise the Swedish participants in this study more closely, and particularly the ones who were dismissed for failing to make the height – relative muscle mass criterion. On the surface, it seems their experience of Bodybuilding is different from my own. However, it is highly unlikely that I, having included two different main locations for the research, and

having included international comparisons largely matching my experience, have observed something exclusively unique. There must exist a feasible explanation as to why the impressions of the Swedish participants are often qualitatively different from my own.

### The Swedish sub-sample

In taking a closer look at the Swedish bodybuilders below the stipulated rMM-value of < 20% I discovered first of all that the response pattern to the male bodybuilder is not valid for this particular sub-sample (Table 6). Their average fit to the cross-cultural response model is a mere < .48 and only five of the suggested 11 response categories reach above the set cut-off point (ie. I, II, VI, Xa, XI).

The most obvious difference between these and the sample proper is that of relative muscle mass. Several participants had an intuitive feel that they might not have acquired enough size to qualify as “advanced” (A6-SE, A10-SE, A11-SE, A14-SE).

*Table 6. Validation matrix featuring the relative agreement over the Swedish sub-sample who did not qualify according to the rMM >.80% criterion. Agreement is shown variable by variable. Complete agreement equals 1.0 whereas no agreement equals 0.0 (n = 13).*

RESPONSE CATEGORIES											
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Xa	Xb	XI	
0.62*	0.77*	0.38	0.38	0.23	0.62*	0.38	0.01	0.77*	0.46	0.62*	

Arbitrary set cut-off point for acceptable validity per category < 0.50, variables meeting this criterion are marked (\*)

However, while the Swedish participants included in the sample proper received mainly negative feedback from people they encountered outside of the gym, the sub-sample received mainly admiration. This difference provides important clues to understanding the apparently unique situation of Swedish bodybuilders. First, this is why I employed the rMM-criterion. People do indeed respond differently to bodybuilders above and below the set criterion. Second, people tend not to disapprove of a fit muscular body if below the

rMM-criterion. On the contrary, it is more often appreciated. A few voices from the sub-sample:

A6-SE: If I go to shop for clothes, go to the doctor's, meet new people and so on, I usually get compliments right away.

A9-SE: Yes, a few at work have very clearly told me they admire me. My girl likes it, and people I meet at parties usually show appreciation as well.

A10-SE: Oh yes, there are quite a few who appreciate bodybuilders and say so. It always gives me a warm feeling when they do.

Third, Bodybuilding is a sport under pressure. Its athletes are consistently accused of illicit drug use and I think also, to some extent, that what the male bodybuilder represents conflicts with the current Swedish male gender role. The following are a few interesting and relevant statements provided by the sub-sample:

A13-SE: Prejudices are the worse. Especially people who have never trained. They are capable of almost anything as they see you. I think that the general understanding of a bodybuilder is someone who has as an only objective to show off and who believes he is a better human being because of his muscle mass. No wonder press and media sometimes bring in the oddballs of Bodybuilding [like every other sport, we have them too] and present them as "typical bodybuilders" ... for example, I avoid dressing in a tanktop, even if I feel like wearing one. I can't stand people staring at me knowing what they think. It is usually men who stare, and who also give air to most prejudice. Then, I have noticed too, a kind of fear mixed with a certain kind of respect. It's hard to define. But I know they are not afraid of being knocked down [by me]. It is something else.

A15-SE: I think there is a problem of acceptance in society [as far as Bodybuilding is concerned]. No one complains when a football player trains hard and eats a lot. That is regarded as something positive. But when a bodybuilders does the very same ... then all of a sudden he is regarded as having low Self-esteem, is mentally unstable, and has to endure listening to comments like "he trains just to get girls". And of course, steroids are always mentioned. If you have size, then you automatically use them.

Obviously what is perceived as prejudice, wrongful and unfair accusations towards bodybuilders is an important issue for the Swedish athletes. In fact, so much so they adapt certain aspects of daily life to be able to avoid it: Participant A13-SE will not wear a tanktop where he can be seen, not even if he wants to. He fears the consequences. In being asked if he had ever been provoked, participant A7-SE replied: "No ... I don't think I have an attitude that puts me in situations like that. How you are treated has a lot to do with how you behave ... I dress in such a way so as to avoid showing my body". I en-

countered the same precautions taken by a bodybuilder in the research setting: “Why do you always train in sweaters and long training bottoms,” I asked one talented bodybuilder in my gym (male, in his late 20s). “Don’t you find it frightfully warm, not to mention uncomfortable as you use the gym equipment?” I was not prepared for his answer: “I dare not dress differently. I don’t want to show myself. Hell no, I don’t even undress on the beach. I keep a shirt on at all times, or else people will accuse me of using steroids!”

The essential difference here between the sample proper and the sub-sample is that these conflicts seem to have been more or less resolved in the sample proper. That is not to say they have been resolved with the surrounding social context, but the displeasure of most others is a cost they seem to have chosen to accept. Most participants in the sub-sample appear to be well aware of the consequences but display hesitancy and ambivalence, not to say some confusion, in how they have replied to the questions providing conflicting answers to given questions. They sometimes rationalised threatening and unpleasant experiences. Remarks whose intent are clearly derogatory or insulting, for example, are usually construed as “they probably only meant that to be funny” and “there is no problem as long as you behave”. The participants of the sub-sample do not yet appear to realise that pursuing the sport to eventually reaching the rMM-criterion of < 20%, other mechanisms will be triggered than the benevolent and socially constructed ones. Reactions to them will change. No matter how exemplary their behaviour they will become “public prey”. In addition to “prejudice and unfair treatment”, as the participants say, will evoke genetically imprinted response patterns where mainly their size will determine how they are perceived. While they were before awarded mostly positive comments for their looks and training effort, they are later likely to receive negative ones instead.

The social pressure against a bodybuilder in Sweden appears considerable. I see two reasons for this: 1) Swedish strategies for informing on and preventing the use of IOC-listed forbidden performance enhancing drugs and 2) the likely mismatch between the evolution-related male gender-role (making some aspects of masculinity universal) and the policy-driven construction of the Swedish male gender-role (making it local, and not necessarily compatible with biologically prompted psychological needs).

One gifted participant in the sub-sample makes very astute observations on this suggestion after having pursued some “field studies” on his own for a number of years:

A5-SE: I started training at age 14, so have been in this sport for some time. It is my observation that there is a Pre-Ben Johnson Era and one Post-Ben Johnson Era in Bodybuilding [ie. in 1987 when Johnson at the World Championships in Rome was found to have used illicit drugs to win]. Before Ben Johnson few knew what AAS were, but after the event almost everyone knew. And media were very successful at communicating the message that “large muscle mass = AAS = an aggressive and stupid individual”. When I started to train, bodybuilders who competed were heroes in the gym. Today most gyms do not even want them as members. I am convinced that the anti-doping campaign as mediated by media, is probably one of the most successful ever.

This participant has most likely analysed the situation more or less correctly, at least I agree with him. Swedish authorities do have a world-wide reputation for “social marketing”; that is, to effectively sway public opinion in the direction of decided policies, or phrased in more technical terms: to facilitate the effective internalisation of new values and norms in a relatively short period of time (Huntford, 1972; Lindbeck, 1997). The most famous example is the 1969-campaign to change eight million people’s traffic behaviour, since it was decided that also Swedish driving should harmonise with the rest of Europe. The Swede had to learn to drive on the right rather than on the left (Kotler & Roberto, 1989). The foreign correspondent to Sweden of British newspaper *The Observer* – Roland Huntford (1972) – noted, with considerable amazement, that “[when] ... governments in Sweden, from the Liberals of the nineteenth century to the Social Democrats of the 1960s, have been able to execute rapid and often uncomfortable changes virtually unopposed, it is because conformity has been made a cardinal value, and dissent a moral sin” (p. 24).

As applied to current anti-doping campaigns authorities have been just as effective. An entire nation has internalised decided policies on drug-use in sports. However, the engineers of such an immense social attitude change seem to have failed to take into account *reasons* for using certain drugs in sports. The promise of performance enhancing drugs in general may perhaps carry with it certain health risks over time, although this is by no means a scientifically proven certainty (Monaghan, 1999; Bahrke, 2000; Brower, 2000; Friedl, 2000). Fame, however, is now. I earlier demonstrated the ambivalence of sponsor contracts in this respect: they do not argue against performance enhancement. On the contrary, they may well count on athletes using them to increase their market share as their sponsored athletes keep improving and continue winning. But contracts state that athletes will effectively be disowned if it becomes public knowledge that he or she has been tested positive for illicit drug

use. Inevitably in today's world he or she who wins has everything to gain right away: fame, fortune, recognition and Self-satisfaction. Therefore, the allure of certain drugs will remain amongst athletes everywhere in all sports for as long as they are related to "gaining an advantage", and we continue to reward athletes who run the fastest, jump the highest and so on. The double standard is obvious because we cannot simultaneously say it is forbidden to enhance performance with illicit drugs, and at the same time also say we like it when you win and will reward you for it! The two are incompatible.

It is in the human nature to be adaptive. If there is a best way of securing an advantage, some more than others will make use of it no matter what ethics, morals, legislation and stipulations may say. This was brilliantly demonstrated by marketing researchers Patterson and Kim (1991), who decided to find out what a representative sample of Americans from all walks of life would actually be capable of under two conditions: 1) The promise of a huge monetary reward and 2) the promise of no legal consequences if there was a crime involved in the given task. A surprising number of people would compromise most, if not all, of their values and norms even to the extent of selling their own children, assassinate someone or have sex change surgery. So, to believe in the "good of all mankind" if considering genetically prompted behaviour patterns, is merely wishful thinking, at least it is irrelevant for the forces of evolution (Dawkins, 1995). To try to secure athletes' adherence to certain socially constructed and politically decided standards is presumably a difficult task when so much is at stake for the athlete. In addition, because given standards are likely to be contrary to genetic programming such an endeavour most likely becomes impossible.

There are aspects of our social existence unreachable to morals and legislation, if by this is meant that well-intending rules and stipulations are also able to change human nature. Probably we need to understand the notion of change (ie. adaptation) in this context and that some are more prone than others to over-ride their genetic programming due to a perceived normative social pressure. The perfect example is male sexual multiplicity and the difficulty of many males to keep within the culturally imposed norms of monogamy (eg. Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1974). So, rather than to consider right or wrong in a competitive context, we would perhaps be better off considering and understanding the adaptive behaviours imposed upon on us genetically.

In Sweden anti-doping campaigns seem to have resulted in a kind of public witch hunt for bodybuilders. I agree with participant A5-SE, that press and

media are likely to be responsible for creating a wrongful public image of the bodybuilder as a “violent, huge, brain-less monster on steroids”. It is worth noting what one of the internationally most well known experts on drug use in sports concludes in this matter (Bahrke, 2000, p. 270):

The frequent and often hysterical references by the media to the unsubstantiated adverse behavioural effects of anabolic steroids has resulted in the loss of both media and medical/scientific credibility, deterring research on beneficial and legitimate uses ... significant positive effects resulting from anabolic steroid administration may also have been overlooked. Also, it is quite possible that the lack of accurate and balanced reporting by the media has hindered efforts to prevent and reduce the use of anabolic steroids.

It is most likely fair to argue then, in the light of this research, that the bodybuilder in Sweden is indeed made public and legitimate prey unfairly. One major reason for this is likely to be the inaccurate and somewhat sensationalist reporting of press and the media (Bahrke, 2000; Björkqvist *et al.*, 1994). This reporting has been so successful in Sweden that even children are aware of “big, bad and stupid bodybuilders”. Authorities have not counted on the fact that people tend to generalise information. If one bodybuilder is conveyed as an anti-social menace and this is made public knowledge, then all bodybuilders are considered to be like him. If anything, campaigns have created a new Swedish minority group that is being blatantly discriminated against in a way that would not be condoned legally against any other group in society. This seems to be an inevitable conclusion in analysing the data.

But, there is another aspect to this also, namely the question of cultural differences in general and differences regarding the male gender role in particular. I have already pointed out above the meaning of “machismo” in the Hispanic world and that there is no obvious equivalent in Swedish culture. Again, participant A5-SE sheds light over this problem from his perspective, being a bicultural bodybuilder with a Swedish father and an Indian mother:

A5-SE: My Indian mother encourages me to compete in bodybuilding ... and she has understood that what newspapers write on bodybuilding is rarely true. However, I cannot tell the Swedish branch of my family that I compete in Bodybuilding, due to what they believe after having read in the newspapers ... Had I travelled to India to visit my relatives. I know that I would cause quite a stir, and in the most positive way [because I am a bodybuilder].

I checked this statement with an Indian-born acquaintance who verified it. “In India”, he said, “as a bodybuilder, you would be looked upon as the perfect

man: big, strong, and able to produce many children. You would be held in very high esteem” (see also Mishkind *et al.*, 1987).

I am suggesting that there is, in fact, a mismatch between the Swedish policy-based male gender role which emphasises what a man should ideally be like in order to achieve complete equality between men and women, and the more genetically influenced gender role prompted by evolution based on the universal male characteristics of aggressiveness, sexual multiplicity and a need and understanding for dominance in social groups (cf. Kenrick & Trost, 1993 but also Barash & Lipton, 2001). The machismo notion of masculinity as well as Middle Eastern and Indian male ideals are possibly more in tune with their biological origins than the Swedish understanding of masculinity, perhaps true also of other European nations (cf. Abreu *et al.*, 2000).

The reason that this is of interest in the current study is that Swedish men’s encounter with male bodybuilders appears to trigger a conflict between the two levels: Expected gender role and the desired gender role, often expressed, for example, as envy towards bodybuilders.

Why would not Swedish men then feel more at liberty to express a kind of masculinity more akin to its biological origin? It is my observation that similarities are generally more emphasised than differences in Swedish culture. It is logical therefore in what is usually outlined as a male hegemony society, in the quest for achieving social equality between men and women; in a culture regarding “sameness” of individuals one of its highest virtues, that it is men’s duty to become more like women. The consistent strive for sameness is, according to Daun (1996), typical of Swedish mentality. This is well exemplified in a recent newspaper article for example, where a primary school headmistress declares: “We want our pupils to be as much alike as possible, since a school is a place of work. It should be a calm and secure place!” (Ostman, 2004). While this research is not one primarily focusing on gender as such, suffice to say here, that to ignore fundamental gender differences and the psychological needs that these are likely to generate, may not be a very successful strategy no matter how good the intentions of equal rights. One example of the conflict that this socio-cultural manipulation appears to create in some Swedish men is an account of Swedish journalist Kenneth Chreisti (1993), who in writing about the “horrors and excesses” of Bodybuilding, exposes more information of himself than he presumably had intended:

I actually like trying to stay fit myself. In fact, at work I am known as something of a fitness buff. But just because I jog I do not consider myself an athlete. I do not look for achievement and measurable results not even to be competitive. I do it just

because I like it! With this understanding [of myself] I find it very hard to understand Bodybuilding to be even a sport. I go regularly to a gym too, but to me this is only another way of keeping in shape (pp. 63–64).

It is interesting that in a book on informing of the alleged excesses of Bodybuilding its author is so eager to tell readers that he trains too! He conveys himself as “the moderate gym-goer and therefore the better one”. In other words, there are not facts conveyed here but norms, and the author seems not aware of it! I suspect the author, on some level, would probably not mind to take on the appearance of the athletes in the sport he warns his readers about.

### The male bodybuilder stereotype

While the data so far have outlined the dynamics by which stereotypical reactions appear to function in everyday-life, taking cultural context into account and having placed the resulting response pattern into a socio-biological framework for better understanding of it, one task remains, namely to describe the male bodybuilder stereotype to the extent the data allow this to be done.

Although response categories have cross-cultural validity, it is obvious from the data that these categories vary from one culture and to another if not in nature so certainly to some extent in content. It is feasible therefore to understand the stereotype as a series of dichotomous dimensions. Cultural factors such as masculinity ideology and policy issues, as discussed above, decide which side of the dimensional dichotomies best describes the stereotype in any given culture or sub-culture (Figure 1).

Someone to envy	◁	▷	Someone to admire
Someone to be afraid of	◁	▷	Someone to make friends with
Someone unintelligent	◁	▷	Someone determined and skilled
Someone to harass	◁	▷	Someone to desire
Someone embarrassing	◁	▷	Someone to be proud of

*Figure 1. The approximated content of the male bodybuilder stereotype expressed as dimensional dichotomies.*

The bodybuilder appears to be either someone to admire or someone to envy. While I would agree that the strength of admiration and/or envy would differ from one individual to another, I think it unlikely that anyone would remain truly indifferent in meeting, seeing or interacting with someone triggering several biologically imprinted reactions as discussed earlier. There would also be other ways of seeking dominance diminishing the impact of envy or admiration, but the basic reaction to muscular size would remain. It is still part of the entire response pattern. Had it not been we would also not have been as troubled by the stress-related illnesses in the post-modern world in which the fight-flight response plays a key-role.

The male bodybuilder seems someone to either be afraid of or to be friends with. In the Swedish research setting this was very obvious, and above all other males – of lesser size – seek bonding (that is, a kind of submission). Alternatively, they seek to challenge or to fight. The latter need not necessarily be physical. Depending on context (and often on how much the challenger has had to drink) verbal duels may constitute a challenge too.

The bodybuilder as someone stupid and unintelligent is a widespread notion in above all the Western world. Presumably not in the Eastern World. However, while some draw from this negative attribution others will express a bodybuilder's commendable dedication and recognise the effort that has gone into the pursuit.

To some the male bodybuilder is acceptable prey; someone that deserves to be stigmatised, insulted and loathed, and if not assaulted personally by verbal abuse the bodybuilder is insulted because of what he is believed to represent irrespective of whether true or false. This was most obvious in the Swedish research setting. However, in other cultures, foremost in Hispanic, Middle Eastern and other Eastern cultures, the opposite appears true. The bodybuilder is rather the epitome of masculinity; one to be desired and someone for men to emulate.

Finally, the bodybuilder is seen as an embarrassment or a liability in some contexts (such as in European academic settings), whereas in others he is someone to be proud of. Note that these sentiments are dynamic. They change over time under the influence of extrinsic influence (ie. media and policy-making). One participant in the Swedish sample pointed this out very astutely. The first bodybuilders in Sweden, at least in the context of the gym, were considered heroes, but this has changed during some 30 years. Bodybuilders are now more or less seen officially as undesired "freaks".



## 5. General discussion

As I launched this research, like most perhaps, I considered Bodybuilding a peripheral phenomenon in society; a private interest of little significance for anyone but to myself. I have, however, had to change my mind! If my initial belief was true and Bodybuilding indeed was a peripheral phenomenon in contemporary society, how come so many have so much to say about it? In addition, very few seem to react indifferently to meeting, interacting or seeing a male bodybuilder. Clearly, Bodybuilding or that which it signifies is not peripheral. On the contrary, it appears to be a phenomenon with wide-ranging significance! My main finding in the project is that, apart from a natural reaction of individuals in any setting to evaluate their impressions of something new or unknown, the variety of responses which the male bodybuilder obviously – and cross-culturally – triggers strongly suggests there are more reasons to react and respond than mere curiosity.

On the assumption that human behaviour has two related origins, namely genetically imprinted behaviour handed to us by the forces of evolution and socially constructed behaviours aimed at environmental adaptation, it is not difficult to understand the bodybuilder as a type of “missing link”. He combines a social present with an evolutionary past in a way that some contemporary, and chiefly Northern European, cultures are not used to (Arbreu *et al.*, 2000). In other words, it is probably correct to argue that in a culture where certain basic (and genetically imprinted) behaviours are suppressed by cultural norms (behaviours related to male aggression, social dominance and male promiscuity) the reaction to a male bodybuilder will be mainly negative.

The likely reason is that the male bodybuilder potentially triggers a psychological conflict in some men involving that which is socially learnt (underplaying or ignoring certain aspects of known male gender-role universals) as well as the intrinsic need to somehow recognise desires and behaviours that are genetically imprinted and seek ways of expressing themselves through overt behaviour. Needless to say, the potency of such needs presumably differs in the male population, which means that some would be more successful than others to suppress them if cultural norms demand they must. If unsuccessful in suppress-

sion, however, research has shown that men may develop a gender strain problem: an identity crisis of sorts (Pleck, 1995). Interestingly enough it has also been suggested by other research that Bodybuilding may be instrumental for some men to sustain their need for remaining (or becoming) non-female in the one area of contemporary life where men very clearly are different from women in a biological sense, namely their ability to develop strength and muscle mass (Dubbert, 1980; Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000).

Would then other ways of construing masculinity, as for example in terms of the Machismo construct discussed earlier, make men less prone to gender role distress? There are some evidence of this (Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000), although gender strain issues have been found with Hispanic men also. It is worth noting that such studies are often done on minority groups, and even though one male ideology predominates in the studied minority group, it is likely to have to adapt to some extent to the surrounding culture's ideology in order to be accepted when interacting with it. Clearly this needs research, but until this has been studied more carefully, I venture to propose that in their traditional and more or less uninfluenced forms, the traditional masculinity ideologies of the Hispanic world, the Middle East, India and so on, are probably closer to genetically imprinted needs and behaviours than in, say, Northern Europe. A male identity crisis would therefore also be non-existent or at least less prevalent than in the Western World. This is worth studying in order to understand the importance of gender roles in relation to policies endeavouring to change gender roles for a variety of reasons!

### **Answering the research questions**

One of the three specified research questions, however, was to establish whether there actually exists a stereotypical response pattern as individuals in everyday-life encounter a male bodybuilder. Such a pattern exists indeed. This pattern appears to consist of a distinctive set of categories with varying content depending on the reason for response. By assumption this pattern is regarded as genetically imprinted by evolution, socially constructed by tacit norms and values and transmitted through the socialisation process or a combination of both of these. It is not likely that any response category is mutually exclusive. With the chosen research method such designation had to be done by assumption and in comparison with other research findings in relevant disciplines, pri-

marily Etology and Biology. Where emphasis has been hard to establish I have opted for a combination where biology and social reality appear to interact by equal proportions. Combination categories usually involve a psychological conflict between the unaware genetically imprinted need and want and one's socialised system of tacit (and usually forbidding) norms

The second research question aimed at establishing the actual content of the emerging stereotypical pattern.

Responses were *disassociative* meaning that they were conveyed by individuals either suspending societal norms (like with marginalised groups in society) or individuals who had not yet been socialised into societal norms. Small children reacted in terms of amazement and often said so spontaneously. It is likely that these responses are biological in nature, since their origin appears not to be learnt. Labels used to describe the male bodybuilder signified apparent strength because of size and clearly visible muscle mass.

*Associative responses* were rather the reactions of somewhat older children and teenagers having been submitted to the forces of socialisation to some extent. Their responses are most likely a combination of nature and nurture, and delivered without much understanding of their actions. But they do know that reactions will potentially have consequences. In the Swedish setting this was obvious in teenagers' challenging verbal assaults from a safe distance always relating to AAS. The international sample, however, noted not much difference in this respect except for a certain shift in male teenagers to a greater focus on the use of potential strength.

Some responses were clearly meant to be *offensive*. The data suggest that insults are socially constructed and especially in the Swedish setting likely to be the result of authorities unknowingly, and on a flawed basis, legitimising the stigmatisation by sensationalist media of bodybuilders rather than other athletes.

*Provocative responses*, on the other hand, are presumably triggered genetically imprinted behaviours intended to provoke or challenge for the purpose of evaluation of physical prowess and level of perceived danger.

The fact that a large-framed male muscular body *signals potential danger* is a part of the complex response pattern also. Perceiving danger there are four options of how to respond, as known in animal behaviour: posturing, the so-called flight or fight response, or you can choose to submit (Grossmann, 1996). In this study submission is best understood as giving the impression of making friends or an ally.

*The projective response* is perhaps the most fascinating response, and one that has attracted some previous research. Individuals beyond a certain height and muscle mass ratio are attributed with personality traits that they do not necessarily possess. Instead, characteristics perceived as related to a large muscular body are projected onto the individual. Interestingly, and somewhat alarmingly, this projection appears to over-ride previous personal knowledge of the muscular male. In other words, it matters little if he has always been balanced, fair, controlled and non-aggressive. With enough size he is attributed a number of qualities, which may well be opposite to reality: unbalanced, out of control and aggressive!

*The reactive formation response* suggests an internal conflict. An individual reacts contrary to what he or she really wants or truly feels. In case of encountering a male bodybuilder, depending on culture and dominating norms and values, the response is often one of envy or perhaps at times of sexual frustration. In the Swedish research context Swedish-born men especially, *not* immigrants born in other countries and cultures, had a tendency to react with recognition and admiration on one level but due to societal norms, this was reconstrued into their opposites: suspicion, condemnation and derogation.

*Sexually oriented responses* were frequent and were most often expressed through touching, feeling and pinching, but some individuals were also very direct and did not “beat around the bush”.

The final response category entails *admiration*. I found distinct cultural differences in relation to admiration. While all participants had experienced admiration in one form or another, they too observed a pattern. As discussed above, whether or not a response is positive or negative for the male bodybuilder often depends on the understanding of the male gender role. Different cultures have different ideals of what a man is and should be like. In the research setting, in three years time, I did not receive one single complimentary response from a Swedish-born individual, whereas I was frequently encouraged and even applauded by immigrants foremost from the Middle East.

Is there a cross-cultural fit to the proposed response pattern? This was my third and final research question. Yes, there is, for all participants who had accumulated < 20% muscle mass relative to their height beyond 1m. For the international sample proper the agreement index is .84, to be compared to mainly the Swedish sub-sample, having not accumulated the same amount of muscle mass. For the sub-sample the agreement index is merely .48. It is fair to argue,

that what I have experienced in the research setting is not likely to be conjecture or isolated and local incidents. There is invariably a pattern and considering its cross-cultural validity, this response pattern cannot merely be explained by social learning. I have therefore suggested that the male bodybuilder stereotype may well vary according to content and emphasis but probably not in nature. I understand this stereotype accordingly as a series of dichotomous dimensions:

- ① Someone to envy or someone to admire;
- ② Someone to be afraid of or someone to make friends with;
- ③ Someone unintelligent or someone determined and skilled;
- ④ Someone to harass or someone to desire and formally;
- ⑤ Someone embarrassing or someone to be proud of.

### **Research implications and further study**

This research set out to explore a stereotype, which would seem a fairly straightforward undertaking. But the stereotype and its reaction pattern revealed a complex web of relationships. I have quite literally stumbled onto the summit of a buried mountain!

I have encountered general research problems such as some published researchers allowing themselves a strong bias in studying Bodybuilding and its athletes. I have caught a glimpse of societal policy-making designed to solve problems but that is rather creating new ones, and I have seen – quite literally – how gender equality issues as handled by society appear to cause considerable pressure on men particularly.

These are not problems I will venture to solve here or even discuss at length. My data would not allow for the elaborate analysis that would be necessary to resolve such comprehensive issues with at least some confidence. However, this research does offer suggestions for further research and suggests what issues are important to pursue and better understand.

### **The media, policy-making and the potential of discrimination**

First, it is obvious from the data that doping information campaigns have been exceedingly successful in creating public awareness, especially so in Sweden, but reports from the United States and the UK are similar. These campaigns,

however, have unexpectedly also created a new social minority group submitted to all the suspicion, prejudice and discrimination in everyday-life, which would be considered illegal, or at least highly inappropriate with any other group in a Western democracy. Bodybuilders have more or less been made general scapegoats for every type of athlete's illicit performance enhancing drug use.

Media above all appear to have been instrumental in creating the unintended problems by ignoring to consider that the general population tend to take to heart uncritically what they report (cf. Bahrke, 2000). It is unthinkable to publish a headline reading "Threatened police officer with a swimmer", no matter how true such a scenario could have been. But it is possible to read a headline like "Threatened police officer with a bodybuilder", as if bodybuilder is a general and synonymous term for a violent criminal. The latter headline is authentic and was indeed published. It referred to a 40-year old male who threatened a police officer with, as the article author phrases it, "the leader of a bodybuilder gang" (Ostgota Correspondenten, 2004a).

A remarkable newspaper article along much the same lines was brought to my attention by Canadian biosocial scientist Rainer Stratkotter (Personal communication, 28 July 2004). In it the bodybuilder even goes *terrorist!* Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is a wanted man in time of writing up this research. The U.S. Government has put a price of \$25 million USD on his head for involvement in terrorism. As atrocious as terrorism is in any form, it is nevertheless astounding that *The New York Times* evokes the notion of "the iron pumper" as "big, bad and stupid" also, and in connection with terrorism. This was allegedly reported to their foreign correspondent: al-Zarqawi was devoted to weight training. Jeffrey Gettleman (2004) writes:

... [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi] adopted religion with the same intensity he showed for drinking and fighting, ... he became ... a dull-witted hothead with gruff charisma ... "He never struck me as intelligent" [says a lawyer] ... cellmates said Zarqawi shied away from politics. Instead, he pumped iron. Cellmates remember his barbells, made from pieces of bed frame and olive oil tins filled with rocks. As the years passed, Zarqawi's arms and chest grew – and so did his role. ... "He could order his followers to do things just by moving his eyes" [says a Doctor.] ...

Also the British Broadcasting Corporation (2002) makes the terrorist-as-a-bodybuilder connection. One headline reads: "Bodybuilding stuntman [Mr Kerim Chatty] turns to Islam". As it turns out in the remainder of the news telegram, however, Kerum Chatty is, in fact, not a bodybuilder at all: "Chatty was also a fitness fanatic and keen Thai boxer, winning a gold medal at a Swed-

ish martial arts championship in 1994". The news also reports Chatty as a drop-out of education being not good enough a student at an American Aviation College and also as more or less a life-long criminal. Again the notion of the bodybuilder as generally being someone "big, bad and stupid", is reinforced and in the case of the BBC, carelessly assumed.

I shall assume that it is not in any democracy's interest to allow discrimination against any group in society. As has been shown in this research bodybuilders are judged by entire cultures and nations merely because of their appearance. This is why above all facts must be reported in an unbiased manner (Bahrke, 2000; Björkqvist *et al.*, 1994). It stands beyond any doubt that bodybuilders are being systematically harassed by media, or alternatively by individuals in the media who for some reason hold personal resentments against them. In social psychological terms bodybuilders are being *stigmatised*. Quite in line with research results researchers Crocker and Quinn (2000) define stigmatisation as "[having] a social identity, or membership in some social category, that raises doubts about one's full humanity. One is devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others ... Stigmatised individuals are often the targets of negative stereotypes and elicit emotional reactions such as pity, anger, anxiety or disgust but the central feature of social stigma is devaluation and dehumanisation by others" (p. 153).

On the assumption that the prevalent and public harassment and stigmatisation of bodybuilders in the Western World is largely unintentional, I propose effect studies of doping information campaigns; studies which are not epidemiological in nature. Authorities need more information than figures on casualties, crime rates, drug trafficking, positive and negative test results and so on. They need to know whether a taken policy or a decided campaign stands up to being democratically accountable.

### **Personal prejudices affect research quality!**

Second, the frequent bias against bodybuilders and their sport has apparently been adopted by some scientists as well. I demonstrated in the introduction to this report, that it is quite difficult to make sense of some research focusing on Bodybuilding because their apparently non-negotiable premise is "Bodybuilding is pathological". I think this research shows quite clearly Bodybuilding is no more pathological than Golf or Engineering. In fact it is probably more true to say that many, who react negatively and excessively to a male bodybuilder, reveal "psychological insufficiency" indeed, to use the very term Klein (1993)

applies to bodybuilders. Not understanding one's reaction or to react because of a triggered inner conflict may well suggest identity problems and/or self-image problems.

This is not to say that bodybuilders are immune to psychiatric disorders or that some may indeed have chosen Bodybuilding for a particular reason that is part of known and well-defined disorders. It is also not to say that Bodybuilding – like most other sports too – might not on occasion facilitate the development of certain problems if individuals are so disposed. The research problems associated with focusing on Bodybuilding, however, are in my experience over-generalising, projecting one's own prejudice on to participants and/or allowing oneself to be motivated by the societal stigmatisation of bodybuilders forming a sub-culture.

Clearly, the Social Sciences need to reconsider the notion of bias and consider the value of Self-knowledge in the research process. If the Social Sciences had not allowed a separation from “essentialism” (ie. our evolutionary past and present), I think the problem of bias in this sense would be less of a problem (Kenrick & Trost, 1993). However, for the benefit of all social research I propose studies of the significance of knowing oneself in relation to research validity and reliability. To be quick and effective may well be attributes appreciated by grant providers and assignment givers in a cost-efficient and budget-driven world. But such premises sometimes produce dubious research (Miller & Philo, 2002). It is known that being reflective, which takes time, is related to a higher IQ than being impulsive (Sternberg, 1988). But, what we need to know more about is to be reflective of oneself in relation to research objectives, used methods and outcomes. Needless to say, this is one of the main points in Phenomenology: the significance of one's own subjectivity (cf, Spinelli, 1989). Apparently, this notion needs a wider application in the Social Sciences irrespective of epistemological creed.

### **Enforced gender equality or increased tolerance and acceptance?**

Third and last, I find that the results of this project have relevance also to the issue of equality between the sexes. It is especially, though not exclusively, the Swedish research context that is suggestive of the fact that policy without any consideration of a population's general psychological needs constitutes poor policy, if not impossible. The Swedish-born men I encountered in the research setting often seemed motivated by conflict or submission in their reactions to

me as a bodybuilder. My impression is that Swedish-born men often feel prevented to finding a masculine identity with which they feel comfortable, whichever that identity might be.

If my data are in anyway indicative of maleness as a socio-biological construct, then Swedish masculinity appears very far removed from its evolutionary origins (cf. Holter, 1992). The comparison made with Swedish immigrants from elsewhere than Europe makes an intriguing comparison. One curious illustration of the distance from “biological roots”, and an example of the discriminating generalisations about bodybuilders made even by Swedish authority officials, is the fact that prisons are about to remove heavy weights from their gyms to avoid “macho culture”. The logic behind this is to safeguard the security of prison officers as inmates train harder and more effectively than their wardens. One Swedish newspaper writes (*Ostgota Correspondenten*, 2004b):

Bodybuilding in prisons may turn emaciated and drug-abusing inmates into walk-about mountains of muscle. The Department of Swedish Prison and Probation Service intends to limit weight training in prisons for security reasons. “The bigger the inmates the more intimidating they are to prison staff and others,” Security Officer Christer Isaksson says ... “This is a problem also in Denmark and Finland. Both countries are about to impose restrictions on heavy weights in prison gyms. As far as Sweden is concerned, Isaksson wants excessive training stopped. Free weights and bars could be used as weapons in case of fights. In combination with smuggled-in drugs the training itself may make inmates difficult to handle. Bodybuilding is often linked to a one-track mind with criminal values based on power and violence”, he says.

Irrespective of the issue at stake in the newspaper article, the last statement by the official is very revealing. Not only is it an example of ethnocentric prejudice in outlining all bodybuilders as “big, bad and stupid”, it also demonstrates a clash between different masculine ideologies of which one is “politically correct” and void of a physical reality and biologically imprinted needs and the other being its complete opposite. The latter type of masculinity is also in an alarmingly generalising way attributed to felons only (cf. Newburn & Stanko, 1994). Note there are examples also where weight training and Bodybuilding in such environments are encouraged and more seen as a means of rehabilitation. Working in the Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch, in the United States, taking inmate and bodybuilder Dennis Lovett as an example, Deputy Superintendent Sheryl Butler and Superintendent Dave Miller, say (in Dobie, 2004):

Bodybuilding requires long-term goals. Lovett studied nutrition, developed workouts and became the source of information for fellow competitors. Eastern's staff hopes that enthusiasm becomes a habit ... If Lovett is preparing for the Bodybuilding, he's preparing for a personal goal ... When he gets out maybe his personal goal is preparing for a job ... Lovett has a better chance of making it on the outside than when he arrived.

What if male police officers in Sweden were all bodybuilders (making the 20 % rMM criterion)? How would *inmates* deal with this? While bodybuilding officers would presumably not lower crime rates in any way, it would by necessity provide a considerable respect freely awarded by evolution, which most individuals in society would heed automatically. It would most likely make the police work of male officers in the community much easier. However, Body-building is hardly a criterion anywhere to pursue a police work career in the service of society. Instead it is viewed with suspicion. Observe that there are others in our communities in the Western World who do recognise the impact of evolutionary heritage better than most authorities seem to do in this particular case: There is a reason that the proverbial bouncer/doorman often comes from the local gym! Bar and club owners know that size often matters. At least it works well enough to keep hiring men of a certain size to keep relative order in their establishments.

I suggest research into the Swedish male gender role, or perhaps more generally the male gender role of Northern Europe, since it has been proposed by other research that this is the least "traditional" male gender role in a global perspective (Abreu *et al.*, 2000). Also British men appear to some extent to renounce a masculine ideology (Christian, 1994). Farrell (1999) even argues in the wake of extreme feminism that American men are actually discriminated against. So, a research focus needs perhaps to be wider than merely Sweden. Of particular interest in such a research venture, however, is the so-called Male Gender Role Strain (Pleck, 1995) and its relationship to equality policy-making and legislation.

I argue that legislative authorities enforce equality on a basis, which creates unforeseen problems. Acceptance and tolerance, rather than enforced policies, are more likely to need to be guiding principles aimed at developing a more equal world between men and women. But these can only be achieved if men's and women's identities are not threatened nor artificially constructed in anyway.

In my experience in the research setting both men and women are threatened by encountering someone who triggers "memories" of an evolutionary past. In other words, if policies are to be fully successful we must learn to



accept differences, including basic differences forwarded to us by evolution, and not try to make everyone similar by force. We all have much in common. Perhaps we have more in common than separates us. But this does not mean we can ignore the differences between the sexes!

Research in this area is likely to be highly controversial since its premise must be that policy-makers may well have good intentions, but they are implementing policies in a way that are likely to threaten male identities. The result of not establishing an identity which is experienced as acceptable as typically male (as opposed to female) will be a internal, psychological conflict (cf. Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975; Josephs, Tafarodi & Markus, 1992).



# References

- Abreu, J. M., Goodyear, R. K., Campos, A., & Newcomb, M. D. (2000). Ethnic belonging and traditional masculinity ideologies amongst African Americans, European Americans, and Latinos. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 1(2), 75–86.
- Adler, P. A. (1985). *Wheeling and dealing: an ethnography of an upper-level drug dealing and smuggling community*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Andrews, N. (2004). *True myths of Arnold Schwarzenegger: The life and times of Arnold Schwarzenegger, from Pumping Iron to Governor of California*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Argyle, M. (1990). *Bodily communication*. London: Routledge.
- Baddeley, A. (1997). *Human memory. Theory and practise*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press.
- Bahrke, M. S. (2000). Psychological effects of endogenous testosterone and anabolic-androgenic steroids. In C. E. Yesalis (Ed.), *Anabolic steroids in sport and exercise* (pp. 247–278). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Baldwin, A. Y. (1993). Teachers of the gifted. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Mönks, & A. H. Passow (Eds.), *International handbook of research and development of giftedness and talent* (pp. 621–630). Oxford, UK: Pergamon.
- Barash, D. & J. Lipton (2001). Making sense of sex. In D. Barash (Ed.), *Understanding violence*, (pp. 20–30). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Barnard, C. J. (2004). *Animal Behaviour. Mechanism, development and evolution*. London: Pearson/Prentice-Hall.
- Barnard, C. J., & Burk, T. E. (1979). Dominance hierarchies and the evolution of “individual recognition”. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 81, 65–72.
- Barrett, L., Dunbar, R., & Lycett, J. (2002). *Human evolutionary psychology*. New York: Palgrave.
- Becker, H. S. (1958). Problems of inference and proof in participant observation. *American Sociological Review*. 23(6), 652–660.
- Berendonck, B. (1991). *Doping-dokumente: von der Forschung zum Betrug* [Doping documents: from Science and to deception]. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Berggren, A-M. (Ed.). (1999). *Manligt och omanligt i ett historiskt perspektiv* [Manly and unmanly in a historical perspective]. Stockholm: Forskningsrådsnämnden.
- Berkowitz, L. (1973). Sports, competition, and aggression. *Physical Educator*, 30, 59–61.

- Berry, J. W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation. Understanding individuals moving between cultures. In R. W. Brislin (Ed.), *Applied cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 232–253). London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Homo Academicus*. Paris: Les Editions des Minuits.
- Bredemeier, B. J., Weiss, M. R., Shields, D. L., & Cooper, B. A. B. (1986). The relationship of sport involvement with children's moral reasoning and aggression tendencies. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 8, 304–318.
- Brewer, N. B., & Campbell, D. T. (1976). *Ethnocentrism and intergroup attitudes*. New York: John Wiley.
- British Broadcasting Corporation (2002, 30 September). Bodybuilding stuntman who turned to Islam. *BBC News*, Internet edition: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2230630.stm> [Accessed 2004, 29 July]
- Brodsky, C. M. (1954). *A study of norms for body form-behavior relationships*. Washington D. C.:The Catholic University of America Press.
- Brower, K. J. (2000). Anabolic steroids: potential for physical and psychological dependence. In C. E. Yesalis (Ed.), *Anabolic steroids in sport and exercise* (pp. 279–304). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Bryman, A. (1988). *Quantity and quality in social research*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Burgess, R. G. (1984). *In the field. An introduction to field research*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Burke, L. (1994). Sports Amenorrhea, osteopenia, stress fractures and calcium. In L. Burke & V. Deakin (Eds.), *Clinical sports nutrition* (pp. 200–225). Sydney: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Burr, V. (1997). *An introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Buss, D. M. (1994). *The evolution of desire. Strategies of human mating*. New York: Basic Books.
- Butler, J. C., & Ryckman, R. M. (1993). Perceived and ideal physiques in male and female university students. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 133, 751–752.
- Ceci, S. J. (1996). *On intelligence. A bioecological treatise on intellectual development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chagnon, N. A. (1976). Yanomamo, the true people. *National Geographic Magazine*, 150, 211–222.
- Chreisti, K. (1993). *Anabola steroider, ungdomar och mansideal* [Anabolic steroids, teenagers and male role models]. Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget Brevskolan.
- Christian, H. (1994). *The making of anti-sexist men*. London: Routledge.

- Crocker, J., & Quinn, D. M. (2000). Social stigma and the Self: meanings, situations, and Self-esteem. In T. F. Heatherton, R. E. Kleck, M. R. Hebl & J. G. Hull (Eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 153–181). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Daun, A. (1996). *Swedish mentality*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Davis, C., & Scott-Robertson, L. (2000). A psychological comparison of females with anorexia nervosa and competitive male bodybuilders: body shape ideals in the extreme. *Eating Behaviors*, 1, 33–46.
- Dawkins, R. (1995). *River out of Eden. A Darwinian view of life*. New York: Basic Books.
- DeJong, W., & Kleck, R. E. (1984). The social psychological effects of overweight. In C. P. Herman, M. P. Zanna, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Physical appearance, stigma, and social behavior*; The Ontario Symposium, Vol. 3. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Derlega, V. J., Catanzaro, D., & Lewis, R. J. (2001). Perceptions about tactile intimacy in same-sex and opposite-sex pairs based on research participants' sexual orientation. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 2(2), 124 - 132.
- Dobie, M (2004, 11 July). Sports in prison: Bodybuilder develops strong presence. *Newsday.Com*. <http://www.newsday.com/sports/ny-pris1-side1,0,2510835.story>, [Accessed 2004, 29 July]
- Dubbert, J. L. (1980). Progressivism and the masculinity crisis. In E. Pleck & J. Pleck (Eds.), *The American man*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Eagan, M. (2003). Arnold's run puts he-men in spotlight. <http://pages.zdnet.com/bodybuilder/fitzroybramble/id16.html> [Accessed 2004, 21 June].
- Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I. (1974). *Love and hate*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I. (1989). *Human ethology*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Elliot, D. L. & Goldberg, L. (2000). Women and anabolic steroids. In C. E. Yesalis (Ed.), *Anabolic steroids in sport and exercise* (pp. 225–246). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Ericsson, K. A., & Smith, K. (Eds.). (1991). *Towards a general theory of expertise. Prospects and limits*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Farrell, W. (1999). *Women can't hear what men don't say: destroying myths, creating love*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Ferstle, J. (2000). Evolution and politics of drug testing. In C. E. Yesalis (Ed.), *Anabolic steroids in sports and exercise*. (pp. 363–413). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Fisher, S. (1986). *Development and structure of the body image. Volume 1 & 2*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Fisher, L. A. (1997). "Building one's Self up": Bodybuilding and the construction of identity among female professional bodybuilders. In P-L. Moore (Ed.), *Building bodies* (pp. 135–161). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

- Fragoso, J. M. & Kashubeck, S. (2000). Machismo, gender role conflict and mental health in Mexican American men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 1(2), 87–97.
- Franck, L. (1984). Exposure and gender differences in the social perception of women bodybuilders. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 6, 239-245.
- Franzini, L. R., & Grossberg, J. M. (1994). *Eccentric and bizarre behaviors*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Freeman, H. R. (1988). Social perception of bodybuilders. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 10, 221–293.
- Freud, S. (1933). *New introductory lectures on psychoanalysis* (Translated by W. J. H. Sprout). New York: Norton.
- Freund, P. L. S. (1988). Bringing society into the human body: understanding socialized human nature. *Theory and Society*, 17, 839–864.
- Friedl, K. E. (2000). Effects of anabolic steroids on physical health. C. E. Yesalis (Ed.), *Anabolic steroids in sport and exercise* (pp. 175–223). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Funt, A. (1952). *Eavesdropper at large: adventures in human nature with candid mike and candid camera*. New York: Vanguard.
- Funt, A. (1994). *Candidly Allen Funt: a million smiles later*. Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books.
- Gettleman, J. (2004, 17 July). Jeffrey Gettleman, New York Times, reporting from Amman, Jordan: America's most wanted in Iraq got his start as a prison bully. *The Edmonton Journal*.
- Gerrity, D. A. (2000). Male university employee's experiences of sexual harrassment-related behaviors. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 1(2), 140–151.
- Gill, D. (1994). Psychological perspectives on women in sport and exercise. In D. M. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), *Psychological foundations of sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics
- Gillett, G., & White, P. (1992). Male bodybuilding and the reassertion of hegemonic masculinity: a critical feminist perspective. *Play & Culture*, 5, 358–369.
- Grossman, D. (1995). *On killing. The psychological cost of learning to kill in war and society*. New York: Backbay Books.
- Halpern, D. F. (1992). *Sex differences in cognitive abilities*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hassler, M. (1990). *Androgynie [Androgyny]*. Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe.
- Herrnstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1996). *The Bell Curve. Intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York: Free Press.
- Hersey, G. L. (1996). *The evolution of allure. Sexual selection from Medici Venus to the Incredible Hulk*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences. International differences in work-related values*. London: Sage.
- Holter, H. (1992). Ny kvinnopolitisk situation – ny kvinnoforskning [A new political situation for women – new research of women]. In J. Acker et al., (Eds.), *Kvinnor och mäns liv och arbete* (pp. 60–77). Stockholm: SNS förlag.
- Howe, M. J. A. (1990). *The origins of exceptional abilities*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Howe, M. J. A. (Ed.). (1990). *Encouraging the development of exceptional skills and talents*. Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society.
- Humphreys, L. (1970). *Tea room trade*. London: Duckworth.
- Huntford, R. (1972). *The new totalitarians*. New York: Stein and Day.
- International Federation of Bodybuilders (2001). *Amateur rules*. Montreal: IFBB International Headquarters.
- International Federation of Bodybuilders (2003). *Constitution of the International Federation of Bodybuilders*. Montreal: IFBB International Headquarters.
- Johansson, N. (2001, 13 March). Snyggingar eller monster? [Are they attractive or are they monsters?] *Aftonbladet sportbladet*. Internet edition: <http://www.aftonbladet.se/vss/sport/story/0,2789,39190,00.html> [Accessed 2004, 21 June].
- Johansson, T. (1996). Gendered spaces: the gym culture and the construction of gender. *Young*, 3, 32–47.
- Johansson, T. (1997). *Den skulpterade kroppen: gymkultur, friskvård och estetik* [The sculpted body: gym culture, fitness and aesthetics]. Stockholm: Carlssons.
- Josephs, R. A., Tafarodi, R. W., & Markus, H. R. (1992). Gender and Self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 301–402.
- Kemper, T. D. (1990). *Social structure and testosterone: explorations of the socio-bio-social chain*. London: Rutgers University Press.
- Kenrick, D. T., & Trost, M. R. (1993). The evolutionary perspective. In A. E. Beall & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The psychology of gender*. (pp. 148–172). New York: Guilford Press.
- Klamberg, M. (2003). LNB Debatt: bekämpa opportunisten! [LNB Debate: fight opportunist!] On Liberala Nyhetsbyrån. <http://www.lnb.se/lnds%20arkiv/0000D090-80000002/000AA3C3-0073F792?Templates=publish> [Accessed 2004, 22 June].
- Klein, A. M. (1993). *Little big men: bodybuilding subculture and gender construction*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Kotler, P., & Roberto, E. L. (1989). *Social marketing: strategies for changing public behavior*. New York: The Free Press.

- Krasniewicz, L. & Blitz, M. (2002). The Replicator: starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Great Meme-Machine. In A. Ndalians & C. Henry (Eds.), *Stars in our eyes: the star phenomenon in the contemporary era*. New York: Praeger.
- Kretschmer, E. (1921). *Körperbau und Charakter* [Physique and character]. Berlin: Springer.
- Kurz, D. L. (1969, December). Physical appearance and stature: important variables in sales recruiting. *Personnel Journal*, 981–983.
- Lewis, C. (1986). Early sex-role socialisation. In D. J. Hargreaves & A. M. Colley (Eds.), *The psychology of sex-roles* (pp. 95–117). London: Harper & Row.
- Lindbeck, A. (1997). *The Swedish Experiment*. Stockholm: SNS Forlag.
- Lipsitz Bem, S. (1993). *Through the lenses of gender. Transforming the debate on sexual inequality*. New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press.
- Luciano, L. (2001). *Looking good. Male body image in Modern America*. New York: Hill and Wang
- Lumsden, C. J., & Wilson, E. O. (1981). *Genes, mind and culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Matzer Rose, M. (2001). *Muscle Beach*. New York: LA Weekly Books
- Mazur, A., & Booth (1998). Testosterone and dominance in men. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 21, 353-397
- Miller, D. & Philo, G. (2002). Silencing dissent in academia. The commercialisation of Science. *The Psychologist*, 15(5), 244–246.
- Mishkind, M., Rodin, J., Silberstein, L., & Striegel-Moore, R. (1987). The embodiment of masculinity: cultural, psychological and behavioral dimensions. In M. Kimmel (Ed.), *Changing men* (pp. 37–52). London: Sage.
- Monaghan, L. (1999). Challenging medicine: bodybuilding, drugs and risk. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 21(6), 707–734.
- Moore, P. L. (Ed.). (1997). *Building bodies*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Moore, P. L. (1997). Feminist bodybuilding, sex, and the interruption of investigative knowledge. In P. L. Moore (Ed.), (1997), *Building bodies* (pp. 74–86). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Mosher, D. L., & Sirkin, M. (1984). Measuring a macho personality. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 18, 150–163.
- Mosse, G. L. (1996). *The image of man. The creation of modern masculinity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Newburn, T., & Stanko, E. A. (Eds.) (1994). *Just boys doing business? Men, masculinities and crime*. London: Routledge.

- Nilsson, J.-O. (2003, 27 October). Mannen utan namn [The man with no name]. *Hallands Nyheter* Internet edition. [http://www.hn.se/m\\_kal.php?avdelning\\_1=178&avdelning\\_2=289&author=155&articleid=239414&force\\_author&m=](http://www.hn.se/m_kal.php?avdelning_1=178&avdelning_2=289&author=155&articleid=239414&force_author&m=) [Accessed 2004, 22 June]
- Osgood, C. E., Suci, G. J. & Tannenbaum, P. F. (1957). *The measurement of meaning*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Ostgota Correspondenten* (2004a, 14 April). Hotade polis med kroppsbyggare [Threatened police officer with bodybuilder]. Internet edition: <http://www.corren.se> [Accessed 2004, 28 July].
- Ostgota Correspondenten* (2004b, 21 January). Fångars styrketräning på väg att bli problem [Prison inmates weight training is turning into a problem]. Internet edition: <http://www.corren.se> [Accessed 2004, 28 July]
- Ostman, K. (2004, Friday, 1 October). Förbjudet! Rektor vill stoppa modekläder i skolan [Forbidden! Headmistress stops designer wear in school]. *Aftonbladet*, 13.
- Patterson, J., & Kim, P. (1991). *The day America told the truth: what people really believe about everything that really matters*. Paramus, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. London: Sage.
- Persson, R. S. (1993). *The subjectivity of musical performance: an exploratory music-psychological real-world enquiry into the determinants and education of musical reality*. (Ph. D. Thesis, School of Human and Health Sciences, Huddersfield Univeristy). Boston Spa, W. Yorkshire, UK: British Library Document Supply Centre.
- Persson, R. S. (2004). Hungry to win, losing your mind? *The effects of eating and dieting in bodybuilders and power sport athletes*. Morrisville, NC: Lulu.Com Inc.
- Persson, R. S. (in press). Voices in the wilderness: Counseling gifted students on a Swedish egalitarian setting. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, Special Issue.
- Persson, R. S., Joswig, H., & Balogh, L. (2000). Gifted education in Europe: Programs, practices, and current research. In K. A. Heller, F. J. Mönks, R. J. Sternberg & R. Subotnik (Eds.), *International handbook of giftedness and talent* (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.) (pp. 703–734). Oxford, UK: Pergamon.
- Pierce, D. W., Sydie, R. A., Stratkotter, R., & Krull, C. (2003). Social concepts and judgments: a semantic differential analysis of the concepts feminist, man, and woman. *Psychology of Women*, 27(4), 338–346.
- Pleck, J. H. (1995). The Gender Role Strain Paradigm: an update. In R. F. Levant & W. S. Pollack (Eds.), *A new psychology of men* (pp. 11–32). New York: Basic Books.
- Plomin, R. (1994). *Genetics and experience*. The interplay between nature and nurture. London: Sage.

- Pope, H. G., Gruber, A. J., Choi, P., Olivardia, R., & Phillips, K. A. (1997). Muscle Dysmorphia: an unrecognized form of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. *Psychosomatics*, 38(6), 548–557.
- Pope, H. G., Phillips, K. A., & Olivardia, R. (2000). *The Adonis Complex: the secret crisis of male body image*. New York: The Free Press.
- Preston, J. (undated). Guest editorial: Bodybuilding saved my life! In *Iron Age*. [http://www.ironage.us/guest\\_edit/preston-life.html](http://www.ironage.us/guest_edit/preston-life.html) [Accessed 2004, 29 June]
- Ramirez, O. (1989). Mexican-American children and adolescents. In E. T. Gibbs (Ed.), *Children of color: psychological interventions with minority youth* (pp. 224–230). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rogers, T. B., Kuipers, N. A., & Kirker, W. S. (1977). Self-reference and the encoding of personal information. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 677–688
- Rosenhahn, D. L. (1973). On being sane in insane places. *Science*, 179, 250–258.
- Rosenthal, J. (2002, May). The big picture: The Claude Groulx File. *Flex*. [http://articles.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0KFY/is\\_3\\_20/ai\\_98465332](http://articles.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KFY/is_3_20/ai_98465332) [Accessed 2004, 22 June]
- Roth, M., & Kroll, J. (1987). *The reality of mental illness*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Rozin, P. (1996). Social influences on human food selection. In E. D. Capaldi (Ed.), *Why we eat what we eat. The psychology of eating* (pp. 233–263). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Schwarzenegger, A., with Dobbins, B. (1998). *The Encyclopedia of Modern Bodybuilding* (Revised). New York: Simon & Shuster.
- Schwarzenegger, A., with D. K. Hall (1993). *Arnold: the education of a bodybuilder*. New York: Fireside.
- SDTS Forum (2004). Helt makalöst: The Thread! [Completely remarkable: The Thread!]. <http://www.sdts.se/forum/showthread.php?t=5287> [Accessed 2004, June 22nd]
- Sheldon, W. H. (1954). *Atlas of men: A guide for somatotyping the adult male at all ages*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Smith, G. J. (1976). An examination of the phenomenon of sports hero worship. *Canadian Journal of Applied Sport Sciences*, 1, 259–270.
- Smith, P. B., & Bond, M. H. (1998). *Social psychology across cultures*. London: Prentice Hall Europe.
- Spence, J. T., Helmreich, R., & Stapp, J. (1975). Ratings on Self and peers on sex role attributes and their relation to Self-esteem and conceptions of masculinity and femininity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32(1), 29–39.

- Spinelli, E. (1989). *The interpreted world. An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. London: Sage.
- Stangor, C., & Schaller, M. (1996). Stereotypes as individual and collective representations. In C. N. Macrae, C. Stangor, & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Stereotypes & stereotyping* (pp. 3–40). New York: The Guildford Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1993). What is the relation of gender to biology and environment? Anevolutionary model of how what you answer depends on just what you ask. In A. E. Beall & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The psychology of gender*. (pp. 1–6). New York: Guilford Press.
- Stone, M. H. (1994). Weight gain and weight loss. In T. Baechle (Ed.), *Essentials of strength training and conditioning* (pp. 231–237). Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics.
- Swedish National Agency for Education (2000). *Allmänna råd med kommentarer för fritidshem* [General advice with comments for leisure time schooling]. Stockholm: Skolverket/Liber distribution.
- Sullivan, M. A., Queen, S. M., & Patrick, R. C. (1958). Participabt observation as employed in the study of a military training program. *American Sociological Review*, 23(6), 660–667.
- Szasz, T. (1960). The myth of mental illness. *American Psychologist*, 15, 113–118.
- Triandis, H. C. (1990). Theoretical concepts that are applicable tp the analysis of ethnocentrism. In R. W. Brislin (Ed.), *Applied cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 34–55). London: Sage.
- Van der Velden, L. (1986). Heroes and bad winners: cultural differences. In L. Vander Velden & J. H. Humphrey (Eds.), *Psychology and the sociology of sports: current selected research. Volume 1* (pp. 205–220). New York: AMS Press.
- Vincent, J. G. (1990). *The biology of emotions*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Weider, J., with Reynolds, B. (1988). *Ultimate Bodybuilding*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.
- Welin, A. (2004, 12 May). Kropp & själ: Killar, var er själva! [Body & soul: Guys, be yourselves!]. *Nättidningen Sourze*. <http://www.sourze.se/default.asp?itemId=10374016> [Accessed 2004, 22 June]
- White, K. B. (2004). Perceptions of the social and personal characteristics of hypermuscular women and of the men who love them. *The Journal of Social Psychology*; 10(1), page numbers unknown.
- Wilson, E. O. (2000). *Sociobiology: The new synthesis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press.
- Wilson, P. R. (1968). Perceptual distortion of height as a function of ascribed academic status. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 63, 351–365.
- Wheeler, F., with Pearlman, C. (2003). *Flex Ability: a story of strength and survival*. New York: Hay Books.

- Whitney, E. A., & Rolfes, S. R. (1996). *Understanding nutrition* (7th Ed.). New York: West Publishing Company.
- Wilson Fussell, S. (1991). *Muscle: Confessions of an unlikely bodybuilder*. New York: Avon Books.
- Yesalis, C. E., Bahrke, S. M., Kopstein, A. N., & Barsukiewicz, C. K. (2000). Incidence of anabolic steroid use: a discussion of methodological issues. In C. E. Yesalis (Ed.), *Anabolic steroids in sport and exercise* (pp. 73–115). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Zill, N. (1986). *Happy, healthy, and insecure: a portrait of middle childhood in the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zuckerman, M. (1994). *Behavioral expressions and biosocial bases of sensation seeking*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

# Appendix I

## *Fellow bodybuilder!*

I am doing a study of how people in general react to meeting male bodybuilders in everyday life. I am myself a competitive (amateur) bodybuilder (45yo, 265 lbs, 5 10) but also a scientist (I am an associate professor of psychology at NN University, Sweden). Feel free to visit my homepage at [www.geocities.com/bodybuilder\\_se](http://www.geocities.com/bodybuilder_se), where there are a few casual pictures of me.

I have noted during many years of training that I am reacted to in many ways by different people, simply because I look the way I do after some 20 years of Bodybuilding. Such reactions, positive and negative, have intrigued me and I want to find out WHY people react this way. They usually do not react the same way to, for example, a golfer, a tennis player or a swimmer.

I have gathered observations during a period of three years (2001–2004), and have already a fairly good idea of how and why many react when meeting, watching or interacting with a male bodybuilder. In order to better understand and see if my conclusions are in anyway correct, I need the help of other male bodybuilders.

It would be much appreciated, if you could answer the following simple questions for me and then return your answers by e-mail ([beefq@bostreammail.com](mailto:beefq@bostreammail.com)) which is my private home e-mail address. Term is over and I work from home until August). If you have any questions please feel free to ask me. Also, if you are interested in the results of this study, let me know, and I will add you to a send-list and mail you a summary of what I have discovered. Replies sent in after July 15th I cannot include in this particular study, since I do have deadlines to consider.

Note that answers given will be dealt with anonymously. Research ethics demand that data should not be able to be traced back to the information provider. Needless to say, I follow this to the letter! Answers given are always given in strict confidence.

## *Here are the questions...*

Please answer to the best of your ability.

- 1a) What is your age:
- 1b) What country do you live in?
- 1c) What is your height and weight:
- 1d) Do you compete, have competed or intend to compete in bodybuilding?
- 1e) What is your profession?
- 2a) Have children (no older than about 6–7 years of age) ever commented you or reacted to your appearance as a bodybuilder? How?

- 2b) Have pre-teens and early teens ever commented you or reacted to your appearance as a bodybuilder? How?
- 2c) Have you ever felt that you have been treated offensively because you are a bodybuilder? How?
- 2d) Has anyone ever tried to provoke you (wanting to pick a fight with you) because you are a bodybuilder? How and when?
- 2e) Has anyone, to your knowledge, ever abstained from provoking you, even avoided you, because of being a bodybuilder? How and when?
- 2f) When you pass another unfamiliar male bodybuilder in the street, on the beach, or spot a new member to your gym for the first time, also an advanced bodybuilder, do you try to impress him discretely by for example doing a few more reps, lift heavier than usual and/or trying to look your best, hiding your flaws as a bodybuilder?
- 2g) Have you experienced that people in general expect that there is a relationship between your physical size and the level of your intellect?
- 2h) Has anyone ever insulted you and you have suspected that such an insult is probably due to envy (they would like to be and look like you?). How and when?
- 2i) Have you because of your size and appearance ever caused a stir amongst people because they believed you to be someone famous (from a TV show, a DocuSoap, a sports event?) When?
- 2ja) Have women ever approached you wanting “to feel” your body (by pinching, squeezing, caressing or touching) and/or have you experienced how they intentionally try to “bump into” you trying to make it look like a mistake, but you suspected it was everything but a mistake? Give examples if you can.
- 2jb) Have men ever approached you wanting “to feel” your body (by pinching, squeezing, caressing or touching) and/or have you experienced how they intentionally try to “bump into” you trying to make it look like a mistake, but you suspected it was everything but a mistake? Give examples if you can.
- 2k) Have you ever been told outside of the gym and by strangers, in the most positive sense, that you look good and that your training effort is admired? Do you recall if there are certain groups of people who do this, or could just anyone spontaneously do it where you live?
- 2l) Is there any other response/reaction you remember particularly that you have not accounted for so far, that you think might be important in trying to understand how and why people, unknown to you, in everyday life react to male bodybuilders?

*Thank you for participating!*  
Your answers will be very useful.

*Roland S. Persson, PhD (Associate professor of psychology)*