

Perfection's Reflection:  
Influencers on Bodybuilder Behavior

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### Abstract

*Perfection's Reflection: Influencers on Bodybuilder Behavior* is an honors thesis project that provides insight on the impact of influencers and may be a value to those who wish to be influential to competitive bodybuilders. Six current and former competitive bodybuilders explained the impact of influencers in seven key themes: 1.) Body dissatisfaction, 2.) Inspiration, 3.) Imitation, 4.) Motivation, 5.) Skepticism and distrust, 6.) Information, and 7.) Avoidance. These seven key themes were identified throughout three stages of the bodybuilders' journeys, "The Beginning," during their early childhood to high school years, "The Middle," the start of their bodybuilding careers, and "The End," the present day. It is concluded that influencers may impact competitive bodybuilders differently based on the stage of their journeys and to be influential, one should provide the ideal impact based on bodybuilders' stage of their journeys.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Competitive bodybuilders are dedicated to their diet and exercise to achieve the perfect physique and compete based on criteria such as overall shape, size, muscularity, symmetry, complexion, presence and posing. Naturally, bodybuilders value their image and the growth of social media and influencers allows them to engulf themselves into their culture, showcase their image-related achievements and compare their physiques with others.

As a student studying marketing, I am interested in the impact that influencers have on bodybuilders' behavior and the factors that make them influential because utilizing influencers have become an important marketing strategy in reaching wide and niche audiences. As a former competitive bodybuilder, I noticed that influencers impacted me differently depending on the stage that I was at in my journey. These combined elements have led to the chosen research topic for my honors thesis project: Perfection's Reflection.

This study requires perfectionists to reflect on influencers' impact on their behavior in order to analyze the bodybuilders' journeys in three stages and then provide recommendations for those who want to be influential to competitive bodybuilders.

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this research is to provide insight on the impact of influencers on the behavior of current and former competitive bodybuilders and serve as a resource to those who wish to be influential. I draw on previous research from across disciplines and conduct in-depth interviews to build theory on how influencers impact bodybuilder's behavior and how their journey gives light on how to be influential to competitive bodybuilders. This study presents a timeline for how life and influencers connect to form a bodybuilder's journey.

### **Significance of Research**

This dedicated study and long-term commitment to understanding competitive bodybuilders and influential factors is expected to serve as a resource to those who wish to be influential among the bodybuilding community. Identifying influencers' impact on current and former competitive bodybuilders will provide important insights on the effect of influencers.

### **Definitions**

Bodybuilder

Competitive bodybuilders undergo strict dietary and training practices to achieve an extremely lean, muscular and symmetrical physique (Sports, 2017) and then present their physique on stage in front of judges. Bodybuilders aim to make their muscles larger but not for the purpose of gaining strength. Bodybuilders use nutritional supplements and monitor their diet to meet or surpass their desired body image goals.

#### Body image

Body image is the way a person perceives their body size, shape, or overall appearance. Since bodybuilders train for the purpose of altering their physique, body image is a source of motivation and often leads to disorders such as muscle dysmorphia and body dissatisfaction.

#### Exercise addiction

Persons addicted to exercise engage in exercise that detrimentally alters their lifestyle causing physical, medical, financial, and social problems (Terry, Szabo, Griffiths, 2004). Bodybuilders may become addicted to exercise. The symptoms of exercise addiction include: making exercise a priority, exercise causes conflict with other aspects of life, when exercise, or lack thereof, affects their mood, it requires more effort to achieve effect from exercise, has withdrawal symptoms and they cannot limit their time spent at the gym.

#### Exercise dependence

Exercise dependence is "a craving for leisure-time physical activity that results in uncontrollable excessive exercise behavior and that manifests in physiological and/or psychological symptoms" (Hausenblas & Symons Downs, 2002a, p. 90). (It) has been described as "a process that compels an individual to exercise in spite of obstacles, and results in physical and psychological symptoms when exercise is withdrawn" (Smith, Hale, & Collins, 1998, p. 66).

Exercise dependence is defined by having three or more of the following criteria:

- (1) Tolerance: either a need for increased amounts of exercise to achieve the desired effect or a diminished effect occurs with continued use of the same amount of exercise
- (2) Withdrawal: manifested by either the characteristic withdrawal symptoms for exercise (e.g., anxiety, fatigue) or the same (or closely related) amount of exercise is taken to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms
- (3) Intention Effect: exercise is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended
- (4) Lack of Control: a persistent desire or unsuccessful attempt to cut down or control exercise
- (5) Time: a great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain exercise (e.g., physical activity vacations)

(6) Reductions in Other Activities: social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of exercise

(7) Continuance: exercise is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by the exercise (e.g., continued running despite injury).

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Substance Dependence, 4th Edition)

### Fitspiration

The social media trend to be fit and healthy. Fitspo is the shortened version of fitspiration.

### Health

Health is the complete state of wellbeing in every aspect of life; physical, mental, emotional, social, environmental and spiritual.

### Influence

Who you are and how you, as a person, will impact the message (Mortensen). An influencer impacts the message that they give on social media.

### Muscle dysmorphia

Muscle dysmorphia (is) a form of body dysmorphic disorder occurring almost exclusively in males, consists of preoccupation with the idea that one's body is too small or insufficiently lean or muscular (Phillips et al. 2010b). Mainly observed in men, individuals with MD have a strong and typically irrational belief that they are too small or skinny, despite often having an above-average level of muscularity (Murray, et al, 2013).

### Obsession

Obsessions are repetitive and persistent thoughts (e.g., of contamination), images (e.g., of violent or horrific scenes), or urges (e.g., to stab someone). Importantly, obsessions are not pleasurable or experienced as voluntary: they are intrusive and unwanted and cause marked distress or anxiety in most individuals. (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition)

They are defined as: Recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are experienced, at some time during the disturbance, as intrusive and unwanted, and that in most individuals cause marked anxiety or distress. The individual attempts to ignore or suppress such thoughts, urges, or images, or to neutralize them with some other thought or action (i.e., by performing a compulsion).

### Persuasion

The process of changing or reforming attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or behaviors toward a predetermined outcome through voluntary compliance (Mortensen).

### Weight loss

CDC.gov noted that the only way to maintain weight loss is to be engaged in regular physical activity and to lose weight and keep it off requires a high amount of physical activity unless the person also adjusted their diet and reduced the number of calories consumed.



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

A literature review was conducted to understand concepts related to bodybuilding, specifically diet, exercise and body image, as well as social media because it is a main platform for influencers. These concepts are important to analyzing the impact of influencers on the behaviors of bodybuilders.

### **Bodybuilding**

Bodybuilding is a sport that involves strengthening and enlarging muscles for physical appearances and has been researched for decades to understand the implications of competing. Preparation to compete at such an elite level of competition can carry financial, psychological, and social costs (Bjørnstad, Kandal, Anderssen, 2013; Sport is Good, War is Bad, 2012) and though bodybuilding can be positive and rewarding for its participants (Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Drummond, 2002; Grogan et al, 2004), research has demonstrated that the sport is isolating, time consuming and impacts social health (Probert, Leberman, 2009). Bodybuilders treat their body like art, sculpting it through their commitment to diet and exercise and although competition prep may be for three to six months, athletes spend years training for muscular growth to compete. Phil Heath, an IFBB professional bodybuilder described his experience as “knowing there’s no such thing as a perfect body, but I’m going to chase it as hard as I can” (Generation Iron). The end goal being physical appearance is what separates bodybuilders from weight-lifters as well as the normalised but potentially risky use of physique-enhancing drugs (Monaghan, 2002). Bodybuilding used to be deemed as bizarre, freaky and risky because of its association with steroids, even pushing to be called body-sculptors, to avoid the dangerous, drug abuser stigma. Though, each bodybuilder experience will be different on their motivations, identities and their point in the prep (Probert, Leberman, 2009) many researchers found it important to understand the implications of bodybuilding in regards to diet, exercise and body image.

### **Bodybuilder Eating Behaviors**

The specific dietary strategies employed by bodybuilders and their underpinning rationale remain poorly understood (Sports 2017) and one can assume that is because each person’s body reacts differently to diets. However, there is research that connects bodybuilding to eating disorders, specifically binge eating (Andersen, Barlett, Morgan & Brownell, 1995; Probert, 2009; Reynolds, 2017) because of their restrictive diets. There are high levels of dieting, weight loss and weight regain (Andersen & Barlett & Morgan & Brownell, 1981). In an interview featured in “Do Bodybuilders Use Evidence-Based Nutrition Strategies to Manipulate Physique?” men stated,

“You kind of work yourself up into a frenzy,” (Ben) “It’s not so much hunger, it’s more so flavour. It’s more sort of like I want a pizza because

I haven't had it in months," (Kyle) "We eat everything we haven't eaten all year," (Will).

Probert and Leberman stated these practices may be perceived by outsiders, including critical scholars and clinicians, as being disordered or unhealthy on the basis that they deviate from their perception of what norms should be (Goldfield et al, 1998; Carman, 2001) but to the bodybuilding culture it is normal, as are their exercise behaviors.

### **Bodybuilder Exercise Behaviors**

Bodybuilders are more at risk for exercise dependence than weight-lifters (Hale, Diehl, Weaver, & Briggs, 2013), and while weight-lifters have often been studied, they will be acknowledged when studying bodybuilders. Individuals committed to exercise had logical, functional and psychological reasons for doing exercise, but those that were addicted had different reasoning (Warner, Griffiths, 2006). As stated by Lichtenstein, Christiansen, Elklit, Bilenberg, & Støving (2014), exercise addiction was once considered a positive addiction, although today, researchers have focused on the impact of obsessively increasing exercise amounts, overuse injuries, interference with work and family, and inability to reduce exercise amounts (Seheult, 1995; Griffiths, 1997; Adams, 2009; Adams and Kirkby, 1998; Berczik et al, 2012). Leuenberger (2006) stated that there is solid evidence determining a relationship between endorphins and addictive behavior [which] may illustrate to society that addictions have neurobiological foundations and are not necessarily determined by will-power of an individual. As mentioned by Hale, Diehl, Weaver, Briggs (2013), researchers have concluded that the excessive exercise behaviors in weight lifters are part of an obsessive-compulsive disorder diagnosis (e.g., Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000), while others suggest that the symptoms are and some have argued forcefully that excessive exercise is a type of behavioral addiction (Berczik, Szabo, Griffiths, Kurimay, Kun, Urban, Demetovics, 2012). Obsessive exercise behaviors have been identified as part of a body dysmorphia/body image disorder diagnosis (e.g., Lantz, Rhea & Mayhew, 2001; McCreary & Sasse, 2000).

### **Bodybuilding and Body Image**

Bodybuilding is an individual sport based on physical appearance and researchers have focused on those implications in studies. Many research studies have been about weightlifters that found body image disturbance in males and female weightlifters (Andersen, Bartlett, Morgan, & Brownell, 1995; Drewnowski, Kurth, & Krahn, 1995; Schwerin et al., 1996). Bodybuilders have higher levels of body dissatisfaction and a greater drive for muscularity (Gilchrist, Thoburn, 2008) and bodybuilding (is) often associated with muscle dysmorphia (Mosley, 2008; Tod & Lavalley, 2010) while bodybuilders were found to be more at risk for muscle dysmorphia than weight lifters (Hale, Diehl, Weaver, & Briggs,

2013). Men with muscle dysmorphia differ significantly from the weightlifters on body dissatisfaction, eating attitudes, prevalence of anabolic steroid use, and lifetime prevalence of DSM-IV mood, anxiety, and eating disorders (Olivardia, Pope, Hudson, 2000). While much of the literature is about men, many researchers agree that female bodybuilders, whether new or experienced competitors, show the same high risks for muscle dysmorphia as male bodybuilders (Hale & Diehl & Weaver & Briggs 2013; Hale & Smith, 2012; Tod & Lavallee, 2010). One study suggests that arranging one's schedule around his/her training regimen and dieting in order to gain muscle predict characteristics of muscle dysmorphia in men and women (Robert, Munroe-Chandler, Gammage, 2009), which often is a technique that bodybuilders must adopt in order to meet their training and diet requirements.

Research shows that body dissatisfaction begins at a young age. For girls and boys, body mass, appearance conversations with friends, peer appearance criticism and internalized appearance ideals emerged as significant predictors of body dissatisfaction (Lawler, Nixon, 2011).

### **Bodybuilder Motivators**

Many differences exist in bodybuilder's motivation and psychological characteristics compared with other exercising populations (Klein, 1993). Reasons to compete included: emulation, self esteem and empowerment, previous participation in sport, health, and other reasons (Baghurst, Parish, Denny, 2014). One study found motivations to be meaningful and valuable... Testing boundaries, personal growth, self-affirmation (Russell, 2005; Willig, 2008). Another study found that bodybuilders exercise more for reasons of increased attractiveness, but not for reasons of enjoyment or tone, while non-bodybuilders exercised primarily for health reasons (Gilchrist, Thoburn, 2008). The bodybuilder experience consisted of themes of proudness of discipline, necessary but evil perfectionism, experiencing recognition, being stigmatized outside of bodybuilding community and going on stage to display willpower and discipline (Bjørnstad, Kandal, Anderssen, 2013). Aspirations toward certain values may be so strong that they dominate the self, in that they ride roughshod over others of the self's interests or values, including its physical health, its family attachments, and so forth (Gewirth 1998) which explains why a bodybuilder intentionally makes sacrifices in order to compete.

Motivation to compete in bodybuilding is requires a change in lifestyle choices. Mortensen (2004) claims that change is either drastic, like having a heart attack, gradual, or internally motivated, deriving from inspiration or desperation. For change to stick, there must be long-term enthusiasm where there is no other option for the person, they pay the price even when they are sick or weak and they must see where change is taking them, seeing the end result (Mortensen, 2004).

### **Social Media**

Social media has created a platform for bodybuilders to form a culture, obtain greater recognition, and influence others. Correlational research has demonstrated that social networking site use is associated with internalization of beauty ideals, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2015; Mabe et al., 2014; Meier and Gray, 2014; Tiggemann and Miller, 2010; Tiggemann and Slater, 2013) which one could assume could impact bodybuilders that are already at risk for body image issues, eating disorders and exercise dependency. With “likes” on photos creating the same brain waves as winning the lottery (Science Teacher, 2016), one can imagine the lengths that a bodybuilder may reach to obtain. However, the links between likes and self-esteem were diminished for those with greater purpose (Burrow and Ranoine, 2017).

### **Social Media Influencers**

Though there is no research yet specifically on the relationship between social media and competitive bodybuilders, the idea of fitness inspirations, fitspiration, has been studied. The influence of “fitspiration,” was explained by four key themes 1) Setting the ‘healthy ideal’, 2) Failure to achieve the ‘ideal’, 3) Being part of a community, and 4) Access to reliable health information (Raggatt et al, 2018). Positive and negative influences were described from engaging with the fitspiration, the negative influences being eating disorders, psychological distress and addictive exercise behaviors (Raggatt, Wright, Carrotte, Jenkinson, Mulgrew, Prichard, Lim, 2018). Posts with the #fitspo were usually thin but toned women, emphasized buttocks, and more likely to be sexualized, while men were more likely to show their face and were often muscular or hypermuscular.

Researchers found that originality and uniqueness are critical to be influential and if the follower’s personality is similar, that strengthens their influence (Casaló, Flavián, Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). This idea aligns with the social comparison theory, that people do not tend to evaluate their options/abilities with others who are too ‘dissimilar’ from themselves (Festinger, 1954). Content posted by relatable individuals or qualified experts was perceived as most trustworthy (Raggatt, Wright, Carrotte, Jenkinson, Mulgrew, Prichard, Lim, 2018) but they stated that future research is needed to determine the individual and content-related factors associated with negative and positive fitspiration experiences.

While influencers want to influence their followers, they also can benefit monetarily. Bodily capital leads to other forms of economic, social and cultural capital... attract more followers, (which) in turn attracts more sponsorship opportunities... weight lifting influencers truly strike a pose for profit (Koontz, E. M., Matera, F., Artigue, R. 2018).

### **Social Media and Food**

The likelihood of developing an eating disorder increases with the time spent on social media websites (NEDA) in adults aged 19 to 32 (Sidani, Shensa, Hoffman, Hanmer, & Primack, 2016). The growing amount of business pages and restaurant's pages, "Foodie" accounts provide a place to gawk at images and videos of food. There is no research on content specific features that promote eating disorders.

### **Social Media and Exercise**

Social media has a plethora of users that are apart of the idea of fitspiration by posting workout videos with tips and tricks as well as offering personal/online training and eBooks for sale. Although, research on the connection between social media and exercise disorders were not found, the theory of normative social behavior, a change in behavior to fit in with a group, correlated the amount of exercise reported by the user's social network and the size of their on-site social network affected the user's exercise behavior over time (Carpenter, Amaravadi, 2016). However, in another study, fitness-idealised images did not motivate participants to engage in higher levels of exercise suggesting that this type of fitness inspiration might not motivate actual exercise behaviour (Robinson, Prichard, Nikolaidis, Drummond, Drummond, Tiggeman, 2017). The use of the social media exercise service can lead to an enhanced perceived level of physical activity, fitness and wellbeing (Santtila, Grönqvist, Räisänen, & Kyröläinen 2016).

### **Social Media and Body Image**

There is plenty of research correlating body image dissatisfaction and disorders with influencers in the media and social pressures. Researchers found pressures from the media to be thin constitute risk factors for body dissatisfaction, concerns over weight and disordered eating behaviors (Christler, 2013; López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-Carracedo, & Fauquet, 2010). Muscle dysmorphia may be an analogous response of young men who are influenced by social pressures to be bigger, as evidenced in the gym subculture, in bodybuilding magazines, and in the many Hollywood movies with bodybuilder heroes (Pope, H., Katz, D., Hudson, J, 1993).

On the other hand, Ferguson (2014) found negative influences of social comparison are focused on peers rather than television or social media exposure. Perloff (2014) agrees that not only attractive advertising models in the mass media produce negative consequences, but also upward social comparisons, particularly with attractive peers via social media.

The way that someone thinks and defines themselves is important to the issue of body image disturbances because it is expected to operate in the process of social comparison (Gilbert et al. 2005; Levine and Harrison 2009; LópezGuimerá et al. 2010). Different beauty and body ideals are prevalent in the media of different cultures (Frith et al. 2005; Morris 2014; Shaw and Tan 2014). Therefore, defining

one's self as a bodybuilder may lead to specific comparisons with bodybuilders. Social media could either increase or decrease the influence of culture (Prieler, Choi, 2014) and may strengthen ethnic norms of body image rather than the body image of mainstream culture by gathering similar, like-minded people (Amichai-Hamburger 2007). Prieler and Choi (2014) suggest accounting for cultural factors when exploring the impact of social media on women's body image disturbances.

### **Influential Techniques**

Understanding the strategies behind influencing is important when understanding which influencers impact bodybuilders and why. According to Mortensen (2004) someone that is skilled will use the 12 universal laws of persuasion without being obvious. The goal of a persuader is to build trust, confidence and persuade but it is recommended that persuasion tools should be used only when the outcome is beneficial to both parties because people will either agree, not listen or be indifferent to the influencer (Mortensen, 2004). Aristotle's famous influential and arguably the most effective persuasive attempts include ethos, pathos and logos.

In summary, there is evidence of bodybuilding, social media and influencers having mental and physical impacts on behavior. Past research indicates that social media and influencers within the bodybuilding culture may amplify a bodybuilder's current issues arising from body dissatisfaction, eating and exercise behaviors. The gap in research can be filled by understanding influencers' impact and the factors that are influential.

Understanding previous research aided in the creation of interview questions aimed to understand the impact of influencers on the behavior of current and former competitive bodybuilders. The specific objectives for this research are to discover key themes to explain the impact of influencers and when bodybuilders were impacted.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

To identify the impact of influencers on current and former competitive bodybuilders, I conducted in-depth interviews on six current or former competitive bodybuilders. The interview focused on the bodybuilder's journey and the impact of social media usage and influencers. Demographics were collected at the end.

#### **Design**

This study used qualitative data to understand perspectives and conduct an in-depth analysis. Divided into two parts, the interview focused on the bodybuilder's journey of how they got into bodybuilding and how social media and influencers impacted their bodybuilding journey. Then a quantitative question was provided for the participants to mark on a Likert scale how often they check Instagram. This conversational setting was a good match to gather in-depth data about underlying thoughts and feelings about social media and if their bodybuilding journey was impacted by influencers.

#### **Participants**

Participants in this study consisted of current/former competitive bodybuilders, aged 18 years and older. Minors, adults who are unable to consent, and prisoners were not included in the final study. Pregnant women, Native Americans and undocumented individuals were neither targeted nor excluded. The study included two women and four men, of which one had retired from bodybuilding, two were on-break to focus on other things and three had set dates to compete in a future competition.

#### **Setting**

This research was based in the Phoenix metropolitan area where bodybuilding competitions occur multiple times a year and where I had established pre-existing relationships with bodybuilders.

#### **Instruments**

Participants were recruited via an Instagram message (Appendix A) where I provided a description of my study and requested participation. I used interview questions (Appendix C) to guide the conversation, understand the bodybuilder journey and where social media and influencers impacted.

#### **Procedures**

Participants were recruited from pre-established relationships and word of mouth. Data was collected from October to November with a goal of obtaining a minimum of 5 participants. Consent (Appendix B) was obtained on a form by receiving their signature before the interview. Interviews took

place in a mutually agreed upon location. They were conducted in the process of directing a conversation to collect information/data and this was stated at the beginning of the interview. The participants expected to spend 20-30 minutes in the interview. The interview was video recorded to ensure accuracy of responses for the data that was transcribed on a secured computer.

### **Analysis**

Each interview was transcribed to analyze responses for common themes. Data was viewed from a chronological standpoint, beginning, middle and end, to see when and how influencers impacted bodybuilder's behavior.

With this information, the researcher has an improved understanding of the bodybuilder journey and the impact of influencers on the bodybuilder's behavior and those who wish to be influential to the bodybuilding community have key insights.



## Chapter Four: Data Analysis



Doug, 29  
Current Bodybuilder



Matt, 24  
Current Bodybuilder



Vanessa, 22  
Current Bodybuilder



Brent, 34  
Retired Bodybuilder



Stan, 44  
On-break Bodybuilder



Carrie, 25  
On-break Bodybuilder

Six current or former competitive bodybuilders, in the metropolitan Phoenix area, were interviewed to understand the impact of influencers on their behavior. Four men and two women participated in the two-part, in-depth interview. The three current bodybuilders were deemed current because they were training for an upcoming show. The bodybuilder that was retired did not plan on competing again and the two bodybuilders that were on-break were not training for an upcoming show but considered competing in the future.

This chapter contains the data presentation, data analysis and interpretation of the impact of influencers on the bodybuilders' journeys from beginning to end, with the end being the day that interviews were held.

### Data Presentation

Interviews were transcribed to identify key themes of influencers' impact. The key themes were found within three stages of the bodybuilders' journeys, which include: "The Beginning," during their early childhood to high school years, "The Middle," the start of their bodybuilding careers, and "The End," as the present day. Each stage includes one or more of the seven key themes that bodybuilders viewed as impacts that influencers may contribute to: 1.) Body dissatisfaction, 2.) Inspiration, 3.) Imitation, 4.) Motivation, 5.) Skepticism and distrust, 6.) Information, and 7.) Avoidance.

### Data Analysis

#### *The Beginning: Early Childhood to High School*

"The Beginning" stage required the bodybuilders to reflect on their past, and they focused on their early childhood to high school years, before they were bodybuilders. Influencers at "The Beginning" stage included peers and the media and were found to contribute to body dissatisfaction. Interview data shows that most of the interviewed bodybuilders experienced body dissatisfaction during their childhood and adolescence by comparing their body image to their peers and the media, and/or getting picked on

and bullied due to their body mass. This resulted in disordered eating for some and appear to have directed some of their life paths towards competing and careers in the fitness industry.

***Body Dissatisfaction.*** Influencers at the beginning stage for bodybuilders may contribute to the formation of a deep-rooted unhappiness with their bodies. Doug said, “kids are cruel, kids are cruel,” using repetition to emphasize the impact that bullying had on his body image and confidence. He recalled “feeling insecure while looking in the mirror,” and “wishing to be in shape.” Doug’s peers may have contributed to his dissatisfaction with his body and feeling of discomfort while looking at his reflection. Their words or actions stayed on his mind and followed him home and they are still remembered years later, which emphasizes the impact that his peers had on him.

The two female bodybuilders attribute their body dissatisfaction to their genetics and timing of puberty. Both women discussed comparing their bodies to their peers and the internalization of their differences as they said:

“I would say (that) I hit puberty before all of my friends, and I'm short, and all of my friends are very, very tall. I was the only one gaining weight and none of my friends were... It made me think I was different, so I had to, like, stay thin.” (Vanessa)

“When I was in elementary and junior high, I was like the fat kid. So there was always the thing in my head, like I needed to lose weight. I was always thicker, I always had big legs and I was never like (the) skinny girl... It was always you need to be a rail, super skinny so I always tried to starve myself or not eat or whatever. But once I got out of high school into college it wasn't about body image, it was I liked working out...” (Carrie)

Both Vanessa and Carrie mention feeling alienated because of their bodies and pressures to look similar, smaller sized, peers as well as feeling a need to do something to change their bodies. Carrie’s claims to starve herself to be like her skinny peers, suggests disordered eating behaviors and “it was always you need to be a rail” suggests an outside factor, such as the media’s portrayal of women displaying a need to be thin. These findings support past research that states, “pressures from the media to be thin constitute risk factors for body dissatisfaction, concerns over weight and disordered eating behaviors” (Christler, 2013; López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-Carracedo, & Fauquet, 2010).

Matt, on the other hand, was not picked on because he was good at the sports he played, but he still felt body dissatisfaction from social comparison, stating “I can’t be short and skinny, c’mon!” Here we can see that his body dissatisfaction was the opposite of Doug, Vanessa and Carrie’s body dissatisfaction from being too big in comparison.

We can see that most bodybuilders described themselves as too big or too small compared to their peers and that may serve as their motivation to change their physiques. Based on Mortensen's (2004) insight on the factors of change, one can assume that most bodybuilder's motivation to compete will be internally motivated, deriving from inspiration or desperation after experiencing body dissatisfaction at a young age. These beginning stage findings are supported by Lawler and Nixon (2011) as they found that "body mass, appearance conversations with friends, peer appearance criticism and internalized appearance ideals emerged as significant predictors of body dissatisfaction."

### ***The Middle: Start of Bodybuilding Career***

"The Middle" stage is when bodybuilders are beginning their bodybuilding careers which was around 18 years-old, post-high school or college, and they may have competed in a single show. Influencers at this stage included bodybuilders seen in the media, such as websites, magazines and social media, and peers at the gym or at bodybuilding competitions. Bodybuilders found influencers to contribute to body dissatisfaction and inspiration, and imitation. Interview data shows that the bodybuilders past experience with body dissatisfaction continues but they now view influencers as where their physique could be, fueling their inspiration and resulting in imitation.

Brent and Stan recalled the influencer's main platforms before social media existed, saying:

"It was like you waited till the magazines to know who won what big contest. You barely get to see still photographs and you'd see the results posted on different websites, who won what show." (Stan)

"In the early 90s, when (influencers) didn't have social media, guys were getting paid 20, 30, 40, 50 grand a month to go somewhere because their social media was magazines." (Brent)

Based on Brent and Stan's insights on the influencers' platforms in the past, magazines and websites, we can see that advanced technology provides influencers the opportunity to connect and share instantly as opposed to waiting for news and updates on bodybuilding competitions from websites or magazines. Influencers appear to be more visible to bodybuilders with social media but may be losing out on income from magazines, but Brent discusses the potential for income from social media usage in "The End" stage as he is an influencer.

***Body Dissatisfaction and Inspiration.*** Influencers continue to contribute to the bodybuilders' body dissatisfaction, but also represent what their physiques could look like if they begin or continue

bodybuilding. Bodybuilders feel body dissatisfaction when comparing their bodies to influencers but at this stage, they are now an inspiration to work hard and reach their ideal physique.

We can see that Stan compared himself to a bodybuilder with a bigger physique and felt body dissatisfaction and an awe that lingered in the back of his head and served as inspiration. He said:

“I think it was kinda always in the back of my head, that it was like the awe of, just seeing the guys, it was like, ‘Wow, they weigh about what I am, with my size, but they look so much bigger.’”

Doug referenced @Ulissesworld as he said: “That was, like, my fitness inspiration right there! That’s the dude that got me into, like, ‘Yo I gotta have a physique like his or better.’” In Doug saying this, we can see that he compared himself to an influencer on social media with an idealized physique and used him as inspiration to obtain a similar or more impressive physique. This finding supports the idea that social networking site use is associated with internalization of beauty ideals and body dissatisfaction (Fardouly and Vartanian, 2015; Mabe et al., 2014; Meier and Gray, 2014; Tiggemann and Miller, 2010; Tiggemann and Slater, 2013).

Matt, on the other hand, was inspired by an influencer to get an education, stating: “It kinda just directed me going to school for it. I didn’t really look up to nobody- it just made me want to learn more about it.” Prior to competing, half of the bodybuilders pursued an education or career in the fitness and health industry which may be because of their body dissatisfaction. Doug, Matt and Vanessa are now personal trainers which displays that influencers may contribute to bodybuilders’ desire to take action towards learning proven methods to achieve idealized physiques.

***Imitation.*** Influencers at this “Middle Stage” are contributing to bodybuilders’ body dissatisfaction because they compare themselves, and bodybuilders’ inspiration because the influencer represents the physique that the new bodybuilder could have, if they work hard enough. The influencer has what the bodybuilder wants which leads bodybuilders to imitate the influencer in order to achieve a similar physique. Doug and Carrie discussed their desire to imitate influencers in order to achieve a similar physique:

“You see some of your favorite idols and they’re just leveling up every time and you’re just like ‘Gosh, what do I need to do to get there?’... My current physique after my first two shows were not good enough.” (Doug)

“After my first competition, I, like, would really look at certain people and be like ‘Oh I wanna look like them,’ or ‘What are they doing?’ ‘What are they eating?’ or ‘What supplements are they taking?’” (Carrie)

Here we can see that as bodybuilders begin their bodybuilding journey and compete in a show, they feel a gap between their idealized influencer’s physique and their current physique. The bodybuilders believe that to achieve the desired physique, they should do exactly what their influencer is doing because it will bring them closer to their ideal self, which leads to their curiosity. They wonder what the influencer is doing differently because they have now competed, clearly saw their muscular developments when they competed and are now eager to understand the influencer’s lifestyle to imitate them.

Stan, on the other hand, became a bodybuilder before the growth of social media and did not experience imitation because influencers were not easily visible or sharing what they did to achieve their physiques. Here is how Stan described his bodybuilding journey:

Stan: It was all basically trial and error. Trying different workouts, different foods, different amounts of foods. And I would basically go for a good range of 2-3 months maybe sometimes 4 months and then seeing how that worked and how that affected my body and how my body responded, and if it was going well, I went a little further with it, and if it didn’t, I made some tweaks and changes and went from there and just playing around. Mostly learning on my own, how I felt, I guess.

Interviewer: How patient.

Stan: Well, that’s what a lot now don’t get, is the patience. It’s said quite a bit, I don’t really think that it’s followed as much as it’s said. It is a marathon. It is *not* a sprint. It takes time. It takes work. Nothing from this sport is going to happen over night. You really just gotta really put in the work and just, kind of, I guess monitor yourself. Seeing what is coming from and how you’re responding to it.

We can see that Stan’s experience may have been more experimental and independent because social media did not exist, compared to Doug and Carrie’s experience as they were eager to imitate the influencer.

### ***The End: Present Day***

“The End” stage focused on the bodybuilders’ views and thoughts at the time of the interview. Influencers at this stage included bodybuilders or people in the media, specifically social media. Bodybuilders explained the impact of influencers in five themes: inspiration, motivation, skepticism and distrust, information and avoidance. Influencers are no longer viewed as contributing to bodybuilders’ imitation or body dissatisfaction at this point in their journey.

At the time of the interviews, the three bodybuilders that became personal trainers, Vanessa, Doug and Matt, had committed to a bodybuilding competition, from six weeks to eight months away and are considered “current bodybuilders.” Brent was considered the “retired bodybuilder,” because he had competed for 10 years and retired, but remains a social media influencer. Then, Stan and Carrie were focusing their attention away from competing and were considered “on-break bodybuilders.” Stan had competed in over 17 shows and decided to focus on his career while Carrie had been bodybuilding for four years and decided to focus on furthering her education because bodybuilding did not provide any benefits besides recognition. She said:

“It’s a lot of money for no real outcome. I mean it’s cool, ‘Oh you could be a pro,’ but even once you’re a pro, you’re not getting paid. You still have to have another job, you still have to deal with that.”

***Inspiration.*** Influencers represent what the bodybuilders’ physiques could look like or the achievements that they could have if they continue bodybuilding. Brent and Stan, the two bodybuilders that began bodybuilding before the growth of social media both discussed following credible and respected bodybuilders that lead the industry. They said:

“You gotta follow the big guys, the guys that lead the industry, like Mr. Olympias, Danny Hesters, Jay Cutlers, Julian Smiths. Guys that have crazy workouts. Most of the time, I’ll follow, like I said, the top guys in the industry, the Michael Hurts, the guys that have been in forever, you know, Arnold and everything like that..” (Brent)

“I just know the work and dedication that’s put in.” (Stan)

Here we can see that Brent and Stan, retired and on-break, have a deep respect for credible influencers that have competed in the biggest bodybuilding competition, Mr. Olympia, or have dedicated their lives to bodybuilding. Due to their experience and knowledge, they understand the required work to achieve idealized physiques and they value their commitment. The most well-known people in the bodybuilding community serve as inspirations.

***Motivation.*** Influencers contribute to bodybuilders’ motivation as a reminder of why they made a long-term commitment to achieve their idealized bodies. Influencers’ physiques and words serve as motivation. Stan emphasizes the importance of influencers providing motivation because of the consequences of bodybuilding. He said:

“It takes a whole different breed and character to compete and compete, over and over again. There's a lot of things that go into it. Just a lot of your body playing with you physically and mentally. You might look good in the mirror to yourself or everybody else that is around you at the gym, but you going through the day or how your body feels- is just run down, worn out, torn down, like garbage.”

We can see that competitive bodybuilding is mentally and physically difficult and explains why incredible physiques and powerful words may be necessary to motivate them. Vanessa and Matt discuss how influencers physiques and words serve as motivation as they said:

“People look to other people's bodies for motivation, not necessarily who they are.”

“(Eric Thomas) influences me to, like, give it my best, ya know, you only got one life to live, just live it to the fullest.”

In Vanessa saying this, we can understand that having a good physique serves as motivation for a bodybuilder to work towards reaching their ideal body. Matt, on the other hand, shows that motivational speaker, Eric Thomas (@etthehiphoppreacher), motivates him through his speeches to give his best, which may be for an upcoming bodybuilding competition.

***Skepticism and Distrust.*** Influencers, specifically in social media, were described as lying, fake and dishonest because they are motivated by money and filter what they share. As Carrie mentioned, bodybuilding costs “a lot of money for no real outcome” but social media has provided a platform for influencers to earn recognition and income. Brent, an influencer, discusses the benefits of social media usage for an influencer:

“The perks of having a social media in the fitness world, is the free stuff, the recognition, sponsorships, payments (and) video shoots... You pretty much get whatever you want... I get DMs all the time, companies contacting me, all the time. And if I'm late, they could find someone else that, ya know, they wanna sponsor and I just lost all the money or free product, so I check it quite often.”

“Everyone's fighting for followers... Everyone's trying to get noticed...”

In Brent saying this, we can see that competition is high among bodybuilders to be an influencer because of the potential perks. We can see that bodily capital leads to other forms of economic, social and cultural capital (Koontz et al., 2018) and we can assume that their desperation to be recognized and earn income may contribute to skepticism and distrust.

Brent and Doug discuss influencers' money driven motivation:

“There's a lot of misinformation out there because people are trying to push things, push products... You got a lot of people out there thinking that their lives are great and really they're not that great, ya know. They're more about pushing product even if the product is not good.” (Brent)

“There's a lot of people who are just saying stuff to get money out of it or not really caring about people's health... a dude might look a certain way and it's not... realistic for a person to achieve that type of body in such a short amount of time.” (Doug)

Here we can see that bodybuilders believe influencers are being paid to promote products that they may not use and wrongly suggest that using their products would bring the bodybuilder closer to their ideal self. The influencers are perceived as dishonest which demonstrates that influencers may be desperate to earn income paid regardless of their views on the product which contributes to bodybuilders' skepticism and distrust of influencers.

Stan demonstrates his disinterest in influencer's promotions as he says:

“I think everybody just kinda gotten more show off type of thing... ‘Oh this is what I'm doing. This is where I'm working out. This is what I'm wearing,’ That makes no difference... Hash tagging what shoes and brand legging your wearing, ya know, I don't care if your wearing torn up sweatpants and a holey shirt, ya know. You're going in there, you get in, you workout, you work hard, and you put in the work... There is a lot more said by being quiet and just doing it than trying to advertise every step. I don't need to see every little thing. I could care less about workout videos, drama, follow arounds.”

Here we can see that Stan views influencers as walking advertisements and is not interested in their promotions at this stage. As a bodybuilder, Stan cares about the results that the influencer gets from working hard and not buying in to their money driven posts.

Carrie, Stan and Matt discussed the unrealistic, yet idealistic, bodybuilding experiences that influencers showcase:

“I don't feel like they're totally open about what goes on behind the scenes... They don't show their struggles... They would be shredded, then they would gain all this weight and you wouldn't see them post pictures for 7 months and then all of a sudden they're like ‘Oh well I was going through... and I was battling this... and now I've gained this weight’ so, it's like, why not be real about that?” (Carrie)

“It's all, ‘this is what I did in the gym and then I'll post a selfie picture of me at the gym three weeks out as I'm now showing more and getting conditioned more. If you're gonna show, show it all. There are a few that do that.” (Stan)



“I feel like a lot of them are fake, lowkey. I feel like people, they just post what they want you to see. They don't post their hardships or anything, so they make it seem like everything is cool and dandy and they really make you feel like you can get there just by eating and drinking and stuff, drinking water and stuff like that, but there's more to it, ya know, for some people” (Matt)

Here we can see that the influencers hide their struggles, filtering out posts regarding their weight gain or hardships, and showcase only points where they look their best. Bodybuilders display a proudness of discipline, willpower and necessary perfectionism (Andersen, Barlett, Morgan, 1981) which may be influencers' reasonings to hide their struggles and only showcase successful moments of their journeys on social media. This idea that influencers “make you feel like you can get there,” when it is more difficult, supports research that “fitspiration” accounts contribute to the “failure to achieve the ideal” (Raggatt et al., 2018). The influencers provide expectations of a perfect lifestyle that makes it easy and simple to obtain a similar physique which contributes to bodybuilders skepticism and distrust because they have gained knowledge and experience understand that bodybuilding journeys often have hardships and require hard work.

***Information.*** Influencers were found to contribute to skepticism and distrust when they avoided sharing about their hardships, but some influencers did share about their entire bodybuilding journey and more to help bodybuilders reach or maintain their ideal physique, build awareness about competitive bodybuilding and provide a sense of community.

Carrie and Vanessa discussed the influencers that are sharing the truth about their experiences while competing, saying:

“People are realizing that social media is not perfect or everything that they post is not real... I think now that they are being more real about the background of all of it, I think it's nice... People are realizing it's not the healthiest thing... and it's not worth it and they're kinda realizing there's ways to be fit but not have to be shredded stage fit all the time.” (Carrie)

“I post about like the very raw and real side of it... It made me, like, really feel connected to who I didn't know or like girls that I did know that we're going through the same things but we wouldn't have known otherwise... I'll follow girls who... kinda post the way I do whereas they write long ass captions and they're very open and very honest, because I feel like I can learn a lot from them.” (Vanessa)

Here we can see that Carrie values honesty from influencers regarding the repercussions that competitively bodybuilding can have on one's health. She also believes people are learning from influencers that competing is unhealthy and that there are alternative ways to obtain their ideal physique. Then, we can see that Vanessa is an influencer as she posts on social media to provide information to her followers and in a way that Carrie would value. Vanessa shares information about her experiences in bodybuilding but also follows people that are honest because she wants to gain more information. We can also see that Vanessa enjoys "being part of a community" by connecting to others that had similar experiences in bodybuilding (Raggatt et. al; 2018).

Brent said, "It's always good to get new ideas and new innovations on diets and workouts and that's what I always try to do on my Instagram." Here we can see that Brent's purpose for social media usage is similar to the influencers' purpose that he follows. Carrie follows Katy Hearn (@katyhearfit) and her husband (@haydnschneider) because she respects their lifestyle and may aspire to live similarly. She said:

"They're, like, real... They will tell you straight up what they're doing or not doing.. and she's just, like, more family oriented, where she just had the baby, so she's, like, doing all that stuff and she's real, so that's the only one I think I follow."

We can see from Brent and Carrie, that influencers appeared more trustworthy when they had similarities or admirable traits. Carrie values these influencers because they provide honest information and are family oriented. This finding is supported by past research that showed that relatable individuals or qualified experts are more trustworthy (Casaló, 2018; Festinger, 1954; Raggatt et al., 2018).

Doug mentioned that he gained valuable health information from an influencer. He said: "I follow, I forget the IG name, but they're really good with uh basically after preps revitalizing support for B12s, getting water back into your body as well, IV fluids, stuff like that." Doug gained "reliable health information" (Raggatt et al., 2018) regarding bodybuilding.

**Avoidance.** Influencers, specifically on social media, were found to be avoided by bodybuilders due to bitterness, not providing an influential factor and protecting themselves from body dissatisfaction.

Carrie displayed signs of bitterness towards brands and people that may be considered mainstream as she said:

"I don't follow any fitness accounts or anything because it's just too much... I don't wanna give them followers because I feel like they already have all this, and it's like I'll

look at them but I won't follow them... I don't follow certain people like that, or... big name brands.”

Here we can see that certain influencers will not earn her following because she may perceive them as having too many followers already but admits that she will look. Carrie appears to control what she wants to view and is reluctant to support brands and people that may be too successful or well known.

Vanessa and Matt avoid influencers on social media because they are busy focusing on themselves. They said:

“I'm not going to follow the girls that are doing the show. I'm not going to compare myself, like, I'm going to focus on really doing this journey for me.” (Vanessa)

“I'm just doing my own thing. I don't really need to follow anybody else. I'm trying to help other people out. I'm not saying I don't need help but I'm not going to go to anyone online to figure things out. I'm gonna have school and actually do my research.” (Matt)

Here we can see that, both Matt and Vanessa prefer to focus on their own journeys during competition preparation and outside of competition preparation. Vanessa does not want to compare herself and feel body dissatisfaction while Matt does not see value in following certain influencers because he has the resources to achieve his ideal physique. Matt prefers to find information out for himself and use his education to impact people in his career of personal training. For Vanessa, following women that will be at her competition and seeing their body change impacts her journey. She also demonstrates that some influencers may not provide value, like Matt's view, as she said:

“I don't follow anyone that just posts like, pictures... Social media girls that- they have, like, a large following and there's nothing wrong with it, I just don't find value in it, so they'll post like a bikini picture with like in the caption is like a heart or like a flower.”

Vanessa demonstrates the importance of an influencer providing value to her other than a body focused photo. When asked if she had ever followed attractive, yet invaluable accounts, she replied:

“Maybe the most I've ever followed was like five people- five girls... I would say, like, they were randomly spaced out. If I was really, like, ‘Oh my god, this girl is so pretty! I just wanna follow her.’”

In Vanessa saying this, we can see that an invaluable account may be the exception to her avoidance if they are very attractive.

## **Interpretations**

This research provides insight on the impact of influencers and may be a value to those who wish to be influential to competitive bodybuilders as well as marketers utilizing influencers. Influencers may impact competitive bodybuilders differently based on the stage of their journeys. Based on the seven key themes that influencers may contribute to: 1.) Body dissatisfaction, 2.) Inspiration, 3.) Imitation, 4.) Motivation, 5.) Skepticism and distrust, 6.) Information, and 7.) Avoidance, to be influential, one should provide the ideal impact based on bodybuilders' stage of their journeys.

The ideal impacts for "Middle Stage Bodybuilders" are imitation and inspiration. Bodybuilders may be most open to marketing efforts at this stage, when they begin their bodybuilding careers, because they are looking for ways to reach their ideal physique, such as exercises, diets and supplements. Influential factors for "Middle Stage Bodybuilders" include being attractive with an admirable physique because bodybuilders at this stage are inspired and eager to imitate an influencer to reach their ideal physique due to their body dissatisfaction.

The ideal impacts for "End Stage Bodybuilders" are inspiration, motivation and information. Influential factors for "End Stage Bodybuilders" include being credible, relatable, open and honest, informative and attractive with a motivating physique. Bodybuilders at this stage are seeking the ideal impacts to maintain their physique or work towards their ideal physique and feel a sense of community.

Influencers should refrain from providing unrealistic expectations, false information regarding products and product usage, and hiding their struggles because they may contribute to bodybuilders' skepticism and distrust. Influencers may be avoided due to bitterness, not providing an influential factor and protection from body dissatisfaction.

## **Summary**

Competitive bodybuilders viewed the impact of influencers in seven stages: 1.) Body dissatisfaction, 2.) Inspiration, 3.) Imitation, 4.) Motivation, 5.) Skepticism and distrust, 6.) Information, and 7.) Avoidance. Through understanding how influencers impact bodybuilders' behavior and providing a timeline of their journeys in three stages, those who wish to be influential have key insights on the ideal impacts and can develop strategies to target bodybuilders based on the stage that they are in.

Although this research provides insights into the bodybuilder's journey and the impact of influencers for people who wish to be influential and marketers, more research is needed.

## **Chapter Five: Thesis Recommendations**

From a young age there are great pressures to look a certain way and this thesis looks beyond competitive bodybuilders' status and analyzes their journey, starting from their childhood, to discover the impact of influencers on their behavior which may serve as a value to those who wish to be influential to competitive bodybuilders. To fully understand the impact of influencers, we conducted in-depth interviews to discover a.) the bodybuilder journey, b.) the impact of social media and c.) the impact of influencers.

This chapter contains a summary of findings, interpretations, implications, limitations and directions for future research.

### **Findings Summary / Interpretations**

This research revealed that six competitive bodybuilders, of varying experience, living in the Phoenix Metropolitan area, viewed influencers as contributing to their behavior in seven themes: 1.) Body dissatisfaction, 2.) Inspiration, 3.) Imitation, 4.) Motivation, 5.) Skepticism and distrust, 6.) Information, and 7.) Avoidance. Influencers' impact may be found to be dependent on the stage they are at in their journey. For those who wish to be influential, they should provide the ideal impact based on where the bodybuilder is at in their journey.

The ideal impacts for "Middle Stage Bodybuilders" are imitation and inspiration. Bodybuilders may be most open to marketing efforts at this stage, when they begin their bodybuilding careers, because they are looking for resources to reach their ideal physique, such as exercises, diets and supplements. Influential factors for "Middle Stage Bodybuilders" include being attractive with an admirable physique because bodybuilders at this stage are inspired and eager to imitate to reach their ideal physique due to their body dissatisfaction.

The ideal impacts for "End Stage Bodybuilders" are inspiration, motivation and information. Influential factors for "End Stage Bodybuilders" include being credible, relatable, open and honest, informative and attractive with a motivating physique because bodybuilders at this stage are seeking inspiration, motivation and information to maintain or work to obtain their ideal physique and feel a sense of community.

Influencers should refrain from providing unrealistic expectations, false information regarding products and product usage, and hiding their struggles because they may contribute to bodybuilders' skepticism and distrust. Influencers may be avoided due to bitterness, not providing an influential factor and protection from body dissatisfaction.

### **Lessons Learned/ Implications**

I personally learned that bodybuilders' knowledge and experience may predict the impact that influencers have on their behavior. It was interesting how diverse my small sample of recruited bodybuilders were, yet they displayed similarities, emphasizing how like-minded the same culture can be. However, the target audience of bodybuilders can be segmented even deeper to the stage of their journey that they are on!

I recommend that marketers should be very selective of the influencers associated with their brand because the influencer may already have preconceived notions that may have contributed to bodybuilders' feelings of distrust and skepticism, and those attributes may get associated with the brand. Best practices would be to target bodybuilders dependent on the stage that they are at, and then ensure that the influencer is providing the ideal impacts.

### **Limitations of Research**

The research included two women and four men, ranging from ages 22 to 44 that provided a range of experience from competing in three bodybuilding shows to over 17 shows, but the research lacked an inexperienced bodybuilder with minimal knowledge that would have provided current views versus experienced bodybuilders that reflected on the beginning of the bodybuilding career. The interview participants also provided top-of-mind influencers that they followed, but influencers that they followed, that were not top-of-mind were not addressed.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This research demonstrated that influencers may impact bodybuilders according to the stage of their bodybuilding journey. Marketers would benefit from future research that works to understand influencer impact on brand attributes, bodybuilder's spending and diet and exercise. Bodybuilders and marketers would benefit from research that deeper analyzed which influencers they followed or frequently viewed to understand specific impacts.

### **Summary**

Competitive bodybuilders have a unique background that has shaped their values, needs and goals. This in-depth, qualitative research revealed six bodybuilder's underlying thoughts and feelings on the impact of influencers and demonstrates the importance of understanding bodybuilders' journeys when attempting to be influential to bodybuilders. This timeline shows how life and influencers connect to form a bodybuilder's journey and shows that influencers impact bodybuilders differently based on the stage

they are at. The most significant finding was that influencers are perceived as lying, fake, and dishonest because they are motivated by money and filter what they share on social media.

To be influential among the bodybuilding community, one should contribute the ideal impacts: imitation, inspiration, motivation and information, based on the stage that the bodybuilder is at. Influential factors include being: credible, relatable, open and honest, attractive, informative and having an admirable and motivating physique.

This research demonstrates that bodybuilders working to achieve a perfect reflection are influenced by someone that has achieved a perfect physique but is real and reflects on every point of their journey, imperfections and all, to bring the bodybuilder closer to their ideal self.

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**Appendix A: Recruitment Message**

## Instagram Message

Hi \_\_\_\_\_! I am conducting a research study for my honors thesis to explore the impact of social media influencers on the behavior of bodybuilders.

I would like you to participate in my study. Being a part of this study will take approximately 20-30 minutes in a location we agree upon. I would like to hear the story of how your bodybuilding journey began and if social media had any impact on your experience.

Participation is voluntary, and you are not required to answer any or all of my questions and if you withdraw at any time there will be no penalty. I would like to video record this interview, but that is dependent on your permission. Your contribution will contribute to a better understanding of the bodybuilder experience.

Please let me know if you would be interested in participating. If you have any questions or would like to set up a time and date, my phone number is \_\_\_\_\_.

Thanks, I look forward to hearing from you!

Kiara Caldwell

**Appendix B: Consent Form**

## Social Behavioral Study | In-person Interview

The purposes of this form is to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether you participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study.

RESEARCHERS | Kiara Caldwell, student in the W.P. Carey School of Business, Arizona State University; and Dr. Nancy Gray, Professor of Marketing in the W.P. Carey School of Business and Honors Faculty for Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University, have invited your participation in a research study.

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY | The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of social media and the role of influencers on the behavior of current and former bodybuilders. Participants must be 18 and older. We expect that individuals will spend an 20-30 minutes participating in the interview. We expect 5 people to participate in this research study. If you say YES, then your participation will take place in a location agreed upon. You will be asked questions about your bodybuilding journey and the impact of social media. Video and audio will be recorded of the interview to create a movie for presentation purposes. You are free to decide whether you wish to participate in this study. You can leave the research at any time, it will not be held against you.

RISK AND BENEFITS | There are no known risks for taking part in this study, but in any research, there is some minimal possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified. Although there may be no direct benefits to you, your participation will contribute to an understanding of bodybuilders.

CONFIDENTIALITY | All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential and will be stored on a locked computer and in a locked home to maintain security. Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information to people who have a need to review this information. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT | if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, talk to the research team: Kiara Caldwell (480-843-1786, [kiara.caldwell@asu.edu](mailto:kiara.caldwell@asu.edu)) or Nancy Gray (480-965-2323, [nancy.gray@asu.edu](mailto:nancy.gray@asu.edu)). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Behavioral IRB. You may talk to them at (480) 965-6788 or by email at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Your signature documents your permission to be video recorded in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of participant

My signature below documents that the information in the consent document and any other written information was accurately explained to, and apparently understood by, the participant, and that consent was freely given by the participant.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent

### Appendix C: In-Person Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your bodybuilding experience:
  - 1a. How long have you been bodybuilding?
  - 1b. How did you get started in bodybuilding?
  - 1c. What interests or used to interest you about bodybuilding?

Prompt if needed to capture:

Goals  
 Motivation  
 Bodybuilding interest  
 Bodybuilding influence  
 Bodybuilding competitions/division  
 Bodybuilding future  
 Past experiences with body image, dieting, exercising, social pressure

---

2. Social Media Influence:
  - 2a. How has social media impacted your bodybuilding journey?
  - 2b. Do you follow any fitness/health accounts on Instagram?
  - 2c. What do you think about the fitness accounts or influencers on social media?
  - 2d. Likert Scale:
    - I check Instagram
    - Not Often \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Very Often

Prompt if needed to capture:

Timeline of following/noticing influencers

---

Demographics:

Gender  
 Age  
 Height  
 Weight  
 Race  
 Education level  
 Occupation  
 Hours worked per week  
 Average time spent exercising/day  
 # of people in household  
 Single\_ Married\_ In a relationship\_

**Appendix D: Transcribed Interview Scripts****Exhibit 1: Doug, Current bodybuilder**

Kiara: So, I just want to know about your bodybuilding experience. How long have you been bodybuilding?

Doug: I've been bodybuilding for 4 years. Haha. About 4 years to this day.

Kiara: How did you get started in bodybuilding?

Doug: My mentor, Jason Strayhand, don't forget that name! Uhm. Gosh I mean, met him through a friend, I kinda just like told him "Ah nah, i'll be okay I can find another trainer that will train probably me in bodybuilding." Then one day I just kinda appeared at the gym at work and lone-behold he was there. He's like "Do you wanna get a workout in with me?" and I was like "Man, I guess," I was like "what do you do that's special?" and he's like "whatever you want" and then you know I trained with him and I said "I wanna do a show" and he's like "I can get you there" and I was like "okay," and after that day, that was actually October 15th! A couple days ago back in 2... you know 20... back in.. ah damn I already forgot the year now! But uh so after I met up with him thats when I really got into it really.

Kiara: Okay so, what are your interests or interested you about bodybuilding to even begin?

Doug: Uhm I think the point um that interest me about bodybuilding was just the uh the just like I would say like the competing of it, the detail of how everybody's body looks. That's like a really good physique, I'm just like man, thats one of the things that excited me. I'm like, man, I want a physique like that, or I wanna look like that. The people to just be in shape, ya know, and look like that.

Kiara: So do you have any past experiences with body image or dieting or exercising?

Doug: Um, I do have a past experience with dieting because I've always been a bigger person.. Um at one point before I met Jason Strayhand, I was around 290, like 290 lbs. I got down to 175, god, then went back up to like 250. So I've always experienced weight problems, eating bad. Definitely looked at myself a lot of the times and was just like, ya know, I wish I was in shape. Uhm so I definitely uh had some insecurities about myself.

Kiara: When did that start?

Doug: Uh man, that started when I was about 12, 13. That started, that started real young!

Kiara: Interesting. Um did you have any social pressures when you were younger do you think?

Doug: Uh yeah I did, ya know, kids are cruel, kids are cruel. Especially when you know, you got a lot of family members who, you know, who are athletes and who are always in shape and then they're messing with you, picking on you, so I mean that definitely did a lot too as well.

Kiara: Super interesting. Okay now we'll get into the Social Media aspect. How do you think social media impacted your bodybuilder journey, was it in the beginning, in the middle, crucial in the end?

Doug: Ummm I think it kinda really impacted me probably towards the middle of my journey. Uhm as far as me seeing dudes ya know, progress with their physique and everything and I'm just like man like what do I do, like man I need to take myself to the next level, like okay my current physique after my first two shows were not good enough. It's kinda like one of those things, you see some of your favorite idols and they're just leveling up everytime and your just like gosh, what do I need to do to get there.

Kiara: Do you follow any fitness or health accounts on Instagram?

Doug: As far as for uh health accounts, gosh, uh I think the only dude.. uh I forget his name... neuropathic.. something. Naturopathic Dr., I follow, I forget the IG name, but they're really good with uh basically after preps revitalizing support for b12s, getting water back into your body as well, IV fluids, stuff like that.

Kiara: Interesting. What about fitness inspirations and those people?

Doug: Oh man! My fitness inspiration had to be... my dude, uh gosh I can't believe I forgot his name.

Kiara: Was it one of the Olympias?

Doug: No, no, no, no. He was actually with uh, what's the dude's name that, that's built like., yeah, his physique is like incredible I just forget his name.

Kiara: He didn't compete?

Doug: No! He competed. I think it's not uh, he didn't compete in uh NPC, he competed in that other show, not OCP but uh what's that other one... WBFF... or what's that other one?

Kiara: IFBB?

Doug: Yeah. He got the long dreads

Matt: Ulisses!

Doug: Ulisses, yes! That was like my fitness inspiration right there, that's the dude that got me into like yo I gotta have a physique like his or better.

Kiara: When did that happen?

Doug: Man that happened maybe 2 years ago. I was just like yo I gotta have a phy- I gotta have a body like his or better.

Kiara: So that was literally in the middle of your bodybuilding?

Doug: Yeah.

Kiara: Ummm.. so what do you think about fitness accounts or influencers on social media?

Doug: Um I think some are good, but there is some that are not so good, I would say, because I know a lot of, ya know, the fitness industry is really tricky. There's a lot of people who are just saying stuff to get money out of it or not really caring about people's health. So it really, a dude might look a certain way and it's not, it's not really, ya know, how would I say, like realistic for a person to achieve that type of body in such a short amount of time. And that's why I think where some social media influencers, ya know, I think they have to think about what people are taking from their page, is it good or is it bad, ya know, what are they taking away from it. And so I think a lot of times a lot people are taking away from it like they think oh I can get there but they're really not taking anything good from it. Ya know, they're just ya know, these social media influencers are kind of- just lying really, they're lying.

Kiara: Yeah. Super interesting. Okay so now I have a scale, I guess you can fill it out yourself. But you just check how much you check Instagram, between not often and very often.

Doug: Ha! Oooh!

Kiara: Very often?

Doug: Often.



**Exhibit 2: Matt, Current bodybuilder**

Kiara: So, I just want to know about your bodybuilding experience. So how long have you been bodybuilding?

Matt: I actually just got started. I just got started in uhm August that's when I first started training for it. My first show was in November, second was in December, third show was in July, so everything was so fast.

Kiara: Yeah, but have you been working out your whole life?

Matt: Basically, I did sports since I was like kindergarten all the way up til 18, turned 18 started going into bodybuilding- well- I started just lifting just to get big then I actually started learning like correct exercises when I went to school for it at ASU. So I went to school for kinesiology.

Kiara: So how did you get started in bodybuilding

Matt: The same person, Jason, Jason Strayhand. We were at the gym, me and this other guy was at the gym and the other guy knew Jason so he went up to talk to him. And they were just chopping it up and uh yeah I was just there awkwardly, so ya know I introduced myself. Like I'm Matt, and he was like oh what's up. Then he said he did bodybuilding before or whatever. Um , I was a little interested, um so I was asking him a lot of questions and he was like "just come to the gym. Let's get that work." And I was just like well I ain't gonna say no. So I went there one of the first day and oh my god I didn't go back, I didn't go back. It took me a whole year and I came back later.

Kiara: So the workout was hard?

Matt: Well it was hard, but it wasn't that it was hard I just wasn't ready to do bodybuilding. At the time they didn't have classic physique, which was my thing, they just had bodybuilding and I didnt wanna wear the whole, the mong, the thing, the man thong... I didn't wanna do all that so I waited a whole year and then he told me oh they have classic you know and I was like oh okay I can wear the dun-dun-dun-duns.

Kiara: Okay wait so you wear...?

Matt: I wear like the boxer briefs

Kiara: But you didn't want to wear a bikini- bottoms?

Matt: I didn't wanna, I didn't wanna wear the-the man thongs.

Kiara: So it was those two and then they made the in between for you?

Matt: Yeah, that's when I was comfortable. I'm not a person that exposes his stuff all over, you know, but then the man thong, That's just a lot going on, alotta skin.

Kiara: Super interesting. Okay, so that's crazy. So what interested you about bodybuilding to make you finally want to join?

Matt: I just wanted to be big. I always been small all my life. I wasn't big at all I was like 110lbs outta high school. And then outta nowhere I just blew up when I started bodybuilding, so I just wanted to be bigger. I can't be short and skinny, c'mon! C'mon! I'm not supposed to.. so uh yeah I just got a little bit of weight on me, we good!

Kiara: Yay! Um so did you have problems in the past with your body image and social pressures do you think?

Matt: Um not really, I guess. Cause when I was doing sports I was pretty good at the sports so it kinda like distracted everybody from my size, not really, like they knew I was small but since I was good at what I was doing they kinda just didn't really mess with me. But to me I thought I was small, I'm not ignorant, I know I'm small so I just needed to do it for myself. I didn't really care about what anyone else thought.

Kiara: Interesting. Okay, alright now we'll get into the social media aspect. So how has social media impacted your bodybuilding experience?

Matt: Uhh.. I mean I guess I seen like a couple of uh videos and stuff before I started bodybuilding and seeing people were bigger and uhm ya I just wanted to be big so I wondered how do I look like that. It wasn't necessarily me wanting to be like them but I just wanted that size. So then I was interested and then I started googling stuff so I was like you know what I might as well go to school for it and actually learn it. So it kinda just directed me going to school for it. I didn't really look up to nobody it just made me want to learn more about it.

Kiara: So when you did that research, was that before you met Jason?

Matt: Yeah, oh yeah, because I definitely, I was already pretty big before I met Jason. He was the one who got me striated, like he got me very cut. I have never been as cut as I have ever, like before I worked with him I wasn't cut at all- I was just bigger. When I started working with him I have never gotten to like 2% body fat. He looked at me one time, I was like 5% body fat and I was like dang that's, that's low huh and he's like I'm walking around at 2. I was like well then, alright. And yeah I had never gotten down that low, it's crazy. So yeah he definitely got me shredded.

Kiara: That's really cool. I think, bulk, like you we're probably in the bulking part. I think that's necessary.

Matt: Oh yeah you definitely gotta do that.

Kiara: So that was good where you were at. Super interesting. So right now do you follow any fitness or health accounts on Instagram?

Matt: Ummm honestly I try not to follow really too many people.

Kiara: "Why?"

Matt: Uhm I mean... I don't know it's irrelevant like I'm just doing my own thing. I use- I use my account to like build my clientele for personal training and stuff like that, I don't really need to follow anybody else. I'm trying to help other people out. I'm not saying I don't need help but I'm not going to go to anyone online to figure things out I'm gonna have school and actually do my research.

Kiara: I love that. I love that. Very cool. So did you- there wasn't anyone that you kinda looked up to at all? I like that you do your own research and you don't need anybody else to influence you, that's really cool, but...

Matt: Um I like this guy, he's not even a bodybuilder, he doesn't look fit at all. His names Eric Thomas, he's just a motivational speaker, so uh he just kinda influences me to like give it my best, ya know you only got one life to live just live it to the fullest.

Kiara: He's not even fit?

Matt: He's not fit at all.

Kiara: Very cool.

Matt: At all.

Kiara: That is crazy. So what do you think about the fitness accounts or the influencers on social media?

Matt: I feel like a lot of them are fake, lowkey. Like lowkey is a little bit. I feel like people they just post what they want you to see. They don't post their hardships or anything so they make it seem like everything is cool and dandy and they really make you feel like you can get there just by eating and drinking and stuff, drinking water and stuff like that but there's more to it, ya know, for some people.

Kiara: Okay, cool. So how often do you check Instagram? You can mark between not often and very often.

Matt: Oh I'm on there all the time. I'm not gonna lie.

**Exhibit 3: Vanessa, Current bodybuilder**

Kiara: So, first, I just want to know about your bodybuilding experience. So how long have you been bodybuilding?

Vanessa: I'd say officially maybe a year and a half.

Kiara: Did you work out before that?

Vanessa: Yeah, so... But I would say like actually- actually trying to get my body the way it should look on stage, I'd say a year and a half.

Kiara: Okay, cool. So how did you get started in bodybuilding?

Vanessa: I actually, so I've been working out since 12. But I mostly just I went to the gym, did my own weights, cardio. And then I think when I was about 18, I was just really bored and I wanted something different. So one of my friends actually was with Herbalife and they did this weight lifting challenge so they gave me a weight lifting program and that was the first time I ever actually followed anything structured. So that was initially when I got started into really lifting with a purpose um and I'd say that lead me to researching more about lifting weights and then actually getting into the bodybuilding world because I really liked how they looked. So I would just get more into that and then I had a friend that actually did a show so that kinda peaked my interest at first and then I just did more research, I was like mm maybe I'll just do one and see how I like it.

Kiara: Cool. So what interested you about bodybuilding was the way they looked, um is that what motivates you every day or?

Vanessa: Um well, I liked lifting weights so like actually the feeling of actually lifting weights and getting stronger, I liked that first. So that is what kept me doing it every single day and being consistent. And then at that point I was like well I'm doing this every. single. day. like I'm spending like 2 hours in the gym just because I want to. Why don't I try to actually have a purpose because I was getting bored and I'm like well I want like a different goal now you know what I mean because it really gives you a purpose. Every day, wake up, this is why your working out. Versus before I was like I like lifting weight but now it's kinda getting kinda boring, I'm doing the same exercises, um it's getting repetitive, stuff like that.

Kiara: So in the past, did you have experiences with body image or dieting or exercising?

Vanessa: Yes, so like when, I think it was when I initially started working out, when I was around 12. So I would say I hit puberty before all of my friends, and I'm short, and all of my friends are very, very, tall. They had really long legs and you know how women they probably start gaining more weight than their used to around like early 20s, I would say that started for me way earlier than everyone else did. So started gaining weight and I was like I wasn't sure why because none of my friends were and I wasn't eating any different so I started going to the gym. And like when I was the only one gaining weight and none of my friends were it made me think I was different so I had to like stay thin so that's why initially that's why I started working out a lot. And then I would say I really struggled with body image in high school, like all throughout high school. College it was up and down. And then even with bodybuilding you know when you diet down really hard and then you gain weight after your show, I would say my body image honestly has just been up down. So even, like, right now it's fine because I'm prepping for my show so I'm leaning down and everyday it's like oh I look good but I know after my show it's going to be hard. So I've kind of just I guess accepted it in a way.

Kiara: Do you ever think it will get better?

Vanessa: I do, just because like, the way I handle it now I can talk about it with you about it and I don't get like emotional. It's more like okay like when I see myself and I don't like it I don't actually like stress about it it's more like okay I'm uncomfortable and I don't like how i look but I'm not gonna let it ruin my

day and think about it ya know. I'm just going to eat healthier, try not to eat as much junk food, um do a little more cardio and I try to keep it more balance. Where as before I'd be like oh my god I need to just eat nothing, do a bunch of cardio for like hours. So now I can recognize it and make myself not go so extreme, ya know. But for me, I, like the way I think about it, I don't know if it's going to be a forever thing but I feel like women in general just deal with body image like even if they have come to a point where they've started accepting themselves, I feel like almost every female struggles at some point. If that makes sense.

Kiara: Yeah, no, I totally, I think it's going to be a thing till like 40 years old.

Vanessa: Yeah. Even girls who stop competing and they don't go through the ups and downs, it-it still really seems like they still struggle with body image, maybe not like I hate myself but not necessarily like I genuinely love how I look. So for me, I'm like, you know what, if this is how it's going to be, just as how society has been, I love the challenge of doing a show it's not even about the aesthetics. I actually love the challenge of every single day having a purpose of waking up. So if I'm going to struggle with body image, regardless, I might as well do what I love. Ya know, I mean yes it makes it a lot harder but even my first show, I was willing, I knew going into it that that was a risk and I was like well I know it and I'm willing to take this risk. And I even, like I told you, I developed bingeing after and it sucked but I got through it. And that was like, I still, it didn't ruin my experience of prepping, I still really loved it. It was just something I had to overcome and yeah I was like this might be a risk for as long as I compete and honestly I'm okay with. At least until I'm not ya know.

Kiara: Yeah, that is totally where I'm at. Like right it's like I... love... not binge eating... ya know

Vanessa: I was there- I was there for like 8 months. Yeah. so like I think I stopped binge eating in February, and then, so I was like January-February I was bingeing, and then from February-July I was chill. So I think that helped me reset and get to a point where I was like okay I'm ready to prep again. And now I'm in a place where I don't feel- like I'm 3 weeks out from my show- a little over 3 weeks and I don't feel like- I don't feel food focused so I am hoping that this experience will be different, ya know.

Kiara: Good. Yay! And this is your 3rd or 2nd?

Vanessa: 3rd. And um , I had a friend she did 7 shows, the first 4 no bingeing, the 5th one she binged really bad, 6th one she didn't, the 7th one she didn't. So the way I look at it, like every experience is different, ya know, the way your mindset it, your- the- your life experiences at that time. Um it can all affect it. So for me, I'm like ya know what, I love it and I'm just going to go with it. So that's kinda where I'm at. But it definitely took like- there no way when I ended in February I was like it is so nice to just have balance that there was no way for the few months after February that I would have ever considered competing. Yet it took me like several months for me to be like okay I think I wanna do it again.

Kiara: That's crazy because I thought competing was my savior.

Vanessa: Really?

Kiara: Yeah, I was like, I need a trainer to um put me on track, like I need a trainer to slap me cause- cause I had the pressure from the trainer, ya know like if I cheated, my trainers going to be mad, even though they're really not but so it's interesting.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Kiara: Anyways, so moving on, we'll talk about social media. Um so how has social media impacted your bodybuilding journey?

Vanessa: Um I would say impacted it positively because the way I went into competing, the way I do just about anything is, I am very research oriented. So before I competed I researched just about every single thing you could about it. All the risks that were- like the mental risks, physical risks to your health, your

thyroid, your metabolism. Um my friend, her liver almost shut down, I knew that -that was a possibility and I still- like- I knew- I wanted to know every single thing, possibility, that could have happened because I knew it wasn't the healthiest thing. Same with social media, so like I read a lot about what are the pitfalls of social media. So a lot of people are like you cannot compare yourself. Do not follow other girls you know who are doing your show. Don't look at other girls that are the same weeks out as you. Because a lot of girls will, like, okay, I'm 5 weeks out... let me search like #5weeksout to see if that's - were in the same place. So a lot of girls do that to be like I am where I need to be, ya know. And that is totally something I would've done. But researching like the pitfalls what not to do, I was like okay I'm not going to follow the girls that are doing the show, I'm not going to compare myself, like I'm going to focus on really doing this journey for me. So I think because I avoided that and that puts a lot of pressure on girls, it was really helpful because I was able to focus on my own journey and the way I approached it was like so I post very regularly on social media and I post about like the very raw and real side of it. So like I'll post about how I went through binge eating after or I'll post about how like one day I was really mentally struggling, like I like to be very open because once you do that the people who don't like to be very open will come to you be like oh my god I didn't know people were struggling with this too. When I posted about binging, I had so many girl like that did my show or just like girls that I knew but had no idea they were going through it, they were like oh my god I thought I was the only one, like holy crap, I had no idea anyone else was going through this. So I think I had actually had a positive experience because it made me like really feel connected to who I didn't know or like girls that I did know that we're going through the same things but we wouldn't have known otherwise...

Kiara: Oooh this amazing. This is so fantastic. Yeah, I did not do the hashtag search thing but that is insane.

Vanessa: I would've! I would've, yeah! And I have a - I actually have one of my clients she follows a lot of girls and she's like omg like there's girls, she's 5 weeks out, she's so lean, like I'm not near there. And so I had to like sit her down and tell to her, ya know, to not- to either delete her Instagram for the time being or not follow those girls or not look at their stuff because it was really affecting her mentally, ya know.

Kiara: Yeah. Do you think she would eventually get to that same leanness or is-are you saying it's about that individual's journey? Don't compare yourself

Vanessa: Yeah, like that individual's journey because a lot of girls will be ready several weeks out and a lot of girls will be ready a week before ya know, and so it will freak you out if you see a girl ready in advance and your not ready in advance but at the end of the day it's about what you look like that day. You know what I mean.

Kiara: Mhm. Super interesting, I love that. Um so do you follow any fitness or health accounts on Instagram?

Vanessa: Um honestly the only ones I follow are people that I actually know or people that - that have actual content. I don't follow anyone that just posts like, pictures. You probably know, social media girls that- they have like a large following and there's nothing wrong with it, I just don't find value in it, so they'll post like a bikini picture with like in the caption is like a heart or like a flower or something like that. Like I'll follow girls who either post about- how they got- like they're very- like, like, like they kinda post the way I do whereas they write long ass captions and they're very open and very honest, because I feel like I can learn a lot from them.

Kiara: Did you every follow the hearts and flower girls?

Vanessa: Mmm I wanna say maybe the most I've ever followed was like five people- five girls

Kiara: Do you think it was in the beginning?

Vanessa: Yeah

Kiara: Or the end? Or?

Vanessa: Mm I would say like they were randomly spaced out if I was really like, oh my god, this girl is so pretty I just wanna follow her. Um but even just in my day today life, like- okay this is like kinda going off on a tangent so you can stop me.

Kiara: No, this is about social media, ya know.

Vanessa: Okay, um, but, like growing up I was definitely the... I would say I was not considered attractive at all and I was kinda more nerdy so I really learned to fall in love with people's personalities, ya know, and then like as I grew up and got more into bodybuilding, I still held onto that. And although I don't feel like that's very common, which I get it people look to other people's bodies for motivation not necessarily who they are, ya know, but there's this girl I follow and she does shows and I'm gonna be honest, like, she's probably like 30 lbs. overweight of what her stage weight should be as she goes on stage, like, she definitely doesn't look like a typical competitor at all, but the fact that she can go up there and put herself out there, like, I'm sure everyone in the audience judges her. And I just think the strength that she has to do that, like that kind of stuff really inspires me, just like that - courageous-ness, ya know.

Kiara: Yeah, yeah. That's really cool, so the beauty aspect, the superficialness doesn't phase you.

Vanessa: Yeah, no. It doesn't at all. Like, I like the people who they- their stories, like, they were super over weight and they just lost a crazy amount or like, they overcame an eating disorder or just stuff like that. So that's always what I gravitate towards because that's the stuff that I'm always like, if they can do that then I can get through this session of cardio or ya know, something like that

Kiara: Totally, yeah, I love that. Um so what do you think about the flowers girls, or even any fitness accounts or influencers on social media?

Vanessa: So, I think everyone has a different purpose. So like if that's your- if you make your living- like if you make a substantial living off of just posting pictures, with like just like an aesthetic picture, I have no right to judge that. I just don't find value in that, ya know, so that's kinda the way I look at it.

Kiara: What about the people who follow those ones?

Vanessa: Um I think it affects- I feel honestly- I feel like it affects them negatively because they tend to compare, but again, like if that's, I- I get it because I feel like as humans we gravitate towards beauty, right. Like when- even me, like if I see someone beautiful walk in I'm going to be like oh my god, ya know, like I'm not going to look away and be like holy shit. Like, we gravitate towards beautiful stuff so I get it. It's just, like I have to remind myself like, in my day to day life, uh like all my friends are just genuinely kind and inspirational people so those are also the people I want to follow on social media whether I know them or not, ya know.

Kiara: Okay so now how often do you check Instagram?

Vanessa: Definitely very often because I post like everyday.

**Exhibit 4: Brent, Former bodybuilder**

Kiara: So I just want to know about your bodybuilding experience, how long have you been bodybuilding?

Brent: Let's see I've been competing for 10 years, uh 8 different sponsors, I filmed a Netflix documentary called The Perfect Physique 2, which the title will change, that comes out next year on Netflix. Um like I said I do all the expos, I've been bodybuilding for probably about, see I'm 34, about 15 years. So I actually started getting ready and changing my body after I played football. Um and cause being a football player to a bodybuilder is 2 different things so you're massed out in one and then for bodybuilding everything's more about shape and how you look so I had to train for a good 4 years before I started stepping on stage to change my body. So I've been in the game for quite a while and then I graduated from Arizona State with a Nutrition degree so I've always been in the health and fitness, for a long time.

Kiara: Very good, so how did you get started in bodybuilding did you know your trainer or what drew you in about it?

Brent: It's actually kinda funny because one of my old friends, I was at the gym lifting legs, and a lot of people don't lift legs um but what they don't understand is that legs is actually super important. But I was lifting legs one day and this guy comes up to me and says "Hey man stop taking all the weights" and he was the head judge for the NPC here in Arizona and him and I uh got to talking and he was like "Hey your body genetically, your perfect for the new category, which was men's physique." This was before men's physique came out and men's physique is ya know instead of going out in skimmies, you come out in board shorts and they, ya know, judge you on shoulders, chest, abs, ya know they don't judge you on the lower part and that's how I got started, was him and I became friends and he was a judge and basically said my body would be perfect and after that, I was done playing football so I needed something to help keep me competitive and kinda ya know pushing for something kinda goal oriented and that's how it started. And that was I don't know like 12 years ago, 13, 14, it was back in the day, so that uh that's how it got started.

Kiara: That is super interesting, so you did it to have a goal in mind, did you have any previous experiences with body image issues or social pressures or dieting or exercise that may have influenced you towards beginning your bodybuilding journey?

Brent: I would say when I was younger, being a redhead wasn't the greatest thing when I was younger until I got to college so I got picked on a lot and made fun of, and bullied back in high school. So when I played football that helped me get bigger and I started becoming more confident and once you start seeing your body change it kind of starts, becoming a little bit more addicting, so but that kind of the start of it. Plus when I was younger, I was an asthmatic and when your an asthmatic they always recommend for you to lift weights or go play sports to help build that um lung capacity so um that was another thing, medical and the fact that I got picked on in high school or even before that um they wanted to push me towards the weights and another thing is that I wanted to be bigger for football.

Kiara: Were you a skinny guy?

Brent: Yeah, I graduated high school at 6'3 175 lbs., now 6'3 260 lbs.

Kiara: Nice! That's super interesting. Okay, so the next part is just about the social media part, so how has social media impacted your bodybuilding journey?

Brent: It's act- just for bodybuilding it's actually been a super positive because it helped get my face and my name out there. Instagram is actually kinda really hard right now, to kinda get out there now. I started my Instagram probably almost two... five... three years ago and because of that my name has gotten out

and that helped me get some more sponsors. I have eight different sponsors right now which I get paid for and I get free product. Um I actually get companies contacting me all the time just sending me free stuff. Um I actually just got a couple plates actually that look like weights, ya know, like 45 lb. weights, they're like plates and the guy just contacted me and was like hey can you throw out a shout out on my social media and it'll just send me a set. And I'm like alright cool so I get free stuff all the time. When I go to, ya know even if it's not bodybuilding related, I go to restaurants and they'll see me following and they'll just give me free meals. So it's kinda like, you kinda write your own ticket a little bit. But it has helped me quite a bit as far as getting sponsors, getting recognized, uh getting more popular, it's uh it's been a good thing to a certain point as far as bodybuilding goes.

Kiara: Do they ask you when your at restaurants, I'm just curious, do they ask you if you have a following, or do they look you up when you're there?

Brent: They'll see my social media following, they'll ask me to come in, they'll shoot me a DM. Because after I retired from fitness- I love food so I became a foodie... So now I actually go to restaurants and do promotions for them. So having a large social media helps with the fitness world. So here's the thing, is that with the fitness world, by having a large social media following, you pretty much get whatever you want. But there's I would say there's tens of thousands of people out there that look way better than me... but they have a small social media following, they won't get a thing. Nothing. I know a whole bunch of pros out there, they look amazing, they only have like four or five thousand, they won't get 1 sponsor, they won't get anything, they might get an ambassadorship, but you get a discount on product but that's it. If you got a large social media following you will get free stuff, get paid, ya know, cause companies want you to push their product out, they want you to have a larger reach. Uhm the uh, let's see I was walking around Olympia this past year, so that was like four weeks ago, five weeks ago, I was walking around someone's like hey Brent how ya doing this, this and this, and this guys got 6 pack bags, and they started another company called Geared Hardware or I think it is which is a watch company and they gave me a free watch, it was like \$300 bucks because I have a large social media following or they follow me or they knew who I was. So that's the perks of having a social media in the fitness world, is that the free stuff, the recognition, sponsorships, payments, video shoots.

Kiara: So you were already well into your bodybuilding journey, right, and then you developed a social media

Brent: Correct

Kiara: So you saw it as a positive, um , what do you think about it now, now that we're deep into it, people are fighting for Instagram followers, paying for the Instagram followers...

Brent: I think social media sucks now, I really do. I think it actually kinda ruined society a bit because ya know, social media, you got a lot of people out there thinking that their lives are great and really they're not that great, ya know. They're more about pushing product even if the product is not good, ya know, or it's just crap, they'll just push it. It just depends on- ugh- I'm not a big fan of it anymore because it takes a lot of my time. Because it is another job, it really is. You always have to be on it, you always have to be commenting or liking or whatever and um that takes away time from, ya know, family, kids, your always on your phone and it becomes like a little bit like an addiction. I think there's some studies that say when you're on your phone a lot, the blue light or something like that is an addiction kind of thing. So um nowadays everyone's fighting for followers. Everyone's trying to get noticed. It's changed the game a lot in the bodybuilding world because everybody wants to try and do something just to get their name out so it makes it hard for guys like myself or guys with large followers to get paid because you have about 50000 other ppl with like 5k followers wanting to do whatever it takes for, ya know, free. So it's kinda



ruined the game a little bit. Even back in the day, in the early 90s, when they didn't have social media, guys were getting paid 20, 30, 40, 50 grand a month, bodybuilders to go somewhere because their social media was magazines. Everybody was in a magazine. Everyone wanted to be on a cover. But now social media, all my friends that are fitness models now, they're cover models, I'm like hey what are you guys going to do? The magazines are gone, everything's digital. So that whole magazine side is dying, everything's all digital now. So everyone's struggling a little bit now that everything's social media now. It's a good thing but it can also be a negative thing because it takes time away from you, you get a lot of attention from, ya know, areas you shouldn't be getting attention to. I know it's affected my relationship with my wife. Ya know people being having sponsors and everything like that. So it's uh it could be a good thing as far as getting paid and getting free stuff but then it's also a bad thing because it's taking away things its taking away time, there's a lot of misinformation out there, that's the big thing, there's a lot of misinformation out there because people are trying to push things, push products, "Hey this does this, or this does this, or this does this" when in reality it doesn't, so that's the big thing now a days, Instagram, Facebook, social media.

Kiara: Great. That was really good. So who do you follow?

Brent: Who do I follow.

Kiara: Do you follow any fitness accounts, health accounts, what do they promote, what do they say?

Brent: I follow more my friends, but, I do follow, obviously, you gotta follow the big guys, the guys that lead the industry, like Mr. Olympias, Danny Hester's, Jay Cutler's, Julian Smiths. Guys that have crazy workouts, ya know, because sometimes your body gets plateaued and your doing the same stuff over and over again and it's always good to get new ideas and new innovations on diets and workouts and that's what I always try to do on my Instagram. I try to put my workouts on there, doing different things to help people out, get out of the plateau. but I usually follow ya know, Olympias. The funny thing is though, if you see a lot of people, a lot of competitors, that uhm, most the stuff the competitors and fitness people follow is food. Because when we're competing my whole feed is food, it's not guys that are shredded or girls that are shredded. So I follow a lot of restaurants. But most of the time I'll follow, like I said, the top guys in the industry, the Michael Hurts, the guys that have been in forever, you know, Arnold and everything like that. But most of the time it's food.

Kiara: That is so fascinating, I love that, I did that too, nobody else I interviewed has actually said that.

Brent: No?!

Kiara: So I love that.

Brent: Yeah, no, like literally when I'm like 8 weeks out, my whole feeds food and I watch the food network so I torture myself.

Kiara: Yes! You are! So I guess the next thing is how often you check Instagram, you can check not often to very often

Brent: Everyday. Every, pretty much every couple of hours. the thing about Instagram is that if your not active on it, you lose followers. And you lose followers everyday. It's just the way it is. It's kinda weird because one day I'll go up a couple thousand and another day I'll go down a couple thousand. And I'm like blugh I don't get. But the thing is they keep changing their algorithms allllllll the time. And if your not active on it, ya know, sponsors and everybody wants to see you active they're always wanting you to push their product so I'm on it all the time, I get DMs all the time, companies contacting me all the time. And if I'm late they could find someone else that ya know they wanna sponsor and I just lost all the money or free product so I check it quite often. I shouldn't, I don't want to but it's also kind of part of the business and part of the addiction because you're just uh I got nothing to do so you just check your phone

and it's just a habit now, so ya unfortunately it's a couple hours.

...

Brent: Everyone's a personal trainer, it's true. That's the thing, it's so hard now a days and they get paid like crap because everyone's doing it.

**Exhibit 5: Stan, On-break Bodybuilder**

Kiara: I just wanna know about your bodybuilding experience, so how long have you been bodybuilding?

Stan: Um I have been bodybuilding- in the gym wise, just working out, um let's see I'm 44, so since I was about 22. Didn't start competing until I was about 27. I took the time to do research, see how my body works, different workouts, different foods, just kind of getting myself ready for competition wise. It took me a little bit to to want to get into I guess dieting. I think that was kind of my biggest fear, not really fear but I guess my, what I was unsure of for the most part. Ya know, just like I said, what really work. Like the whole getting from, role of eating what I wanted to eating more or eating more of to try to I guess put on muscle to get bigger, and then I was kind like turn it down and turn it all around and was like okay well now I gotta diet and watch what I'm eating and I'm gonna lose some of that size. That was kinda the first change, kinda had to get over. So it was about 3 years that I was actually like lifting and working out for bodybuilding before I actually got in competition wise.

Kiara: SO who did you know? How did you get started?

Stan: The interest came from being in high school and in sports. I got into working out at a gym... the membership that I got was just over the summer, some bigger guys that were competing at the time, interest grew from there. Got into getting magazines, Flex, Muscle and Fitness. From there, meeting and knowing a guy that competed locally out here that was a trainer at the gym. He saw me and we chatted back and forth... and he took under his wing to give pointers and the relationship grew from there. He was the first original guy to help me get through my first-year of competitions.

Kiara: So it wasn't like an official trainer?

Stan: No. I didn't hire anybody. It was just asking questions, different things that he did, that maybe that I had tried or put my own little twist on. It was all basically trial and error. Trying different workouts, different foods, different amounts of foods. And I would basically go for a good range of 2-3 months maybe sometimes 4 months and then seeing how that worked and how that affected my body and how my body responded, and if it was going well, I went a little further with it, and if it didn't I made some tweaks and changes and went from there and just playing around. Mostly learning on my own, how I felt, I guess

Kiara: How patient.

Stan: Well, that's what a lot now don't get, is the patience. It's said quite a bit, I don't really think that it's followed as much as it's said. It is a marathon. It is not a sprint. It takes time. It takes work. Nothing from this sport is going to happen over night. You really just gotta really put in the work and just kind of I guess monitor yourself. Seeing what is coming from and how you're responding to it.

Kiara: So what really drew you in about bodybuilding? Was it the size, the competition, having something to do?

Stan: It was the competition thing after I was done playing a couple years Jr. level baseball. I was already in the gym anyway... I needed something else to compete in. I was already in the gym. I think that's kinda why it took the 3 years, because I didn't really want to diet because I remember from wrestling but wanted to make sure I was ready. And I went and watched a couple competitions and I think it was kinda always in the back of my head, that it was like the awe of, just seeing the guys, it was like wow they weigh about what I am, with my size, but they look so much bigger. Kinda also drew me to pushing more to I guess make myself more ready or when I felt I was ready to be up there. There wasn't really a first love or anything like that sport, it was just kinda I was always in sports and in the gym anyways and it grew from there.

Kiara: Did you have any past body image issues or dieting issues, you obviously had the fear of dieting like you said...

Stan: Dieting issues, yeah, from wrestling in high school I didn't necessarily know the correct ways of dieting. It was always binge eating or crash dieting one week to the next week. You go into wrestling practice in sweats and bags and as many clothes as you can wear to try and drop weight to make your weight class and it was like the minute you stepped on the scale and you wrestle your match it was like oh I can eat again and turn around it was 2 days later your 10... 11... 12 lbs. over your weight and you got another 3... 4 days to make weight again so it was like okay, stop eating, eat half as much... it was really just a bad way of dieting i guess.

Kiara: Is that you were afraid of with bodybuilding?

Stan: Not afraid of doing it wrong again... I wanted to accumulate as much knowledge about dieting right as I wanted to... Although I made the weight I always felt weaker, didn't necessarily always keep as much muscle and strength as I should have if I was feeding and fueling my body correctly and just gradually losing the weight over time and keeping myself down there but still eating well.

Kiara: Yeah that's so interesting

...

Kiara: So how many competitions have you done?

Stan: Quite a few, hold on let me see. I started competing in 2001.

Kiara: What division?

Stan: Uhm my 1st one I actually did was just the plain novice. I was the novice middleweight. I ended up placing 3rd...I had 5 that I did my first year, after that i have basically about 1 every year after that, plus there were occasionally 1 or 2. I think I'm in between the 17-20 range of how many shows I've done. and that's over 15 years because I haven't done a show in 2 and a half years now.

Kiara: Are you done?

Stan: Not done, I've kind of just gotten busy with other things that it was- I was qualified and ready to do another national show again but life, and work got in the way. Didn't exactly go the way I planned or the getting to the gym or my prep wasn't going to where I wanted to. Um I could've done the show and still probably, ya know I guess been for my own personal feelings about average where I should've been but personally also it was like, being kind of in my own eyes average where I should be, and trying to do a national show I didn't feel it was worth it. so it was like if I wasn't going to go there to compete at the top level, then I'm not going to sink that time or money into.

Kiara: So now we can get into the social media aspect of it. Do you have an Instagram? How do you use it?

...

Stan: Social media was one that I wasn't really involved with. I don't know if it was I didn't want to or the unsure of, I just didn't really have the interest. It was a friend of mine that actually made my pages. He set it up sent me a text message and said here's your Facebook. He did the same thing with Instagram?

Kiara: Has it impacted your bodybuilding journey

Stan: It has helped with getting to know people in the industry and getting to also be known by a few more. I guess I haven't put myself out there like business wise ya know or advertising wise... as like a strictly bodybuilding page or sponsors or anything like that. I just kind of it's been like a I'll throw up pictures here and there at the end of the day or sporadically. It's not like 3, 5, 10 posts a day type of thing or watch my videos working out type of thing. It's been a more fun thing I guess of getting to know people.

Kiara: Interesting. So do you follow any fitness accounts?

Stan: I do follow a lot, yes.

Kiara: Okay who? Matt ones? What impacts your life? Who are you like oh I wanna see their post or what do you follow, like what do you want to see, what do you open to your mind in life?

Stan: Well competition wise, I follow just a lot of pros. Not necessarily for the gossip of or drama of the industry, ya know who's beating who and stuff like that. Just ones that I guess I'm a fan of and of all classes whether it be bikini girls, 212lb bodybuilding guys, the bigger open heavyweight guys, everybody. It's more of just I guess my interest is the- I just know the work and dedication that's put in. So just kinda seeing who's out there who's doing what with competitions. I don't get into the drama who's saying they're gonna beat somebody else at one big show or the workout videos or the following me around as I'm walking out of my car into the- I could really care less. It's just okay.. that's everyday- I can see you as I walk by out of the gym, what your carrying. I don't need to or want to see you walk into the gym and pull out your preworkout. Okay you take the scoop and instead of mixing it in the water you put it straight in your mouth. So what, just go in and workout. I don't need to see every little thing. I think everybody just kinda gotten more show off type of thing. "Oh this is what I'm doing, this is where I'm working out, this is what I'm wearing," That makes no difference. Hash tagging what shoes and brand legging your wearing, ya know, I don't care if your wearing torn up sweatpants and a holey shirt, ya know. Your going in there, you get in, you workout, you work hard, and you put in the work. That is more of what i'd rather see. Doing the work and actually, just kinda, I guess, I get into the more working hard and keeping to yourself type of thing. There is a lot more said by being quiet and just doing it than trying to advertise every step.

Kiara: I love that. I love that so much, that's what I go for. So what do you think- I know you went on your rant about what you think about them but obviously people like them what do you- and you're following them so they're probably going to post regardless, them drinking and their sponsors. So what do you think about those fitness accounts? Are they real? You think it's showoffy.

Stan: I get it. There is a lot of it that is for the advertisement whether it be their sponsor, under obligation, you have to show that or they wanna see. A lot of times it's for the sponsor, it's what can you do for us, how can you impact us.. The people seeing you using our products. I get those pictures and the videos. They're going to post it whether I'm following or whether I just scroll past it or not. Social media wasn't around, it was like you waited till the magazines each to know who won what big contest. You barely get to see still photographs and you'd see the results posted on different websites, who won what show. It wasn't all of the... showoff. Those who work a regular 9-5 job.. video while they're drained.. starving, dehydrated, waiting till they get their next meal in an hour and a half, just really making it through the day, ya know, its all this is what I did in the gym and then I'll post a selfie picture of me at the gym 3 weeks out as I'm now showing more and getting conditioned more. If you're gonna show, show it all. There are a few that do that and there are a few who, whether it be their Facebook page or Instagram page or timeline videos, there are a few that even have YouTube channels that they'll show day in and day out of what they eat, this meal, that meal, them cooking, them going to the grocery store, what their day entails. Some of them are regular gym trainers and do online clients so they show them going through keeping up with their clients. Those are, in the overall aspect of it, the few and far between who actually show all of that.

Kiara: Interesting

Stan: I think it's more of what I'm gonna show you type of thing. I don't think it is to attract... it might be just be to get the following, for some people it's how many more likes I can get, but just to show to a broader span I guess. Not necessarily just those that are involved in the industry, but just kind of, 'Look what I did' type of thing... I think that also attracts a lot more people that aren't necessarily ready for

getting involved in the fitness industry or the competition aspect of it. Yeah, it'd be great getting or attracting to working out and getting healthier, bettering yourself physically. But it takes a whole different breed and character to compete and compete over and over again. There's a lot of things that go into it. Just a lot of your body playing with you physically and mentally. You might look good in the mirror to yourself or everybody else that is around you at the gym, but you going through the day or how your body feels- is just run down, worn out, torn down, like garbage. So it's like what's in one hand doesn't always mix with what's in the other, so it plays with you in that way, too.

Kiara: Interesting. So the last thing is how often you check Instagram. I have a scale between not often and very often so you can just check mark where you're at on the spectrum

Stan: Haha um I'm probably more closer to very often. A lot of it is more I'll just go through. I Don't necessarily just follow the fitness industry but I guess where I catch myself checking it more is just a lot of seeing friends, what they're doing. A lot of them are in the industry's are a lot that aren't so it's not always just for the bodybuilding or fitness aspect of it.

**Exhibit 6: Carrie, On-Break Bodybuilder**

Kiara: So I just want to know about your bodybuilding experience, how long have you been bodybuilding?

Carrie: Consistently, probably 4 years.

Kiara: Okay cool, and how did you get started in bodybuilding?

Carrie: My sister-in-law because she did a competition so then they forced me to do one, too. First, she was like You're just going to do one because I had just gone through a breakup so I needed something to like keep my mind occupied and wellp that worked. I didn't know much about it, so going in I was kinda like naive, This isn't going to be that hard, I work out, I eat pretty decent but when you like get into it, it's like oh wow, this is a lot of work, teaches you a lot.

Kiara: So what interested you or did you have any interest going into it?

Carrie: I thought it was cool, obviously, but I didn't want to get up on stage. I'm not somebody who wants to be in front of people. And then when I saw amber get up there in her little bikini, I was like there's no way I would ever do that but then I'm like okay it gives you a goal, ya know, okay, I liked having the goal to getting on stage and seeing what it was gonna be like. But I don't know if I was super interested in it until I actually did it, and then you kinda get hooked.

Kiara: What hooked you about it?

Carrie: I think the adrenaline and then the seeing what your body can do, like not knowing what you're gonna look like at the end, until that last week, and then you figure it out and all the tweaks and all the little stuff.

Kiara: Yeah I definitely think it's crazy. So you did Bikini?

Carrie: Yes.

Kiara: How many did you do?

Carrie: 3.

Kiara: Are you going to do anymore?

Carrie: Uh I don't know, I keep going back and forth. I want to but then I don't.

Kiara: You're like lean enough.

Carrie: Yeah like I could, if I really wanted to right now if I just started doing cardio I probably could get on stage but I just- there's no like end result, you know what I mean, it's like its all for myself. I would do it but like I feel like its a lot of money for no real outcome. I mean it's cool, oh you could be a pro but even once you're a pro, you're not getting paid. You still have to have another job, you still have to deal with that. So I don't know I might just to, just for fun if I get super bored.

Kiara: Okay and did you have any past experiences with body image or dieting or exercising or social pressures?

Carrie: When I was in elementary and junior high, I was like the fat kid. So there was always the thing in my head, like I needed to lose weight. I was always thicker I always had big legs and I was never like skinny girl which wasn't, ya know, it was always you need to be a rail, super skinny so I always tried to starve myself or not eat or whatever. But once I got out of high school into college it wasn't about body image, it was I liked working out...

Kiara: Did you lose that weight like from the younger years in high school or college

Carrie: No, I didn't start losing weight until my first competition so I was already out of college. Well I did college fast too so it was like 19.

Kiara: Super interesting, you're an inspiration. I wanna be like a small girl you know what I mean.

Carrie: But it's like my frame, I have a thicker frame.

Kiara: But you're not anymore. Do you feel you are?

Carrie: I'm still, kinda thick, like there's areas where I'm definitely like thicker. But I have like a curvy figure, I'm not like a block figure where a lot of people are and that's why they look so tiny. Like even if I competed now, I'd still be on the thicker side of everybody so it's like why ugh I don't know.

Kiara: It's frustrating

Carrie: It is. It's a struggle. It took me probably three years to lean my legs out. Cause I had thick just massive thighs, like my thighs were probably 24 inches around, that's big, and now they're like probably 21-22 but they're still muscular so it's like finding how to be lean and still keep your muscle at the same time.

Kiara: That's where I'm at, yeah, because I want to squat heavy because I don't know if that's ruining me or not. I think it's not...

Carrie: I'll squat heavy probably once or twice a month, like I still do it but I won't do it every week. especially if I have like a big meal I'm like I need to work, I have the food in my body to burn off and im not going to hurt myself because I didn't eat as much this week. so ill squat heavy and deadlift on days that i had like a cheat meal or like twice a month probably but I won't do it consistently

Kiara: Okay, interesting. Okay now we can go to the social media part. How has social media impacted your bodybuilding journey?

Carrie: It's like everything. You look at social media and you're like oh I wanna look like them or like oh what are they doing. Or I mean there's the positive side of it now I think. People are realizing that social media is not perfect or everything that they post is not real. But before, like even just a year ago, it was like oh I wanna look like them, what are they doing. But I think now that they are being more real about the background of all of it, I think its nice.

Kiara: Totally and when do you think that you started paying attention to those bodybuilders?

Carrie: After my first competition, because I didn't know anything about it before, then like I wouldn't really, I'd be like oh they have a good body but then after my first competition I like would really look at certain people and be like oh I wanna look like them, or what are they doing, what are they eating or what supplements are they taking so probably after my first competition.

Kiara: Okay. Interesting. So do you follow any fitness or health accounts on Instagram?

Carrie: No. I follow 2 or 3 fitness people but not like, I don't follow any fitness accounts or anything because it's just too much. and I like don't-f- this sounds terrible but like I don't wanna give them following, followers because I feel like they already have all this, and it's like I'll look at them but I won't follow them. I think I follow Katy Hearn and her husband as the only like real fitness accounts that I follow just because they're like real and they're down to like.. they will tell you straight up what they're doing or not doing or.. and she's just like more family oriented, where she just had the baby so she's like doing all that stuff and she's real so that's the only one I think I follow.

Kiara: Has she competed?

Carrie: Uh-uh, she just had a like a booty program and then she got really popular and she started her own gym and they have their own supplement company. So I feel like that's the different like aspect of it. I don't know. I don't follow like... who's the main? I don't follow like Courtney King or any one of them.

Kiara: Did you ever?

Carrie: No. Uh uh. I looked at them but I never followed them I don't know I'm weird. I don't follow certain people like that, or like even like big name brands.

Kiara: You didn't follow Cellucor?

Carrie:Mm-mm.



Kiara: What?! I did!

Carrie: I know I didn't follow any of them. I was like I'm not about it like, 1st Phorm, all that, like I won't follow them. I don't know why.

Kiara: Yeah I don't follow the new ones but I only did Cellucor because of them

Carrie: Yeah I followed some of the people

Kiara: and Atomic I did

Carrie: Yeah I didn't follow them. Haha I'm so bad, I'm like nope! I'm sorry!

Kiara: They were fake though because they follow you and then they unfollow you

Carrie: Then they unfollow you..

Kiara: And it makes me mad

Carrie: Yeah, and I'm like why, just keep it, it's so much work to go back and unfollow me. Right. I know.

Kiara: Seriously. But yeah that's so interesting because when I first started I think, I didn't watch like Generation Iron or anything

Carrie: Mmmhm

Kiara: before I competed I watched it after um but before I competed I definitely like found, somehow I found Courtney King, I found all the Bodybuilding.com spokesmodel people

Carrie: Mmmhm

Kiara: I think it was before I competed, it might have been after but

Carrie: I feel like when you competed though it was like when it was kinda on the rise. It was like at the peak of all of it. You know what I mean? It was like when you started getting into it, it was like really extreme. Everybody was competing, everybody was doing this, but now its kinda taken a little bit of a hit. Like, did you see the people that just competed this last show?

Kiara: No I didn't go to that, did you go to that?

Carrie: No I just looked at people and usually Felicia is like the biggest show and has like the most shredded girls and I was like there's nobody who looks like really on point

Kiara: Reaaaally?

Carrie: and usually November is like oh my god how you would think...

Kiara: I went in July and there was nobody there, and apparently that July, there's 2 in July and the 2 July I went to,

Carrie: Yeah I think there is, like one in the beginning and one in the middle.

Kiara: it was like the Showdown or something um it was dead and apparently that's known for being a dead show

Carrie: Mhmm

Kiara: It was like, why even go on stage if there's no one in the crowd and that's where I was at, that's when I was like competing is stupid!

Carrie: Right! It's so dumb! Haha I know.

Kiara: Like these people were like about to pass out on stage, and I'm like who are you doing this for, cause there's no one here,

Carrie: You have to do it for yourself.

Kiara: you don't look the best, anyways.

Carrie: I don't know it's crazy.

Kiara: Super interesting.

Carrie: It is.

Kiara: I was thinking that it was only dying down because I wasn't in it, ya know.

Carrie: Noo. I think it's really just kinda... people are realizing it's not the healthiest thing

Kiara: and it's not worth it

Carrie: and it's not worth it, yeah and they're kinda realizing there's ways to be fit but not have to be shredded stage fit all the time. So I don't know, I feel like people are starting to get away from it.

Especially because like what, Courtney King is the Olympia winner and she's like put out on blast that like hey it's not healthy like this did this to my body and like now she's kinda being real and she's like I will never go back to that mindset.

Kiara: That could totally be it. I followed her and Ashley Kaltwasser

Carrie: Oh yeah

Kiara: I wish she would be a little more real because I think she's dying.

Carrie: Yeah, she has to be

Kiara: her hair is so dry and stuff

Carrie: yeah and she's shredded all the time like year-round.

Kiara: Yeah, I literally think she's dying

Carrie: Right, they have to be because it's not healthy, it's really not, it's crazy

Kiara: It's crazy because she's smiling all the time

Carrie: Like fake happy, blegh, I know that's why I don't follow like half the stuff because you are not happy. There's no way, there's no way, I don't know, I don't get it.

Kiara: Yeah. That's interesting. Okay, um I think we just talked about what you think about them, but since you're ignoring them, you think they're not real...

Carrie: I just feel like they don't show their struggles, or they used to, but now I think a lot more people are coming out because there was obvious, they would be shredded then they would gain all this weight and you wouldn't see them post pictures for 7 months and then all of a sudden they're like oh well I was going through and I was battling this and now I've gained this weight. So it's like why not be real about that? Why not be like hey competing messes you up, like unless you do, granted yes the OCB I think is somewhat healthier because they don't look for super shredded people, they're not taking any supplements they're not doing anything else to help them out, so it's a little bit more healthy I guess but still I'm like I don't know I don't feel like they're totally open about what goes on behind the scenes.

Kiara: I actually unfollowed Courtney King because I think she's rude, I think a lot of them are actually not nice.

Carrie: Yeah! I think so to, I'm, like, not about it.

Kiara: So now you just have to check on this little scale of how often you check Instagram.

Carrie: Did you see that thing where you can check your activity on Instagram?

Kiara: I hate it, it makes me depressed.

Carrie: I totally thought I was on there more. I'm only on like an hour. I was like that's not as bad as I thought but I do spend a lot of time. But I've been so busy lately like that I don't have time to be on Instagram and then if I do get on I get annoyed because I have to scroll through everybody because I'm like that person that has to get to the bottom you know like first, so I'm like sitting there and I don't even like anything I'm just scrolling and I'm like ugh never mind... so I just don't get on but I used to be on a lot more than I am now. Instagram or Facebook