

# The Role of Bodybuilding in the Transformation of Grief

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## Abstract

Grief is a universal human experience associated with loss and bereavement. The price we pay for love. The symptomology of grief closely resembles depression, and they frequently co-occur. Exercise is considered an effective intervention used in the treatment of depression and in the promotion of positive mental health but its use can also go to extremes. Bodybuilding might be considered one such extreme where the goal is to develop musculature beyond functionality and for aesthetic merit. In men, the bodybuilding process is of interest as it is an example of very challenging external self-development and growth, but has not yet been explored in the context of potentially being a process of internal self- development and one of transforming grief. In order to understand more about male bodybuilders and the potential relationship between bodybuilding and grief, the present work explores coping with and transforming grief in male bodybuilders. The aims were to explore male bodybuilders' lived experiences and perceptions in order to better understand the psychology involved and better inform health interventions. A qualitative approach has been taken with eight participants using semi structured interviews. The thematic analysis provided the following superordinate themes: Precipitating factors, coping mechanisms, developing self, health and wellbeing and psychosocial influences. Within each theme sat smaller themes which begin to tell the story of these male bodybuilders' motivations. Wide ranging, from simple enjoyment to more complex accounts of using bodybuilding as a means of managing the difficulties of daily life, including grief. It is concluded that male bodybuilders' motivations are varied, complex and personal and that interventions must be tailored as such. The current work begins to give male bodybuilders an academic voice and highlights the need for further research.

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas. Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed ..... Date .....

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## Introduction

The study explores the potential relationship between bodybuilding and grief, seeking to address the following research questions. Is there a relationship between bodybuilding and grief? How can we better understand bodybuilders? In a rapidly growing age of social media and selfies there is more pressure than ever to present and/or look a certain way (Pope et al., 2002; Cooper, 2014). The media pullets us with images of happy people with lean, toned, firm bodies constantly through television, billboards, newspapers, magazines and social media with a massive rise recently in the use of Instagram quoting lines such as #fitfam #fitnessgoals #bodygoals. Alongside the explosion of the internet and social media with sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, there has been a general shift towards business and social interactions being managed online. It is argued that a 'tipping point' has been reached in recent years with the shift from in person, face to face interactions, to online interactions (Rizk, 2018). Despite many opposing beliefs and ideas about the impact of this and its usefulness, it has become a reality of our time and we move with it or get left behind (Vaynerchuck, 2018). Consequently, society is becoming more and more disconnected in personal relationships and under more pressure than ever to present these idealised personas and bodies (Brand, 2017). Communities do not hold the same value, marriage no longer holds the same value, and there is a reported epidemic/age of loneliness where emotional warmth is undervalued in favour of presenting yourself in an almost dehumanised, robotic manner, to the rest of the world (Brand, 2017). The role of politics cannot be overlooked in cultivating this type of society in which people are less satisfied than ever and consuming more than ever to fill the inner emptiness which might be considered a cultural sign of 2018 (Brand, 2017). The food industry plays a part with levels of obesity and eating disorders rising alongside body dissatisfaction and a growing fitness industry (Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018). There are gyms everywhere, again promoting these idealised body types. All the while ignoring the real drivers of excessive consumption and a hollow society (Brand, 2017).

Mental health has been a rapidly growing area of concern with what one might describe as a mental health crisis in recent years (Brand, 2017). Grief is described as the experience of loss and the accompanying sorrow, sadness or



emotional content associated with that loss. This may be as the result of a bereavement or the death of a loved one, but it is not limited to this. The terms grief, bereavement and loss are often used interchangeably to describe the same thing. One might consider that bereavement or loss signals an event or state and that grief is the response to that (Parkes, 1996; Barnard, 2019). Typically, British culture promotes a 'stiff upper lip' surrounding the arena of grief and we can't overlook how cultural conditioning is impacting on the individuals' ability to understand, process and move through grief in a healthy and functional way (Desai & Bevan, 2002; Salomonson, 2018). More and more people are seeking ways to cope and manage their innate experiences of being human, including grief (Brand, 2017). It's worth noting the secondary conditions that can occur as a result of complications around grief such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism and addiction, all of which can take on a life of their own (Rosner et al., 2010). What begins as a very human need to allow and process sadness when denied can easily become a complex mental health issue requiring specialist treatment and a 'peeling back' of the layers of behaviour to re-access the initial emotions (Van Der Kolk, 2014; Mate, 2019). Consequently, given the inherent connection between mind and body, physical health will eventually be compromised (Van Der Kolk, 2014; Mate, 2019).

Men are under more pressure than ever to appear strong and lean or risk being labelled weak, insufficient or lacking in some way (Bailey & Gillet, 2012). Feelings about body image can have a profound effect on masculine identity and pride with comparison against other peer group males common (Bailey & Gillet, 2012). Adolescence can be a particularly troublesome time with the merging of physical and emotional strength and the natural pull towards body ideals and becoming more muscular (Pope et al., 2002). The pressure to attain these ideals alongside rapid psychosocial development can lead to problems (Pope et al., 2002). Concerns are raised by Gruchy (2018) about the impact of these pressures on men's mental and physical health, particularly those working within the fitness industry, and the coinciding body dissatisfaction, depression and drug use associated. Considering these societal pressures it may be no surprise that more and more men are feeling the pressure to 'bulk' up, to be manlier (Ricciardelli & Williams, 2016; Gruchy, 2018).

A recent documentary 'Under Construction' followed the story of a harm minimisation worker in the field of steroid use who subjected himself to extensive steroid use for the purposes of research. The documentary reported a 400% rise in anabolic steroid use in the last 2 years between 16-24 year olds and it is currently estimated that 61,000 men are using anabolic steroids purely to look better (Crosland, 2015). The rise of bodybuilding has also grown from small communities of 'old school' bodybuilders in spit and sawdust gyms to physique competitors becoming a norm in most commercial gyms (Monaghan, 2001). Historically, anabolic steroids have been used by experienced and aspiring bodybuilders to assist in creating more size and muscle and in the reduction of body fat, but there has been, and continues to be, a distinct rise in the use of steroids recreationally in young males for purely cosmetic reasons, with no specific training goal or pending competition (Cooper, 2014; Korevaar, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019).

### *Current Research*

It is widely acknowledged that there are massive gaps in both bodybuilding research and the use of anabolic steroids, our understandings are limited and users' perceptions and the longer term impacts of steroid use are not yet clear (Cooper, 2014; Korevaar, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). Despite this, the limited literature available does agree on various key points. Firstly, that appearance related goals and problematic body image are on the increase, ranging from the stereotypical female wanting to lose weight and be smaller, to males wishing to be larger or bigger and more muscular (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018; Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018). There is of course crossover, but these two are identified trends and still considered the most socially acceptable 'norms' (Grogan et al., 2014). Also, on the increase, rather worryingly, is the risk people are willing to encounter to achieve these goals and from a much younger age than has been identified previously (Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). People are risking their health to improve their appearance and are quite often using non-prescribed drugs that are untested and unregulated (Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). This constitutes a significant public health concern, and the examination of the longer-term impact of this trend is both timely and necessary.

It is very clear that further research is needed. As such, a multi-disciplinary approach may provide greater insights into the issues at hand alongside a better understanding of the motivations and drivers, both explicit and implicit, that influence risk taking behaviour in this context (Pope et al., 2012; Cough et al., 2016). Steroid dependence is the least understood and most under researched area in drug dependence, however the limited research indicates a high correlation with other illicit drug use and known predictors of risk are conduct disorders and poor relationships with fathers (Pope et al., 2012). The health effect of steroids and substances being used in the pursuit of these body image goals has historically, and continues to be, under researched (Monaghan, 2001; Kaufman et al., 2015).

Reported symptoms of steroid use include fatigue, sexual dysfunction, bloating, baldness, altered liver function, heart disease and insomnia (Korevaar, 2018). A study on the long term effects of anabolic steroids on the brain also found increased right amygdala activity (Kaufman et al., 2015). These changes are associated with negative emotion and the slowing of pathways between regions of the brain leading to impaired visuospatial memory and decreased cognitive functioning (Kaufman et al., 2015). This study highlights the need for longer term research given that the misuse of steroids is a relatively new phenomenon (Kaufman et al., 2015). Interestingly, by contrast, anabolic steroids were ranked less harmful than alcohol, tobacco, solvents and cannabis in a report by a leading psychopharmacologist (Nutt et al., 2007), however this is taking into account broader societal impact rather than viewing the issue at a solely individual level. Monaghan (2018) adds that steroids can have positive effects on the body. That said, there are many variables which affect risk levels in the use of anabolic steroids including gender and age, not to mention that risk itself is subjective. It is the unregulated use of anabolic steroids and the demonised subculture surrounding them that causes the greater risk (Monaghan, 2001). A review of the research highlights a lack of academic research, with almost all accounts coming from less reliable sources (Monaghan, 2001). For example, online chat forums have been used in several publications to evidence users' views, leaving a clear need for steroid users' perceptions to be given an academic voice (Monaghan 2012; Richardson et al., 2019). This is further highlighted by Hall et al (2016) who

acknowledge that in the absence of specialist, reliable knowledge, the gap is being filled with opinion and propaganda. A study exploring users' perceptions towards physicians found that, due to the lack of scientific knowledge relating to illicit steroid use, friends, internet sources and even the drug dealers themselves were rated as more reliable sources of information than healthcare professionals (Pope et al., 2004).

The current literature and research available to assist our understandings of grief and its navigation are sparse. Despite the many offered interventions, there is little by the way of scientific evidence to support their efficacy (Rosner et al., 2010). Theories of grief have shifted over time more to a position of considering grief as a long-standing loss in which the grief remains, but over time, the individual builds other areas of their life so that the grief becomes lessened in proportion (Tonkins, 1996). This would sit alongside grief viewed through the lens of attachment and loss (Bowlby, 1998). There are many out dated theories of grief in western culture, on the most part proposing that grief is a process to be moved through (Kubler-Ross, 1973). This perspective would suggest that at some stage the individual completes a grieving process, which may not always be the case (Boddez, 2018). Perhaps one of the most widely known theories of this kind is that of Dr Kubler-Ross and the Five Stages of Grief (Kubler-Ross, 1973). There are many others of a similar nature, all viewing grief as a process. Many contemporary grief therapies based on these outdated theories have proven to be ineffective and, in some scenarios, even harmful. Further research is needed to develop better, more current understandings of grief (Boddez, 2018). Likewise, The American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health (2013) lists persistent or troublesome grief as an area requiring more research. With more and more emphasis being placed on the importance of how personal an experience grief is, and how attempting to fit that into theories, neat stages or processes can be counterproductive, Kilcrease (2008) argues that it is time outdated theories were abandoned in favour of treating the experience of grief as unique and individual. In doing so, this would highlight the need for further research and new, fresh and more contemporary understandings of grief and its management.

While there is currently no research on the relationship between grief and bodybuilding, or even grief and exercise; research in related areas might offer clues and insights. In recent years, in line with the rise in the acknowledgment of the bidirectional influence of mental health and physical health, there has been a shift towards more holistic forms of treatment and wellbeing interventions, including the use of exercise (Crone & Guy, 2008). It is now well evidenced that there is a positive correlation between exercise and mental health (Crone & Guy, 2008) although it might also be argued that excessive exercise can become problematic (Smith et al., 2016). Given that depression and anxiety are common mental health problems that often coexist alongside grief, it could be argued that it might be viewed through a similar lens (Parkes, 1996). Despite these recent shifts, exercise is still often overlooked and undervalued in terms of its effectiveness as a mental health intervention and further research is needed in this area (Crone & Guy, 2008).

### *Bodybuilding*

One might consider bodybuilding at the pinnacle of society's projections of the idealised body and at the height of aesthetic standards (Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018). Travelling to the extremes of beauty and ugliness, it is an intriguing and fascinating part of contemporary western culture (Monaghan, 2012). The concept of the superhero body originates from the 1920's and 1930's bodybuilding trend which inspired characters such as Superman and the first physical culture magazine. This was furthered in the 1960s by Charles Atlas and Joe Weider appearing in fashion adverts as products of hypertrophic transformation with handsome bodies of super strength (Kobre, 2019).

In relevance to this project it is helpful to define the terms bodybuilder and bodybuilding. The term bodybuilder will be used to describe a self-identified individual who commits him/herself to specific and patterned training regimes to achieve artistic merits. The primary goal, and what separates a bodybuilder from other types of weight lifters, is intention. The Bodybuilder's goal is to improve the aesthetics of the physique using a scientific training approach of maximum intensity to failure in order to achieve hypertrophy as opposed to weight training to

gain strength, fitness or agility (Monaghan, 2001). Bodybuilding can be quite simply described as the process that this entails (Monaghan, 2001).

There is still much to be explored in the arena of bodybuilding on both implicit and explicit levels. Despite there being limited research, much of what has been carried out from a psychological perspective has involved relating bodybuilding to low self-esteem, the struggle of male identity, and the need for power (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018). This has almost always entailed a rhetoric of bodybuilding being considered a means of self-harm, addiction or muscle dysmorphia (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018). The implicit nature of drug use associated with bodybuilding, including the use of not just body enhancing drugs such as anabolic steroids, but the peripheral 'side' drugs used such as cocaine, have added to these views (Monaghan, 2001; Monaghan 2012).

Other perspectives, perhaps more positive, offer bodybuilding as a form of art where by the body is built and sculpted with the drive for body perfection understood as a form of personal expression and individual creativity, or purely in the terms of a competitive sport (Monaghan, 2001). Stevenson (2002) offers the positive use of constructing the identity through sport where lifestyle, dedication and commitment to the pursuit become a source of pride and achievement. This view is shared by Bailey & Gillet (2012) who acknowledge the social significance in achieving an aesthetically pleasing body and how that can lead to bodybuilders' uniting in shared masculinity. As a form of art, the body might be considered a canvas and as a means for articulating personal growth (Linder, 2007). Sparkes et al. (2012) propose shame as an implicit driver in bodybuilding, shame is a self-critical judge and becomes embodied. Through the process of exposing the body to external criticism and judgment, opportunities to develop identities emerge, therefore this process could be considered one of personal growth. Bodybuilding becomes a character-building process of embodying a way of life that is meaningful and connected to the larger society, a means of connecting to flow (Sparkes et al., 2012). We might consider flow state as 'being in the zone' a mental state of operation where the person performing an activity is completely immersed in the present with high energy, focus and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). What is unanimous across all these propositions is that bodybuilding can be considered a form of self-construction, whereby practices and routines are

followed almost like a philosophy for life with a religious conviction (Smith et al., 2016). Accounts of bodybuilders' experiences and self-perceptions of bodybuilding have been explored and documented (Hall et al., 2016). However, there remains a paucity of research exploring bodybuilders' wider life experiences, motivations or anything that offers any level of emotional content or connection.

Despite the shift in societal trend to being fitness-orientated, social views of bodybuilders are generally negative, often due to associated drug use and the fear of the unknown (Monaghan, 2001; Monaghan, 2012). While there has been a rise in the popularity of bodybuilding as described above and the shift into more mainstream gyms, there remains a silence and a social stigma attached with many bodybuilders having their rationality questioned due to the extreme nature and sacrifice involved in the bodybuilding process (Monaghan, 2001; Monaghan, 2012). Bodybuilders are often labelled irrational, scary, meatheads, superficial and lacking in personality (Monaghan, 2001; Monaghan, 2012). The stereotypical brainless thug with a Tupperware box of chicken and rice who uses steroids (Monaghan, 2001). There has been a slight shift with bodybuilders being presented in a more favourable light as intelligent, sensitive, diligent and hardworking men (Crosland, 2015). Often committed to partners, family and work in an unfaltering manner, the first to lend a hand or show acts of kindness with sound moral fibre achieving almost impossible levels of workload to achieve their goals (Crosland, 2015). There is, therefore, a need to explore what drives this kind of process where such extreme levels of social, emotional and often financial deprivation and sacrifice take place (Monaghan, 2001) and to question if there is a better, more contemporary way, we could begin to understand bodybuilders and their motivations.

### *Grief*

Grief in all its complexities is a hard thing to define. It is highly subjective and personal and while there is no 'one fits all description' or definition, it is important to define the term for the purposes of the present research. The term grief is used to describe the experience of loss and the accompanying sorrow, sadness or emotional content associated with that loss. In many cases this may be as the result of a bereavement or the death of a loved one, but it is not limited to this.

The terms grief, bereavement and loss are often used interchangeably to describe the same thing. One might consider that bereavement or loss signals an event or state and that grief is the response to that (Parkes, 1996; Barnard, 2019). Whilst the present research focuses on the personal aspects of grief i.e. the emotional, physical, mental impact, it is also worth noting the other factors such as culture, politics and philosophy that feed into and impact the individual's experience (Desai & Bevan, 2002; Barnard, 2019). It is now widely accepted that emotions are connected to thoughts and behaviour and that, in turn, these affect our physical health and wellbeing (Van Der Kolk, 2014; Mate, 2019). Cognitive behavioural therapy proposes that we all draw meanings about ourselves, other people, and the world from our experiences in life (Beck, 1995). Minds, bodies and emotions are inextricably linked, and perhaps nowhere more obviously do we see the effects of our experiences than on the human body (Van Der Kolk, 2014). For this reason, it would be naive to overlook the importance of the meaning that an individual might draw from their experience of bereavement or loss and the impact that may have on self-esteem and their sense of self (Ningning et al., 2018; Salomonson, 2018). Other examples of loss that may result in grief are wide ranging such as the loss of a relationship with a person who is still alive, the loss of a job, a lifestyle, a pet, health or a home (Parkes, 1996; Barnard, 2019). Perhaps the most detrimental and overlooked loss might be that of the loss of self and the loss of hope (Brand, 2017; Barnard, 2019; Mate, 2019).

Experiences of grief differ dramatically (Barnard, 2019; Rizk, 2018), and people report feelings such as emptiness, sadness, separateness or disconnection, irritability and anger, frustration, guilt, anxiety or fear, ambivalence, numbness and depression or simply a sense of wanting to escape (Parkes, 1996). Energy levels can be affected along with sleep and eating habits with some people losing or gaining large amounts of weight (Parkes, 1996). Social isolation, loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities and relationships, loss of libido and avoidance of triggers have also been reported (Parkes, 1996). Other factors that impact on the individuals' experience of grief include age or life stages, how the loss occurred, how sudden the loss was, previous history of grief, resilience levels and coping strategies (Ningning et al., 2018; Salomonson, 2018). Reported positive coping strategies include talking to family or friends, engaging in social or community



activities, exercise, eating healthy nutritious food, reading, writing and listening to music (Parkes, 1996; Rizk, 2018).

As touched on above, theories around grief are wide ranging and on the most part offer grief as a process with stages to navigate although there has been a recent shift in thinking towards grief being something you build around as opposed to move on from (Tonkins, 1996). This view is shared by Bellet et al. (2018) who propose that while negative outcomes are a possibility, grief can also act as a transformational process leading to greater resilience and strength. Growth is common following bereavement, more so in medically related deaths than traumatic ones (Ningning et al., 2018). Again, it is worth noting the implications that social circumstances can have on the grieving process (Salomonson, 2018). In some situations, there just isn't the support or the resources to honour the grief, particularly for those with caring responsibilities and/or poor social support and emotional capacity (Desai & Bevan, 2002). Another barrier to moving through grief is presented as grief shame, this typically occurs in losses which violate social norms. Social silencing of grief can lead to grief being turned inwards and social isolation, in such cases, reconnection, empathy and compassion are essential (Salomonson, 2018). While counselling for grief has become more widely available through the voluntary sector there are still barriers to accessing that support (Doka & Martin, 2010). These include time in a fast-paced society, financial constraints, and perhaps more relevant to this project is the social stigma attached to men asking for help, the need for men to appear strong, to stay strong for others and the masculine tendency to develop action based as opposed to emotional coping strategies (Doka & Martin, 2010).

### *Bodybuilding in the Transformation of Grief*

There is an important influence of cultural and political drivers on an individuals' ability to process grief (Desai & Bevan, 2002). One might view the possibility of bodybuilding in the transformation of grief as a positive coping strategy as the basic ethos fits with reported positive coping mechanisms (Parkes, 1996). The need to become part of a community is met through gym membership and quite often bodybuilders become part of small exclusive groups almost replicating that of a family, offering a sense of acceptance, belonging and shared masculinity

(Monaghan, 2001; Stevenson, 2002; Bailey et al., 2012). Exercise and nutritional needs are met at a high level and music is an integral part of any gym culture. The therapeutic benefits of music are well established (Ansdell, 2014). If we are to give credence to the current grief research it is easy to see how bodybuilding could become attractive to a grieving male with a need to be strong, especially given that physical strength can be an outward manifestation of inner or emotional strength (Ricciardelli & Williams, 2016).

Considering the level of commitment necessary to become a competitive bodybuilder, the process of specific and patterned regimes with religious conviction and the sacrifice involved in personal relationships and financial outlay, the process takes on a life of its own (Monaghan, 2001). It is an intensive occupation, and involves almost everything associated with it in excess. For example, it would not be considered unusual for a bodybuilder to train for several hours per day, and is often regarded as an essential component (Monaghan, 2001). As mentioned earlier excessive exercise can become problematic (Smith et al, 2016). What could begin as a desire or need for community has the potential to become the isolation grieving individuals often seek and the avoidance of relationships and everyday triggers (Parkes, 1996; Salomonson, 2018). Life becomes a cycle of train, eat, sleep, and repeat without the explicit goal of avoiding the grief or even any awareness of the drivers behind the process. While this may offer a distraction from grief, it could also lead to mental myopia adding to feelings of numbness, disconnection and separation associated with grief (Brand, 2017; Mate, 2019). The eventual irony being that it is not possible to selectively numb emotions; if the pain is numbed then so is the joy (Brand, 2017; Mate, 2019).

Most people just want to feel better, viewed as a physical manifestation of an internal process, the need is transferred to the body and becomes 'I want to look better'. A short conversation with any bodybuilder, regardless of state of body, will result in hearing about body dissatisfaction (Smith et al, 2016). One might almost describe it like chasing an impossible goal. This is where, if they haven't already, substances and steroids can come into play alongside the risk-taking behaviour in the pursuit of this completely unattainable goal (Pope et al., 2012). The massive financial implications are high maintenance and while this hasn't been previously

touched on it deserves consideration. Relationships and other family commitments can become strained and neglected in this process alongside work and social obligations. Risking ones' own health begins to become a concern due to the nature of using untested and unregulated substances not just with the substances themselves, but the means of administering these drugs (Monaghan, 2001; Monaghan, 2012; Gruchy, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). This likely creates a barrage of cognitive dissonance given the unwavering commitment these men show to family and loved ones in other circumstances (Monaghan, 2001). It is perhaps then no wonder that bodybuilders have their sanity and rationality questioned (Monaghan, 2001). A step further, if the perfect body could be obtained what would happen then, it surely could not be maintained due to the aging process alone without the myriad of other associated factors. All these things would suggest that if there was a relationship between grief and bodybuilding, that arguably it might not be such a positive coping mechanism longer term.

Could it be that these men are in fact grieving and will never achieve these impossible goals because they aren't the goals necessary to afford them the happiness and wellbeing they so desperately seek? That potentially when the initial positive coping mechanism has outlived its usefulness, that a dependency has been formed making it extremely difficult to affect changes of behaviour (Monaghan, 2001). To attempt to change behaviour after this point could become even harder due to the likelihood of further losses being experienced because of the over commitment to the process, adding to the initial grief at the outset. This may account for why some view bodybuilding as a form of addiction (Monaghan, 2001). It is now quite widely accepted that addiction of any form develops from a centre of emotional distress (Brand, 2017; Mate, 2019).

### *Aims*

The current work aimed to explore the potential relationship between bodybuilding and grief in order to better understand bodybuilders' lived experiences and perceptions using a qualitative approach.

In order to address these aims male bodybuilders were engaged using semi structured interviews and questionnaires to explore aspects of their stories around bodybuilding and better understand their perceptions.

## Methods

### *Positioning the Study*

Qualitative research is sometimes viewed as less valuable, poor and even lacking evidence. Smith (2018) highlights that qualitative research is no less valuable than quantitative research, it is in fact valuable in a different way. He goes on to argue that research is still incredibly valuable even if it is not generalizable in terms of conventional metrics for generalization. There are many ways of understanding generalizability and it should not be sought for the sake of seeking it (Smith, 2018). Not everything is comparable and in our attempts to simplify and legitimate we run the risk of limiting our understandings (Bureau, 2007). This point is furthered by Seidman (1998) who considers that good qualitative work runs at such a depth that the aim of generalizability is replaced by the need to understand an individual's experience and that while that may not lead to the ability to predict or control, by contrast it offers the opportunity to be moved by humility and understanding. Naturalistic generalizability has been employed for the purposes of this study with the aim of providing enough richness and depth of data that the readers themselves can reflect and make their own naturalistic generalizations to their own experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2015).

The Methodological theory underpinning the study sits within a relativist ontology proposing that everything is relative, that there are many truths and that facts depend on the viewpoint of the observer (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Smith & Sparkes, 2014). From an epistemological stance, the study is informed by a constructionist approach which allows for the researcher as an active agent in the process of constructing and interpreting the world from the participants' point of view (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Smith & Sparkes, 2014). Qualitative research allows for an interpretive approach to capturing the essence of the human experience and has become a more widely used form of enquiry given the multi-faceted nature of researching the human experience (Gibson, 2017). The goal of

the qualitative researcher is to interpret the interpretation of others (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). There is a general level of acknowledgment that theories, background, knowledge and values of the researcher can influence what is observed. Constructionism assumes that there is no absolute truth, only interpretation, and that objectivity can only be achieved by awareness of the potential effects of researcher biases, reality can only be known imperfectly (Crotty, 2003). Truth is in itself subjective, Beck (1995) writes 'There is no such thing as reality, only perception'. Considering generalizability early on in the research process ensures the most appropriate methods are selected in order to address your specific research questions (King & Horrocks 2010). That said, Smith (2017) reminds us that generalisation can be considered a process and that reflexivity throughout the research is required in order to achieve this. Reflexivity also assists the process of adhering to sound research management which in turn assists in maintaining the credibility of the research (Tritter 2007).

### *Participant Selection*

Participants were selected using a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling. The author's unrelated work role within the fitness industry facilitated the convenience sampling and the initial selections. It is important to factor in how these connections have been established and the potential impact this may have on the research, patterns and data (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001; King & Horrocks, 2001; Low, 2007). Snowball sampling was then applied whereby initial participants were invited to suggest other suitable participants who may be willing to take part (Low, 2007). It is also described as a process of selecting participants based on certain characteristics and through their suggestions finding others who share the same characteristics (Gobo, 2004). A benefit of this type of participant recruitment is the possibility to elicit data from participants who share similar structural and social conditions, adding weight to the stories collected (Seidman 1998). This method of participant selection was selected given that the bodybuilding community is considered a hard to access (or hidden) population for many reasons, including the implicit use of steroids often associated with competitive bodybuilding and the attached social stigma. Many bodybuilders will simply just not trust or tolerate strangers asking questions (Monaghan, 2001). For

this reason, the study was not advertised publicly and participants were identified following referral and assessment of suitability.

Project approval and ethical clearance were obtained in adherence with The University of Gloucestershire's codes of practice (see appendix A & B). A small group of eight participants were then recruited from as diverse a range as possible in terms of geography, age and personal circumstances, to counteract the possibility of community bias reducing the validity of the research (Grix, 2004). Given that there is some debate regarding what validity means in qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) it might be useful to expand on the meaning in relation to this work. We might simply consider the term an expression of the authenticity of the research, that it is an accurate portrayal of the topic under exploration.

Fourteen participants were initially contacted by telephone, twelve of whom responded with a verbal agreement to take part in the research and two contacts were not responded to. Formal invitations were then sent by email to the twelve who verbally agreed, including a participant information sheet and a consent form (see appendix C & D). From those twelve, four later dropped out and eight participants gave written consent and interviews were arranged. One participant later withdrew and another was recruited in his place. An informed participant was selected from the final eight to help guide the research and was consulted throughout the initial planning stages of the project to ensure suitable language and terminology were employed. The eight participants were interviewed at times and places convenient to the participant and my own need for safety considered within those arrangements. Ethical guidelines and the British Psychological Society Codes of Practice were at the forefront of all interactions with participants including informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (Grix, 2014). Regular reflexivity and open discussion in supervision sessions assisted this process.

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to guide suitable participant selection. Participants were required to be resident in the UK in order to be readily accessible for interview. This was later extended following the opportunity of obtaining data from a participant outside of the UK. The research

selectively recruited men, again due to availability, as female bodybuilders are in the minority with levels of social stigma rising steeply due to gender (Monaghan, 2001; Grogan et al., 2014). Participants were required to be aged 18-60, reflecting a typical working age range and offering a wide scope of experience, both life experience and bodybuilding experience. Additionally, participants could only be included if they self-identified as a bodybuilder, and had competed in at least one competition. This was employed to ensure that individuals that are not truly bodybuilders (for example, weight lifters) were not incorrectly incorporated into the project given the distinct differences that bodybuilding presents. It is not uncommon for weight lifters to consider themselves bodybuilders when their goals are to be stronger and are not based in artistic merit (Monaghan, 2001). Exclusion criteria were employed simply for practical and safety reasons. Participants should not be of diminished capacity or otherwise unable to articulate experience. This was to ensure participants could adequately provide informed consent, and to assure integrity of the data gathered. The inability to accurately recall, identify and articulate lived experiences would undoubtedly impact findings (Randall & Phoenix 2009). A final exclusion criterion was that potential candidates should not be considered unsafe or threatening. This final criterion was for practical and personal safety concerns.

### *Participant Profiles*

“Ted” was interviewed in person at his office, he is 38 years old and a gym owner, engaged with children. Ted started bodybuilding at 17, and describes his health as excellent, he is not currently competing and has been using steroids for over twenty years. Ted has no religious beliefs and describes himself as having been raised as a catholic and is now non-practicing. Ted stopped competing at age 35 due to injury and business commitments. (See appendix E)

“Harry” was interviewed over the telephone following his need to cancel our pre booked interview, he is 22 years old and a self-employed personal trainer, single with no dependants. Harry started bodybuilding at 19, and describes his health as excellent. He is not currently competing but plans to compete again and talks openly about steroid use. Harry describes himself as agnostic. (See appendix F).

“Jason” was interviewed over the telephone at his convenience, he is 34 years old and a full time lecturer, living with a partner and no dependants. Jason started bodybuilding at 21, and more seriously at age 26. Jason currently competes, describes his health as good and talks openly about his steroid use. Jason describes himself as agnostic. (See appendix G).

“George” was interviewed over the telephone due to geographical logistics at his convenience, he is 46 years old and a self-employed health advisor, married with dependants. George started bodybuilding at 16, and no longer competes. George stopped at age 43 due to changed goals and spoke openly about extensive use of steroids over long periods. George describes himself as agnostic. (See Appendix H)

“Marcus” was interviewed in person in a quiet area of a café of his choosing, he is 25 years old and a self-employed personal trainer, single with no dependants. Marcus started bodybuilding at 19 and is not currently competing but plans to compete again. Marcus has never used steroids and describes himself as an atheist. (See appendix I).

“Steve” was interviewed at his office, he is 48 years old and a full-time manager of several health and fitness sites, married with dependants. Steve started bodybuilding at eighteen years old and stopped competing at 26 due to family commitments. Steve describes his health as excellent, has never used steroids and considers himself a Christian. (See appendix J).

“Tim” was interviewed in a quiet area of the gym of his choosing. He is 38 years old and employed full time as a manual worker, married with dependants. Tim started bodybuilding at 25 and doesn’t currently compete but is keeping an open mind. Tim describes his health as fair, has never used steroids and considers himself agnostic. (See appendix K).

“Andrew” was interviewed on a quiet area of the beach, he is 56 years old and the only participant not resident in the UK. Andrew is retired and married with dependants, he began bodybuilding at 21, and retired at 35 due to injuries. Andrew describes his health as very good and was open about his extensive history of steroid use. Andrew has no religious beliefs but holds strong spiritual beliefs. (See appendix L).



### *Data Collection Techniques*

To address the research questions of 'Is there a link between grief and bodybuilding?' and 'How can we better understand bodybuilders?' semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were employed as data collection methods. (See appendix M). As the mostly commonly used method in qualitative research in sport and exercise sciences (Smith & Sparkes 2009), interviews were selected as the primary method of data collection. In order to capture participants' lived experiences and perceptions the interview process can be considered a storytelling process (Randall and Phoenix, 2009). Typically, interviews are not used as a stand-alone method and given the researchers' history as a therapist, the necessary skills to facilitate the interviews effectively were present. Semi-structured interviews offer the benefits of enough structure to facilitate lines of enquiry with the freedom for relevant information to naturally evolve. The use of questionnaires was to add the benefit of removing the potential influence of the researcher and were clearly worded, using appropriate language, in order to minimise the chance of misunderstanding which can arguably be a disadvantage in using questionnaires (Grix, 2004).

Interviews in qualitative research are an excellent way to gather detailed information, and are in the words and expressions of the participant. They offer the benefit of face to face interactions, the opportunity to interpret body language, tone, facial expressions and for the researcher to create a safe space for data to emerge (King & Horrocks, 2010). Rapport built with the researcher and the appropriate use of self-disclosure can help to foster a sense of safety and encourage participants to construct stories based more from their inner voice and from a deeper level of meaning (Seidman, 1998). That said, self-disclosure should be used with caution as inappropriate or badly timed self-disclosure has the potential to elicit the opposite response. The researcher becomes a fluid part of the interview process (Seidman 1998). By contrast, interviews not conducted face to face, using skype for example, might limit the depth of data that emerges due to the lack of opportunity to create a 'safe space' and the greater potential for distractions in the participants' environment (King & Horrock, 2001). The flexibility within this method and the opportunity to add as much structure as is deemed useful, for example semi-structured interviews or a simple interview guide, made it

a clear choice (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001). Generally more structured interviews reduce the potential to go off track and help to keep the research process focused. Semi structured interviews offered the benefits of enough structure to facilitate lines of enquiry with the freedom for relevant information to naturally evolve (King & Horrocks 2001).

Interview schedules and questionnaires were built through a process of considering the research questions and how those might be best answered in a non-leading manner. Themes to be explored were listed in relation to those questions. Wider life experience, bodybuilding experience, motivations, strengths and general wellbeing. Questions/prompt were then selected in order to generate conversation regarding those themes (See appendix M). The questionnaires (See appendix N) were deliberately aimed at capturing demographics, opening the interview and allowing a safe space for participants to engage in conversations regarding steroid use which they may not have been as open to discussing with a tape recorder playing for obvious reasons relating to legalities and employment. Interviews lasted from twenty minutes to one hour.

At the end of each interview participants were thanked for their time and contribution and given a participant debrief with signposting to relevant agencies in the event that the interview process had evoked any distress or concerns (See appendix O). Participants were given the opportunity to provide an email address should they like a copy of the completed work. Seven of the participants indicated that they would like to receive a copy with the provision of an email address. After each interview, I took the opportunity to reflect on the interview and look at how this might inform my next interview. A researchers' diary was employed as part of the research process in order to facilitate this. As qualitative researchers we must increase our ways of knowing, reduce ignorance and realise the relative size of our efforts in the grander scheme of things (Seidman, 1998). Given the researchers role as instrumental within qualitative research and the need to be reflexive, it is perhaps worth noting the value of keeping a researchers journal or diary to assist this process (King & Horrocks, 2010). In making observations researchers should do so intentionally, honestly, openly and with modesty, reflexivity can assist this process (O'Reilly, 2005).

## *Analysis*

Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by hand with the assistance of a transcription programme called Trint during which time the recordings were held in a password protected programme. This offered the opportunity to really become familiar with the content of the transcripts in an intimate way. Once transcription was complete, the recordings were destroyed in line with data protection. Participants were assigned and given a number during the interview process to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were later assigned with the aims of further protecting participant anonymity and ensuring they were not identifiable to the reader.

Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis before being considered in relation to the results of the questionnaires with the aim of identifying solid patterns and themes. Interpretivism was selected in order to interpret the deeper meaning of the data and allow for the understanding of multiple realities (Guest et al., 2012). The lens of interpretivism in thematic analysis sits well within the ontological position of relativism and the epistemological stance of constructivism by allowing for the construction and theorising of meaning, motivations and experience in a simple way (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible and accessible form of analysis offering the benefit of highlighting important parts of large volumes of data (Braun & Clark, 2006). This criticism of thematic analysis being too open to interpretation can be counteracted through auditability (King & Horrocks, 2010). The analysis began by looking at word frequency across the transcripts, collectively and individually, to begin to generate themes. A computer software programme, Nvivo, was used during this initial analysis process. Each transcript was then read individually with these initial themes in mind in order to immerse myself in the data and to look for evidence which supported or contradicted these themes. At this stage an issue relating to my questionnaires and ambiguity became apparent that I could not have foreseen. What are your religious beliefs, if any? In response to this question one participant identified as atheist, one identified as Christian and another as spiritual followed by a line in the response slot from one participant and 'none' from the remaining four. What did

the line and the 'none' mean? Following consultation with research supervisors and reflecting on these responses, the decision was taken to contact the four relevant participants asking them for further clarification. Three then classified themselves as agnostic and the remaining participant described himself as 'raised as a catholic but non-practicing'. Following clarification, and through a process of boiling down, self-reflection and discussion with the supervisory team, solid themes were established and assigned a colour code. Each transcript was then coded using the appropriate colour assigned to that theme in order to highlight the supporting data. The themes were then considered in terms of hierarchy and split into five groups. Five overarching themes were established in which smaller themes sat. The final part of the analysis process consisted of relating the themes back to the research aims before splitting the five larger headings in to two groups to appropriately address the research questions. The explicit documentation of these processes all add credibility and evidence solid research practice (Tritter, 2007).

What follows is a summary of what the men told me about bodybuilding and grief and their lived experiences and perceptions arranged under theme headings. I have not specified which participant said what in order to protect the identity of the participants.

## Results

### *Is there a link between Bodybuilding and Grief?*

#### Precipitating Factors

##### Parental Absence

While not explicitly acknowledged in all cases, accounts of parental absence featured strongly in participants stories. Parental absence might be experienced as loss when considered through the lens of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998). Three participants reported no issues relating to their parents and described home life as 'normal' and good. The remaining five spoke of parental absence in various forms through death, divorce and absence due to work commitments.

*I felt like when I was growing up like my parents weren't doing a great job and people were letting me down. I just thought if I just take care of*

*everything myself it'll be alright. I had no role models so I had to create my own. Role. Male role model which was you know from the gym and all that stuff. If my dad was around then like maybe things would have been easier. You know like to get a job and I felt like I had nobody there so. I had to make it on my own. And I couldn't afford to slip up.*

One participant spoke of his experience following his father's death and how he found male role models in the gym and became self-reliant as a result of his experiences.

*Not so much, like my parents were often away touring. Well 'Dad' was not actually my birth dad. He took me on as his own, he was my mum's partner. I don't know my real dad.*

Another spoke of never knowing his real father and described how his mother and step father often spent long periods away from the family home while he stayed with his grandmother.

*My mum and dad split up in 2007.*

Despite not acknowledging any negative impacts of the separation or appearing to draw any real meaning from it, another participant described his parents 'splitting' up.

*That's probably from my dad because my dad was always a very hard worker and would always be doing a lot of things. And sometimes I wouldn't see my dad for two weeks because he'd be off on a camp or something.*

Absence due to work commitments was also mentioned with fathers on the most part the focus of the absence, this was with the exception of one participant who described a rather moving story of losing his mum to cancer at the age of thirteen.

*Definitely, so I lost my mum when I was 13 to cancer, bowel cancer. So, for me, I channelled that emotion into rugby and sport. Contact sport, which for me was a big help. But because of that it caused me to be very intuitive about health and living a healthy lifestyle.*

Interestingly, and in line with predictors of anabolic steroid use (Pope et al., 2004) all four participants reporting fathers absence were also steroid users.

## Grief

Seven of the eight participants shared stories and experiences of grief. Wide ranging, from the death of a parent including a detailed narrative of the shock and the struggle to adjust, to the loss of relationships and the loss of self. The loss of self (Brand 2017; Barnard 2019; Mate 2019) described by one participant tells a tale of poor choices and has been expressed as disappointment in self and communicated as an emotional process of guilt.

*I think when my dad died when I was 13, and that was a huge shock because just my whole world like, changed at that point. Not just because I lost my dad at a very crucial moment for a young man because you've just come into puberty and everything and you know, basically becoming a man and you want to know how to become a man and who is your role model as a father. Then there's a whole upheaval because shortly after that my mum met another guy and we moved from where it was what was familiar to me to somewhere else. So this whole period was a big, big shock and a big upside down.*

*I was in a relationship of guilt. Long story short I got married to someone I shouldn't have married, through no fault of her own, no big deal. There was no negativity in the relationship it just wasn't supposed to be. Yeah, I had an affair which resulted in my daughter. I didn't stand up to that relationship as in the one with my daughter. I walked away. I walked away from my marriage as well, but I also walked away from the daughter. The guilt of that, I put myself almost into self-punishment.*

These wide-ranging experiences of grief describe the experience of loss and the accompanying sorrow, sadness or emotional content associated with that loss as proposed by Parkes (1996) and Barnard (2019).

*I've been having a horrible time recently and yeah I've been really, really sad about lots of things.*

*They just split up, obviously at the time, I was 11 years old it was a bit, disheartening, didn't really know what was happening but since then I've sort of grown up knowing I get to see them both whenever I want.*

Two participants spoke of grief in a transformational manner. One participant described the process of being spurred by loss and the other spoke of channelling emotional energy through pushing his body. Bellet et al. (2018) proposed a transformational theory of grief outcomes leading to greater strength and resilience which both participants articulated. Interestingly, Ningning et al. (2018) suggested that growth is more common following medically related bereavements which was the case for both participants.

*It was kind of like a now or never sort of thing. Before, about a year before, we had a miscarriage. And um that, and that sort of spurred me to. After that happened she was not really wanting to have kids for a little while. So, I said well okay. Because I wasn't going to compete again. And then. Because obviously she was pregnant and then the miscarriage. So, when that happened, I was like okay. Let's not try to have a kid for a little while. Yeah. And then I said let's do this.*

*I mean for me the grief was more, like I channelled my emotional focus into rugby, contact sport, so I guess my training was another way of outlaying that, like pushing my body.*

Other participants spoke of experiences of grief in a more emotionally distant manner, almost hypothetically and from a place of detachment, stating events as opposed to experiences or perceptions of those events.

*But I do feel, I do feel, well when I was in the bodybuilding sort of red mist as it were. Yeah, I do feel that. Because. If something happened and somebody did die or there was something catastrophic. I suppose because I'd sort of bury my head into bodybuilding. That's how I dealt with stuff because um I didn't have to work you know all I was worried about was training and eating that was it.*

*My friend brought over a bench press and said why don't you try and do this instead of getting high on your own at home. Yeah and he would come over. He suffered from severe mental health problems. He killed himself actually but he mmm, that was his gift. I found out that even in my bedroom training I got strong very quickly.*

*I was just going through a divorce.*

The remaining participant had no reported experiences of grief despite having a very complex health issue unrelated to bodybuilding. This participant did however report strong experience of using bodybuilding as a means of distraction and that he had escaped death on multiple occasions. This might be understood as the loss of health and I would consider this through the lens of Randall and Phoenix (2009) who remind us that some experiences are unspeakable. The inability to articulate or report grief does not mean it is not present or has not been experienced.

Coping Mechanism

Positive Distraction

All of the participants gave reference to bodybuilding as a positive distraction. Articulated in a variety of ways ranging from 'a way out of everything around me' to simply being something that gives you a goal or a focus. We might consider Parkes (1996) symptomology of grief here and a sense of wanting to escape. Tunnel vision has also been described by one participant which might be another way of understanding mental myopia.

*I want to do bodybuilding, I want to do competitions and I want to make a career out of it somehow. I didn't know how exactly but I just saw it as a way out of everything around me. Yeah because I was in this tunnel.*

*I suppose it gave you a goal and it gave you a focus.*

*I just got, I got really depressed and just felt like I had to focus on something so that's why. I said to my girlfriend at the time, I'm going to do this show. So at least I've got something to focus on. Yeah. Well I'm getting ready. So, I'm not going into a spiral of depression. Yeah. So that's what I did, and I started doing my first show. And then I had that thing with my job and everything else so thought do you know what I will then, just give myself some focus. So that's why I got into it.*



Two of the participants explicitly described the positive distraction as helping them. One also noted the benefits of social support, both observations are in line with reported positive coping strategies (Parkes 1996; Rizk 2018).

*I had a lot of friends around me and focused my energy into sport and that helped massively. I became a very self-motivated person.*

*Because it was helping us. It helped him at the time and it helped me. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough for him, but it has been enough for me. I don't deal well with idle time because my mind is fucked so I'd say it's more of a comfort blanket of something that I know that I can control. Two hundred pounds is always two hundred pounds sounds fucking weird. I have control it's my thing. It's my thing.*

The ability to 'block things out' and push things to the back of the mind have also been reported. This appears to be with regards to issues relating to self and to others. One participant shared the experience of his grandmother dying shortly after a big competition and how he had blocked out that she was dying leading up to the show. He presented during interview as very much being in a process of coming to terms with that loss which was demonstrated by his use of language and changes of frames of reference during interview.

*I can be really ill as well, I mean I trained all through my dialysis for 9 months. I really can just put everything to the back of my mind and do what I need to do.*

*I blocked the Gran thing out for the British.*

The proposition that we might consider bodybuilding as a positive distraction is however slightly challenged by several accounts of the longer term impact. For this reason I think we can only unanimously agree that bodybuilding might be considered a form of distraction without placing a concrete value judgment of negative or positive alongside it.

*It was an acceptance of. You're not. Doing this thing that you were doing anymore which required 100 percent laser focus an all-consuming thing that you were doing and now you're not doing it, it's like you don't really know who you are.*

*But when I do look back and I analyse it I think sometimes things did I sort of, was that maybe me doing bodybuilding and then not having to sort of worry about everything else in life because it was quite an easy life.*

*A lot of my drive around training was personal unhappiness. I was always constantly looking for something. My training was my sanctuary.*

*How can we better understand male bodybuilders?*

## **Developing the Self**

### Young Adulthood

All participants reported starting to train with a bodybuilding focus between the ages of 17 and 21. Typically competing started slightly later, in some cases not until age 25, with one participant describing himself as a bodybuilding 'late bloomer'. This may account for the proposition that bodybuilding be considered as part of a quest for masculinity. While Smith et al. (2016) describe this as a struggle other perhaps more positive viewpoints offer the possibility of constructing and developing identities (Stevenson 2002), uniting in shared masculinity (Bailey et al. 2012) and embodying a way of life that is meaningful (Sparkes et al. 2012). Routes into bodybuilding differed greatly ranging from reports of internal processes of 'just knowing' it was meant for them to other accounts of external motivators such as getting involved through friends and by invitation.

*I've trained since about 17 years of age consistently. I mean I've trained since 15 just messing around in my bedroom with weights and I just enjoyed it and got some quick results which is what kept me interested really.*

*When I was about 17 /18, I then sort of pushed on to the next level, so I then joined a gym. Naturally I've got a fairly, addictive personality possibly is the word to use. I'm not sure or I'm quite competitive anyway.*

Two participants also spoke of trouble, drugs, parties and fighting. While both described how control, discipline and structure were used in order to survive, not get into too much trouble and provide some order in their lives, one participant

describes bringing those qualities to bodybuilding and the other describes learning them from bodybuilding. Interestingly, both participants were steroid users and met criteria for both predictors of anabolic steroid use, conduct disorder and a poor relationship with father (Pope et al, 2014).

*So I left home at 16 and I managed to like. You know. Kind of survive and not get in too much trouble. And that was because I had some kind of control and discipline.*

*So, bodybuilding taught me structure, before structure there was nothing. There was no structure there was there was there was nothing you know there was drugs, parties and all the normal stuff, fighting.*

#### Autonomy and Work Ethic

A strong theme within each participant's story was the demonstration of autonomy. We might consider autonomy as independence, the right to self-govern or to be free of control. This was articulated in many different ways ranging from accounts of a sense of being in control and strong self-reliance to the acknowledgment of not being someone who takes direction well. Accounts illustrate the suggestion that bodybuilding be considered an expression of a need for power (Smith, et al. 2016). That said, we might also interpret demonstrations of autonomy as a reflection of ownership and self-responsibility which are essential components of personal growth (Brand, 2017).

*The training I'm doing myself, the eating I'm doing myself everything. I can control all that. And. The competition when I get on stage it's me up there and it's me that's done the work, it's me that's done the diet. And. Win or lose I take the responsibility and or the glory or whatever it comes out of it.*

*I've got no safety net, no family, nothing, no one's coming to help me. You're going to do it yourself or that's it.*

*No I've never had, while I've had one coach in the time I've been doing bodybuilding competitions. And he's a really nice guy the problem is I'm not someone who takes direction well.*

This point is furthered by the following extract from a participant who links both propositions together, the need for power and the role that personal growth plays in that. We might then further consider the work of Sparkes et al. (2012) who offer that bodybuilding might be understood as part of a character-building process and a means of personal growth.

*I've been developed to a point now where I really don't let other people's opinions, perceptions whatever like, they're not mine they don't belong to me so I do what I want to do for my benefit and people that I love and. The World. I make my decisions based on that and not on what somebody else may or may not think be thinking. It's of no concern to me. You lose power if you do that.*

Work ethic featured heavily in all participants' stories which may come as no surprise given the challenging and gruelling nature of bodybuilding. It requires dedication, commitment and hard work (Monaghan, 2001).

*So I said I'm going to give hundred percent to the show and if I don't place in the top five to be realistic I haven't got what it takes to be a successful professional body builder.*

*I've got set times and it's almost like going to work for me. I train every day my lifestyle fits around it.*

*The kind of hard working belief. Yeah, I think it's relative to life it's taught me you know if you work hard at something and you're persistent and dedicated you could achieve some pretty amazing things. Which I think can be relative for anything.*

Two participants spoke about the work involved as a process of working on self, overcoming difficulties and forming identities. Learning processes were also described as a form of growth in line with the views of Stevenson (2002).

*People I've met on the journey, my girlfriend as well she was very loving caring hardworking and also very self-motivated. I think for a lot bodybuilding is a kind of sanctuary they're working on themselves, kind of head down and just do it. It's one of the things that you do feel better about. Going to the gym. After training. Great. Seeing what your body can do.*

*Just reinforcing. Reinforcing, reinforcing, because everything that you do becomes a habit. So if you step up to something and it's difficult. And you say fuck it I'm doing anyway I'm over it and you jump over. Next time something comes up that looks like that a little bit difficult I jumped over that before I can do it again. But the reverse is true as well. If this comes up you know. Aw no I can't do it maybe the next time and you're not going to get anywhere. It's not easy but if it was then I guess we wouldn't learn anything.*

One participant spoke openly about the dark side of a strong work ethic, how community expectations fed that pressure and how he now understands his experience as one of self-harm. Interestingly, he was the only participant to make reference to self-harm and community pressure despite the amount of literature pointing towards that conceptualisation (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018).

*There was a very big focus and a very big ethos on hard training and generally you were disregarded in the gym unless you did train hard. I got a reputation very early on for training hard that was also because I liked to inflict pain on myself. It was really a socially acceptable form of self-harm. I was at that time aware of steroids but previously hadn't been so when I'd looked at pros, I always assumed that they just trained harder. Again, that installed this very, very, strong ethic of very hard training, I didn't know anything about overtraining, didn't know it existed and didn't believe it existed. You want to get bigger. You just trained harder it was as simple as that, the only thing stopping me from growing was how hard I trained. And then at 19 I did my first steroid cycle and I absolutely exploded.*

The theme of autonomy and work ethic was also evidenced through employment choices where relevant. Of the eight participants interviewed, one was retired and one had complex physical health problems unrelated to bodybuilding. The remaining six participants worked in roles which demonstrate autonomy and work ethic. One participant worked in a managerial role, two participants worked in educational roles and three were self-employed, all on a full time basis.

## Taking Control of the Mind

All participants spoke about the importance of mentality in bodybuilding. A mind over matter approach whereby you have total control over your thoughts and mental focus. Given the rise in mental health concerns in recent years we might consider this process of taking control of the mind as a means of managing mental health. As highlighted by Brand (2017) more and more people are seeking ways to managing everyday human experiences including grief.

I always had it in the back of my mind. One day I want to do this.

*It's the mind. I kept myself focused. 100% all the time. Didn't take time off. Don't get distracted. Put everything else aside. Even my family.*

*I'm a thinker like the mind is everything.*

Interestingly, only one of the eight participants was able to articulate how his wider life experiences had facilitated the development of that mentality (Beck 1995; Mate 2019).

*Well I think my background, my upbringing probably had an effect on making me single minded and focused.*

Three participants spoke about the importance of bloody mindedness, tunnel vision and stubbornness, describing a grit like process of determination. We might consider the risk involved in such processes given that one of the participants was training against medical advice in spite of ill health and the other two are steroid users (Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019)

*If I want something I will have it there's no stopping me, there's no reasoning with me. I can come to the gym, wait for it to pass, sleep at home, I don't mean to sound cocky, but I believe I'm mentally stronger than 95% of people. Bloody mindedness and tunnel vision of seeing it to the end. You just focus on the end goal. You don't see anything else. So, like tunnel vision. Ill health wouldn't stop me.*

*I've sort of got, I'm very much a dog with a bone. Sometimes if I set my mind to doing something. Then I'll make sure I see that through to fruition.*

*So, if I if I said I'm going to be on stage at a certain time I will make sure I'm on stage at a certain time.*

*I needed to be just be focused and keep a certain level of aggression all the time. Like GRRR.*

Two participants spoke about the importance of goals in establishing and maintaining that focus. This comes as no surprise given the inherent nature of goal setting within bodybuilding (Monaghan, 2001). One participant made reference to his better self which would indicate a process of character building and growth as offered by Sparkes et al. (2012).

*See if I don't have a goal in mind or if I'm not 100% set in the mind set to do it the I easily fall off the band wagon, If you don't keep a focused goal. If there's a slight barrier in the way that could sort of affect that then it's easy for me to fall off the band wagon.*

*Yeah your better self yeah. I mean that's what you wanted right. You wrote it down. Yes. So why are you going to go against that because that's what you wanted. You know we've got different aspects of our personality. But the boss says we're not drinking this week.*

#### Improvement, Success and Ego

The need to improve, learn and grow was apparent in all participants' stories. There was a strong sense of bodybuilding facilitating opportunities to do that. One participant spoke about the increase in confidence and mood when he first started to 'improve his physique'. While low self-esteem has not explicitly been mentioned an increase in confidence would suggest that may have been present and there is clear indication of an improvement in body image in line with the proposals of Smith et al. (2016) and Gruchy (2018).

*It massively increased my confidence because I think in physically improving your physique, it does give you confidence to make you feel good and you look good and you go from sort of like a bit of wasn't really a skinny, really skinny kid or anything but I went from being a little bit sort of a podgy sort of normal looking teenage kid to looking quite muscular and then you do feel good.*

Another participant spoke about a similar experience of self-improvement and the benefits of growth, achievement and 'seeing what your body can do'. This theme echoed throughout other areas of his life including his work life as a personal trainer where he actively sought learning opportunities to deepen his knowledge and expand his skills base. This theme of personal growth, sense of achievement and developing identifies fits with the proposals of Stevenson (2002) and Sparkes et al. (2012).

*Over the last 5 or six years I've developed my knowledge through various courses. Strength and conditioning, sport therapy, kettlebell work then advanced nutrition, then going into deeper nutritional protocols really. To kind of be the best version of me. And always looking for that kind of self-improvement. And also, like pushing your body to that level, being an athlete, I always look to be better, stronger, fitter, so taking your body to that extreme to see what you can do is pretty awesome. And I am fascinated by nutrition and what you can do with the human body so last year during my prep I actually pushed a tank for 10 hours in a calorie deficit. So, pushing your body to those extremes and seeing what it can do.*

Progression as a bodybuilder in terms of competition was given attention by several participants. Improvement might be viewed as an integral feature in the bodybuilding process given the nature of being judged during competitions. Realising the need to learn more in order to improve and how that process can take on a life of its own has been highlighted by one participant who described the process as a spiral. Again this fits with the theory of understanding bodybuilding as a means of personal growth and potentially the concept of 'embodied' shame as suggested by Sparkes et al. (2012).

*Then I thought well if I want to do another show I want to be better. So, I learned a bit more about. Nutrition and stuff. And um. Yeah. Sort of spiralled from there. So that was how I got into bodybuilding competitions. And as I went through the years I went to the British finals and stuff.*

Improving, succeeding and ego are components of the bodybuilding process but as the following participant made clear, are certainly not exclusive to bodybuilding. We might consider the desire to grow as a human need (Brand, 2017) and



bodybuilding as a means of actualising that need. The bodybuilding can come and go, but the desire to learn, to grow, to feel good about who you are and what you are achieving, is transferable.

*I like learning and I like evolving so I don't want to stay in the same place and bodybuilding I've already done that, I've done it to the max. So what juices left in the lemon? Nothing right. The lemons finished. So I do some other things I can do yoga and it's something I can do as old as I can get and it could also keep improving because you can always learn bodybuilding I couldn't top what I already did because the weights I used to move and the size I had and everything. I feel good that I've been able to grow to this place and continue growing where most people just get stuck. If a guy has won a major competition as a professional normally he'll try to maintain this physique and this image and this lifestyle until the day he dies. Because that's his identity. So tied up with that but mines not. I did that but I can do other things as well.*

The need to compete, to be number one, might be understood as a reflection of ego. While apparent in all participants' accounts and in line with the proposition that bodybuilding be considered an antidote to low self-esteem, the struggle for male identity and the need for power (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy 2018), different approaches to ego were voiced. Some participants seemed more accepting of that aspect of bodybuilding than others.

*Yes being no.one, winning. Number two is just like almost, it's a no no, in fact it's worse than last.*

*I enjoy competition so yeah you know so I just I suppose I like to be the best I can whatever I do. So, you know I don't. And that's for me it's not I have to be better than somebody else. The aim is for me to be as good as I can be.*

*It's kind of given me a goal. I thought in a year or something I'd like to compete, but I've always had that mentality anyway just to try and get bigger and better shape. Because I'm shorter as well. Maybe that's an attribute towards it. My motivation is just to be better, bigger and better. There's other people, other people motivate me, seeing someone else*

*that's better than me drives me to be better again. I'll be honest with you, the comments help as well like if you go out on a night out that drives me even more if someone says you're looking good. It's a bit of an ego drive to be honest.*

*Maybe it's a part of ego, I wanted people to be, at the time, I, wanted people to be talking about me. It's a bit of arrogance.*

The negative side of ego was talked about by three participants whose accounts followed a theme of 'selfishness'. These participants presented as less accepting of ego with one participant stating it as a reason for longer competing.

*It is you know a very selfish and isolating sport I think.*

*In fact bodybuilding is gluttonous and selfish, about how you feel. If you're going to be straight.*

*That's partly why I will no longer compete, you have to be selfish and I wouldn't want to be like that.*

## **Psychosocial Influences**

### **Agnostic and Nonbelieving**

This theme became apparent primarily through the data collected from the questionnaires. Six of the participants were non believing, four classified themselves as agnostic, one as an atheist and the final participant described having been raised as a catholic before classifying himself as 'non practicing'. Two participants held clear views of their religious beliefs, one identified himself as a Christian and the final participant held spiritual beliefs. Both participants with clear views were no longer bodybuilding, of the remaining six, five of them were still bodybuilding. This is of interest given the open acknowledgment that times are changing, that society and communities no longer hold the same value (Brand 2017) and that we might consider religion as a value system. Smith et al. (2016) noted that bodybuilders display religious conviction to their training and regimes almost like a philosophy for life. That in mind, and given the data, we might consider bodybuilding as a form of religion or a substitute for religion in these

men's eyes. Only one participant spoke openly about his beliefs during interview describing a process of exploring religion before deeming it unhelpful.

*I'm spiritual not religious. Religion kills spirituality it's just a manmade construct with negative consequences. So no, I'm not religious, but I am spiritual. I believe that. Everything is kind of connected in this world. Somehow and maybe some of the ancient religions that you can find all the in Buddhism and Hinduism and so on. So I'm interested in those and of course I follow meditation and so on. So I'm a big believer in the spirit and the interaction of your own thoughts with this gan, this reality we are in if you like. So yeah I'm spiritual and I'm spiritually concerned and. seeking more knowledge along that path. That doesn't include religion. Maybe I read a little bit a start and then just realize that this isn't helping.*

#### Media and the Fitness Industry

Gaining inspiration from media in the form of magazines, books, videos and shows played an important role in shaping these mens' ideas and goals. This may come as little surprise given the history of bodybuilding and the role media played in its social construction (Kobre, 2019). Mostly portrayed positively by participants, motivations ranged from seeking role models and the struggle for masculinity (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018) to simply looking for a focus for their training.

*It was almost like these guys from the magazines were my surrogate fathers because I was reading about these guys in the magazines, like you know maybe this is the model of a man and what you want to be. I read about these guys and I really like Mike Mensah because of his philosophy, logic and his writings. And training methods which I came to adopt so I guess via a magazine Mike Mensah was a bit of a hero.*

*I needed a focus for my training. You know I was always kind of obsessed at a younger age with reading men's health and looking at cover models and all the rest of it.*

One participant described a thirst for knowledge and described how he used books and videos as learning tools. Another talked of learning how to pose through a process of watching videos, he goes on to acknowledge that there is far

more information available now but this highlights the mystical nature of bodybuilding which has been described by Monaghan (2012) as both intriguing and fascinating.

*I just had a thirst for knowledge I had read so many books magazines articles, you know watched videos of bodybuilders and trainers and you know people in the bodybuilding world have watched pumping iron about three million times see just for inspiration and things.*

*I didn't know how to pose so had to teach myself from videos and I did have the internet but there was nowhere near the information they have now.*

Competitions and shows were another facet of attraction offering opportunities to find inspiration, network and to learn in a live manner. One participant described his process of enlisting a coach that he had seen compete and later finding and contacting him using social media. This would propose the rise in social media as a positive contribution in the realms of bodybuilding which is a refreshing acknowledgment given that most associations with social media and the fitness industry are portrayed and reported negatively (Cooper, 2014).

*So in 2016 I was just watching one of the competitions at the Bodypower and the guy who was my coach, I seen him on stage, he stuck out like a sore thumb, he was the best physique on the stage all day so I looked him up on social media, contacted him and a week later I was in my own competition prep.*

Taking part in the flow of media productions also featured with two participants sharing their experience of being involved in the making of a documentary and a series based around bodybuilding and associated activities. These experiences offered the opportunity to unite in shared masculinity (Bailey & Gillet, 2012).

*I was invited to a documentary about it which we did very, very, quickly and that launched the under construction franchise, the second one was a more planned and constructed documentary but we have a lot of problems in the production of that.*

*Let's do a six-part seven-part series. Which leads into the show at the end. Okay. So, it's good. You know it's not just you training and stuff. It's a good.*

*Seven hours or whatever. So that's what we did. So that was called prep. We filmed that it was it was good experience. That was six months though we had to do that. We released a new one every sort of three to four weeks or something. So that was, I mean we made seven episodes in the end. That was, that was a really good experience doing that. It was tough. But it was really well received by people in the industry we thought everyone was going to go oh that's shit that is. But we sold. A lot of copies.*

The negative side of social media was acknowledged by one participant who shared experience of pre-show pressure and how that can unfold and be amplified with the use of social media. Gruchy (2018) voiced concerns about how such processes of body comparison in men can cause pressure and the subsequent negative impact on mental and physical health.

*Coming up to the show there was a lot of bitchiness and guys looking at each other's pictures via social media.*

The impact of the explosion of the fitness industry played out in several of the mens' stories ranging from how bodybuilding has been watered down and commercialised to the role the industry plays in promoting and maintaining poor body image and the consequential impact on mental health and the growing use of steroids (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018; Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018).

*It's a whole fitness industry they call it now. It was just bodybuilding and it was more pure and it was more sport now it's like half a modelling competition and half of something else. So many categories because it's become a business. So the more people you can get in the net the more money so I understand that from a business point of view and nothing lasts forever. Everything always changes and adapts and so on. And of course the stereotype does exist. Of course. It does exist as well. People are only concerned with how they look. Now it's got more like that with the social media people going in the gym more to take pictures and to show people that they are training rather than worrying about actually training. So it has got a lot more like that with the social media aspect. Any group of people or any culture or anything like that. You know you could have a general picture*

*within that group you're going to have all kinds of people. Yeah. So yeah you have got that stereotype and sometimes it is a bit embarrassing but it's not the way I do it.*

*I mean it's being shown that exposure to the fitness industry alone increases people's body image issues and increases the rate of depression. When you use drugs you then have that problem what happens when you remove the drug. I mean it's been shown time and time again that social media likes are addictive. You get compliments particularly if you've been someone that's never really received compliments on physical appearance. Yes. And your posting on social media your results, you're using drugs to achieve those results are you getting compliments from people aspiring to look like you physically that can be a very powerful drug to people without the chemicals themselves the mental health side of steroids is a massive problem.*

A clear thread of working within the fitness industry revealed itself within the men's stories with five of the eight men employed there, it's worth noting that of the other three participants only one worked within a completely unrelated field. If we are to perceive bodybuilding at the pinnacle of the idealised body (Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018) we might also consider it at the pinnacle of the fitness industry. Gruchy (2018) proposed that men working within the fitness industry are at the greatest risk of body dissatisfaction which might assist us in our understanding of the role the industry plays. Two participants described their experiences of owning businesses and holding managerial positions within the fitness industry which might be interpreted as positions of power.

*I own a couple of businesses related to health and fitness. I generally help people to look better and manage their health and nutrition.*

*I have been working in the fitness industry for probably the last 28 years. I'm currently a fitness manager.*

## Health and Wellbeing

### Health

Health weaved its way throughout each of the mens' stories in various forms and through a variety of perspectives, offering many angles on the same topic. Data from the questionnaires provided a self-perceived health rating from each participant. Four of the men rated their health as excellent, two as very good, one as good and the final man as fair. The participant who gave the 'fair' rating had a long term illness not related to bodybuilding. One of the men was able to make a clear distinction between competition and training stating that training was an integral part of his wellbeing. The benefits of exercise are undisputed (Crone & Guy, 2008).

*Although the competition is a hobby. The training is an integral part of my wellbeing.*

Longevity of health was of real concern to several of the men who were able to consider and articulate the longer term health implications of competing and the temporary nature of the extremes of being on stage and competing. Smith et al. (2016) reminds us that excessive exercise can be damaging and that even positive actions can have negative outcomes.

*You know you can take it to that extreme of being on stage however for me it's about longevity of health. That's really, really, important to me. It should be at the forefront of anyone on a fitness journey. That they want to be fit and healthy for the rest of their life. Not just period of time. Yeah, I think for the long haul right. Yeah. So, I think body building can almost be detrimental to people's health. If you don't know when to get out.*

The theme of longevity of health was furthered by another participant who talked in detail about his post bodybuilding health. There is explicit acknowledgment of the impact of the extreme training methods on his body and we are reminded by Van der Kolk (2014) and Mate (2019) that the body keeps the score and will eventually say no. A process of recovery, adjustment and healing was described as the man shared his story of making the shift from a bodybuilding experiment to a health and

wellbeing experiment. The self-evaluation and learning processes articulate a cycle of growth and character development (Sparkes et al., 2012).

*I've been doing yoga for about three years. I do a lot of mobility stuff. So my spine is good, my health's very good. And this is what I'm looking at now. I'm not thinking like how big is my bicep. I'm looking what's my blood pressure. Is my heart right. Yes. It's my cholesterol. You know, what's my flexibility. Number two. How's my cardio. Those are really more important not to say that weight training isn't important, of course it is. As you get older you want to maintain muscle mass. But as I've done weight training all my life it's not as important for me. The other things are more important. So I do a very little bit of weight training because I'm limited by the shoulder injury. Shoulder is very weak I can barely do it like maybe 8 push ups because it's so weak just the joint is weak. And I have a tear on the tricep and a tear on the bicep so that means this whole side is weak. Anything I do is kind of imbalanced. And then that's bringing to this side. It's nothing like. You know what I'm trying to do here maintain some kind of image of myself in the past. To keep me my ego or other people happy like. These people that say oh you're skinny now. Whatever. I do what's best for me. And what's best for me now is. Doing everything. For my health. And so that I can keep continuing to live this active lifestyle as I'm getting older I want to be hiking up mountains and swimming in the sea and all these things. That's what I need now I don't need 22 inch biceps anymore. Nobody ever died from small biceps. It's about having a good quality of life. Like hey what's the point in living from 80 to 100 if you're a cripple or you're in pain. I was fairly calculated about what I did and perhaps not the healthiest thing in the world to do but I'm living a totally different lifestyle now. And I think your body can heal and adapt to pretty much anything. And. If you believe it also. Living a lifestyle now which is maybe a counterbalancing what I did before. Yeah. So a lot of little injuries and stuff that I acquired or tightness and all this stuff. I'm working them out now and improving them same thing with my general health. I'm pretty much. Now almost. Vegan. Pretty much plant based which is a lot healthier. And I can study. I get newsletters coming all the time and I've got books so I'm studying all the time now natural health*



*which I find very fascinating how diet affects your health. Yeah, so, really that's what I'm doing now. I did my own bodybuilding experiment before. Now I'm doing my own health and wellness experiment.*

The exploration of the use of anabolic steroids and the risk potential risk to health (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018; Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018) was a consideration within each of the mens' stories, while not all of the men chose to use steroids, they had all given it consideration. Of the eight participants, five of them were steroid users. Here one of the men talks about his decision to use steroids and how he came to that conclusion after assessing the risks. He felt that the risks were debatable (Nut et al., 2007; Monaghan, 2011).

*The possible risks of taking steroids or whatever. You know serious or not serious they might be we could debate that, but there may be some risks so all these things I wanted to be realistic and not like a lot of people around me that were giving up everything.*

Another participant decided against using steroids in favour of researching and exploring natural ways to achieve his goals. Reasons for deciding against use were fear and professional standards as a personal trainer and role model. This man was able to not join the crowd despite the awareness that a friend using steroids was in very good condition. This is of particular interest as Gruchy (2008) proposed greater risk and pressure to those working in the industry, however in this participants case the industry worked as a protective factor.

*Yeah, I mean it's something I did consider at one point when I was around 20 years old. A friend of mine was doing it at the time and in very good condition. However, to be honest it scared me. I think. I didn't know enough about it to kind of want to take that jump and also, I think being a personal trainer. I don't know, I felt like I shouldn't, but it was against my, like as a PT I think there's a thing like steroids have a bad name, I didn't really go down that route. So, I kind of avoided it and I thought actually proper research and some of the guys I follow like Eric Hows didn't need to use steroids to get that kind of physique.*

Opinions varied greatly within the participants' stories on the perceptions of risk involved in using steroids and the decisions about whether or not to use them.

One participant, an ex-steroid user, spoke passionately about his concerns regarding steroid use and the longer term impact of individuals' health and the knock on effect on public health (Pope et al., 2014). Clearly this subject was very emotive for this participant who also offered recommendations for how he felt health provision could be improved for steroid users.

*I mean what I do agree with is steroid use in the UK and the harm it generates, in comparison, to the health problems of tobacco and alcohol are less. When you start looking at bodybuilders using steroids for 30 years you start finding some very, very, ill and very fucked up people. Particularly what we're seeing more recently is impacts on brain chemistry and brain structure. I mean cholesterol management is what we will see I guarantee you that in about 10 to 15 maybe a little bit longer you'll start seeing a large number of steroid related health issues coming to light. Yes. The guys that have been harbouring trends for years start to mature. Dr Pope is a researcher in the states. We're also seeing dependency and addiction and severe mental health problems. Now research has shown that about 70 percent of users are full time dependent/ addicted to them. There's no way that banning steroids is ever going to solve the problem. We know that we've seen it time and time again it doesn't work. What we need to have is an education program and what we desperately need is a better mental health service in understanding and knowledge of steroid use. Because the frontline medical bias towards steroid users is ridiculous and is discouraging steroids users from engaging with medical services before it's too late, the NHS just isn't geared up for the problem that coming.*

A disturbed relationship with food was mentioned by two of the participants who disclosed stories of disordered eating and the subsequent emotional impact and cycle of binge eating. Interestingly, despite a reported rise in eating disorders (Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018), across all participants, the larger struggle with food was not understood as disordered eating, the struggle was to consume enough food to meet calorie surpluses required to gain the extra muscle and the repetitive eating of the same foods.

*Which actually gave me a pretty bad relationship with food, so this led to my satiety levels being all over the place, leading to kind of binge eating and emotional eating you know, not having a good relationship with food.*

*I've actually had situations at work where I've been offered doughnuts, said no, drove home, sneaked a couple of bars and eaten them so no one can see me, and I don't feel like I've failed. It's stupid, even hid, gone outside and eating an extra snack and then you kick yourself and feel terrible. You really kick yourself it wasn't worth it at all.*

The impact of ill health was influential in mens' stories ranging from personal ill health to the ill health of loved ones. One participant shared his experience of dialysis and a kidney transplant and how training helped him to cope with his ill health and to remain positive, it is also worth noting that he was training against medical advice. Again we might consider the benefits of exercise in relation to mental health (Crone & Guy, 2008) while being mindful of the negative effects of excessive exercise (Smith et al., 2016).

*I had a kidney transplant five years ago which has been successful. I've been ill all my life, a load of different operations.*

*Yeah I've been having operations all my life every few years and usually there would be something wrong, like a twisted tube in my kidney, last year I had a hernia but I couldn't just have a hernia I had a cyst on top of it as well, things always seem to spiral but I don't pay much attention to it I just get on with it. It doesn't, a lot of people can dwell on things but I'm the opposite.*

Other participants shared stories of loved ones' ill health and the subsequent impact on their desire to be and stay healthy. One participant told a heart wrenching story of losing his mum to cancer and another had diabetes in the family with his father losing his leg through diabetes related amputation. In both cases we might consider how those loved ones experiences became transformative to the participants and how those experiences of grief led to growth and positive outcomes (Bellet et al., 2018; Ningning et al., 2018).

*Probably obviously with my father he's diabetic, my sister is diabetic a couple of other family members are diabetic. That's why I'm a bit fitness driven and focused on my diet, health conscious as well. So, making sure that I'm looking after myself because my dad had his leg amputated and I really don't want to go down that road myself. I've seen him suffer because of obviously health issues so I just want to be as fit and healthy as I can as well within reason and not get to that kind of level.*

Mental health, anxiety and the use of supporting drugs like heroin and cocaine were mentioned by another participant as he described the implications of heavy bodybuilding on the joints and how the use of steroids can lead to anxiety and poor mental health. Pope et al. (2012) proposed a high correlation of illicit drug use with steroid use and this participant clearly articulates a process of selling your soul to the devil and the subsequent snowball process.

*They also sold their soul to the devil because what I found was. People that did that were very anxious, lots of anxiety. They generally didn't just take steroids. They'd have to take other drugs as well to mask the pain of their joints because it's not natural to be able to lift the weight that you can lift that quickly and so therefore the pain in their back and the knees and everywhere else the shoulders even the tendons, they then take things like heroin and cocaine. That's the trouble you know. But also, you know if I woke up this morning and I had a bit of a pain in my tummy or my leg was hurting, or my hip was sore I could just go well that's probably due to running yesterday but if you're on steroids you're thinking oh my god you know. Are my bones thinning now is that what's happened and then they google it and then yeah, they might have a bit of indigestion and as you said they might be thinking that their heart's finally going to pop or whatever. Yeah. So, they're so anxious about every little thing.*

Overtraining and the concept of addictive exercise was explored by one of the men who spoke about the consequences of too much exercise and overtraining (Smith et al., 2016). While acknowledging that he felt that could be addictive and unhealthy he also made it apparent that he believed that was true of any behaviour and that the underlying vulnerability or pre disposition is within the

individual (Brand, 2017; Mate, 2019) as opposed to being constructed by the sport or in this case bodybuilding.

*So yeah that could be addictive. And become unhealthy if you know. If it's interfering with the rest of your life and too much exercise it is physically destructive, it's not healthy and it's aging your cells because you're producing so many free radicals from the exercise. That you know the benefit of the increased cardiovascular strength or whatever is being outweighed by all these free radicals, it's just aging yourselves. So some extreme athletes. I mean their life expectancy is lower than a sedentary person because they are just wearing themselves out with too much, marathon runners and so on. Ill all the time because their immune system's fucked. So yeah it can be addictive and unhealthy. But. I think most things have got that potential. It depends on the individual that's doing them, their mind set. Yes you could be addicted to going to the gym but that same person could go and do something else and find that they are getting addicted to that because there is some imbalance Yeah.*

## Enjoyment and Humour

A strong theme throughout all men's stories was enjoyment and humour. All participants described enjoying the process, the release and sense of fulfilment and satisfaction training and getting on stage offered alongside the positive feelings it evoked in them. All participants also displayed sense of humour during interview which was hard to capture the essence of and to convey with words. It was clear that these men had, on the most part, found a lifestyle and way of being that worked well for them. A philosophy for life perhaps (Smith et al., 2016).

The process of embarking on bodybuilding and competition was described as an exciting journey to the stage. One participant described how his training progression evolved into competition and how enjoyable he had found the whole experience and sense of achievement. The progressive nature explained might be considered a sign of any competitive sport, Monaghan (2001) states that bodybuilders' motivations are complex and varied and that in some cases the motivation is purely about the sporting aspect and associated process. The

sporting process can present opportunities for achievement and pride (Stevenson, 2002).

*I enjoyed it and I sort of felt that I'd done all right. And then I sort of. Then sort of pointed to then wanting to progress it onto the next level so that I sort of entered natural bodybuilding competitions that were sort of like a regional type thing so sort of evolved into that really. But yeah, I just really enjoyed sort of. The lifestyle really, I enjoyed the training anyway, so it wasn't as if I found it hard to do because I was doing it anyway.*

Another of the men described wanting to do it again having enjoyed the process and watching his body change and how rewarding it had been to coach another competitor and share in their achievement. A sense of wonder and awe was conveyed, for some the bodybuilding process offers the opportunity for personal expression and creativity (Monaghan, 2001). Sharing the process with another competitor also created the opportunity for meaningful interaction, connection and experiencing the process as part of flow (Sparkes et al., 2012).

*I definitely do want to do it again. I did kind of enjoy the process afterwards, structure and seeing my body change were pretty incredible. Obviously being able to coach someone who competed with me was pretty awesome. She went on the following week to actually win which was pretty cool.*

A similar story was told by another of the men who described his moment of glory on stage which he experienced as a way of displaying his hard work and found unimaginably rewarding. Linder (2007) understood this process as a form of articulating creativity where the body acts as a canvas, this view is shared by Monaghan (2001) who spoke of the opportunity for creativity and expression.

*One of the most rewarding feelings I could imagine. Being on stage in the best shape of your life knowing that all the hard work, dedication the hours of sacrifice are well worth it. Regardless of the trophy or not, the whole experience of obviously getting to stand up, getting pumped up, looking your best. Just showing everyone the hard work. Showing your confidence on stage.*

Enjoying the training and preparing for competition were also described as a means of constructing and maintaining happiness with participants understanding the process as something that they embarked on first and foremost for themselves. Variations in the reasons for enjoyment varied from enjoying the practical applications to the aesthetically pleasing results. Again we might consider how the process has been applied as a philosophy for life (Smith et al., 2016) and the social significance that having an aesthetically pleasing body can offer (Bailey et al., 2012).

*I do it for myself more than anything, to keep myself happy. I enjoy the process. I enjoy the regimented aspects of it. I enjoy the focus and I enjoy structure, structure works well for me for me as it allows me to let go of the worry of life and if that if I know everything that's going to happen right the way down to what I'm going to do and it's an enjoyable thing for me to structure my life in such a way that I don't have to think about the variables.*

*I genuinely enjoyed lifting weights and. Being strong and looking good and everything else.*

The benefits of having a positive outlet were expressed by several of the men. One participant described bodybuilding as a hobby, another shared about the benefits to his relationship with his partner and how she never worries when he goes training. Brand (2017) spoke about the rise in people seeking ways to manage their innate experiences of being human and both participants expressed how bodybuilding offered them that.

*Bodybuilding is a hobby to me. Something that I enjoy doing.*

*Yeah, she's always never worried if I go training and has never really said anything. I don't have much of a social life anywhere, I don't go out drinking at weekends so it's kind of the only thing I do. I don't watch football that is literally all I do.*

Good memories and creating positive experiences that can be kept for life acted as a source of pleasure to one of the men who had the opportunity to document his competition prep process with close friends through taking part in a series. A

sense of shared masculinity, the capturing of the moment and connecting to flow was very apparent (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Sparkes et al., 2012).

*I was quite pleased with that and it's something I've got for life now, I've got that experience for life, so I've got the video stuff.*

The ability to help, to make a difference, to make a dent in the universe was also described by one participant who as part of the bodybuilding flow has been able to use his experience to help others. The sense of achievement was clear and demonstrated the positive use of constructing identity through lifestyle and the dedication and pride experienced in that process (Stevenson, 2002).

*I'm like, really, Wow that I've touched someone like that. It's. Like I don't think I inspire people. But. Apparently, I do. And then I'm like wow. That I've made that that positive impact on someone's life.*

Reflecting back on the process of bodybuilding with humour and gratitude was displayed by two of the participants, one explored what he could still do post bodybuilding and the other looked back with amusement at the extremity of his conviction at the time. The ability to reflect and articulate change is illustrative of a growth mind set (Brand, 2017).

*Well I don't train for bodybuilding anymore because of my injuries but I still really like training in the gym and I can train legs I don't really have any injuries there.*

*And I look back now and I find it laughable, but it was great. Laughter. I really enjoyed it though and I still enjoy training now you know*

Enjoying the pain of the process was also mentioned by one of the men who understood his bodybuilding days as a practise of self-harm and described looking for ways to increase the pain. Smith et al. (2016) proposed bodybuilding as a form of self-harm although only one participant made sense of his process with that understanding.

*I enjoyed the pain, I enjoyed enduring the pain and as a result I sought out ways to increase the pain while I was training.*



## Depression and Suicidal Thoughts

Depression featured most heavily in relation to discontinuing the use of steroids. Given the long term and prolific nature of steroid use we might consider this mans' experience as a detox process from steroid dependency (Pope et al., 2012). He spoke very openly and in detail about his process of coming off steroids and the subsequent depression which he understood as mostly due to the severe and sudden drop in testosterone levels due to stopping. He described a process of deflation and adjustment and the role that testosterone replacement has played in his recovery alongside other health related lifestyle choices. We might also consider this as part of a grieving process (Parkes, 1996).

*Coming off definitely you feel very depressed because you got a high level of male hormones which makes you feel very assertive and aggressive and confident and then you've got you know levels of a 10 year old girl. Like. Once it comes out of your system and it takes a long time to adjust. And often it doesn't. So mine after I think it was about two years it wasn't rebounding so I just went onto testosterone replacement which I've maintained. To this day actually. For most guys over 40 45 might be worth looking into anyway. It's healthier for your testosterone to be in the normal to high range. It's actually, a lot of health/age related diseases for men are due to low testosterone, even diabetes can be remedied with testosterone, if it is low when you put it normal. Diabetes would go away, arthritis many things like that so. So no I don't regret it. It's like I made a decision I calculated the risks and you know got away with it and I'm not going to be regretting. Afterwards. And I don't have any. Health. Negative health effects at this point. All my health results are very good. But I'm living a very healthy lifestyle. Great diet and the sun is, Just living in the sun makes you much more healthy.*

The role that other circumstances played in this period of depression were acknowledged and mention was given to retirement, grief and loss and relationship problems, coupled with the lack of hormones it is of no surprise this was experienced as a very difficult phase in this mans' life (Parkes, 1996; Barnard, 2019).

*I don't think I even knew what it was at first, I don't think anyone really knew. And I can say now it was. Was down to circumstances because I'd retired. This is a major stress for anybody. Somebody very close to me died. This is another major stress. My marriage was going through problems like triple whammy at the same time as I decided to have like no male hormones in my system.*

Depression as a stabilising factor was also described. What goes up must come down (Brand, 2017) and so depression was almost accepted as a by-product of that process of extreme highs and lows.

*And so it's just this huge anti-climax if you're not careful know.*

One of the men spoke about how the pressures of everyday life can take their toll and lead to feelings of depression and how position, money and power do not defend against being human and experiencing hardships (Brand, 2007).

*It doesn't matter who you are. Life is. Sometimes. Joy and sometimes hard, position money power doesn't protect you from that.*

A sense of hopelessness was conveyed by another of the men who had recently been bereaved, was suffering an injury and having to support a parent who was experiencing mental health distress. We might understand these emotions as part of a grieving process (Parkes, 1996; Brand, 2017), grief and depression often go hand in hand and despite the differing causes, present with similar symptoms. Poor social support and caring responsibilities can also impact massively on an individuals' ability to process and move through grief (Desai & Bevan, 2002) which was evident in this mans' story.

*So right now, when my shoulders fucked and my grans dead and my dad's ringing me up giving me shit then yeah, I feel like what the fuck is the point in anything.*

The positive use of bodybuilding as a means of coping with depression was expressed by another of the men who talked about how he used the focus of bodybuilding as a safeguard against depression. The positive use of exercise as a mental health intervention is well documented (Crone & Guy, 2008). Given the orientation towards action based as opposed to emotional coping strategies in

men it makes further sense (Doka & Martin, 2010). At difficult times in life the benefit of social support is essential, the bodybuilding process acts as a means for men to connect in a less emotionally challenging way, as Bailey et al. (2012) described it “uniting in masculinity”.

*Yeah originally it was a way to. Yeah. It was originally a way to sort of focus to not get depressed under shit circumstances.*

Suicidal thoughts featured as a part of one of the participants’ stories. The openness of this particular man was both inspiring and commendable. He shared a brave story of how having reached the peak of his competing career he had struggled with wanting to take his own life and how nothing mattered to him at that point. He described an intense sense of meaninglessness which he later understood as a struggle point. We might also understand these feelings and experiences as that of grief (Parkes, 1996; Brand, 2017)

*I got depression and felt like killing myself and showing myself the trophy didn't help me. Showed myself my bank account it didn't help me. It's all in the mind. It's a struggle point. So I want to get out of here because I don't want to. Face this possible change or whatever. It's too hard. Yeah. Then you get to this point where you're struggling but you get over it and you're stronger again.*

Letting go, the death of the old self and the recreation of a new self (Brand, 2007) were articulated in an emotionally engaging and heartfelt manner where this man described a process of losing himself in what he loved and later finding himself there too. Again we might understand this as part of a grieving process as Bellet et al. (2018) proposed grief can be a transformational process.

*You invest yourself into a project it becomes very all-consuming and you start to lose a little bit of yourself you start to lose a little bit of your own identity and then you've got to find yourself again because you're known for your physical presence and not for anything else and you start to relate to that and now I understand what it's like for athletes whose careers end. They've got to find value in themselves because they've spent so much of their life dedicated to what they're doing trying to find who they are again that can be a difficult process. When it came to drop the size. It took some*

*time to get my head around. And to start to accept that my size was not me. It wasn't what defined me and everything else that could change my size and I could come down in size and I wouldn't be any less of a person if I did so.*

## Discussion

### *Discussion*

In a culture where men are under more pressure than ever to be strong and to present these idealised bodies (Pope et al., 2002; Cooper, 2014) it is perhaps of no surprise that some men have found solace in the process of bodybuilding and sanctuary in the hustle of gym culture in what one might describe as a process of muscle worship. Strength, muscularity and tenacity are favoured while vulnerability, showing emotion and humanness are perceived negatively, and often as weakness (Brown, 2010). British culture plays a role in the forming of these perceptions through the promotion of the 'stiff upper lip' attitude and politics plays a clear role in the construction and maintenance through the implementation of policies that often do not allow the opportunity for grieving or for any forms of perceived weakness, it is not good for the economy. We cannot overlook the impact of how these forces play out as a backdrop (Desai & Bevan, 2002). All of the men interviewed had found positive benefits from bodybuilding, most rated their health as high and described feeling better, stronger and happier as a result of their training efforts. The enjoyable nature of the process was undisputed, which might be of some surprise given the negative association made in most of the academic literature surrounding bodybuilding (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018). Even the participant who had in retrospect come to understand his bodybuilding days as a form of practicing self-harm talked about the happiness he had encountered from the processes at the time and how the gym had served as a sanctuary.

The relationship between bodybuilding and grief was explicit in some of the mens' stories and implicit in others, Randall and Phoenix (2009) remind us that some experiences are unspeakable. The inability to articulate or report grief does not mean it is not present or has not been experienced. Grief stories were varied and ranged from the death of parents to the loss of jobs, relationships and even the

loss of self. Parental absence and the associated loss (Bowlby, 1998) featured as a precipitating factor in the relationship between bodybuilding and grief which in some of the mens' stories led to the search for substitutes or role models and meaningful ways to understand and live life. Bodybuilding clearly served to meet this need for some of these men in the provision of a philosophy for life (Monaghan, 2001).

Interestingly, and in line with predictors of anabolic steroid use (Pope et al., 2004) all four participants reporting fathers' absence were also steroid users. All of the participants described the bodybuilding process as one of distraction which we might consider as a coping mechanism, there were varying accounts of how distraction played out in each of the individual stories and clues as to what it might have been a distraction from for each of the men. While distraction was mostly positive and working in these mens' favour on the most part, the longer-term impact of its usefulness was challenged by several participants' stories. For this reason, while the data proposed bodybuilding as a form of distraction, the value judgment of negative or positive remains to be seen and is clearly open to interpretation in each individual case.

The perceived need or yearning for self-development was evident in all of the mens' stories beginning in young adulthood. All participants reported starting to train with a bodybuilding focus between the ages of 17 and 21. Typically competing started slightly later, in some cases not until age 25. This may account for the proposition that bodybuilding be considered as part of a quest for masculinity. While Smith et al. (2016) describe this as a struggle, other perhaps more positive viewpoints offer the possibility of constructing and developing identities (Stevenson, 2002), uniting in shared masculinity (Bailey & Gillet, 2012) and embodying a way of life that is meaningful (Sparkes et al., 2012). Given that parental absence featured as a precipitating factor this search or yearning makes sense (Mate, 2019).

Routes into bodybuilding differed greatly, ranging from reports of internal processes of being drawn to bodybuilding, to accounts of external motivators such as getting involved through friends and by invitation. Two participants also spoke of what we might consider anti-social behaviour. While both described how control,

discipline and structure were positive forces in their lives, one participant describes bringing those qualities to bodybuilding and the other describes learning them from bodybuilding. Interestingly, both participants were steroid users and met criteria for both predictors of anabolic steroid use, conduct disorder and a poor relationship with father (Pope et al., 2014). What begins to become apparent throughout the data is the complexity of each mans' individual story and even those arriving at the same destination, having taken the same route, will have a different personal understanding of that journey.

Autonomy and work ethic fed into each of the mens' stories. A sense of independence, the right to self-govern and to be free of control. This was expressed in various ways ranging from of a sense of being in control and strong self-reliance to the acknowledgment of not being someone who takes direction well. Again, if we consider this in light of parental absence as a precipitating factor, we might consider autonomy as an adaptive quality, self-reliance becomes salvation. Accounts illustrate the proposition that bodybuilding be considered an expression of a need for power (Smith et al., 2016). That said, we might also interpret demonstrations of autonomy as a reflection of ownership and self-responsibility which are essential components of personal growth (Brand, 2017).

Given that bodybuilding requires dedication, commitment and hard work (Monaghan, 2001) it may be of no surprise that work ethic featured strongly. Most participants portrayed a strong work ethic positively within their stories with only one participant describing the dark side of how he felt pressured by community expectations and now understands his experience as one of self-harm. Interestingly, he was the only participant to make reference to self-harm and community pressure despite the amount of literature pointing towards that conceptualisation (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018).

The need to take control of the mind and to construct a conducive mind set in bodybuilding in order to achieve goals and remain focused was apparent in all participants' stories. While we might consider the merits of this ability to generate a mind over matter approach, it is a double-edged sword. Given the rise in mental health concerns in recent years (Brand, 2017) this process of taking control of the mind might be understood as a positive means of managing mental health. By

contrast, mind over matter also points towards mind over body which can create a disconnection from the body and the ability to disconnect from emotions and bodily sensations (Mate, 2019). When we disconnect from our emotions and our bodies we compromise our immune system and leave ourselves open to illness and injury (Van Der Kolk, 2014; Mate, 2019). Several of the mens' stories described the need to be bloody minded, to develop tunnel vision and develop a grit like process of determination. Participants reported risky behaviours such as training against medical advice in spite of ill health and the use of steroids (Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). Given these factors we must consider the risk to physical health and wellbeing against the benefits to mental health in such processes. This would also be reflective of the mental health crisis (Brand, 2017) and highlights how poor mental health left untreated can impact negatively on physical health in exercise populations.

The need to improve, to be successful and the role of ego was a strong thread throughout the mens' stories. The yearning to learn and grow was clear and the data points towards bodybuilding facilitating opportunities to do that. This sense of wanting to improve and aspiring to do more and to be more echoed throughout other areas of the participants lives including professional and business lives where learning opportunities to deepen knowledge and expand skills bases were sought out. These stories of personal growth, a sense of achievement and developing identifies fits with the proposals of Stevenson (2002) and Sparkes et al. (2012). That said, while these personal attributes clearly work positively in a bodybuilding process, they are certainly not exclusive to bodybuilding. We might consider the desire to grow as a human need (Brand, 2017) and bodybuilding as a means of actualising that need. The bodybuilding can come and go, but the desire to learn, to grow, to feel good about who you are and what you are achieving, is transferable.

The men spoke about the increase in confidence and mood when they began to build and improve their bodies. While low self-esteem has not explicitly been mentioned by participants, an increase in confidence would suggest that may have been present and there is clear indication of an improvement in body image in line with the proposals of Smith et al. (2016) and Gruchy (2018). The need to compete, to be number one, might be understood as a reflection of ego. For this reason,

considering bodybuilding as an antidote to low self-esteem, the struggle for male identity and the need for power (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy 2018) is understandable. We might also consider here the impact of parental absence as a precipitating factor and how that might impact on an individual's sense of self. Participants expressed varying attitudes towards ego, some of the men appeared fairly accepting while others showed a sense of dislike for the selfish nature involved in bodybuilding.

The impact of psychosocial influences in these mens' stories played out primarily in two ways. The first thread highlighted what we might consider to be a lack of belief in any form of religion and presented on the most part as a high prevalence of agnosticism. This is of interest given the open acknowledgment of cultural changes in recent times resulting in society and communities no longer holding the same values (Brand, 2017), we might consider religion as a value system. Smith et al. (2016) noted that bodybuilders display religious conviction to their training and regimes almost like a philosophy for life. That in mind, and given the data, we might consider bodybuilding as a form of, or a substitute for, religion in these mens' eyes. Only one participant spoke openly in his story about his beliefs and described a process of exploring religion and finding it unhelpful. The second thread, media and the fitness industry, was much larger in scope and very influential in the mens' stories. Gaining inspiration from media in various forms such as magazines, books, videos and shows helped to shape participants ideas and goals. Given the role media played in the history and social construction of bodybuilding (Kobre, 2019) this is unsurprising. Men mostly perceived media influence as positive, with motivations ranging from seeking role models and the struggle for masculinity (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018), to simply looking for a focus for their training. This was of interest given that in most academic work the role and impact of media is viewed and portrayed negatively (Cooper, 2004). The men spoke of many examples of the positive impact of media in terms of offering opportunities to learn, to network and to connect with likeminded people. Given the mystical nature of bodybuilding described by Monaghan (2012) as both intriguing and fascinating, the mens' stories suggested that media went some way towards shedding some light on those processes. The use of social media having a negative impact was mentioned on one occasion and by one participant. This



would lead us to challenge the propositions of Gruchy (2018) and the suggestion that the media feeds negative processes of body comparison and dissatisfaction in men. While it raises a valid point, the data highlights the need to be mindful that the vulnerability to such stressors lies within the individual and cannot be fully attributed to the media.

The fitness industry was perhaps the most prevalent back drop within the mens' stories. The role played and the impact differed but the overarching sense was of two things. Firstly, how old school bodybuilding has been watered down and commercialised and secondly the role the industry plays in creating poor body image and the consequential impact of that on mental health and the growing use of steroids (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018; Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018). Working within the fitness industry revealed itself within the mens' stories. If we are to perceive bodybuilding at the height of the idealised body (Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018) we might also consider it at the height of the fitness industry and so this correlation may come as no surprise. Gruchy (2018) proposed that men working within the fitness industry are at the greatest risk of body dissatisfaction and therefore are at a higher risk of using steroids which could lead to the assumption that the influence of the fitness industry is a negative one. The data has challenged this proposition as working within the fitness industry actually acted as a protective factor for some of the men in their process of considering the use of steroids.

Health consciousness and a desire for wellbeing amongst the men was clear. Several of the men reported training as a positive contributor to their physical and mental wellbeing with the biggest shifts being reported in the early days of training. Many of the men felt that training was a positive outlet for them and found the process both enjoyable and rewarding. The benefits of exercise and the correlation between physical and mental health is fairly well established (Crone & Guy, 2008). Longevity of health was of real concern to several of the men who openly acknowledged the temporary nature of bodybuilding, competing and the extremes of being on stage. On the most part the participants seemed very aware of the risks of excessive exercise, the damage it can cause, and the risk of negative outcomes (Smith et al., 2016). Healing processes were considered in attempts to counterbalance these extremities. The use of anabolic steroids and the

potential risk to health (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018; Gruchy, 2018; Korevaar, 2018) was a consideration within each of the men's stories, while not all of the men chose to use steroids, they had all given it consideration. Several of the men decided that the risks were debatable (Nut et al., 2007; Monaghan, 2011). The men's views on steroid use varied greatly within their stories and so did their perceptions of the risk involved. The impact of steroid use on mental health, anxiety and the use of supporting drugs like heroin and cocaine were mentioned. Pope et al. (2012) proposed a high correlation of illicit drug use with steroid use and the data backed this up. Interestingly, despite a reported rise in eating disorders (Bonoto Vieira Da Cunha et al., 2018), across all participants, the larger struggle with food was not understood as disordered eating, the struggle was to consume enough food to meet calorie surpluses required to gain the extra muscle and the repetitive eating of the same foods. While ill health was influential in some men's stories, ranging from personal ill health to the ill health of loved ones, those experiences and losses became transformative to the participants and led to growth and positive outcomes (Bellet et al., 2018; Ningning et al., 2018). The concept of addictive exercise and overtraining (Smith et al., 2016) was explored in relation to bodybuilding and health and several of the men acknowledged that they felt that could be true of any behaviour and that the underlying vulnerability or pre disposition is within the individual (Brand, 2017; Mate, 2019) as opposed to being constructed by the sport or in this case bodybuilding.

Enjoyment and humour was a clear component in the men's motivations and feelings of fulfilment and satisfaction were generated through the bodybuilding process. A sense of humour and ability to laugh at oneself was also present throughout the interview process which speaks volumes, these men clearly enjoyed the opportunity to share their stories with me. The process of embarking on bodybuilding and competition was described as an exciting journey to the stage and presented opportunities for achievement and pride (Stevenson, 2002). A sense of wonder and awe was conveyed and clear enjoyment at not just sharing the process with other competitors but also reliving the experience through the process of sharing the story with me. We might consider these meaningful interactions, connections and experiences of being a part of the flow of life

(Sparkes et al., 2012). Good memories and creating positive experiences that can be kept for life acted as a source of pleasure to many of the men. The shared sense of masculinity, capturing the moment and connecting to flow was very apparent (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Sparkes et al., 2012) as these men shared their stories. The ability to help, to make a difference, to make a dent in the universe all added to this sense of achievement and pride (Stevenson, 2002) experienced as a by-product of the bodybuilding process. The men displayed the ability to reflect back on their experiences with humour and gratitude during interview which we might understand as facets of a growth mind set (Brand, 2017).

Enjoying pain was mentioned by one of the men who came to understand his bodybuilding days through the lens of self-harm. While Smith et al. (2016) proposed bodybuilding as a form of self-harm and that may be true for some, most of the data has pointed away from this proposition. Depression after discontinuing bodybuilding and the use of steroids has been reported and we might consider the work of Pope et al. (2012) who proposed understandings of steroid dependency. Severe feelings of depression and a sudden drop in testosterone led to a physical and emotional process of deflation and the need for adjustment. After some time of suffering, testosterone replacement and other health related choices began to facilitate recovery. We might also consider this as part of a grieving process (Parkes, 1996). Retirement, the loss of someone close and relationship problems all fed into an understandably difficult time (Parkes, 1996; Barnard, 2019). Given the extreme highs and lows involved in bodybuilding, perhaps associated depression makes sense, what goes up must come down (Brand, 2017). There was further expression of how bodybuilding is no defence against being human and experiencing hardships and that position, money and power can't save you (Brand, 2017).

A sense of hopelessness was conveyed by another of the men who had recently been bereaved, was suffering an injury and having to support a parent who was experiencing mental health distress. We might understand these emotions as part of a grieving process (Parkes, 1996; Brand, 2017), grief and depression often go hand in hand and despite the differing causes, present with similar symptoms. Poor social support and caring responsibilities can also impact massively on an individuals' ability to process and move through grief (Desai & Bevan, 2002) which

was evident in this mans' story. On the flip side, the positive use of bodybuilding as a means of coping with depression was also expressed. Given the orientation towards action based as opposed to emotional coping strategies in men, this makes sense (Doka & Martin, 2010). At difficult times in life the benefit of social support is essential, the bodybuilding process acts as a means for men to connect in a less emotionally challenging way, as Bailey & Gillet (2012) described it "to unite in masculinity". At the peak of depression suicidal thoughts featured as a part of one of the participants' stories. An intense struggle and a sense of meaninglessness were described which he later came to understand as a struggle point. We might also understand these feelings and experiences as that of grief (Parkes, 1996; Brand, 2017). Finally, letting go, the death of the old self and the recreation of a new self (Brand, 2007) were articulated in a manner described as a process of losing himself in what he loved and later finding himself there too. We might also understand this as part of a transformational grieving process (Bellet et al., 2018).

It would appear that we have come full circle in the discussion. While this was not a conscious intention, it might in fact be representative of the topics under discussion. The consideration of the data started out by exploring the relationship between bodybuilding and grief and we have travelled a journey of mixed terrain as we have visited the various motivational processes involved in bodybuilding in order to assist our understandings. The concluding point of the discussion terminates at the same place through the process of looking at depression, suicidal thoughts and grief in relation to bodybuilding. What this offers is an understanding of bodybuilding as a process of distraction: it will take you around in an enjoyable circle, but bring you back to your starting point. Not exactly of course, due to the passage of time and how we as humans adapt with experiences. If bodybuilding picks you up and distracts you from feelings of grief and depression and you do not deal with the mental and emotional aspects involved, when you can no longer take part in the bodybuilding process, it will drop you back off to those same mental and emotional experiences as illustrated. In summary, the present work has begun to explore the relationship between grief and bodybuilding and to develop some fresher, more contemporary

understandings of how we might better understand bodybuilders and the motivational processes involved.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of interviews as a method lie within the participants' ability or willingness to recall and relay information in a useful manner (Randall & phoenix, 2009). Depending on the size of the project, interviews can be logistically challenging, labour intensive and time consuming in terms of transcribing the interviews (King & Horrocks. 2010). This could however be the case with any chosen method and should not therefore be the basis alone for any choice of method (Seidman, 1998). Low (2007) adds that a weakness of interviews is that what people say they do, or report that they do, is not necessarily what they do. This point is furthered by Randall & Phoenix (2009) who openly acknowledge how implicit processes such as the complexity of memory and the passage of time might disrupt the storytelling process and the role that social constraints and language can play in the interview process. The functions of the brain called upon in the recollection of memories can be hindered in instances of trauma which can lead to an inability to articulate experiences (Van Der Kolk, 2014). Some experiences are simply unspeakable (Randall & Phoenix, 2009). Studies show that the brains response to grief is similar to that of trauma, impacting the same functions (Archer, 1999). As a limitation of this project, which explores potential links between grief and bodybuilding using the interview method, the use of art could offer an expansion route for further research in this area. Given the tendency towards the use of words in qualitative sport and exercise sciences, and the call towards embracing sensorial experiences to explore more complex research questions, the use of art may lead us closer to what we might consider truth in such circumstances (Phoenix, 2011).

The potential for the researcher to influence the research holds the possibility of a further limitation. It is arguable that it is impossible to avoid the influence of the researcher and so in order to address this limitation self-awareness, placing the emphasis on making a positive contribution as opposed to a negative one, for example creating a safe space versus the participant not feeling safe or able to openly reflect on experiences and transparency have been employed (King &

Horrocks, 2010; Randall & Phoenix, 2009). The suitability of character and the skills base of the researcher were also considered given that the interview process involved meeting and sharing space with strangers. A level of confidence and ability to hold the 'interview process' was required (Seidman, 1998).

Finally, ethical and moral considerations were considered during method selection in order to adopt the best methods to address the research aims and basic questions such as who does the research benefit and to what end were considered (Seidman, 1998).

### *Reflexivity*

There was the possibility at the start of this study that there would be no relationship between bodybuilding and grief and that my own lens had influenced what I had observed. I have worked hard throughout the research process to engage in reflective practice through the use of a research journal and regular supervision sessions. These processes have enabled me to keep an open mind and to remain subjective and alert to my own bias, suspending my own propositions in favour of evidence and being open to the data that challenged my view (Crotty, 2003). Given the researchers' role as instrumental within qualitative research, and the need to be reflexive, it is perhaps worth keeping a researchers' journal or diary to assist this process (King & Horrocks, 2010).

While the need to differentiate between generalizability in quantitative and qualitative research has mostly been accepted, historically there has been no universally accepted criteria in order to judge generalizability in qualitative research (Gibson, 2016). New proposals have however offered some sound practical alternatives to the conventional applications applied in quantitative research (Sparkes & Smith 2014). We might generalize by asking if we could expect to see similar findings in a similar sample group enabling us to make transferable inferences and therefore propose generalizability as a strength (Smith, 2018). Arguments against this view highlight that qualitative research is layered and context specific therefore the idea of repeatability is inappropriate (Burke, 2016). Despite qualitative research sometimes being viewed as less

valuable and even lacking evidence, Smith (2018) highlights that qualitative research is no less valuable than quantitative research, it is in fact valuable in a different way. He goes on to argue that research is still incredibly valuable even if it's isn't generalizable in terms of conventional metrics for generalization. There are many ways of understanding generalizability and it should not be sought for the sake of seeking it (Smith, 2018). Not everything is comparable and in our attempts to simplify and legitimise we run the risk of limiting our understandings (Burau, 2007). This point is furthered by Seidman (1998) who considers that good qualitative work runs at such a depth that the aim of generalizability is replaced by the need to understand an individual's experience and that while that may not lead to the ability to predict or control, by contrast it offers the opportunity to be moved by humility and understanding. Naturalistic generalizability has been employed for the purposes of this study with the aim of providing enough richness and depth of data that the readers themselves can reflect and make their own naturalistic generalizations to their own experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2015).

On this basis, while I make no claims to conventional generalizability, I would invite the reader to consider naturalistic generalizability on the basis that I have provided sufficient rich detail that a reader can assess the extent to which conclusions drawn in one setting might be transferred to another (King & Horrocks, 2010).

## Conclusion

The aims of this study were to explore the potential relationship between bodybuilding and grief and to better understand bodybuilders lived experiences and perceptions using a qualitative approach. There has been a clear need for research of this kind with large gaps in understanding apparent in both grief and bodybuilding literature. With more and more emphasis being placed on the importance of how personal an experience grief is, and how attempting to fit that into theories, neat stages or processes can be counterproductive, Kilcrease (2008) argues that it is time outdated theories of grief were abandoned in favour of treating each persons' experience of grief as the very personal experience it is,

and in doing so highlights the need for more research and new, fresh and more contemporary understandings of grief and its' management. Likewise, it is widely acknowledged that there are massive gaps in both bodybuilding research and in the use of anabolic steroids (Cooper, 2014; Korevaar, 2018; Richardson et al., 2019). Given the recent rise in the use of steroids in young men and the subsequent public health concerns there have been calls for further research and for multi-disciplinary approaches and understandings in order to assist in providing greater insights into the issues at hand alongside better understandings of the motivations and drivers, both explicit and implicit, that influence risk taking behaviour (Pope et al., 2012; Cough et al., 2016).

While the current work is the first to propose and explore the relationship between grief and bodybuilding or even grief and exercise, research in related areas has offered clues and insights. In recent years, in line with the rise in the acknowledgment of the impact of mental health on physical health and vice versa, there has been a shift towards more holistic forms of treatment and wellbeing interventions, including the use of exercise. It is now well evidenced that there is a positive correlation between exercise and mental health (Crone & Guy, 2008) despite this, it can still be argued that excessive exercise can become problematic (Smith et al., 2016). Given that depression and anxiety are common mental health problems that often coexist alongside grief, one might argue that you could view grief through a similar lens (Parkes, 1996). Despite these recent shifts, further research is still needed in these areas (Crone & Guy, 2008).

### *Implications for Practice and Future Research*

The current work aimed to explore a new theory of understanding bodybuilding as a means of transforming grief and to expand our current understandings of male bodybuilders' motivations. The men interviewed on the most part were able to articulate experiences of grief, precipitating factors and the use of bodybuilding as a coping mechanism through the process of bodybuilding acting as a distraction. On the basis of that data we might consider bodybuilding as a stand-alone measure a positive means of transforming grief on a short term basis. As a longer term coping mechanism this may be problematic and lead to an increased likelihood of risk taking behaviour if underlying emotional and mental needs are



not provided for and addressed alongside the bodybuilding process. This may account for why some view bodybuilding as a form of addiction (Monaghan, 2001) given that it is now quite widely accepted that addiction of any form develops from a centre of emotional distress (Brand, 2017; Mate, 2019). From a long term perspective, in order to reduce the likelihood of risk taking behaviour in bodybuilders with experiences of grief, policy makers and health care professionals might consider the provision of routine mental health interventions such as counselling as a preventative measure. The relationship between grief and steroid use is yet to be explored and future research in the area is needed.

The current work also sought to explore understandings of bodybuilders' motivations and perceptions of lived experiences. These were very individual and personal and while themes developed, each of the men had a unique way of exploring, understanding and articulating their experiences. What was unanimous was the sense of enjoyment derived from the process and how bodybuilding offered these men a philosophy for life which on the whole increased their mental and physical wellbeing through the process of training.

The experience of embarking on bodybuilding and competition was described as an exciting journey to the stage and presented opportunities for achievement and pride (Stevenson, 2002). A sense of wonder and awe was conveyed and clear enjoyment at not just sharing the process with other competitors but also reliving the experience through the process of sharing the story with me. We might consider these meaningful interactions, connections and experiences of being a part of the flow of life (Sparkes et al., 2012). Good memories and creating positive experiences that can be kept for life acted as a source of pleasure to many of the men. The shared sense of masculinity, capturing the moment and connecting to flow was very apparent (Bailey & Gillet, 2012; Sparkes et al., 2012) as these men shared their stories. The ability to help, to make a difference, to make a dent in the universe all added to this sense of achievement and pride (Stevenson, 2002) experienced as a by-product of the bodybuilding process. I highlight these points again as they are very relevant in terms of conceptualising new understandings of bodybuilders and bodybuilders motivations. While current academic literature is limited, much of what is available to date focuses on negative aspects from a psychological perspective such as relating bodybuilding to low self-esteem, the

struggle of male identity, the need for power and the proposals that bodybuilding might be considered through a lens of self-harm, addiction or muscle dysmorphia (Smith et al., 2016; Gruchy, 2018). I would propose that in order to better understand these men, instead of focusing on what bodybuilders might be lacking, we instead focus on what the bodybuilding process is offering.

From the data collected in this study the benefits are clear and vast. Mate (2019) reminds us that it is impossible to fully understand a behaviour without asking what relief is to be found, or hopes to be found, from the behaviour. It is clear that while some of the data backed up negative views of bodybuilding, what we might consider the dark side of bodybuilding, was given minimal attention by participants and not mentioned at all by the majority.

On the most part academic views of bodybuilders and their motivations are outdated. Contradictory findings also played out in relation to the impact of media which again has been portrayed negatively academically with participants on the most part sharing positive experiences of media influence. Monaghan (2001; 2012) spoke of the social stigma attached to bodybuilding with many bodybuilders having their rationality questioned due to the extreme nature and sacrifice involved in the bodybuilding process. Looking at the data this project has generated may begin to shine a new light on these processes which appear far less irrational when you look closer and fully absorb the benefits that these men are experiencing. What might have been considered irrational now appears to be more of a trade-off of personal choices and self-expression.

Perhaps it is time to discard of our outdated stereotypical views of bodybuilders as irrational, scary, meatheads, superficial and lacking in personality (Monaghan, 2001). The data from this study backs up a far more contemporary picture. There has been a slight shift recently with bodybuilders being presented in a more favourable light as intelligent, sensitive, diligent and hardworking men. The results from this study can now add to that fresher understanding through a process of breaking down negative stereotypes and presenting a more accurate and less demonised view of bodybuilders.

It is hoped that in time academics and healthcare professionals will begin to take a less fearful and judgmental view of bodybuilders and particularly of those using

steroids and approach requests for help with less terror and more compassion. More research is needed to better understand how steroid users can be effectively engaged in support services and how healthcare interventions can be tailored to meet their personal needs.

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## Appendix A

Dear Emma,

Thank you for your application to the School of Natural & Social Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel (NSS-SREP).

Following institutional ethical review, I am pleased to confirm ethical clearance.

Please keep a record of this letter as a confirmation of ethical approval for your study (detailed below), reviewed by the Ethics Review Panel of the School of Natural & Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

Project Title:	The Role of Bodybuilding in the Transformation of Grief
Start Date:	August 2018
Projected Completion Date:	June 2019
NSS-REP Clearance code:	NSS_FOSTER_180809

If you have any questions about ethical clearance please feel free to contact me. Please use your REP clearance code in any future correspondence regarding this study.

Kind Regards

**Dr Charlie Parker**

**School of Natural and Social Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel Lead**

University of Gloucestershire

## Appendix B



### PROJECT APPROVAL Reviewer Form

To complete this form you should have received:

- **Project Approval** form completed by the candidate
- **Project Approval Supervisor Pre-submission checklist** completed by the supervisor(s)

Please refer to the **Project Approval Guidance Notes** for further information. See end page for Flowchart of Project Approval Process.

#### CANDIDATE AND REVIEWER INFORMATION

<b>Candidate Student Number:</b>		0909645				
<b>Candidate's Name:</b>		Emma Foster				
<b>Supervisor Name:</b>		Rachel Sumner				
<b>School:</b>		Natural & Social Sciences				
<b>Degree:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MA/MSc	<input type="checkbox"/> MRes	<input type="checkbox"/> MPhil	<input type="checkbox"/> PhD	<input type="checkbox"/> Prof Doc	<input type="checkbox"/> Euro Doc

*(Note: Place the cursor on the box and double click.)*

<b>Reviewer Name:</b>	Malcolm MacLean
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If minor or major amendments are required, the student must respond to the feedback given in the assessment of the Project Approval form in the following sections. Your feedback should be written to provide the student with clear guidance on how to proceed.

If a reject recommendation is offered, the student will require feedback on the significant points of failure for their proposal.

#### REVIEWER EVALUATION OF PROJECT APPROVAL FORM

	Reviewer to complete		
	Yes	No	Details of action required (Provide further explanations if required)
Is the title appropriate for the project as currently conceived?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the supervisor highlighted any budgetary implications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

	Reviewer to complete		
	Yes	No	Notes
<b>Do you agree with the assessment of the supervisor in the pre-submission checklist?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Objective two is clumsily worded, but makes sense in the light of Objective 1
If <b>no</b> , please detail below against the form section the action that the student must take to address your concerns			
<b>Details of action required</b>			
<b>PROPOSED PLAN OF WORK</b>			
Aim/purpose of the research			
Research objectives			
Importance and originality of the research			
Proposed research methods			
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>			
<b>RESEARCH ETHICS</b>			
	Yes	No	
Does the proposal need to be referred to the University Research Ethics Committee?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Please ensure that your feedback to the student explicitly states that this is a requirement of approval.			
<b>STUDENT CHECKLIST</b>			
<b>STUDENT STATEMENT</b>			
<b>ADDITIONAL COMMENTS</b>			

#### RECOMMENDATION ON FIRST REVIEW

The PROJECT APPROVAL FORM should be:			Amendment deadline
	<b>Approved as is at first submission</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Resubmission	<b>Subjected to minor amendment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>Subjected to major amendment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>Rejected</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

<b>Reviewer Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b> 24/09/2018
----------------------------	----------------------------

For approve and reject recommendations please send form to PGR Lead.

For minor or major amendments, please forward to candidate (copied to supervisor(s)) for action.

<b>PGR Lead Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b> 24/09/2018
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## Appendix C

### Participant Information sheet

#### The Role of Bodybuilding in the Transformation of Grief

The study is to explore the relationship between life experiences, bodybuilding and wellbeing. I hope that the study might start to overcome some of the stigma and stereotypes associated with bodybuilding and add to existing knowledge on how bodybuilders can be better understood.

The inclusion criteria are that you must be a male of working age and self-identify as a competitive bodybuilder.

Interviews will last approximately 1 hour and are to take place at a location and time convenient to you. The interview will consist of a questionnaire and some open questions to elicit your personal experience. Interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed.

All information will be collected anonymously and stored in line with data protection guidelines. Any personal information about you as a participant and any information you share for the purposes of the project will remain confidential unless you report a risk of harm to yourself or others (for clarity the use of drugs/anabolic steroids does not constitute harm).

Please note that while the interviews will be led by you, sharing only what you are comfortable to share, sometimes emotive issues and distressing emotions can surface. I am also a trained therapeutic counsellor, so I hope this would offer any reassurance necessary. If distress is experienced, you would be, with your permission, signposted on to the relevant support.

The procedure for this study has been assessed by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Gloucestershire and has been deemed to be ethically appropriate. You have the right to withdraw yourself and your data from the study without having to provide a reason. If you would like to withdraw, please notify us within two weeks of completing the interview. The information you provide to us, including the answers to the questionnaires, is for research purposes only. As such, we cannot provide any individual feedback about your personal

contribution. We do offer, however, the opportunity for participants to receive a summary of the research findings once data collection and analysis have finished. All the information you provide us is confidential, and your data is anonymous. Your data will be held by the University of Gloucestershire in accordance with Data Protection legislation, and in line with University research policies for 10 years.

The results of the study will be included in my thesis and may also be put forward for academic publication. My thesis will be freely available on our research repository.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the project or the process and I can be contacted by email [email redacted].

Supervisors contact details:

Dr Rachel Sumner [email redacted]

Prof Diane Crone [email redacted]

This study has been reviewed and by the University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics committee. Should you have any concerns about the study, or wish to speak to a representative other than the research team, please contact Dr Emily Ryall – [email redacted]

Please sign to confirm that you have read the information above and that you agree to take part in the project:

Name.....



Signed.....

Date.....

## Appendix D

### Participant Consent Form

Participant Identification Number.....

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. Please sign below to confirm that:

- A) You are over 18, you are healthy and are not aware of any reason that you should not participate in this project.
- B) You have received, read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and that you are happy to take part in the project.
- C) That you are aware of the process for withdrawing your information and the timescale in which you can do that.
- D) You have been given the opportunity to ask any questions in relation to the process.
- E) You have been provided with a participant identification number.
- F) You have provided your email address if you wish to receive a short summary of the research once completed.

Please sign two copies, one of which you should retain with your Participant Information Sheet.

Name.....

Signed.....

Date.....

Email address.....

## Appendix E

**Me:** [00:00:06] So first question, they are deliberately open, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

**9:** [00:00:11] What would you like to know?

**Me:** [00:00:12] What do you want to tell me? It's one of those.

**9:** [00:00:16] Okay so I, so you're going to analyze it.

**Me:** [00:00:21] (laughter) so If I didn't know anything about you and somebody said tell me about yourself what would you say?

**9:** [00:00:33] Okay. So, I used to do competitive bodybuilding. I don't anymore. I own a couple of businesses related to health and fitness. I generally help people to look better and manage their health and nutrition. I have a family. Four kids. One of my daughters lives up in York with her mother. The other three kids live with me in Bristol. With their mum. And my family is dotted around the country. My parents are Worcester, sisters in Cheltenham. My brother is wherever he needs to be because he's an artist. I've owned a gym for eight years.

**Me:** [00:01:26] Do you say an artist?

**9:** [00:01:28] Yeah, he's just recently had an exhibition in Chelsea. So, he's quite a good artist.

**Me:** [00:01:37] So we've got a scientist and an artist.

**9:** [00:01:39] Apparently, an artist, so Yeah um so he's he's doing quite well. The gym has been open eight years. I've been competing since 22 so that's 13 years as a competitive bodybuilder. I used to work before I opened the gym at the town council. Did that for 5 years and then opened the gym. And. I've done bodybuilding competitions of in and out of other stuff.

**Me:** [00:02:08] So where are you in the family in terms of...

**9:** [00:02:08] Third, so 2 older sisters and then my younger brother.

**Me:** [00:02:14] Ok. Did he come and steal your glory?

**9:** [00:02:22] No, I think by the time you get to three kids you don't really care anymore do you, no one is more important.

**Me:** [00:02:28] The youngest ones tend to get a bit spoiled though don't they. So how did you start bodybuilding?

**9:** [00:02:33] So I was doing jujitsu in martial arts which I originally started doing for self-defence because I was a small kid so got bullied. So, I started doing jujitsu, so I could defend myself against bullies. And then I was good at that and I started doing competitions. I went to one competition and got absolutely handed me arose because I wasn't fit enough or strong enough to beat the guy that beat me. I was absolutely shattered. So. Yeah. So, I said to my dad can you get me to a gym, so it could be stronger and fitter. So, I joined the bodybuilders old school gym in Worcester. And then. And then just started training from that. So, I was doing that for a little while doing jujitsu and I was doing bodybuilding for. A couple years together maybe six seven years together. And then it comes the point where I wanted to compete again, so it is going to be either competing in martial arts which had been sort of the octagon MMA stuff or would have been competitive bodybuilding and the two don't really go together. So, I made a choice and went down the bodybuilding route. I had a few injuries from the fighting, so I thought give that a miss and then. Went down the bodybuilding road and. Then my first show at 22. And then I did shows intermittently for the next 15 years or so. (distracted by chocolate orange).

**Me:** [00:04:00] Was there a coach or anything that kind of, I mean did somebody suggest doing a show?

**9:** [00:04:29] So there was a guy. I was working in a nightclub. And I just decided I wanted to do a show. So., I think the reason I decided to do a show was because I was unemployed and apart from doing the door work. And um. I was between, I was having a year off university because I originally had a placement at this business placement at Lloyd's. And that fell through at the last minute. Because of. My uh my tutor wrote me a not so great reference. And then so Lloyd's phoned me and said you know we can't have you because he's wrote this. I was like well that's not really, that's not really the truth. The truth is this and. It was about having to resit an exam. So, but I was having to resit an exam. I think there's an illness or something. So, it couldn't do the last one. And they said Oh no. Because you haven't got this exam, we can't do it, so I said well in three weeks I will have it. But anyway, so my placement fell through Lloyds which would have been a marketing placement. One of the biggest banks in the world. So. That would have been potentially a different future for me. Yeah. So, I was pretty gutted about that. And then. I had a new job, so I'd given up my job to go into his placement. And I was like while what am I going to do for a year. So, I could get a job I couldn't do anything. I just got I got really depressed and just felt like I had to focus on something so that's why. I said to my girlfriend at the time, I'm going to

do this show. So at least I've got something to focus on. Yeah. Well I'm getting ready. So, I'm not going into a spiral of depression. Yeah. So that's what I did, and I started doing my first show, I was working my club and there was a guy there who was a bodybuilder who competed before. And one of the customers was a doorman. Sorry was a bodybuilder and um as I was speaking to him about it and so I've done show, so we sort of had a good chat about stuff. And anyway, so I did my first show. He gave me some pointers and some help and stuff. And um. I did that, and I thought I looked shit on my first show you know really shit probably looked like I didn't diet to be fair compared to now. So, I did that show one, I won because I was just like the biggest guy there. And. Then I thought well if I want to do another show I want to be better. So, I learned a bit more about. Nutrition and stuff. And um. Yeah. Sort of spiralled from there. So that was how I got into bodybuilding competitions. And as I went through the years I went to the British finals and stuff. But I never seemed to hit it right in the British finals with my nutrition just always seemed to get it wrong a few days before but now knowing what I do I know why that happened. But at the time I couldn't figure out what it was but.

**Me:** [00:07:29] Well it sounds like the business stuff hasn't been lost as you've managed to weave the 2 together quite successfully.

**9:** [00:07:35] Yeah. So, I was working at the town council and I had an idea that I wanted to open my own gym anyway. But I just thought you know that's an expensive thing to open a gym you need a lot of money and everything else. And I spoke to another guy who I've known for ages and he's got his own gym and he says oh no you know you can do this this and this to fund it. So, I looked into that and I was like ok I will do that then. So long story short I got the, I looked into all the funding and financing what it would cost and everything else and then I had to go through getting planning permission which took nine months and I did all this while I was working this other job. And I knew my boss knew about it because when the planning application went down the first time. Her friends on the council told her. But she carried on as if there was nothing. So, when I actually got the planning application decision overturned because it was it was completely false and shouldn't have happened. So, I appealed it and we got a judgment against the council and I won 2,000 Compo. And then I just handed my notice into my boss. And then as I like right, I've got no job now I'm actually self-employed and that was like shit. Better make this work then. Yeah. So, then we, we opened the gym did a load of work on it. I competed at the time, so I competed and then after the show about three weeks later the gym was supposed to start. Got the keys to the gym three weeks later and then that's when we started doing all the work. So yeah that was a hectic time.

**Me:** [00:09:08] It's fair to say that you're hardworking and ambitious then. Ok, so what was your experience of competing?

**9:** [00:09:15] I quite like competing as in getting on stage, I'm not a fan of the dieting and I'm not a fan of the how you feel when dieting and some people love that stuff. They love being. I don't know, feeling horrible and. You know they like all all that, my experience of dieting for the first

couple of years because I didn't really know much on nutrition. Yeah that was it was horrible. So no sooner do I do a diet and think got that bloody food to eat again.

**Me:** [00:09:43] So did you have a coach at this point?

**9:** [00:09:43] No I've never had, while I've had one coach in the time, I've been doing bodybuilding competitions. And he's a really nice guy the problem is I'm not someone who takes direction well.

**Me:** [00:09:58] One of the themes I've noticed so far is self-reliance.

**9:** [00:10:02] So some some guys, obviously I work with competitive bodybuilders. Some guys say say do this and they just want to be told what to do they go away they do it and they get the results and come back. Me I'm the worst one following orders. Even my own advice I'm the worst one for doing it. So now I know more about nutrition I'll make up reasons why I can have that chocolate bar and stuff. And justify it to me. So, I had a couple of years off competing. And. When I went back to competing after those four years off, I had an injury which really put me out. I thought put me out of competing forever. I had a disc out in my C6 C7 which I lost basically all the Muscle on my right side. So, it's still, my backs still not 100%. There's visible difference in my right and my left. Where the nerves been damaged. So, I did that just lifting in the gym. Not with bad form or incorrect form or anything it just happened. So that put me out of competing for about four years and then me and my friend, Paul was taking a hiatus from competing as well. I said shall we do a show together because we never compete against each other. And then at the same time everyone was doing DVD's and stuff like that, so I said why didn't we do a DVD of us. Our competition. So. So I phoned one of my mates who's a who's a videographer. I said Look can you do a DVD of this thing. How much will that cost. Anyway, we had a meeting and he said everyone's doing DVD's let's do a series. Let's do a six-part seven-part series. Which leads into the show at the end. Okay. So, it's good. You know it's not just you are training and stuff. It's a good. Seven hours or whatever. So that's what we did. So that was called prep. We filmed that it was it was good experience. That was six months though we had to do that. We released a new one every sort of three to four weeks or something. So that was, I mean we made seven episodes in the end. That was, that was a really good experience doing that. It was tough. But it was really well received by people in the industry we thought everyone was going to go oh that's shit that is. But we sold. A lot of copies. Enough that we could pay for the videography and everything and have a couple of hundred quid left over for ourselves. I was quite pleased with that and it's something I've got for life now, I've got that experience for life, so I've got the video stuff.

**Me:** [00:13:05] You've kind of made your mark on history, it's recorded. So, the dieting you you didn't enjoy but you did enjoy getting on stage.

**9:** [00:13:12] I like the stage stuff. Yeah. I like the stage presence. I just don't like the way I feel on a diet. The last time I dieted I knew more about nutrition. So, it was a better experience for me. It was still tough.

**Me:** [00:13:26] So, you mentioned children, an older child, what age were you when....

**9:** [00:13:31] So, Ellie is my stepchild. I was married to her mum and Ellie was not my child so. So, she I still. She's still my daughter. We still have that thing. She lives up north with her mum and that was eight years ago. I first competed when she was around, so she would have been 8 or something like that.

**Me:** [00:14:07] So probably a bit easier to manage. It was. Yeah, I mean now I've got a 2-year-old. So that would be incredibly difficult to diet with that. And Nik my partners other kids the 15 and 13 nearly. So that would have been a bit easier but Jacob's 2. So that would be. Difficult. Yeah. So. So that's part of the reason why I don't compete anymore as well.

**9:** [00:14:44] Yes. So Poppy and Ben are my step kids and Ellie's my step kid. And Jacob's my biological child.

**Me:** [00:14:53] You're a good guy (poor guy jokes) so it sounds like you probably stopped competing before Jacob was born.

**9:** [00:15:10] So basically me and Paul both did the show and then we come off the show and me and Nik had planned to have a child. It was kind of like a now or never sort of thing. Before, about a year before we had a miscarriage. And um that and that sort of spurred me to. After that happened Nick was not really wanting to have. Kids for a little while. So., I said Well okay. Because I wasn't going to compete again. And then. Because obviously Nik was pregnant and then the miscarriage. So, when that happened, I was like okay. Let's not try to have a kid for a little while. Yeah. And then I said to Paul let's do prep the series now and. So. So, we did that and then when we come off, as soon as I come off the stage, I was sort of into a rehab to get my facility back up and then we conceived Jacob six weeks later. And ironically Paul. And his misses were pregnant four weeks before that. So that's. So, Sam, Paul's child is exactly four weeks older than Jacob. Yeah. So that's that's that's weird isn't it. Yeah. So. So yes. So, I haven't dieted well Jacob has been around. And. I wouldn't want to because if. I'm not I'm not the happiest of people when I'm dieting so.

**Me:** [00:16:52] Yeah ok, so what initially. What do you think was your driver or motivation for bodybuilding or how do you understand it?

**9:** [00:17:00] Well initially I did it as a supplement to my martial arts to get stronger. As I got better at it, I was thinking I'm looking alright doing this and I thought I would like to be better, so I did it naturally. About five years. And then. I wanted to compete. And I saw it almost myself, so I don't want to be a natural bodybuilder on stage because I don't have no muscle. That's not to take anything away from natural bodybuilders. I wanted to be a big guy. So, I said to myself if I want to compete at that level. Got to do something to be able to hold that level of mass. So, it did about six months of research into steroids and associated products. So, I knew pretty much nearly everything. Before I ever touched anything. So, I knew what to look out for the potential risks and I did my first course. I. Think. When I was 21. I think. And then six weeks. And then I came off and then I did another course, I started small. Got reasonable results and um. And I thought well you know I was getting bigger and I was looking better in the gym and people said oh you should compete, I thought I'm not big enough yet to compete. And then one of the guys doing some gyms I was training at at the time, he was a competitive bodybuilder. He said you are, you are big enough to compete. And then I had that thing with my job and everything else so thought do you know what I will then, just give myself some focus. So that's why I got into it.

**Me:** [00:18:50] So it's been a way for you to focus?

**9:** [00:18:50] Yeah Originally originally it was a way to. Yeah. It was originally a way to sort of focus to not get depressed under shit circumstances. But as I went on and got better at it. There was a thing about I had to compete because I was sponsored and all that sort of stuff. I didn't really get paid I just got free stuff. So, I was doing my bodybuilding for free basically I got to go and do a guest spot somewhere and I just thought Yeah this is an alright life because I got flown out all expenses paid. After a while I thought I'm doing this for me. And then my sponsor dropped me because I hadn't competed for a year. And I wasn't actually that bothered about that. So, I was like yeah that's great. You know you don't want to be sponsored by anybody I don't have that. That tie in where I have to compete or have to do something. Because the time before I was sort of. Pushed into competing at the British and I wasn't ready I was just going through a divorce so. I wasn't ready to do any sort of shows. And then the sponsors like you've got to compete because it's you know. It's in your contract. So, then I decided to do the show when I wasn't ready, and I wasn't mentally there I didn't win the qualifier which is a sure sign it wasn't going to do anything the British. I normally do win the qualifiers. Yeah. And then I got to the British, looked absolutely shit. But part of that was I was working until 5:00 the day before here. So, I had no staff at the time. So, it wasn't a good situation. So, after that I decided I was going to take a break from competing. And. And then I started putting more into our training, getting bigger and stuff. And then I had that illness that injury and that put me out for four years. So, I missed my window really for. Doing anything good, I've done magazines and I also got a lot of. Social proof that I'm good at bodybuilding but I think it was just one of those things that wasn't meant to be, I think.

**Me:** [00:21:04] So training is very disciplined, It's hard work. The diet. Is. Hard work. Where do you think your strength came from?

**9:** [00:21:33] It's one of those situations when you're dieting. When you go to the gym you end up sort of starting to hate it. Starting to hate dieting and training because you know you've got to do it. To maintain your muscle mass. But it becomes more. Again, it's more that you have to do it. But you know you're not very strong. So, you know that the work out you can do is going to be shit so you go into a place to do something you actually love doing knowing that's going to be rubbish. Yeah that's difficult to certainly not motivate yourself to go to the gym isn't difficult but motivating yourself to actually get something productive out of it. Yeah that's tough. You know all the time I was just walking around in, especially towards the end of the last couple of weeks before the show, I was walking around in a dream world not really knowing what I was doing. Doing my cardio and then sitting down in here for 2 hours like not being able to move. Yeah because you end up just not having any energy for anything. So, and again I suppose that's now I know more about nutrition. That wouldn't happen now because although it would still be tough to train, I would time my food, so I had a certain amount of food around mw workout and stuff like that. I'm I'm a bit better at fasting now and I can fast for longer and if I need to. I think it be interesting now if I did a show what would be the result of it.

**9:** [00:23:07] I'm not going to compete again.

**Me:** [00:23:08] So is that absolute?

**9:** [00:23:11] Yeah because I'm not, I'm not competitive now the way that, my body isn't competitive. If you look at guys now who I'd be up against the quality that is there now is so so high the standard is so high and because I haven't been. I'm 38 now, those sorts of guys who have been sort of competing for years and years and years. They've got a certain quality of muscle and although I've got that level of definition I'm just not as big anymore. I haven't been pushing it in terms of food and you know gear and stuff like that. I'm really not competitive. Well if I wanted to compete again, I'd have to spend a good 18 months solidly just focusing on bodybuilding just to get back that size that I sort of lost. But I'm still amazingly good shape and still big and look ok I'm not what I used to be. And. I just wouldn't be competitive, I'd be a horse than ran on stage if I got up there now because I haven't been on it. We've got to be always on it to be successful and so put in a year and a half, 18 months to just do bodybuilding. Well I work for myself and I have. Clients I have to deal with. You know I couldn't just ditch all those.

**Me:** [00:24:30] Yeah, the other thing I'm noticing about what you've said is that your initial thing was business. Yeah. Bodybuilding was kind of yours, sounds like it was kind of your plan b.

**9:** [00:24:39] Like a hobby or a lifestyle.

**Me:** [00:24:40] And you've come back to what your intimal thing was which was business.



**9:** [00:24:44] Yeah. So, my focus was, I always wanted to make money. And. That's been my main focus. Sort of provide for my family and not have to struggle for things. So that's always been my main focus. That's probably from my dad because my dad was always very hard worker and would always be doing a lot of things. And sometimes it wouldn't see my dad for at two weeks because he's be off on a camp or something. He used to do army camps, he'd do all the catering for the camps. So, he'd go away for two weeks doing these.

**Me:** [00:25:14] Are you parents still together?

**9:** [00:25:14] Yeah, they've been together 45 years or something like that.

**Me:** [00:25:22] Yeah. So, have mine!

**9:** [00:25:24] My dad used to go for like maybe a week to two weeks doing these camps and everything else and then he would come back in the early hours of the morning or whatever and I'd see him for a little while then he'd go off again and that would always be in the summer and then we go off on a massive holiday because. When he was off doing these camps he used to run the the black market food for them so that when you're in the army and you don't know what's it's like now but then you're in these camps you weren't allowed to leave, so you're in this camp and the sergeants and everything would collect money from the privates, they'd all pool it together with a shopping list. Give it to my dad and he'd go off and get it and come back and he'd take a percentage of that and he would just come back with wads of money in his pocket because the percentage he'd make because there'd be like ten thousand people at these, at these camps which he was doing the catering for the whole lot of them. And he would just come back which with wads of cash and that would pay for a foreign holiday.

**Me:** [00:26:15] So that's probably where your business brain came from then.

**9:** [00:26:17] Maybe.

**Me:** [00:26:18] It sound like he was your inspiration.

**9:** [00:26:19] Yeah yeah, I do. I do discuss a lot of business stuff with my dad now if I'm stuck on something or I want to bounce an idea I do speak to him about it. So. Yeah, I do get a lot of that from him but, yet my main focus is making money and a lot of bodybuilders are just like they just love bodybuilding and they just don't care if they make money or not. But then you know they know all those guys will just end up with no money because all they are doing is competing.

**Me:** [00:26:47] I guess if you're someone who's going to be really good at it.

**9:** [00:26:47] Yeah, I mean if you're someone like, Dorian Yates is not the best example because he's not the best financially but someone like Sean Ray who really had a business in mind. I always remember a story I was told, when he was at CNP and then when Kerry decided that he wasn't going to be involved in the brand anymore and took away his credit card and. Just got rid of him I remember the story they told us was that the day that Kerry did that he went out and bought Bentley because the money he saved from not funding Dorian's habits. I don't think you should probably print that.

**9:** [00:27:48] He likes white power and he's not a very good businessman.

**Me:** [00:27:52] I spotted that within minutes the runny nose gave it away.

**9:** [00:27:56] He's sort of a bit of a hero of mine because his commitment to bodybuilding, but I've met him twice and every time I saw him, so for the first time I thought he's probably tired or something. So, the second time I met him, and I said the same thing to him both times I met him, I said you know you really inspired me to get into bodybuilding and your work ethic and everything and he didn't give a fuck. Literally did not give a fuck. And. Conversely, when I spoke to Flex Wheeler. And I said and ah Flex I've read your book and your physique was always an inspiration to me. Yeah. And he was like Oh man that's awesome you know I'm so glad I inspired you and I spoke to Kevin Lavone at Body Power one time and said your posing scene from Mr. Olympia, I really enjoyed that, and he talked to me for about 20 minutes. And Dorian was like what you do now. I said I own a gym and he said I can sell you some stuff. No thanks Mate. Yeah. I'll see you later. Just. Literally just. Not destroyed my idea of him but thought you know what, if someone said to me, you're an inspiration and a few people have said oh yeah watched your story and prep etc. and it's inspiring.

**9:** [00:29:21] I'm like, really, Wow that I've touched someone like that. It's. Like I don't think I inspire people. But. Apparently, I do. And then I'm like wow. That I've made that that positive impact on someone's life.

**Me:** [00:29:34] And not just on the people that you directly come into contact with either but the people they come into contact with.

**9:** [00:29:36] Yeah, we've been told that a few times about prep that people really get really good inspiration from it which is just crazy we never intended to be like that.

**Me:** [00:29:59] Did you make that with James?

**9:** [00:29:59] James Grealish shot it.

**Me:** [00:29:59] I've seen his other films, Under Construction. That was grueling. Parts of it.

**9:** [00:30:00] Yeah Yeah. I haven't watched them, he's done one with Anth Bailes as well hasn't he. That's Why, I think. They. Thing. Yeah.

**Me:** [00:30:10] Ugly is the best way I can describe it, I mean don't get me wrong. It was really graphic. But there were some parts of it that were just ugly, and I've seen some heavy films in my time. I needed half an hour with Orpah to level out after I watched It. It was dark.

**9:** [00:30:28] I haven't watched it so yeah, I don't know what it was like.

**Me:** [00:30:50] So, what got you through?

**9:** [00:30:50] I've Sort of got, I'm very much a dog with a with a bone. Sometimes if I if I set my mind to doing something. Then I'll make sure I see that through to fruition. So, if I if I said I'm going to be on stage at a certain time I will make sure I'm on stage at a certain time.

**Me:** [00:31:07] Interrupted by phone call. recording stops. So, would you say that you're fairly stubborn and a bit bloody minded, maybe mental strength?

**9:** [00:31:07] Yeah, it is that for sure, pretty much, it becomes like a one-sided thing so everything as to be like on that, like you become blinkered which is sort of a good thing but sort of not I've you've got a family. That's partly why I will no longer compete, you have to be selfish and I wouldn't want to be like that.

**Me:** [00:31:07] Ok, so any idea where that drive comes from?

**9:** [00:31:07] Maybe my dad because he used to be the same with his business, very driven.

**Me:** [00:31:07] So it might be like a learned behaviour?

**9:** [00:31:07] Possibly.

**Me:** [00:31:07] And we've established why you no longer compete, business and family commitments. It sounds like at times bodybuilding has been a positive distraction, you mentioned the miscarriage and the period of unemployment.

**9:** [00:31:07] Yeah, absolutely because you have to be single minded. It gives you something else to focus on.

**Me:** [00:31:07] Ok, so I think that's covered everything, we're done.

**9:** [00:31:07] Oh Ok. (Sigh of utter relief).

## Appendix F

**Me:** [00:00:02] So we're all on I, can just ask you to start by telling me a little bit about yourself.

**7:** [00:00:11] So I've been training properly in the gym for about four years now, taking it seriously probably about 3 years regarding going into bodybuilding. Started off just the average gym goer then went to BodyPower Expo in 2016 and that's what sort of got my motivation to wanting to step on stage I went straight into a competition prep, a 15 week competition prep and then competed twice in September 2016 and then had a 3 month off season and then competed again in 2017 and that was the last time I competed.

**Me:** [00:01:02] Cool. Okay So just, we will back some of that stuff that you've just picked up on there so just a little about you as a person outside of bodybuilding, if you met a stranger and they said I mean you'd probably say that you do bodybuilding cos it's a big part of your life but if you met a stranger what would you be telling them about yourself?

**7:** [00:01:22] I am a personal trainer, I enjoy socializing with friends. Obviously when I'm in my off season. I enjoy alcohol. I enjoy food, I play football as well on the odd occasion. Yeah.

**Me:** [00:01:40] Ok, cool, so you said you're single at the moment, do you live alone, or do you share with someone?

**7:** [00:01:49] So, I'm currently living with my mum, I'm looking to move out within the next month or so. Obviously just waiting for the right time, waiting for the right place to pop up around my local area.

**Me:** [00:02:01] So okay so just, and I appreciate this probably seems a bit kind of fake because you know that I know the answers to some of these questions, but I just need them for the purposes of the interview. So, you mentioned that you just live with your mum, so your mum and dad are not together anymore?

**7:** [00:02:21] No. My mum and dad split up in 2007.

**Me:** [00:02:30] So that would have been, you would have been, I'm trying do just do the math's, how old would you have been?

**7:** [00:02:38] 11.

**Me:** [00:02:38] And If you've got any siblings?

**7:** [00:02:40] Yeah, I've got an older sister, she's 4 years older than me and has a 3-year-old boy.

**Me:** [00:02:45] cool, nice so thank you for telling me about that.

**Me:** [00:02:50] So you've already answered some of these questions, so the next question is how did you start bodybuilding. So, you said that you went along to show, eh bodypower?

**7:** [00:02:59] Bodypower 2015.

**Me:** [00:02:59] And then soon after that you started your prep so did you did you find a coach like how did that process come about?

**7:** [00:03:06] So in 2016 I was just watching one of the competitions at the Bodypower and the guy who was my coach, I seen him on stage, he stuck out like a sore thumb, he was the best physique on the stage all day so I looked him up on social media, contacted him and a week later I was in my own competition prep.

**Me:** [00:03:34] So you saw this guy and that kind of sparked something in you. So much that you wanted to find out who he was?

**7:** [00:03:43] Yeah.

**Me:** [00:03:43] So What was your experience of competing and preparation?

**7:** [00:03:53] It was a bit robotic obviously because I'd never dieted before I didn't know what to expect. Obviously, you learn a lot from it about yourself. Yes. Monday the Sunday, 24 hours a day, set routine, same thing day in day out, prepping your meals training, sleep. Psychological problems of worrying if you're in shape, if you are going to be ready, constantly worrying about little things like making sure your meals are prepped, you're getting enough sleep, making sure you're getting a certain amount of water intake, meal timings, making sure you're eating at the right times. And obviously taking that alongside work or at the time when I was at university trying to juggle that with my university work and financially as well it's quite expensive with the

food, the asparagus, the fish, lean meat. If you are in a position to be able to go into competition prep, then you should really have a good think before you jump into one.

**Me:** [00:05:09] So what I'm hearing you say is that it requires dedication, commitment and a level of sacrifice.

**7:** [00:05:15] Yeah definitely.

**Me:** [00:05:26] Ok, so on the competition day how was that for you?

**7:** [00:05:26] If I'm honest probably sporting wise, obviously I play football as well and I won the national title at college and it's probably alongside that, one of the most rewarding feelings I could imagine. Being on stage in the best shape of your life knowing that all the hard work, dedication the hours of sacrifice are well worth it. Regardless of the trophy or not, the whole experience of obviously getting to stand up, getting pumped up, looking your best. Just showing everyone the hard work. Showing your confidence on stage.

**Me:** [00:06:17] Ok, so it sounds like it was a bit of a buzz at the end of it all?

**7:** [00:06:20] Yeah, yeah definitely.

**7:** [00:06:22] So that's why I think I wanted to do one. As soon as I sort of got into bodybuilding I wanted to experience it on stage. I've known people in the past to do three, four years of like, bulking trying to gain muscle to get on stage, they get on stage and they don't even enjoy it. So, for all that three, four years they've been obviously stressing about it, trying to get as big as possible as lean as possible and they haven't even enjoyed the stage. I thought I'd rather get in as soon as possible, sit back enjoy it and then go from there.

**Me:** [00:07:02] It makes sense. Okay. And have you kept the same coach throughout?

**7:** [00:07:08] I've got a different coach now. So probably about six months later. Straight after my competition prep, Romaine gave me this off-season plan to go by. So, it wasn't like weekly coaching like we were doing. There's more a case of do this for the off season and he was there for me if I wanted to go back to him after. In that time remained professional so his prices went up quite a lot. So, I wasn't really prepared to pay the same. Well, pay much more money for the same service.

**Me:** [00:07:48] Yes.

**7:** [00:07:50] So now I have Zak and and he's a bit more to the point with it though, there's no BS, he's straight to the point with you he's honest with you, so he coached me last year for my competition and also, I've been with him since.

**Me:** [00:08:17] Ok, so from what you've described there's an element of tunnel vision isn't there that's involved in order to be successful with this. You've got to be quite driven as a person, quite motivated.

**7:** [00:08:31] you've got to have that inside you, definitely.

**Me:** [00:08:40] Were you aware of that in any other area of your life before you found bodybuilding, or do you think it's something that's just grown in you through bodybuilding?

**7:** [00:08:48] I think regarding financially as well, if you want money you've got to have that, that career focus, you've got to be money driven. You've got to put the hours in, it's the same with personal training. That's why I didn't compete this year because I didn't feel like I was in a psychological position to go into a competition prep as well as trying to create my business. So, it definitely, obviously with being driven especially being self-employed you've got to have that want to wake up every morning, sort of just get up and get it done, put the hard work and effort into something that you're passionate about.

**Me:** [00:09:33] So, before you found bodybuilding was your outlet for that football?

**7:** [00:09:37] It first come from football, so I was playing football at Hartpury college in Gloucestershire.

**7:** [00:09:49] I left just school and I wanted to play so I went to Hartpury. I was there for five years. So, I done two years at college and then a three-year degree. In that time, I won the nationals in my second year with the college team and then my third year we got to the finals but lost in the final against Gateshead. They were both played at professional stadiums so the first year was played at Stoke, Stoke City, and the second year was played at Notts county.

**7:** [00:10:25] So again there were 5 teams at Hartpury, so it was very competitive. I started off in the 4th team so I basically went in as a nobody. Everyone else had academy experience whether they'd been at Plymouth, Argyle or whether they'd been at Bristol Rovers, Bristol City, Swindon



Town, Where I was just a lad from school kids, good at school level, good county level but never really broke through at an academy level.

**7:** [00:10:54] But that sort of spurred me on knowing the players around me have a similar level but that they're playing at the same level as me then. We had different mentalities, they had a bit of arrogance about them, they were dropping down they thought they were the boys. They thought they would walk in the team where as I was there, and I wanted to work hard, then within a year I went from the 4th team straight up to the first team so I made my way up within a couple for each team and playing as a striker and scoring goals. Kept scoring goals, kept scoring goals, wanting to work hard to get in that best team possible and that's sort of where my mind changed into wanting to work on my physique, my nutrition my sort of speed, agility. I knew that if I was quicker stronger, if I was in better shape, if my nutrition was better I could be a better footballer and that proved that even for a footballer that is going to help me with my body and progress me physically.

**7:** [00:12:16] And we have two strength and conditioning sessions a week, on a Monday and a Friday. That was based in the gym, some of the lads didn't really want to be there, just going through the motions, having a stretch, the odd couple of sets of squats/lunges where as I knew I wanted to change my body, I wanted to be as strong as I could as quick as I could and it was being vein as well I knew that it was making me look better. So, the other lads, as much as I wanted to get out on the pitch as well, they didn't have that in the back of their heads that they wanted to look good. They just wanted to play football.

**Me:** [00:12:56] So it sounds like what you're saying is that you felt there was something different about you to other people? in a good way.

**7:** [00:13:03] I'd say so, definitely at college yeah, just because of the improvement that was there. Rather than coming in at the top and staying at the top, I've gone from the bottom and got to that level.

**Me:** [00:13:27] Yeah there's that drive thing isn't there, so how do you understand that drive in you or that motivation? I mean part of it from what you've said is clearly about wanting to to work hard, to achieve, there's the money as part of the motivation but is there anything else on an emotional level that you think drives that process?

**7:** [00:13:45] I think in a way, the way people perceive me, maybe it's a part of ego, I wanted people to be, at the time, I wanted people to be talking about me. It's a bit of arrogance.

**Me:** [00:14:09] Yeah, don't be hard on yourself because lots of people get attention in very negative ways and you're only human and everybody wants to be. Everybody wants to be loved. That's a very natural urge.

**7:** [00:14:20] Yes. I just wanted, especially as I was scoring goals. It's coming up probably like 200 players all together getting selected into the five teams and if you're scoring goals everyone is talking about you. So that's what it was all about really, I just wanted it to be about me.

**Me:** [00:14:41] Sure. Okay. Was there anybody in particular that you wanted to make proud?

**7:** [00:14:47] Pardon?

**Me:** [00:14:47] I Said was there anybody in particular that you wanted to make proud?

**7:** [00:15:08] Not really, my dad obviously supported me throughout, he took me to the games when I was younger, my family, I wanted to be something different, I wanted to get somewhere with everything.

**Me:** [00:15:15] So what would you say was your strength in the difficult times? So, focusing back on the bodybuilding when you've got that 2 o'clock in the morning you could really just eat that, wallop that whole bloody jar of peanut butter or you know you're dog tired and you mates are going somewhere, and you really wanted to go but you know you need to stay in. Or whatever, what was it that got you through? or what gets you through?

**7:** [00:15:38] Again at the time it was probably just that, knowing that I had to be in the best shape possible on the stage, and I knew that after the competition the food would still be there and I'm going to make the most of it afterwards. So, for the sake of 10 weeks of sacrifice. I know that in 10 weeks' time I'm going to make the most of it.

**Me:** [00:16:12] So do you think you could have done that without the looming competition? If Somebody had asked you just to do that for no reason. Do you think you could have done it then?

**7:** [00:16:20] See if I don't have a goal in mind or if I'm not 100% set in the mind set to do it the I easily fall off the band wagon, If I don't you keep focused goal. If there's a slight barrier in the way that could sort of affect that then it's easy for me to fall off the band wagon.

**Me:** [00:16:46] Yeah, Yeah, Yeah. Okay. So, I think what I'm hearing you say is the focus in the goal so keeping focused on that, so that's your mind isn't it.

**Me:** [00:17:05] So anything, was there anything else significant in your life that you feel as impacted on your emotion that might have um added to your drive to be successful and to achieve and to make the most of everything?

**7:** [00:17:30] Probably obviously with my father he's diabetic, my sister is diabetic a couple of other family members are diabetic. That's why I'm a bit fitness driven and focused on my diet, health conscious as well. So, making sure that I'm looking after myself because my dad's had his leg amputated and I really don't want to go down that road myself. I've seen him suffer because of obviously health issues so I just want to be as fit and healthy as I can as well within reason and not get to that kind of level.

**Me:** [00:18:22] So just just thinking about wider relationships as well because you mentioned that you were single, have you had a girlfriend while you've been in like a prep.

**7:** [00:18:32] Yeah for my second year of competing so last year 2017 I was in a relationship for the whole part of the competition prep.

**Me:** [00:18:44] Ok, how do you think that impacted on your experience?

**7:** [00:18:48] At times it was a bit difficult, it wasn't bad as I thought it was going to be if I'm honest because she wanted to diet down with me. Obviously not to the extent but it was much easier with food, when we had our weekly cheat meal we made the most of it. We enjoyed that sort of time together, that Saturday night/Sunday evening but other than that if it was a case of I needed a couple of hours in the evening to myself, so if I needed a couple of hours extra sleep myself and sort of shut off sooner then it was pretty sound. She'd sort of let me have that but then on the other hand if was a bit grumpy, a bit tired she will always obviously remind me of the goal remind that it's only short term it's not going to be for long, it's only a matter of weeks and the end goal is much more important than a couple of weeks of tiredness and hunger.

**Me:** [00:19:59] Okay so it sounds like that relationship actually supported your goals and was actually probably, there's never anything that is completely one way but on the whole that supported you.

**7:** [00:20:08] There was never a time where she sort of didn't want to be part of it all or think I was doing the wrong thing. She was always supportive.

**Me:** [00:20:20] Okay. How about friendships we've other lads?

**7:** [00:20:24] Unfortunately that sort of, not broke up but I felt like I didn't really have much of a social life. I felt like I didn't really want to be out in a pub just drinking water or anything because if I go out I want to have an alcoholic beverage, I want to get a little bit tipsy just to sort of get in that jolly mood.

**7:** [00:20:49] Yeah but come to like a Friday/Saturday night on prep you don't want to be out with a pint of water, you just want to be chilling out on the sofa, putting your feet up, dropping off to sleep if you need. Just zoning out so unfortunately, I didn't have much of a social life, I knew my mates were there and they were supportive but then there'd be like Thursday steak night and I couldn't go along, but they were supportive as well. I think a couple of them do like MMA, Mixed martial arts/boxing so they do similar diets at specific times of the year. so, they know when they've got to sacrifice things.

**Me:** [00:21:38] Yeah, I guess as you get older anyway even if it wasn't bodybuilding, as you get older you know it's not all about everybody everybody hanging out on a Friday night for whatever reason, whether that's bodybuilding or kids or work or whatever it is.

**Me:** [00:21:52] So before we, just before we wrap things up with the last question, and you might have seen on the initial participant participation sheet that I'd used the word grief?

**7:** [00:22:09] Yeah.

**Me:** [00:22:11] And then I kind of, and then I took it out just because I didn't want to be putting words in people's minds but, anyway back to the point me mentioning that, have you had any experiences of bereavement or of any grief?

**7:** [00:22:27] Hmm. No. If I'm honest I haven't.

**Me:** [00:22:28] Ok, although it sounds like potentially, like maybe when your dad left that maybe there could have been, or might have been some grief in as much as you know your life wasn't the same way anymore because your mum and dad were no longer together?

**7:** [00:22:54] They've always been there they just split up, obviously at the time, I was 11 years old it was a bit, disheartening, didn't really know what was happening but since then I've sort of

grown up knowing I get to see them both whenever I want. None of them lived too far, well they lived five minutes away from each other.

**7:** [00:23:23] Well obviously a lot of parents go back to their family homes at the other side of the country and only ever go opposite ways as well so definitely lucky.

**Me:** [00:23:36] Ok, so we've touched on it briefly but just to kind of wrap it all up, where are you now in relation to Bodybuilding?

**Me:** [00:23:39] And I know that you decided to pull out from the competition, didn't you?

**7:** [00:23:42] Yeah the next time I want to step on stage, I've been doing junior physique so it's obviously the board shorts, this would have been my last year as a junior, next time I want to enter the classic physique so it's like a new category, like classic bodybuilding, like classic physique so there's more like, shorter board shorts, so they show the quads but they're not the proper trunks like the old school bodybuilders wear.

**Me:** [00:23:59] Speedo joke. laughter.

**7:** [00:24:40] Next time I step on stage I want to make a statement in that category so even if it takes me another year or two of growing the next time I step on stage I want to have 2 comparison pictures of the last I stepped on stage and the next time and know that I've made some big improvements. You've only got to look at the top-level bodybuilders some of them don't compete for six years, they just do 6 years of hard graft. They don't diet down they don't waste time trying to cut down on bodyfat in a deficit, so they can't gain size, it's 6 years of hard bulking. So, probably a year minimum, I won't be competing within the next year and see how much size I put on.

**Me:** [00:25:34] Ok, makes sense.

**Me:** [00:25:43] How about when your relationship ended with your girlfriend, was there a grief process involved with that or was it not like that because sometimes people just decide mutually that's it's not working anymore and there's not that same process.

**7:** [00:26:03] It got a bit nasty for a couple of days. Couple of things were said but it never at any point affected my training on my diet. There was never really a time when I felt down, we both knew it was the right decision.

**Me:** [00:26:25] Ok. Excellent. I'm going to turn the recorder off.

## Appendix G

**Me:** [00:00:01] Right okay.

**6:** [00:00:03] I was a bodybuilding late bloomer.

**Me:** [00:00:08] Right. So, tell me a little bit about yourself. These questions are deliberately open so that you can say whatever it is that you feel is relevant.

**6:** [00:00:17] Bodybuilding is a hobby to me. Something that I enjoy doing. It was a mistake, ah, not a mistake but it was not I never planned to compete. That wasn't my goal and I used training as an outlet. I consider myself. A mind person. I enjoy a like intellectual aspects of my life with teaching. I say that my greatest achievement is still my PGCE even though I've got body building accomplishments that are good. I still value my role as a teacher greater than that.

**Me:** [00:01:02] Okay, Makes sense.

**6:** [00:01:09] Don't know how to summarize it but I'm a thinker like the mind is everything. Body is second. Yeah and that the two are linked. Describe Myself. I'm yeah, I'm an anxious worrier with a hard exterior.

**Me:** [00:01:32] Ok, cool, so you would say to somebody who didn't know anything about you, they haven't seen you and they said tell me something about you, the first thing he would say is that you're a teacher.

**6:** [00:01:44] Yeah and that bodybuilding is a hobby. Yeah.

**Me:** [00:01:48] That's a lot of commitment to a hobby isn't it.

**6:** [00:01:50] It actually, it allows me to allows me to do everything else. I guess it's an enabling part of my life. I'm obsessive. I am, I have a short attention span, I was medicated, ADHD. And so, the training actually taught me the discipline to enable me to be a teacher it's one of the same. It's not. It is part of my life. Although the competition is a hobby. The training is an integral part of my wellbeing.

**Me:** [00:02:32] Okay. So, ADHD. How old were you when you got that diagnosis?

**6:** [00:02:37] I was about 11 and I mean that was only when I got a statement. You know whatever people say I don't think it's like a thing, but I was definitely different cognitively, than my peers.

**Me:** [00:02:58] Okay. So, you been using medication ever since.

**6:** [00:03:03] No I stopped. I didn't last long on Ritalin.

**Me:** [00:03:08] Okay. Probably a good thing was worth not that that's what we're talking about, but I think that's probably a good thing.

**6:** [00:03:13] I don't know my dad took loads of them said they were quite fun. They just meant the speed wasn't really my drug of choice as it would bring me down.

**Me:** [00:03:21] That shouldn't be funny, but it was.

**6:** [00:03:25] But Yeah, it's not a defining factor in fact once I got out of mainstream education I think that it made me better at the things that I choose to do. Because although my attention is drifting one I've managed to make my life so that I did things that I was interested in rather than the shit that they make you do when you are young. I was able to obsess about the right things.

**Me:** [00:03:54] Okay so how did you start bodybuilding.

**6:** [00:03:59] I was on tag. So, I spent long long evenings at home.

**Me:** [00:04:05] You're ace. I just need you to know that.

**6:** [00:04:17] My friend brought over a bench press and said why don't you try and do this instead of getting high on your own at home. Yeah and he would come over. He suffered from severe mental health problems. He killed himself actually but he mmm, that was his gift. I found out that even in my bedroom training I got strong very quickly.

**Me:** [00:04:38] ok, so he killed himself.



**6:** [00:04:41] Yeah.

**Me:** [00:04:42] When did that happen.

**6:** [00:04:44] About about 6 6 years ago.

**Me:** [00:04:50] Wow were you still close at that point.

**6:** [00:04:55] I wouldn't have ever called him really a close friend. Because it is very hard to connect with someone who was bipolar, so my uncle was like bipolar and if you've got experience of someone at that level it's very hard to be close because you don't have long periods of time together through incarceration and you know that two possibly three or four different people.

**Me:** [00:05:23] Okay so were as close as you could be.

**6:** [00:05:27] I think we we we shared the iron that was our relationship.

**Me:** [00:05:31] ok so was there any impact on you when he, did he, commit suicide?

**6:** [00:05:36] Yeah, he hung himself, yeah.

**Me:** [00:05:37] oh wow ok, mmm, interestingly that happened to me as well. My best friend she hung herself, probably around the same time weirdly.

**6:** [00:05:50] Yeah, it's bad.

**Me:** [00:05:51] Yeah, so wow, Ok. Cool. So that was how you started bodybuilding.

**6:** [00:05:59] Yeah. He was the reason.

**Me:** [00:06:03] He was the reason.

**6:** [00:06:04] Because it was helping us. It helped him at the time and it helped me. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough for him, but it has been enough for me.

**Me:** [00:06:13] Okay. So, did his shift from bench pressing in your bedroom to using a gym somewhere. What was that process like?

**6:** [00:06:24] After six months of being on tag and I was able to earn enough

**Me:** [00:06:32] Bench pressing like a fucking lunatic in your room.

**6:** [00:06:32] I outgrew, I outgrew my, the home set up. I couldn't train legs at home really not that I was interested in training legs really at that point. Yeah when I could afford a gym membership in the weren't many gyms around, so I went to a health club and trained there. Yeah. Yeah, I was still drinking and stuff on the weekends, so I wasn't taking it seriously. I wouldn't say it was bodybuilding. Then I was going to the gym and lifting weights.

**Me:** [00:07:10] There is a difference between lifting weights and body building isn't there the reasons people are doing it is very different. So, the shift into formal bodybuilding how did that happen?

**6:** [00:07:22] I started training with a friend that was a little bit older. He's taught me to train with more intensity and I got bigger. Yeah. I then moved to London. Maybe when I was 24. And then I think when I was 25 cause someone I was training with in London said Hey you wanna try these Steroid things and I was like Yeah definitely.

**Me:** [00:07:53] So it came your way rather than you pursuing it?

**6:** [00:07:56] Yeah. I wasn't looking for it, it just, well his name was swarn. He was actually like a Kurdish fucking freedom fighter and like he's gone to Turkey and fucking killed everyone. But that's another story. But he's my friend and although I thought most of what he was telling me was a joke, but he was deadly serious is actually the fucking dangerous human. but anyway, he said hey I'm gonna get some of this and I was like Okay. And then things ramped up a little bit. Took a little bit more control over my food but I was really, like I didn't have any money. So, I was eating whatever I could.

**Me:** [00:08:33] What were you doing in London were you studying?

**6:** [00:08:35] Yeah, the London College of Music.

**Me:** [00:08:37] Right. Okay that sounds like quite an experience.

**6:** [00:08:41] Yeah yeah yeah It was interesting. I hated uni I hate I hate the experience. I wanted to do it to make my mum proud because I'd never done anything apart from get arrested. And although I'd fucking hated it because I was older as well I was secluded for most of the time. It was a lonely experience. But then the gym when I was in London After that I joined a gym in Brentford which was all just like weird Asian wannabe gangsters. Which at first was intimidating but I made a friend called Cash and he was one of the big guys and we got on, so everything was cool and that was a good gym at Brentford and I would just do that. That's what I would do I would study, and I would do that.

**Me:** [00:09:34] ok, so how did you shift from there into your first competition?

**6:** [00:09:38] So I came up Bristol for a summer. I was working the doors. My friend. Yeah. I'd met previously, and I knew previously who taught me about intensity, I returned one summer, and I met someone else through Trojan, Trojan wasn't always a gym, it used to be a supplement shop and the supplement shop had extras and through the extras I met someone called Dan. He said you should do a show and he'd done a show before. so, I said Okay. And to be fair I went into my show, I followed the e-mail, that was my only reference was an email. I don't know how to pose so had to teach myself from videos and I did have the internet but there was nowhere near the information they have now. I didn't know anything about water, I didn't know anything, I wasn't really training, I trained legs, but we didn't have the equipment in the Bristol gym and there weren't many gyms, Trojan didn't even have a gym yet. I was still at the point where I wasn't very good, but they said they said why don't you try this want to try this and I said yes, and I did.

**Me:** [00:11:11] ok so your experience of competing and I know it's an ongoing process for you so up to this point.

**6:** [00:11:21] Yeah progressively got better, brought up the floors and enjoyed the process, it's a snowballing effect. Now it's quite serious I guess. So just yet. It's about. Control and gradually taking control of every aspect of your life for your chosen outcome. Whereas before it's I train hard, off season I eat. Back then I would eat whatever I wouldn't really think about it even when I was competing I probably wasn't making the right gains in the offseason. You know and then it builds momentum to the point I track everything I eat every day of my life consistently.

**Me:** [00:12:08] Okay so how would you describe your experience of competing, is it something that you say you would say you enjoy? Is it something that's massively anxiety provoking?

**6:** [00:12:15] Is it not for me. I don't know. I don't like show day. I don't enjoy being on stage and I don't enjoy that aspect. Maybe I will later. Now that, I have low confidence in my ability in bodybuilding, so I never go into shows thinking I'm going to win. So that's the the final hurdle. I enjoy the process. I enjoy the regimented aspects of it. I enjoy the focus and I enjoy structure, structure works well for me for me as it allows me to let go of the worry of life and if that if I know everything that's going to happen right the way down to what I'm going to do and it's an enjoyable thing for me to structure my life in such a way that I don't have to think about the variables.

**Me:** [00:13:11] It could go on and on couldn't it thinking about the 312 different things that could happen. Yeah, I get you, totally get you.

**6:** [00:13:18] To plan everything made me calmer.

**Me:** [00:13:27] And gave you a sense of control?

**6:** [00:13:27] Eah Yeah.

**Me:** [00:13:28] I don't want to put words in your mouth, but would you say that bodybuilding has been an empowering process for you?

**6:** [00:13:37] Yeah. Well I started training about the same time I started succeeding and other aspects of my life so the structure that I learned within bolding, ah body building, within bondage, I was able to apply what I learned through bodybuilding to other aspects of my life to become, like I don't want to sound like Instagram, but to become successful in what I wanted to do which was ultimately complete education and become a teacher. I'm you know which was my goal from quite early. Yeah. Being spawn of two famous musicians I didn't want to be a famous musician. I knew that I had music in my blood, but I wanted to teach and that was my goal. But I'm an all or nothing. So, bodybuilding taught me structure, before structure there was nothing. There was no structure there was there was there was nothing you know there was drugs, parties and all the normal stuff, fighting.

**me:** [00:14:36] Okay so how about all the background to that when you were still, still living at home, was their discipline and structure at home?

**6:** [00:14:46] Not so much like my parents were often away touring. So, my gran was a huge, my grandmas' old school she'd come kick your ass. I was scared of Gran. Yeah, I mean, I didn't, I didn't adhere to any structure or rules. That was never gonna happen. There was no amount of, even if I wanted to. There was nothing that could hold me down at school I was kicked out of every school I ever went to, I went to Hartcliffe special unit. And then I was home schooled. So, although there were attempts, any attempt to try to regulate what I was doing was an open invite to push against.

**Me:** [00:15:36] Yes.

**6:** [00:15:38] I think one of my school teachers said that any implementation of restrictions on my life I would destroy.

**Me:** [00:15:50] Okay. That's really interesting. So, you've even used that to channel positively into your training. Would you say that's fair?

**6:** [00:15:59] Yeah yeah. The training has allowed me to see the bigger picture. Before I lived in the day it was day to day and I think that when I was younger I lacked many aspects. Yeah. I lacked foresight. I regretted nothing. I think I had an overbearing lack of empathy for anyone. I was a cunt. It was like a consideration for others or anything it was just didn't seem to really exist.

**Me:** [00:16:42] Okay so where did that, are you aware that somewhere that shifted, or do you think it was a gradual process.

**6:** [00:16:48] I think I grew up.

**Me:** [00:16:50] So it was probably a gradual thing then. There is a huge, even though you've described it as a hobby, there is a huge commitment that comes with bodybuilding. What would you say is your motivation or your driver? What drives that process? I'm not sure how to describe it but almost that force that you've just spoken about is perhaps the driver, but I don't know how you'd label that. What would you call it?

**6:** [00:17:17] Well at the moment, the momentum is being carried through a force now I don't control.

**Me:** [00:17:31] Yeah. You are not the only person to say that by the way.

**6:** [00:17:35] I set it in motion, it's not done yet, so it's ingrained it would be more effort now to not. I mean I'm injured at the moment, I took the week off and actually that's hard. Go and train and eat and do everything I do every day and always have for 8 years. That's easy. There's 24 hours in a day. There's more than enough time for me to complete my hobby and be a professional and be a musician and be a carer to my grandmother. There's a lot of hours in a day.

**Me:** [00:18:13] Yeah.

**6:** [00:18:14] And I just made sure that I utilize them. I don't deal well with idle time because my mind is fucked so I'd say it's more of a comfort blanket of something that I know that I can control. Two hundred pounds is always two hundred pounds sounds fucking weird. I have control it's my thing. It's my thing. Although other people come and train with me, I train other people. Ellis comes and trains with me. It seems like loads of people you know come and train, I have a trainer now, well not a trainer but I have a coach, but it's my thing, it's mine.

**Me:** [00:18:50] And it sounds like it's your anchor

**6:** [00:18:53] Yes yes it is. You know when everything's going shit I Just go to the gym and just count numbers. Yep.

**Me:** [00:19:01] That's interesting actually that counting numbers. Do You know where that started?

**6:** [00:19:08] Yeah training was, once I'd started training properly to feel the benefits. Not physically but mentally being able to sleep. If I had to stop, I'd be scared. So, I'd be scared of stopping because it's so heavily ingrained. What the fuck would I do.

**Me:** [00:19:30] Okay so next question's what gets you through the tough, you know like 2 o'clock in the morning when you could eat your fuckin arm. Yeah but you need to not eat anything, or I'd imagine that's probably, that's the tough bit for me anyway, it's not so much disciplining myself to go to the gym that's the bit that gets me. But there's going to be something different for everybody. I know that some people have said that they find it hard to eat more food.

**6:** [00:19:58] That's the thing that I hate. That's the thing if I could magic something away it would be to not and still get massive. If I had one thing to choose it would be that.

**Me:** [00:20:08] So you know when you kind of do you have any thought process that you think about quitting would or do you not even allow yourself to think about it?

**6:** [00:20:16] It depends what stage I'm in. So right now, when my shoulders fucked and my grans dead and my dad's ringing me up giving me shit then yeah, I still like what the fuck is the point in anything. You know what, you know what's the training, like to not give a fuck about the training now and think about quitting. I don't think I'd even know how to quit. Ellis is into training. I don't. It's ingrained it's everything, it's my fridge, it's my cooker, it's the design of my cupboards, it's it's my Tupperware collection.

**Me:** [00:20:53] It's who you are.

**6:** [00:20:57] So it's not, I don't have to try anymore. I've set everything in motion so that everything's there I don't need to try to train or if it's in a competition it's like I'm prepping for a show and then there's my show date, it doesn't even cross my mind to quit or to eat a biscuit or to like You know that is not even an option to drop out because I'm starving or like It's not a problem for me because it's not an option. It's not even a pathway. It doesn't, and it never has. It never has. You'll never ever see me cheat on a prep ever. It never has happened. I've never even like You know added a biscuit. I've never gone outside it is not an option either. I don't think that's like because I'm well hard or anything. It's just like I have this thing. I suppose it's driven through the outcome. If I go on stage and I get beat, which I've been many times. I look back and I go OK I did the thing. If I look back and go well I ate that biscuit or a skipped that thing or I didn't do cardio for a week or like if I lost and look back am I really gonna spend 3 months half doing it where I could look back and go oh actually if I hadn't been such a dickhead then maybe I would have won. You may as well not do it, that wouldn't make sense to me, it wouldn't.

**Me:** [00:22:31] What you're saying makes absolute sense to me, it makes complete sense, it's almost like what you're saying is that it's like black and white thinking that you're describing, it's either one way or the other. There is no grey.

**6:** [00:22:44] Well I made the decision to do the show. So Why would I then make the decision to fuck up the show it doesn't make any sense. it's not a thought pattern. Yeah, the two. Yeah, I just I can't even explain it because It's not a cognitive, and everybody knows so to me it doesn't make any sense. You say you're going to do a show, you're going to do the best and you go and eat biscuits every day. You've obviously not said you're gonna do a show you've said I'm going to see what I feel like or we'll see what happens or yeah, we'll just aim for it and see if I get there. That's not how I approach a show. This is the show I'm going to turn up in shape, it is going to happen. No regrets. I don't wanna get beaten, and then I need to be able to look back at 3 months and say wow I just got beaten because he was better not because I've eaten a fuckin sandwich or a subway or whatever, that's not going to be my excuse ever.

**Me:** [00:23:38] Okay so that makes absolute sense. And everybody that is successfully at what they do says the same thing for what it's worth. so, flipping that on its head for a minute so for you it would be hard for you to rest when you need to rest if you've got an injury?

**6:** [00:23:53] It's very new to me. This pulling back thing it's also been the best thing for my bodybuilding and my progression has been a pullback push forward. Yeah, I'll take one step back and two steps forward and I think that is a maturity aspect. You cannot go 100 percent all the time especially not when you reached 30.

**Me:** [00:24:17] It gets worse when you hit 40.

**6:** [00:24:24] So I have been able to actually take the bigger picture response to that. So actually, taking the rest is my training. So, when someone is like or you're having time off I'm like no this is part of my training. My training now is to not go, my training now is to stop, my training now is to do this. The thing is that if I'm coming in I'm being a pussy in the gym it's written in my plan. This is the time to not go past failure. So, it is my training. It's like having a high carb day. It's not a cheat meal. I'm not cheating it's on the plan. Why would I call it a cheat when it's not? It's the plan.

**Me:** [00:25:10] so what process did you go through when you realized initially you needed to back off with your training? What happens initially before you get to that because what you're describing is you've consolidated the new thought process haven't you?

**6:** [00:25:27] Ultimately, I gave control to someone else. Because my mentality was always do more do more go harder and actually my last show before this run was I turned up at the Kent classic and I was fucking peeled and I was dry, and it was good. It was a good show and it was good to come back from what had been actually not a comeback, but it was good from a time before that where my body just basically didn't respond. I came up pretty much. Not in great shape, not in great shape. Which was. Yeah which was bad and then between there and the British I did more when actually what I should have done was less and put my body in a state where it was feeling better cos it looks better and when I put my trust in someone else. The one thing Anth actually tells me to do is do less, pull back, go less hard. He never has to instruct me to go harder put the pedal down and he knows that that doesn't need to happen. He knows to not tell me to train hard to do this. He is always on my arse saying Take it easy. Do less, between the Welsh and the British I didn't do any cardio, you know I trained but my diet was still you know predominantly until, until the CARB depletion was almost 3000 calories and I was ripped to bits because my body was happier about the situation. When I came to the British I was even fuller even better from doing less you know to me that was like the biggest reveal my body had burned fat because It was happy not because I'd smashed it into a wall. Whereas between the welsh if I'd have been left to my own devices I'd have been like right it's the British need to go harder. I need to come in and I would have fucked it up between the Kent classic the year before and the British I said right. Hence the British and I fucked my physique up. I was shredded but it wasn't full. It wasn't pleased looking. It wasn't, I got worse from doing more.

**Me:** [00:27:47] So I think what you're describing there is a learning process isn't it?



**6:** [00:27:55] Yeah more isn't more. Yeah and that's like obviously what I do with my clients. I try and get them to realize that early.

**Me:** [00:28:08] Yeah. So where are you now in relation to, obviously you've had that success haven't you, where are you now, what are you thinking?

**6:** [00:28:20] Well I'm like nowhere, this is my time off of like training three days a week. I track everything I'm eating because I have very poor digestive system. So, going and eating shit turns into shit literally. So, going off the rails doesn't help me. You know I can get abdominal pains from eating things that are outside.

**Me:** [00:28:41] Might be a blessing in disguise.

**6:** [00:28:46] Well yeah, well like if I have an upset stomach and stuff like that it actually makes me really really upset.

**Me:** [00:28:54] Well yeah, it's not nice is it.

**6:** [00:28:55] And a lot of anxiety so I mean arguably I've got stress induced IBS anyway. I've been going, I mean you know everything's relative but for me I've been having a horrible time recently and yeah I've been really really sad about lots of things even though my life's with my existence here at home you know my wonderful house like with Ellis and everything's like a around I've got sponsorship and stuff like everything around me, you know me is cool. However, the people that I care about everything's fucked. Not you know with Ellis but with my family. My family doesn't really exist anymore. You know five years ago I had. You know my Gran, my uncle, my dad and very quickly everything turned to shit. I can't remember the relevance of why I'm telling you this.

**Me:** [00:29:55] We were talking about your time out and really it sounds like what your time out is doing is allowing you time to process that stuff that you've just identified.

**6:** [00:30:12] Yeah, I blocked the Gran thing out for the British. Even though granted I was there all the time. I was doing my duty emotionally I wasn't giving to that situation and I explained that through my interviews that I did at the British when I spoke about the Gran situation and doing less.

**Me:** [00:30:34] I'm not sure that could have been any other way though because at the end of the day you're only human.

**6:** [00:30:40] Yeah. But yes, so now my downtime is to try and emotionally balance from that. This is a unique downtime. This is also the first time I haven't tried to do a big sort push for extra gains after show, do a rebound. I haven't done that I didn't train this week, getting bloods done, coiling the spring. We call it, me and Anth call it coiling the spring. I'm trying to get rid of all the niggles that I've picked up along a big Journey to the shows and to the British so that I can then do a very big push again with a better body than I came out of the show with. I've got tendonitis in my elbow, my rotators fucked. I had patella tendonitis and trying to let them settle down as much as I could. Inflammation breeds inflammation in the body as well. You know you have one thing going on it inflames other things you have other sorts, a lot of white blood cells flowing around. Yeah not a good place. Psychologically horrible at times but I can lend myself to work. I'm obviously building relationships back up with people that I neglected when I was in prep.

**Me:** [00:31:59] Ok so it sounds like your way of coping with that emotional change is through relationships and distracting yourself positively with work.

**6:** [00:32:15] Yeah, I like work. Work is, I get paid to do something that I like. I've won in life. Yeah totally. You know. So that's that's great. I don't begrudge sometimes I don't want to get up in the morning, but I don't want to get up in the morning anyway ever.

**Me:** [00:32:32] The other thing that strikes me about everything that you've said and you haven't said explicitly but you've kind of set your life up to support your success with bodybuilding haven't you with the type of relationship that you're in with Yeah you could have set yourself up for success really in the way that you've built your life haven't you.

**6:** [00:32:54] Yeah yeah. I mean accidentally or not, having a relationship with Ellis who supports the gym and everything, doesn't give me a hard time for going to the gym. I don't think it would have worked any other way. So, I think that's why we've been successful. Then yeah, my house, my job does work in that way, that wasn't how it was intended. But being able to leave for 4.15 before the traffic goes means I can go home and hit the gym. And I can work from home. My relationship with my boss's at work, they know that I'm good & I get my shit done. You don't have to worry about my corner, if you ask me for any of the paperwork I've got everything. I've done everything. People don't need to worry about me at work, so they don't hassle me when I leave at 4.15 to go to the gym. No-one's on my case so it's not necessarily the work but my work ethic which has allowed people to get off my fucking case, so they don't bother me. They don't need to, and they know that I can do my shit and whatever I need to because I look after my corner. I get good success rates, I'm a qualified lecturer. I did my PGCE and stuff. They don't have to be on me and that's allowed me the freedom.

**Me:** [00:34:11] I mean the thing the other thing that you didn't say as well, you spoke about you training feeding into your, kinda giving you the discipline you needed to achieve in your teaching but what you didn't acknowledge was that kinda learning process that you were then able to bring back to you training so the two things feed into each other even though they're opposite ends.

**6:** [00:34:37] Yeah, they do now, I preach now even when I'm teaching that these young people should go and pursue physical activity. Which a lot of them don't. They sit at home and sit on the Internet and wonder why they're sad about stuff that doesn't exist or doesn't matter and Instagram and unrealistic expectations. Yeah. So yeah. They are two of the same your mind your mind is everything the body is nothing and know you know there will be a time where the body doesn't exist, or you know.

**Me:** [00:35:11] I mean personally I think it goes one step beyond mind. I think it's a soul thing but that's kind of, it's a little bit harder to quantify a soul isn't it. It's a bit easier to study a mind.

**6:** [00:35:27] Soul, I don't know. I think soul is for people in energy. I don't know whether training is part of my soul. I don't know if I would say that, I'd say the journeys of discipline and realization that I got from training are for soul, but I wouldn't say that training is linked, competing and bodybuilding I certainly wouldn't put that in there.

**Me:** [00:35:53] Maybe that's more for your teaching.

**6:** [00:35:58] Giving giving, giving to people, involvement in trusting young people, the building of others and yourself that's soul. No one gets anything from my bodybuilding in their soul. Everyone goes Oh that guy looks fucking crazy. I think that's this world stuff, so they are separate because it doesn't help anyone. It doesn't help anyone. In fact bodybuilding is gluttonous and selfish, about how you feel. If you're going to be straight. It's a cunt game.

**Me:** [00:36:38] No no no I know exactly what you're saying and that's why I laughed, my bodybuilding doesn't help anyone. I mean okay like now.

**Me:** [00:36:47] You say that and maybe not on the surface it it doesn't look like it did it did does. But if you hadn't if you didn't if you haven't found bodybuilding, like because of the bodybuilding and the anchor that's given you were then able to and to be grounded enough to to do all those other positive things that you've just described. So even on the surface of it it might not look like it helps anybody in a roundabout sort of way maybe it has because without that then you wouldn't be in a position that you are able to help people in other ways.

**6:** [00:37:17] Yeah yeah.

**Me:** [00:37:20] So it's not I mean I get what you're saying.

**6:** [00:37:22] I like to think I might have got there anyway but it certainly helped the process, I mean it saved me from you know what ultimately was my mum's able to when everyone says oh how's Dan she can say oh he's a teacher and they're like oh that's really great rather they expected me to do which was to go to jail.

**Me:** [00:37:52] Ok what's making Ron sick?

**6:** [00:37:57] Oh Ron just vomits sometimes he's into it. I don't know if you're had a dog but they someone's secrete weird green shit out of there Penis.

**Me:** [00:38:08] Mine was a girl so she didn't have a penis.

**6:** [00:38:11] Well that happens.

**Me:** [00:38:16] Oh okay. How is Ron is he good?

**6:** [00:38:21] Yeah Ron's wicked.

**Me:** [00:38:21] That's Good news okay. Say that that is covered all the questions that I needed. So that's completed the interview. Thank you very much Dan and I'm gonna turn this recording thing off.

**Note:** [00:38:32] After the interview ended Jason disclosed that his 'Dad' was not his birth dad. He did not know who his dad was, but his mums partner took him on as his own.

## Appendix H

**Me:** [00:00:02] Okay so my first question is can you tell me a little bit about yourself generally?

**5:** [00:00:07] In what sense?

**5:** [00:00:11] Okay so if somebody said Just tell me a little bit about you as a person I'd imagine you'd probably, you know the training would.

**5:** [00:00:19] As in the type of person I am, personality wise, or as in what I do in my job or what.

**Me:** [00:00:27] Okay. These questions are deliberately open with the kind of aim that you can tell me what you think is, you know what you want me to know or what you think is relevant.

**5:** [00:00:36] Ok, so I'm 47, married with kids, I work in the field of steroids, I've spent the last 10 years developing my profession. I'm considered an expert in my field I work with a lot of government agencies in that capacity as a person. I've had the biggest arms in Europe. Competing was never really a driving factor for me. I am quite competitive, more competitive with myself. Training for me has always been a personal thing so I got into training about 16 mainly really to start with because I was a fat kid and I needed to be a bit stronger for my size for rugby. I wasn't particularly good at sports. It was never something I really excelled in and then I found with the training not only was it something I enjoyed it was something I was good at. So, it stuck, thought it was a passing fad, but it stuck. I was very lucky at a very early age to be exposed to some very top-flight trainers. A lot of pros a lot of British record European world record holders of power lifting all the pro bodybuilders and I trained with a wide array of people and very quickly built up a very large repertoire of training techniques.

**Me:** [00:02:30] Ok, so what's your understanding of how that happened do you think it was location, were you in a city where those people were or.

**5:** [00:02:38] I was lucky, element of it was luck and at that point I was very obsessive. The world of training has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. There was a very big focus and a very big ethos on hard training and generally you were disregarded in the gym unless you did train hard. I got a reputation very early on for training hard, that was also because I liked to inflict pain on myself. It was really a socially acceptable form of self-harm. I enjoyed the pain I enjoyed enduring the pain and as a result I sought out ways to increase the pain while I was training the by-products of that was, I learned a lot of very sophisticated and very effective training techniques very early on. So, on top of that then I got a lot of good results. Now early days didn't understand diet and really didn't understand weight gain to be honest. So, I gained a lot of weight, but it was a lot of fat and at 19 I wanted to compete in bodybuilding, so I diet down

competed as a natural and won my show. But there was nowhere else to go. I was at that time aware of steroids but previously hadn't been so when I'd looked at pros, I always assumed that they just trained harder. Again, that installed this very very strong ethic of very hard training, I didn't know anything about overtraining, didn't know it existed and didn't believe it existed. You want to get bigger. You just trained harder it was as simple as that, the only thing stopping me from growing was how hard I trained. And then at 19 I did my first steroid cycle and I absolutely exploded. Didn't have a clue what I was doing and continued to use without a break for four years the result was somebody was tipped as being the next big rich pro, 24 stone in good condition and strong as an ox and Dorian took an interest in me.

**5:** [00:05:05] Unfortunately shortly after that due to being very very fired up about the prospect of turning pro I detached my pec very severely. That threw me off kilter and I dropped out of training and everything for about 15 years.

**Me:** [00:05:22] Wow that was a long break.

**5:** [00:05:25] Life got in the way the result was a 30 stone fat git on top of me being incarcerated. That's when I started to sort my shit out and started training again, sorted my diet out and then I went back on gear with a view to be a strong man, didn't like that and then a pro friend of mine told me to compete again in bodybuilding. My heart was never in it. I got probably about 6 weeks out from the show and decided to bollox to this. I wanted to see how big I could get because I've always wanted to push me, I always want to push the limits.

**Me:** [00:06:21] I've watched the films and found it quite gruelling.

**5:** [00:06:30] Initially it was just going to be an exposé on line the blog whatever I might tell you this is a good tool to show people that good and the bad. Yeah, I didn't know what was coming. I didn't know what to expect as much as anyone else. I've never done doses at that level so it was an experiment all round right, I wanted to be open and honest as possible and then towards the end of this first project I was invited to a documentary about it which we did very very quickly and that launched the under construction franchise, the second one was a more planned and constructed documentary but we have a lot a lot of problems in the production of the that. I've always been driven as I've got older, I've accomplished more in life. I've become a lot more rounded and a lot less single track with things. Yes. I mean I feel now I have a very good balance both work home and everything else. I'm actually very happy now a lot of my drive around training was personal unhappiness. I was always constantly looking for something. I don't have that anymore and as a result of the intensity with which I used to train just seems to be beyond grasp anymore but at the same time doesn't bother me I am very very comfortable with who I am.

**Me:** [00:08:16] Yeah that meeting makes an awful lot sense. Makes perfect sense in fact so going back to your kind of, you started training at 16 which is quite a young age. So, what was your kind of family setup. Did you live your parents or?

**5:** [00:08:34] Normal just typical parents. Dad worked mum didn't, reasonable upbringing not particularly rich but not particularly poor. We did all right. Part time jobs as kids know nothing untoward just really really normal. Nothing really outstanding about any of it. To be honest it was it was pretty mundane. I've got two brothers one was eight years older was 9 years old.

**Me:** [00:09:08] Okay so your youngest youngest of three.

**5:** [00:09:11] Through my teens I pretty much grew up as a single kid because those 2 were grown up.

**Me:** [00:09:16] Yeah what strikes me about that is you were the type of person that's a bit of a thrill seeker that that kind of lack of you know that normality sometimes is enough to drive people to the brink of strange behaviour.

**5:** [00:09:40] Yeah, I did some stupid shit, I got carried away I wouldn't say I was particularly a thrill seeker. I'm quite intelligent. I always have been. And I was quite academic. It wasn't a case of I needed I wasn't an adrenaline junkie in the case of thrills, but I did need stimulus and I did need challenging and if I wasn't charged in a positive way, I'd challenge myself in a negative way.

**Me:** [00:10:06] ok, you've talked a little bit about how that kind of drive or that motivation is subsided in you as you've become more content when it was kind of full on how you understood that. Where do you think that came from what was that about for you?

**5:** [00:10:23] Well earlier in my youth I don't think I had a handle on what was motivating but there was an element of trying to find where I belong and where I fitted at that time. So, I loved my training and my training was my sanctuary. The gym was my mole hole so to speak it was me and the weights and I pushed and challenge myself. Within that the more dedicated I was with my training the more the rest of my life was structured. When training went out my life became very disorganized. And the discipline of training carried over into other aspects of my life as I got older the desire was probably a lot to do with personal relationship as well. so, when I go with my wife, I've been married three times in total and I'm with my third wife now. We had a previous relationship which is why I've got a 19-year-old daughter with her. When she came back into my life that was the final piece of the jigsaw to complete me. But I very much found myself while I got sent to prison for a bit of time, I very much found myself in prison. Had a long time to look at myself and sort of break myself down and not in a negative or positive way. A very factual and clear concise or sentence this is the truth now decide what you want to do with what you know.

**Me:** [00:12:15] So how old were you when you went to prison.

**5:** [00:12:17] 31

**Me:** [00:12:34] How long were you there for?

**5:** [00:12:34] 4 years. VAT evasion and receiving stolen vehicles.

**Me:** [00:12:48] So, your current wife, Was she your wife at that point.

**5:** [00:13:03] No. We've been together now seven years.

**Me:** [00:13:06] Okay. Were you married when that happened?

**5:** [00:13:11] Yes, I was in a relationship of guilt. Long story short I got married to someone I shouldn't have married, to no fault of her own no big deal. There was no negativity in the relationship it just wasn't supposed to be. Yeah, I had an affair which resulted in my daughter. I didn't stand up to that relationship as in the one with my daughter. I walked away. I walked away from my marriage as well, but I also walked away from the daughter. The guilt of that I put myself almost into self-punishment. I did meet somebody else and we did get married again if it wasn't for the proper relationship or relationship, we should have been in. It was a self-imposed punishment almost it was what I felt I deserved. 12 years of a very unhappy and miserable relationship. 4 of that being in prison I came to obviously the realization that whatever mistakes I've made in the past if I don't stand up for them and move on from them, I will continue, and I am continuing to make that same mistake. So, when I got out of prison, I started about rebuilding my life and dealing with the failings from the past. So, I left. It took a while because I thought I was trying to get into a situation where. I could leave my wife but in a scene in a scenario where she had an income and was supported but never came to fruition properly but that was down to her as well because she was spending too much money all the time. And I realized that you know what I was looking for was not really there and what I needed to do was just literally break free and move on.

**Me:** [00:15:16] Yes what I'm hearing you say is the need for self-forgiveness and I think that the hardest thing in the world.



**5:** [00:15:27] There was a need for acceptance. I don't think you can self-forgive I think you have to be forgiven by the person you've wronged. But I think you can draw a line under it and you can't carry this baggage and you can't continue to punish yourself in a way that's almost selfish in its own right. Because it's not you harm it's the person you harmed. So, it's their decision as to whether you require to be punished or not. Not yours. I accepted that you know basically I'd be a twat where I'd gone wrong and everything boiled down to a lack of truth. So, the big change for me in prison was an acceptance and a belief in truth. I am now very very honest both in my relationship and which is why it works so well is because I've been very honest from the beginning and we've been very honest with each other.

**Me:** [00:16:34] Yeah absolute honesty is 100 percent always the way forward. Couldn't agree with you more.

**5:** [00:16:39] I mean people sometimes people say you're very blunt. If you ask me am I fat and I say yes. You take that as an insult. It's not an insult. Yeah. Yes, you are fat. that's a descriptive word it's not negative or positive. You attach that feeling to it. The truth is the truth. You can try to hide from it and you can try and block it and you can try to push over whatever you want or make excuses for it but all you're doing by doing that is holding yourself back. The sooner you accept who you are what you are. Saying you can start worrying about whether you want to change. That then boils down to how much you desire to change against how much work you required to change that desire doesn't outweigh the work. Then you won't change. So, then you have to just accept that this is me. These are my feelings this is what I do wrong is what I do right. and not judging yourself continually for it because if you do that, you'll hold yourself back you cannot act without consequence you can't change the past, so you just go this is what it is. I've Learned from it. I now try and be a better person moving forward.

**Me:** [00:18:00] Yes. Couldn't agree with you more. Absolutely.

**5:** [00:18:47] Then the project to get big, it was the fulfilment of the goal and goal that became very blinkered and very very narrow minded. And I remember that stepping on stage over the 400-pound mark and I was like, is that it. In your head you build it up to be this big event and it wasn't. You invest yourself into a project it becomes very all-consuming and you start to lose a little bit of yourself you start to lose a little bit of your own identity and then you've got to find yourself again because you're known for your physical presence and not for anything else and you start to relate to that and now I understand what it's like for athletes whose careers end. They've got to find value in themselves because they've spent so much of their life dedicated to what they're doing trying to find who they are again that can be a difficult process. when It came to drop the size. It took some time to get my head around. And to start to accept that my size was not me. It wasn't what defined me and everything else that could change my size and I could come down in size and I wouldn't be any less of a person if I did so.

**Me:** [00:22:00] So when you were in those difficult phases of really pushing yourself to the limits what would you say was your strength.

**5:** [00:22:15] It wasn't an option. I felt like quitting every freak in day. There's no pleasure. There's no fun there's nothing of any joy in it whatsoever. Bloody mindedness and tunnel vision of seeing it to the end. You just focus on the end goal. You don't see anything else. so, like tunnel vision. Ill health wouldn't stop me.

**5:** [00:24:33] But even now I mean I've got 24 percent kidney function I should be taking it easy and I work about 110 hours a week.

**Me:** [00:26:23] So, the gym as your sanctuary, from what?

**5:** [00:26:46] Everything. When I worked out the stresses of the day. I mean every time I split up with a partner, I was a very angry, aggressive trainer. Actually, there was something about being angry it fired me up.

**Me:** [00:27:23] So you're no longer bodybuilding and focused on helping others now.

**5:** [00:27:42] yes harm reduction. So, I deal with a lot of people who have messed themselves up with steroids and I coach training and nutrition focused to minimize drug use.

**Me:** [00:27:49] Okay. So just going back to the drug use for a second in terms of your experience, it seems to be that the risk comes more with the way that the steroids use as opposed to the steroid themselves?

**5:** [00:28:39] No all steroids are dangerous.

**Me:** [00:28:47] I'm just thinking about professor nutt, he did get sacked, but he ranked steroids as less harmful than tobacco and alcohol.

**5:** [00:29:02] Nutt did not have our research. I mean what I do agree with is steroid use in the UK and the harm it generates generated and in comparison, to the health problems of tobacco and alcohol are less. When you start looking at bodybuilders using steroids for 30 years you start finding some very very ill and very fucked up people.

**Me:** [00:30:10] That's just the physical aspect then there's the mental aspect.

**5:** [00:31:21] Particularly what we're seeing more recently is impacts on brain chemistry and brain structure. I mean cholesterol management is we will see I guarantee you that in about 10 to 15 maybe a little bit longer you'll start seeing a large number of steroid related health issues coming to light. Yes. The guys that have been harbouring trends for years start to mature. Dr. Pope is a researcher in the states.

**Me:** [00:32:05] Okay I'll check him out.

**5:** [00:32:23] We're also seeing dependency and addiction and severe mental health problems. Now research has shown that about 70 percent of users are full time dependent/ addicted to the I personally.

**Me:** [00:32:48] Looking at this project even though I haven't gone in with that lens I consider myself to be you know quite on the ball with addiction in the understanding of it. what I'm hearing a lot of in these interviews fit with what you might constitute an addictive personality.

**5:** [00:33:35] I mean it's being shown that exposure to the fitness industry alone increases people's body image issues and increases the rate of depression.

**Me:** [00:33:46] You know part of my thing with this is I just think if you had that goal of you know trying to get the perfect body when you get there then what.

**5:** [00:33:59] When you use drugs you then have that problem what happens when you remove the drug. I mean it's been shown time and time again that social media likes are addictive. You get compliments particularly if you've been someone that's never really received compliments on physical appearance. Yes. And your posting on social media your results, you're using drugs to achieve those results are you getting compliments from people aspiring to look like you physically. that can be a very powerful drug to people. without the chemicals themselves the mental health side of steroids us a massive problem.

**5:** [00:34:50] The boom of CBD oil usage with steroid users just proves how much that reduces anxiety /depression. But when you speak to users. No I'm fine. The biggest bunch of bullshit liars If you if you wanted to see the textbook case of the moral disengagement look at steroid users.

**Me:** [00:35:22] Cognitive dissonance.

**5:** [00:36:01] The whole community is full bullshit and the peddlers of dreams. People can't face themselves and online people can't face the truth. The bodybuilding community even worse for it. There's no controls no legislation. There's no way that banning steroids is ever going to solve the problem. We know that we've seen it time and time again it doesn't work. What we need to have is an education program and what we desperately need is a better mental health service in understanding and knowledge of steroid use. Because the frontline medical bias towards steroid users is ridiculous and is discouraging steroids users from engaging with medical services before It's too late, the NHS just isn't geared up for the problem that coming.

**Me:** [00:56:34] Thank you so much. And when this finally translates into a piece of work I will send you a copy. thank you.

**5:** [00:57:29] It's not a problem.

## Appendix I

**Me:** [00:00:02] So, just to start, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? These questions are designed to be open so that you can tell me what you would like to tell me.

**4:** [00:00:11] So I'm Dave, I have been a personal trainer for six years. I'm 25 years old, I came from a sporting background of rugby, I played rugby at a fairly high level for the south west of England. From there I picked up a rotary cuff injury in my shoulder, dislocated it which led me into rehabilitation and looking at getting stronger through exercise and development. From that I chose a path of going into personal training, research, training nutrition. I had a passion for that and that's what led me into a career in personal training. Over the last 5 or six years I've developed my knowledge through various courses. Strength and conditioning, sport therapy, kettlebell work then advanced nutrition, then going into deeper nutritional protocols really. Learning other industry leaders in terms of knowledge, last year was the first time I competed in men's physique as I also coached a female to compete. I'm currently coaching 2 other people to compete in bodybuilding competitions and for the last few years my trend has been based around physique development in terms of muscular hypertrophy and bodybuilding style training.

**Me:** [00:01:39] Ok, so how did you start bodybuilding, you've spoken about a sporting background, how did your shift in to bodybuilding happen?

**4:** [00:01:43] so, through kind of rugby. It was always a focus on kind of performance. Getting stronger, more powerful, faster. When I came away from that I needed a focus for my training. You know I was always kind of obsessed at a younger age with reading men's health and looking at cover models and all the rest of it.

**Me:** [00:02:09] So magazines?

**4:** [00:02:12] Yeah, yeah magazines and Yeah, I wanted to get myself into that sort of shape. That led me to kind of research and training, nutrition and that style of training wanting to build my own physique. That's how I got into it. I also competed in a strong man competition so did a kind of strength phase, when you look body builders you look at a phase of where you are bulking as such, where you're building muscle tissue so I utilized that Into a strong man competition to utilize that build-up of strength and muscle before going into my cut phase where I cut down stage. Which worked really well actually. I think a lot of bodybuilders they kind of don't have an off season focus whereas coming from an athlete background I'm quite a competitive person, I like to have a goal set. So, having a strong man in the offseason and then a stage competition in season worked very well for me personally, you actually see a lot of bodybuilders doing like power lifting competitions in their off season.

**Me:** [00:03:20] Makes a lot of sense, ok, so you mentioned just looking at your questionnaire, I saw that you mentioned that steroids never featured in your body building prep. Was there ever a time that you considered that or was it always a no no for you?

**4:** [00:03:43] Yeah, I mean it's something I did consider at one point when I was around 20 years old. A friend of mine was doing it at the time and in very good condition. However, to be honest it scared me. I think, I didn't know enough about it to kind of want to take that jump and also, I think being a personal trainer. I don't know, I felt like I shouldn't, but it was against my, like as a PT I think there's a thing like steroids have a bad name, I didn't really go down that route. So, I kind of avoided it and I thought actually proper research and some of the guys I follow like Eric Hows didn't need to use steroids to get that kind of physique.

**4:** [00:04:30] Unless you wanted to take it to an extreme level which was never my goal.

**Me:** [00:04:34] Ok, makes sense, so what was your experience of competing?

**4:** [00:04:44] Scary. I actually tried to compete the previous year. Prior to last year. However. I fucked myself over basically with prep and did everything you shouldn't do in a prep. So, I went in full guns blazing, was doing cardio every day, got my calories far too low to quickly and probably went about six weeks of grinding myself into the ground while PTing and training and massively burnt myself out. Which actually gave me a pretty bad relationship with food, so this led to my satiety levels being all over the place, leading to kind of binge eating and emotional eating you know, not having a good relationship with food. That's what led me into doing strong man because I was gaining weight quite fast yeah, I was gaining weight fast my strength was going up and I was like I need something to focus on and that's what led me to the strong man competition and then through more kind of research of my own and I was like ok and that was when I went to the Eric Hows conference and learnt more specifically about should sort of structure a periodized diet and then I was like okay I feel as though I've got enough knowledge now to actually apply this knowledge and have another go and that's when I went into it. So, I did it over a 14-week period consistently, ticked all the boxes and actually when it came to the stage day I was still craving a lot of food. So, by the end of that prep so the first 10 weeks is okay. The last four weeks when you go down to very low levels of body fat that's when it starts kicking in. It was kind of back into that satiety levels all over the place can stop looking at foods and wanting stuff. Cravings went through the roof, the day, show day for me was pretty scary. I actually don't think I enjoyed it because I was so kind of nervous if that makes sense.

**Me:** [00:07:06] It's a big thing to do, to get on the stage in just your pants, it's a very brave thing to do (laughter).

**4:** [00:07:13] However, I definitely do want to do it again. I did kind of enjoy the process afterwards, structure and seeing my body change were pretty incredible. Obviously being able to

coach who competed with me was pretty awesome. She went on the following week to actually win which was pretty cool.

**Me:** [00:07:36] Ok, so it sounds like, from what you've said, that those deprivation levels that you go to you could manage for a period of time?

**4:** [00:07:47] Yes, I mean certainly now through extended research into diet periodization that incorporating diet breaks into prep to make it a lot more healthy. So, sort of six to eight weeks into a calorie deficit having a week or 2 at maintenance calories to just sort of restore satiety levels.

**Me:** [00:08:04] And sanity (laughter).

**4:** [00:08:04] And sanity is a very good thing to do and then making going back into a deficit a little bit more sustainable because the research suggests that in terms of refeeds that a 2 to 3 day refeed is more beneficial than a single day refeed in terms of satiety and leptin levels etc. I think now doing it the first time, I now have a more flexible approach to dieting. So I was quite rigid in what I was doing however now I'd be a little bit more flexible certainly up until the last two weeks of prep before competition then I'd kind of tighten it up a little bit more just to make it more of a healthier lifestyle and that's certainly at the moment I'm coaching people to compete and their prep has been very flexible in terms of their diet and working around their calories and macros so it suits their lifestyle whereas before I was very strict and rigid which again by the end of it it gave me a unhealthy relationship with food.

**Me:** [00:09:11] So, you've spoken about your professional knowledge and growth, did you have to coach yourself during that period?

**4:** [00:09:23] Nope.

**Me:** [00:09:23] So you kind of found your own way. So, what would you say was your driver or your motivation?

**4:** [00:09:33] To kind of be the best version of me. And always looking for that kind of self-improvement. And also, like pushing your body to that level, being an athlete, I always look to be better, stronger, fitter so taking your body to that extreme to see what you can do is pretty awesome. And I am fascinated by nutrition and what you can do with the human body so last year during my prep I actually pushed a tank for 10 hours in a calorie deficit. So, pushing your body to those extremes and seeing what it can do.

**Me:** [00:09:55] You like going to the edge then. Thrill seeker. Laughter. (discussion of charity event).

**Me:** [00:10:19] So, I know when you spoke a little bit about yourself you didn't really touch much on your family background. Is there anything in your family history that you think is kind of nurtured that drive in you?

**4:** [00:10:37] Definitely, so I lost my mum when I was 13 to cancer, bowel cancer. So, for me I channelled that emotion into rugby and sport. Contact sport, which for me was a big help. But because of that it caused me to be very intuitive about health and living a healthy lifestyle.

**Me:** [00:10:53] Wow, that's huge, I wasn't expecting you to say that, I don't know why, but I wasn't, so how old were you when that happened?

**4:** [00:10:53] 13.

**Me:** [00:10:53] 13. That's quite a key stage in someone's development too, your kind of just finding out who you are and how your body works and Wow.

**4:** [00:11:21] To be honest I was quite an overweight kid before that. I probably overate, I didn't really exercise I was a bit of a Geek, I big into my education I played in a brass band.

**Me:** [00:11:35] No way! Really, that's so cool.

**4:** [00:11:40] I'm actually making a YouTube video at the moment of my kind of journey and there's some stuff in there about that. So, when I went to secondary school I started to walk to and from secondary school to home and that then because I was such a big kid and we were made to play sport and rugby which I was never really into it. I was quite good because I was so big, I was actually a front row prop and as I started playing I got better and that led me to lose weight and get more into fitness and nutrition and wanting to eat better so I could perform better.

**Me:** [00:12:18] ok, wow, that's still Landing with me. I just really wasn't expecting you to say that. Kind of backed up my theory. And it's not it's not something that you alone have experienced. And I think there's something quite significant about it happening at that age, there's a bit of a theme with that as well. Okay. So, in the difficult moments, because it is a tough process. It can be



a really painful process. A lot of sacrifice involved you know like if you know you've spoken about that. It's like the starvation, the deprivation, you know what got you through?

**4:** [00:13:00] Good question? I think it's certainly helped that my girlfriend Jess at that time was doing it with me. Yeah, I certainly think having a supportive partner is beneficial. Because it is hard, having someone to keep you accountable. And certainly, with the posing practice and everything else, having some understanding. Because to the general population it's very alien. And when you're saying you can't go to family meals and eat certain things people just don't get it. Yeah. It was great to have someone there to go through the journey with you I think made it a lot easier whereas otherwise it can be very isolating. For a lot people. It is you know a very selfish and isolating sport I think.

**Me:** [00:13:58] Yeah. That was, I've got to be honest that that was part of what sparked my interest because if you look at the academic literature I'm around bodybuilding there's a lot of kind of negative stereotype, you know there's a kind of really negative air that seems to come with bodybuilding possibly partly because of the steroid use but I also think that You know that there's a lot of talk of narcissism and self-centredness and all that kind of stuff but I also from my own experience of meeting bodybuilders that they're some of the kindest most generous, warm hearted, hardworking, loving and that side of it seems to have been overlooked somewhere along the line. So that's partly why I'm hoping to chip into with this project.

**4:** [00:14:42] Yes, I certainly think, people I've met on the journey, Jess as well she was very loving caring hardworking and also very self-motivated. I think for a lot of bodybuilding is a kind of sanctuary they're working on themselves, kind of head down and just do it. It's one of the things that you do feel better about. Going to the gym. After training. Great. Seeing what your body can do.

**Me:** [00:15:17] So do you have any philosophical, religious beliefs?

**4:** [00:15:21] None.

**Me:** [00:15:38] The knowing smile, that didn't surprise me. Okay so do you have any kind of spiritual beliefs?

**4:** [00:15:48] No.

**Me:** [00:15:53] Ok, do you see how maybe body building might act as a kind of philosophy for life? or a framework.

**4:** [00:16:01] Yeah. I Mean certainly. The kind of hard working believe. Yeah, I think in relative to live it's taught me you know if you work hard at something and you're persistent and dedicated you could achieve some pretty amazing things. Which I think can be relative for anything. Yeah, I mean from competing last year to where I am now I have got the balance back of being healthy. So, you take that to that extreme of the stage and low body fat to that healthy balance of being fit and able to, I ran 10K this morning and I'm still able to train and be strong in the gym maintain a good lifestyle be sociable. And that's important. You know you can take it to that extreme of being on stage however for me it's about longevity of health. That's really really important to me. It should be at the forefront of anyone on a fitness journey. That they want to be fit and healthy for the rest of their life. Not just period of time. Yeah, I think for the long haul right. Yeah. So, I think body building can almost be detrimental to people's health. If you don't know when to get out.

**Me:** [00:17:19] Okay. So. Where are you now in terms of, you've said no current competitions lined up but that you're open to the possibility of

**4:** [00:17:32] Yeah, I mean at the moment I enjoyed a bit time away from purely bodybuilding so mixing my training with a lot more running, some calisthenic work and making sure my body is moving well. Yeah. Pain Free which has been a big thing for me and something I preach to my clients. However. Certainly, prepping clients for stage and seeing progress and what they're doing I know that the next few weeks when I go to see the shows it probably. Could. Spark that fire again of me wanting to get back on stage. However, you know it's one of the things where it's such a selfish sport. My focus is on business and life over bodybuilding, it hasn't been a priority for me currently. However. Certainly, I know I want to step on stage again and beat that physique which I know for me is going to be a big challenge but something that I do want to do as I'm only 25. Certainly, got more years in me yet.

**Me:** [00:18:39] Okay so you probably will have seen the initial participants information sheets that came out had used the word grief. The reason that that came out was because several people dropped right after, it could have been a coincidence. But I just thought for some people the word grief is quite scary. You know particularly if they want their focus to be elsewhere. They just might not want to engage with that. So That was why it was reworded and resent. How do you think your grief has impacted on your Body building experience? Do you think it's been a positive driver or that it's made it more tricky?

**4:** [00:19:31] Potentially. I mean for me the grief was more, like I channelled my emotional focus into rugby, contact sport, so I guess my training was another way of outlaying that like pushing my body.

**Me:** [00:19:46] Yes. I mean you started in a team and you're there and you've kinda come up to, how I see it is you've come up to the top which is you on a stage.

**4:** [00:19:54] Yeah 100%. So, it probably has been a positive driver certainly pushing my body to the extreme. Pushing that tank last year for 10 hours again that was a kind of background driver for me, an emotional anchor, that's been a big thing for me, wanting to better myself, and do my mum proud.

**Me:** [00:20:19] If it helps I was actually thinking while I was listening to you that it you were my son I'd be very proud of you. So, I'm sure your mum would be very proud of you too.

**4:** [00:20:39] Thanks Dude.

**Me:** [00:20:40] Have you ever considered therapy? or not something you want to think about or maybe not at this stage.

**4:** [00:20:43] No, not at this stage really. I think obviously when I was 13 I had a lot of friends around me and focused my energy into sport and that helped massively. I became a very self-motivated person Yeah. I mean I didn't go to university. I was going to do strength and conditioning and rehabilitation and massage however I wanted to help people, so I looked at personal training.

**Me:** [00:21:26] I kind of think, my personal thing is, I think no trauma no treasure. You know its kind of. And I just think maybe you know maybe. If there is a link which is what I'm exploring, you know the debate is on whether it's a good one or a bad one, I think it's good to a point. And potentially I mean you may find that further down the line when you come to have children of your own that and your lifestyle changes that then you know the emotional impact of. The loss of your mum might hit you a little bit more. You know it might be at that stage that you think actually you know I'd like to go and talk to someone because there's something about the way my life has changed that is making me feel the loss of that a little more.

**Me:** [00:22:09] Yeah. I think it's a very good thing to a point. Like personally I think it's a really positive thing to a point, where it becomes tricky is. Like I've got a very dear friend of mine actually. He's got to a stage where he can't let go you know. And quite often that's because of all that pent-up emotion that's still there and to let go of that means to let go of the emotional baggage. for want of a better word. It's horrible isn't it. No one wants baggage, I don't even want it at the airport let alone emotional baggage. laughter. Yeah. But I'd imagine that there's probably something really therapeutic in pushing that tank because if I put myself in your shoes I'd be quite angry.

**4:** [00:23:06] Yeah. definitely.

**Me:** [00:23:08] You know like you've been, your mums been taken. Not surprised you're an atheist. I don't have any religious belief either. I kind of think that there's something, like you know something in nature that's where I find it, there's got to be something bigger than we are. You just don't know. Okay, well that is super thank you very much for your time. I'm going to turn this off.

## Appendix J

**Me:** [00:00:02] Can I just get you to tell me a bit about yourself.

**3:** [00:00:06] Yes. So. I am 48. Married, 2 children been working in the fitness industry for probably the last 28 years. I'm currently a fitness manager for everyone active over three sites. Still doing a bit of activity every week but more so for health maintenance and fitness rather than any competitive sports or anything.

**Me:** [00:00:39] So how did you start bodybuilding?

**3:** [00:00:41] So I was always extremely sporty at school.

**3:** [00:00:47] You know if there was a school team I would be in it so I was never going to make my living at any particular sport but I would be in the football team the tennis team hockey team volleyball basketball whichever you name I would be in it. And then when I got to probably 16 17 when I finished school I sort of. Tended to then sort of drop off the sports side of things started to sort of go out have a few drinks and do things like that and ended up sort of. Almost going from quite a fit physical active person to being fairly unfit and overweight and. Got to a point that I thought actually I'm not overly happy with this, so I started to do some running swimming and initially just to sort of get leaner and get fitter. And then when I was about 17 18, I then sort of pushed on to the next level, so I then joined a gym. Naturally I've got a fairly. Addictive personality possibly is the word to use. I'm not sure or I'm quite competitive anyway. So. You know for me I couldn't just play football I would have to play football for a team. So, when I started going to the gym it sorts of evolved then to sort of, I got more and more into it really enjoyed it quite liked the changes that it makes on your body. And then it wasn't almost because of the way I am it was almost like I it's not good enough just to just go to the gym that I sort of almost sort of wanted to go more into bodybuilding so I suppose the people I was working with at the time, I was in the leisure centre in Swindon, the oasis. And there was you know working as a lifeguard there was probably a team of 14 or 16 people at that time and probably 4 or six or eight of us were all into the gym all into training, so we were all into it and it was that sort of environment the more I got into it the more I enjoyed. And then I'll just say it just sort of evolved naturally into that. The gym I was training at the time then had sort of like its own intergym bodybuilding competitions, so I ended up doing that when I was probably 19 20 that sort of age. And then I did that, and I enjoyed it and I sort of felt that I'd done all right. And then I sort of. Then sort of pointed to then wanted to progress it onto the next level so that I sort of entered natural bodybuilding competitions that were sort of like a regional type thing so sort of evolved into that really. But yeah, I just really enjoyed sort of. The lifestyle really, I enjoyed the training anyway, so it wasn't as if I found it hard to do because I was doing it anyway.

**Me:** [00:03:28] OK so it sounds like you are aware of a drive within you.

**3:** [00:03:32] Yeah. You know I am. That's just me. I can't help that it I mean it's, ironically enough the opposite where I live at the moment there's a pub that's transformed. Into a rifle range. Now the kids are off my hands I've got more time on my hands. So again, I sort of joined that just socially where you shoot rifles at targets and its great fun. But again, now I'm you know shooting in a team and entering competitions and stuff it's just I'm naturally you know when I played squash again, I couldn't just play squash for my mates three times a week. I ended up playing sort of all-around Wiltshire in competitions it just for me. I enjoy competition so yeah you know so I just I suppose I like to be the best I can whatever I do. So, you know I don't. And that's for me it's not I have to be better than somebody else. The aim is for me to be as good as I can be.

**Me:** [00:04:26] So okay you enjoy a challenge. So, is there anything you think in your personal history maybe in your childhood that you think nurtured that kind of drive in you?

**3:** [00:04:42] Never really thought about it to be honest. I'm the youngest of five kids so you know I've got brothers and sisters who were anything up to 13 years older than me. So, I suppose there's an element if you were the youngest one then you would always want to be on a level playing field with the older ones. So, whether that subconsciously. I never felt that I had to prove myself or beat them or whatever, but I suppose if I was playing tennis in the street and you're playing with the one person who's six years older than one that's two years older than you you're going to want to try and beat them because it's just sibling rivalry.

**Me:** [00:05:22] I'd imagine probably being one of five kids meant that he were probably competing for your parent's attention as well subconsciously perhaps?

**3:** [00:05:30] Possibly I was a bit cleverer than that though because my grandmother only lived around the corner, so I realized quickly that I could either be at home and have no attention or I can just walk two minutes running to my grandmother's and then I was the apple of her eye.

**Me:** [00:05:42] Laughter. So, your experience, before we move on to this did you have a coach or was there somebody in particular that was....

**3:** [00:05:57] No I just had a thirst for knowledge I had read so many books magazines articles, you know watched videos of bodybuilders and trainers and you know people together in the worlds watch pumping on about three million times see just for inspiration and things. I trained with a chap. Who I worked with. We were on the same shift pattern and we trained with each other for a few years then I trained with my brother. He's six years older than me. So, we trained together for a period of time. So, I always tended to train with somebody you just think when you're training, and I didn't get to any level. But when you train with that intensity you know you need somebody because you're going to lift a failure and you just have the drive and the sort of you know all that sort of motivation that you can give each other and encouragement and things.

**Me:** [00:06:58] So it was more of a mutual support as opposed to....

**3:** [00:07:02] I would probably say that I tended to be more of the lead person. So my brother would look to me to dictate what we were going to train that day didn't mean I trained harder than him but you know he you know I would say I'm going to do this today that tomorrow that the next day I would be the one who would probably be sort of but then possibly obviously with PT qualifications and things you would think I had more knowledge than the people I was training with but yeah so.

**Me:** [00:07:34] I was just thinking that it's quite interesting that despite being the youngest child you were the leader. That's how it sounds.

**3:** [00:07:41] I wouldn't say I would say in my family I would say my eldest sister is like the matriarch of the family and she would my mum would definitely almost be governed by my sister. I never. I don't suppose I was governed by my sister as such because I suppose she'd almost left home but the time I was seven or eight she left home anyway. But you know. I don't know if. I never really would say that I was the leader particularly.

**Me:** [00:08:22] Interesting because maybe not within the families but outside of that you're certainly the leader here aren't you. Very humbly admittedly.

**3:** [00:08:31] Well I am but I suppose I'm sort of. My style of leadership is. I tend to almost have a sort of I feel almost like a parental feeling over everyone I manage. And I think that's because I genuinely care for the people that work for me. Yeah and I take a genuine interest. In them you know. I mean you worked here a while ago and I was genuinely excited to hear about how Charlotte had got on and I know just recently had a grandchild etc. so you know. I was I suppose that's how I am.

**Me:** [00:09:08] So yeah you kind of lead in a non-authoritative way. Yeah. You know there are some people there that are in leadership roles that are kind of bossy and controlling.

**3:** [00:09:21] I always think I feel quite comfortable with who I am as a person and how I am in life and my conscience is clear on every level I don't know I feel I've been genuine to everybody and not everyone likes me but even the ones that don't like me I don't feel that I could have been any different to them. Yeah. I don't know, I think sometimes when people are slightly more shouty or authoritative, need that power surge etc. then I think there's probably some sort of insecurities within the store within that, they might feel insecure within their role that's their sort of bravado to try and make up for that whereas I don't feel insecure I feel if I don't know something I don't

know. And if somebody else is working for me and they know more than me and I'm happy for them to know more than me. Because. That helps me out. So, I don't mind employing people who have got more qualifications than me. Better instructors than me and everything else because that's good for me, then I've got people working for me.

**Me:** [00:10:33] That's good for team.

**3:** [00:10:34] Yeah. I've always had a bit of an attitude. As much as I don't really like Manchester United you know Alex Ferguson was an extremely successful manager there. And. You know the people he employed, he was never a great footballer or or a great player himself. But you know. But he still had better people working for him and I just feel the same sort of attitude here, you know I'm happy for people to come and have world class instructors working for me because it's great isn't it. Why wouldn't you Some people would be possibly, they might fear for their job because they'd feel insecure that person might do a better job than them and therefore whereas I suppose I don't really feel that.

**Me:** [00:11:18] Ok. so, your experience of competing.

**3:** [00:11:24] Yeah. So, as I say I trained anyway and then wanted to sort of I suppose it gave you a goal and it gave you a focus. I suppose if I thought about it deeply it probably gave me a reason to live that lifestyle to justify it in a way. Yeah. But also, it was just good to physically look like that. When I was in bodybuilding mindset and I can genuinely sort of look back now and I do sort of thing. That. I was. You know slightly sort of obsessed and a little bit of an idiot sometimes you know I'd go to sort of somebody's barbecue and I'd take my own food and I'd think what I was doing, why didn't I just did eat their chicken and their steaks. Why do I have to take my own, but I suppose because I'd weighed it and I wanted to know how much I was eating.

**Me:** [00:12:13] Is there any other way to do it successfully.

**3:** [00:12:17] Probably not. But I suppose it's almost you just. I don't know. It's just the reassurance that you you're doing the right thing and everything else isn't it. But yeah, I can sort of see that you are sort of. You know so obsessed with that that other things in life don't seem to the most important thing in your life at that point is you know training food nutrition and everything else. It's not your job or how much money you've got or anything. You don't tend to worry too much about that. But when I do look back and I analyse it I think sometimes things did I sort of, was that maybe me doing bodybuilding and then not having to sort of worry about everything else in life because it was quite an easy life. You get up in the morning. You eat your mountain of eggs and porridge for breakfast go to work for a bit but two hours later you're eating a protein drink and something else a couple of hours later you're eating a lot of chicken and rice a couple of hours later you're having another protein drink. And then you're throwing a load of weights around in the gym you come home you eat a load again and then you go and rest and



then you eat alone again. Yeah. And it's just constantly training and eating, and you have to worry about everything else in life and you're not really you know worrying about pushing your career on or other things. Yeah. So, I suppose it was quite a simple life for me really you know it was quite enjoyable. But competing to answer your question. I would usually take probably 16 weeks to go from one point to then stepping on a stage. So, first month I would just so I never did cardio outside of competing, so I would then up my cardio and start doing a few sessions a week and then just sort of tidy my diet up, so I would then not eat particular things like chocolate or crisps and things not that I ate a massive amount anyway. Yeah takeaway. So, I just eat good normal food but wasn't really monitoring it or weighing it or anything but it's just good. Quality food. Twelve weeks out I'd sort of change my diet and I would be in a specific diet for like four weeks four weeks later I change it again I'd just strim it down a little bit and then four weeks from the end I'd change it again and then the last sort of week or so you're just messing around with. Taking on different amounts of water to dry yourself out so you're looking a bit more ripped.

**Me:** [00:14:41] It just seems funny hearing you say the word ripped. laughter.

**3:** [00:14:50] So yeah as I say that was you know just I didn't mind it was quite disciplined I'd have all my food set out so I was following a specific type that I wanted to follow and I just packed it up and ate it, I'd weigh it to the nth degree and if I felt I was losing too much weight I'd eat a bit more because I knew exactly what I was eating it was easy to eat a bit more or less, a bit more chicken, oh now I'm getting a bit too skinny. But you know you can manipulate your food so easily.

**Me:** [00:15:17] You've spoken about parts of it that almost sound easy.

**3:** [00:15:29] I did find it easy, I honestly did find it easy because I was I was eating clean and eating well and training hard anyway it would almost be you know if people were going to drink loads of beer and eat loads of chocolate I wasn't having to think oh my god I need to eat that, to me the mindset I was in would be somebody asking me to smoke a cigarette as to eat a chocolate bar and why would I want to do that. And that same attitude. So, I didn't find yeah if you don't smoke and I said oh you have a cigarette then you would go no thanks. Well I wouldn't want to eat a cream cake or anything like that. You're having a laugh what would I want to eat that for. I'd rather eat a 4 egg omelette or something. So certain times. It was I say it was easy. At certain times it wasn't easy. When I especially if your show date fell and there was like you know a family holiday or a holiday. You know and then you're down in Devon or something and you're trying to eat those meals every day. You know no ice cream no meal in a pub. You know you're just eating (screws face - laughter) I would just be there with my little Tupperware pot of food day in day out and I didn't mind going to the pub and they could all eat it. But that was, You know that was quite tough.

**Me:** [00:16:50] It sounds like from what you said that you could almost see it like an escape from everyday life.

**3:** [00:16:58] There was an element of that. I suppose I really enjoyed. The sort of in the early stages of doing bodybuilding. I did find that it massively increased my confidence because I think in physically improving your physique does give you confidence to make you feel good and you look good and you go from sort of like a bit of this wasn't really a skinny really skinny kid or anything but I went from being a little bit sort of a podgy sort of normal looking teenager kids to looking quite muscular and then you do feel good. And I almost did feel it in my mind it makes you do feel to a certain degree a superior would be a pompous word to use by use it. But you did feel. Almost a bit superhuman because you're quite strong and. You know I suppose if you're walking down the street and even now I'm not. I haven't competed in bodybuilding for 22 years or something you know. But I still retain that element of strength and actual natural from that and I still you know if I'm walking my dog at twelve o'clock at night because I want to walk, I did it last night and I'm walking down a dark alleyway close to where I live, I don't actually know, I think well I still feel quite confident and quite strong and you know even when I'm with my kids and things they've always even I don't think I give off that sort of persona but they say I always feel alright when I'm walking around with you. And I suppose it's because you do feel quite sort of strong and fit. And I think people then treat you different because then they'd be sort of. Slightly different in the way that they might approach you if you were looking quite meek and scared.

**Me:** [00:18:47] So it sounds like it was an empowering process.

**3:** [00:18:50] Yeah I think so. You know when you, and also the fact that you can do it takes a lot to be honest you know.

**Me:** [00:18:58] I know you said you found it easy, some people find it impossible.

**3:** [00:19:02] I find it quite easy. But yeah, some people wouldn't have the discipline. And it makes you feel like you know if you cannot eat chocolate and not drink the rubbish they drink and eat all rubbish foods and you know you do feel I can do that somebody else can't. So yeah, I think it does.

**Me:** [00:19:22] Ok, so what do you think was your driver of all your motivation other than women. And that's the obvious one people would say.

**3:** [00:19:32] I didn't care whether I won a show or not because I just wanted to just be the best I could be. So, I didn't really with bodybuilding. It's so subjective in the judge's eyes it's so political. That I don't think I was your typical stereotypical bodybuilder anyway as I say. So, if you've got a judge I was always as I said I would probably look more like a middleweight boxer than a bodybuilder. If you saw me at that time which was the look, I really liked I would rather look extremely conditioned extremely even when I was bodybuilding, I still played competitive football. Yeah. So, it wasn't like you know. So, I could do other things it wasn't like that was all I could do. I think also I'm intelligent enough to realize that you know you've got to look at your

genetics and other things and I'm not genetically gifted for bodybuilding, but I made the best of what I had. And so, I sort of realized that you know I'll never beat some bloke that looks like Mike Tyson before he's even picked a weight up and So I was under no illusion of that. But yeah, I suppose it's just I enjoyed the challenge of doing it and how I looked physically because it's quite nice when you've just competed at a show then you go on holiday or something and you will look in in really good condition. So That's quite a nice feeling and I quite liked that imagine and portraying that anyway even just naturally.

**Me:** [00:21:10] So if you did have struggles with any part of it that was difficult for you, what would you say go through?

**3:** [00:21:26] I think I think I've naturally got quite good pain threshold and I think that's from training. So when you're lifting weights and you're going to lift you know a lot of weight on your back squatting and it's going to crunch when you're pushing and the weights coming down and you know I suppose you almost get quite a good tolerance because of what you're putting your body through workout wise. So I suppose you just sort of deal with it. I find it more hunger doesn't bother me. I can just deal with it. So, I just sit there think Well I'm starving but that's just bad luck. I probably be a bit more short tempered and ratty and stuff like that. But I can deal with that. I just deal with it. I find it more. More hard. The hardest thing I found was if you're eating, you know I was eating probably six chicken breasts a day at one point. A dozen eggs a day. So, when you were sitting there with one and half to three chicken breasts in a bowl with a little bit of rice and about three or four boiled eggs at 10:00 in the morning and that's your meal to eat and then you've got to like almost go. And you've been eating that for the last six weeks eight weeks anyway. I find it almost like. Hard to physically go and chow that food down. Yeah that's what I find it hard. The actual hunger side. I can deal with it. I can feel hungry or I'll just stay here because I'm due to eat in another three hours, so I can just do that. But eating monotonous food. You know that was what I found more hard. Because you've eaten it and then three or four hours. I found that honesty. I found that was the hard thing for me was you know when you've been eating something for six or eight weeks and you've still got to eat it wasn't like you're not just eating you know a sliver of it you're eating loads honesty and it was that was what I found more the hard side of it. Yeah.

**Me:** [00:23:30] So I'm just thinking what got you through? would you say it was determination?

**3:** [00:23:45] So in my mind, the reason why I didn't go sod it I'll throw that in the bin and I'm going to go and eat McDonald's, or I'm going to go and have a bacon sandwich. What the hell. The reason I kept going was because I on the sort of person if I said I'm going to do something I'll do that. And whatever that might be I will do it. And even if it means that I've upset somebody because of it. Yeah. If I said I'm going to do it then I will do it's just the way I am. So, because I have said I'm going to be competing and I'm going to be stood on a stage. I suppose it was the thought of like. To stand on the stage and you've only got a pair of trunks on you think if I'd cheated on my diet then there's no hiding place and it's my self-pride as well. You know you want to look the best that you can. And again, there will be other blokes that beat me but as long as I'm

looking the best I can. I can look at that, I'd feel an idiot. If I'd walked on there and not even dieted. I'd just think what are you doing. So that's what drove me was the thought that I've committed to do it and therefore I will. So, I. Do it to the best of my ability. So. But that's when I was. If ever I was sort of questioning myself, I be like well I've said I'm going to answer, it's on this day. And therefore, it would in fact it would never. It would never have been questioned because I've said I'm doing it and that's it.

**Me:** [00:25:21] So at what point in that process did you meet your wife?

**3:** [00:25:27] When I was 22, I stopped when I was twenty-six twenty-seven. So, my wife was. I found it quite easy, so I met my wife when I was twenty-two and then we were boyfriend girlfriend for a year which doesn't really affect anything because I'm living at home and she's been living where she's living so you see each other evenings and weekends. So, I could still her job was sort of nine to five thirty. She'd get home at six. I used to train probably around four o'clock and I'd finish about probably half five and get home at 6:00 even when we then bought a house when we were twenty-three it still didn't affect anything because you know it doesn't matter to her what I'm eating and what she's eating. And unless I was competing then my food would change but for the rest of the year, I could still eat my evening meal with her. Because that's not a problem. Yeah. And because she was at home till six o'clock it didn't affect anything, and she was really supportive as well. The thing that sort of changed it was more sort of like when you have children because then you've got a choice you can you go well, I'm going to be a bit of a super selfish type dad and I'm just going to say sod the kids I'm just going to do what I want. But it was more selfish to my wife it because if I was, we decided for her to not work when the children were little which was crippling financially because you're losing her wage and she was like 15 grand a year, but we just made that decision. It Was really tough, and you know we ended up instead of having 2 cars we only had one car. Yeah and I had to ride like this rubbish motorbike to work and back because it was cheaper to run that than it was two cars and we never went on holiday abroad or anything like that. You know we just had sort of weeks in a caravan her sister owned on caravan sites we could go for a week or two and things like that. And we just sort of like you know didn't have a real massive expenditures and things, but it was nice to kind of know. My wife I don't think would have coped with going to work and leaving the kids just because I just don't think she would have coped with that very well because she's really like mumsy and stuff. And it's what I would have wanted as well because I wanted that for my children as well. So that was, that I suppose that's how I was brought up, my wife was brought up, so sort of you know and it was really tough. But I didn't feel comfortable in myself finishing work at two three or four o'clock then going to the gym and then getting home at half five. Knowing that my wife had been home with the child all day. And then she's at home another two hours trying to sort of cook the tea feed the kids do whatever you know standing their turning a pot with a kid in her arm. I Just felt it wasn't right. So, I suppose also I'd sort of competed a few times and I'd sort of thought. Actually, you know I'm not going to make any money at this. I didn't do it for that I'm not going to get a job from it. I don't want to be a model or anything like that I genuinely enjoyed lifting weights and. Being strong and looking good and everything else. I was never going to win any competition because my genetics aren't brilliant. I wasn't prepared to take any steroids or anything like that. I just thought I don't need to focus slightly more on my career. I'm not a big career person anyway and if I won the lottery I'd finish and go. Home and wouldn't worry. I mean I'm not motivated by work I just work because I have to in order to pay for a lifestyle that I'm happy with, I haven't got

a flash lifestyle or anything, but it does what I like. I suppose I sort of had a bit of a sort of light bulb moment when I thought I'm doing all of this. I didn't want it to impact on my family my wife and all of that stuff. So, I ended up still just training but. Doing that. And then I sort of moved jobs so. That sort of changed a little bit.

**Me:** [00:29:51] So it sounds like it was a natural growth out of it. My Personal kind of you know I think that that's the healthy way to go and that perhaps when grief comes into the picture that's when people get to that point and then they find it difficult for them to let it go.

**3:** [00:30:12] You mean grief. Because I'd stop being a bodybuilder and I felt almost the same feeling of grief because I wasn't the person I was before. Is that what that means or? Or sorrow for not doing it anymore.

**Me:** [00:30:26] Well, I think there are some people that I mean I noticed a bit of a theme with people and that was what sparked my interest in the two things. The amount of people that when when you said oh you know just in conversation what was your motivation. And then they mentioned somebody that was very close to them that had died. Which is what got me thinking that there may be a link, for some people they get to that stage where life is kind of telling them that actually it's time to let this go know something else needs your time and attention. But for whatever reason they find it really difficult to. To let go of that as their natural process.

**3:** [00:31:04] I don't think that was the case for me. For me I think it was just. I started training and enjoyed it, really go into it. Then thought I'm doing it anyway, so I may as well compete because that's what I'm like and then even when I stopped playing, I stopped bodybuilding the club I was at I got into squash so ended up playing loads of squash. But I could do that sort of but not impact on the family. So. So I was playing loads of squash and um yeah, I was playing probably 10 or 12 hours of squash a week. Because I got into that because that's just my you know even like with rifle shooting. Now that sounds pretty funny but um you know I'm sort of doing that a couple of times a week again and it doesn't impact on the family it's like eight o'clock on a Wednesday and a Sunday and stuff like that you know.

**3:** [00:31:49] So I'm at home and I just go off and have an hour or two just doing that. It's just how I am really. Even when I was a kid, I'd go fishing but I ended up fishing in competitions. just because I don't know it's just the way I am.

**Me:** [00:32:09] I mean I know your information in terms of the project is just as valuable because I think that without a healthy kind of example to compare something to and just because you don't have a tale of grief that doesn't mean your information is any less valuable.

**3:** [00:32:25] But I do feel I do feel well when I was in the bodybuilding sort of red mist as it were. Yeah, I do feel that. Because. If something happened and somebody did die or there was something catastrophic. I suppose because I'd sort of. Buried my head into bodybuilding. That's how I dealt with stuff because um I didn't have to work you know all I was worried about was training and eating that was it. prepping my food training and eating at some point because I used to cycle my training so I over 12 weeks I would go from like. Lifting this much weight. And by the week 12 I would be lifting more than I'd ever lifted in my life And I'd have about eight weeks when I was well within myself and the last four weeks I would probably start creeping up to my maximums and beyond. So, I'd sort of like to sort of cycle my training like that and when I got to like the last few weeks of that cycle, I'd even take a day off work. Use a day's holiday because I would especially if things like legs yeah, I'd take a day off work. Because I was training my legs and I think that's hilarious.

**3:** [00:33:34] I used a day's holiday the more the sort of that sort of mental approach to that workout because you know I'd be squatting like for me and to some people it would have been a breeze. But for me I'll be squatting massive weights leg pressing loads of plates. So, for me the thought of going to work that day having to work and then go to the gym I'd take a day off work and I'd sort of sleep I'd get up I'd eat, and I'd go back to sleep. I'd have something else to eat I probably put pumping iron on and watch that and get this myself and I'd be like Yeah. So, in my mind ready for that workout. And it was just bizarre. And I look back now and I find it laughable, but it was great. laughter.

**3:** [00:34:22] The most Important thing to me that day was just doing that and likewise you know I just say if something like your grandmother yeah, you're sad but as long as it wasn't like a tragic death. You know I mean if she was old and stuff you just think well fair enough but because you know you do tend to sort of um other things that happen whether it be at work or wherever you know as long as because that well you know your priority was your training and you're eating and so other things you didn't really care about too much to be honest, which was quite a funny way to live I suppose.

**Me:** [00:35:01] So did you go through any process when you let go of the um, it sounds like you've continued your training.

**3:** [00:35:08] My trainings been it's just different you know. So, I went to play squash for. Probably eight or nine years and played loads of Team squash and everything else. Yeah. But again, similarly I found when I then changed jobs again, I did find because I was sort of reflecting thinking actually do you know what I'm out this night and that night playing squash. Again, I'm not home quite as much so yeah. So, I made a conscious decision to sort of finish that but also it helps implications with knees and hips and stuff so yeah.

**Me:** [00:35:39] You wouldn't say that you went through a process. Well I mean some people have spoken about like a bit of a depression that they went through when they gave up.

**3:** [00:35:54] Not at all. I really enjoyed it though and I still enjoy training now you know. But yeah, I do quite like the fact now that I can still eat what I want to eat and not have to be sort of eat food for a fuel rather than because you fancy something. I love that.

**Me:** [00:36:14] Did you ever I mean you said that steroids weren't something that you wanted to get involved with Was it something you considered?

**3:** [00:36:24] No. So, for me. The way that I look at steroids and people that have been on steroids if they want to take steroids in some ways, I think fair play to them because they took them and that's what they wanted to achieve. But in my mind and the way that I am. I if I love an analogy and the analogy, I always used for bodybuilding was. To me it felt like cheating. And so, it would feel like if I wanted to have a brand-new watch or a television or a car I would save up and when I've got enough money, I would buy my watch or my car or whatever I want to buy. If somebody's used steroids to me. I'm not saying this is the case but for me I feel it's like the same as somebody that's shoplifting. Yeah so they've cheated they took steroids they've got the gains so you know they would look the same as me or better than me and I've been training for about six or eight years Yeah eating what I've been eating all those chicken breasts all those protein drinks amino acid tablets and everything else and then all of a sudden within six months they've gone past me. to me that felt like shoplifting like they cheated. They also sold their soul to the devil because what I found was. People that did that were very anxious lots of anxiety. They generally didn't just take steroids. They'd have to take other drugs as well to mask the pain of their joints because it's not natural to be able to lift the weight that you can lift that quickly and so therefore the pain in their back and the knees and everywhere else the shoulders even the tendons, they then take things like heroin and cocaine. Generally, take that but also.

**Me:** [00:38:24] And not just for the pain I've been quiet, it's been quite enlightening process to realize how many bodybuilders use cocaine and heroin pre-contest.

**3:** [00:38:34] So for me it felt as I said it felt like they were cheating but also, they all deny it as well. One person that I know who openly admits to it and talks about it. The rest of them. Just sort of it's either a taboo subject and they don't even talk about it. You wouldn't even feel there's an environment to even open that conversation or they deny it. You just say no no no no I just eat loads of chicken and I do this, and you know I'm 48 and as I say I've been in gyms for. Over 30 years you know I can spot somebody within about two seconds who's took steroids. Partly because I know. I worked, and I trained and never got anywhere near it. You're telling me at the age of 19 that your, it's just like really. laughter.

**Me:** [00:39:26] The other thing, not that this is about me and my personal opinion, but I share that opinion and I also think as well how anybody can ever be satisfied after that because you can't take steroids forever you know what's going to happen when you have to stop taking them.

**3:** [00:39:45] But they do tend to take them forever. That's the trouble you know. But also, you know if I woke up this morning and I had a bit of a pain in my tummy or my leg was hurting, or my hip was sore I could just go Well that's probably due to running yesterday but if you're on steroids you're thinking oh my god you know. Are my bones thinning now is that what's happened and then they google it and then yeah, they might have a bit of indigestion and as you said they might be thinking that their heart's finally going to pop or whatever. Yeah. So, they're so anxious about every little thing.

**3:** [00:40:23] So for me it was never an option as it would be not an option for me to shoplift. Yeah because it just it's wrong and It's just the way I am and yet. I say right is right wrong is wrong. Yeah that's wrong in my opinion so therefore I wouldn't do.

**Me:** [00:40:55] It's setting unrealistic expectations as well. in terms of the Interview I think we've pretty much covered everything that I needed to cover unless there's anything else you'd like to tell me for the purposes of this research?

**3:** [00:40:58] No, I don't think so, we've covered loads.



## Appendix K

**Me:** [00:00:00] Ok. So, can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

**2:** [00:00:03] Hello, I'm Tim, I'm 38 years of age, I've had kidney and liver problems since birth.

**Me:** [00:00:11] Joke about not being a police interview (laughter).

**2:** [00:00:18] I had a kidney transplant five years ago which has been successful. I've been ill all my life a load of different operations, I've trained since about 17 years of age consistently. Other than when I've had illness, but I've still trained even though that. Trained all the way through dialysis for nine months. I've competed about six times and I pretty much always placed in top five. Regardless of what's going on around me. And that's as far as I can say for the moment.

**Me:** [00:01:09] Ok, so how did you start bodybuilding? You said you've been training since you were 17.

**2:** [00:01:11] I just came to the gym, probably when I was 16 or 17 I trained, and I just gained muscle mass really quick. And seen a difference really quick. I mean I've trained since 15 just messing around in my bedroom with weights and I just enjoyed it and got some quick results which is what kept me interested really.

**Me:** [00:01:35] Ok, so how did you go from using the gym to bodybuilding specifically?

**2:** [00:01:45] Well when I started training I got a lot more size, but I kept good definitions so. I kind of went from there I seen other people who were competing, and I thought I could do as well as them. I would just purely after I had my kidney transplant, and a year after, I decided to compete as soon as I had my transplant. One year after I just went to my first show. My posing was absolutely atrocious. I went, and I was in an open weight category as well which I was disappointed about because there weren't enough people on the day in my category, so I just jumped in with everyone.

**Me:** [00:02:28] So do you think the kidney transplant, did the kidney transplant affect you wanting to compete? Did it push you to do it?

**2:** [00:02:30] Its kind of give me a goal. I thought in a year or something I'd like to compete, but I've always had that mentality anyway just to try and get bigger and better shape. Because I'm

shorter as well. Maybe that's an attribute towards it. I'm not too sure. I've always been keen on it really.

**Me:** [00:02:54] Ok. So, was there somebody that was an inspiration to you or did you have a coach?

**2:** [00:03:21] No. I've always trained on my own, never had any PT's or any coaches, I did it all myself and the results spoke for themselves really.

**Me:** [00:03:22] So how did you find out about the first competition did you look on the internet? Did someone suggest it to you?

**2:** [00:03:22] Well, there was kind of the Federation I was going to go for which is the natural one, so I always had that one in mind and then as the course of time went on I went and did a few different ones which were unnatural. Yet I still managed to hold my own and placed second place muscle model, so I managed to hold my own with all of them.

**Me:** [00:03:33] Ok. (more recording jokes) so what was your experience of competing like? It sounds like it was quite positive.

**2:** [00:04:01] Yeah, I found it quite good to be fair. Dieting right up until the end. (more recording jokes) Oh yeah, I found it positive coming up to the show there was a lot of bitchiness and guys looking at each other's pictures via social media. But other than that, it wasn't too bad. There was a lot of support, on the day it was very good. The initial sort of hour before I went on stage that's when I basically got nervous then and messed stuff up. Because of the pressure and the nerves and then you took other people and you feel that they are better. It's mentally tough, nothing else, physically it takes its toll just but it just mentally more than anything else.

**Me:** [00:05:14] Ok, so you said that you're married and that you have children. Were you already married when you started bodybuilding?

**2:** [00:05:14] Pretty much. I've always kind of been in a relationship. All through, it doesn't really seem to affect me. My training is I do that no matter what, I've got set times and it's almost like going to work for me. I train every day my lifestyle fits around it. Competing is harder because you're looking more at what other people are eating and children, if they're eating chocolate and stuff you notice it a lot more and you realize how many things, how much junk that other people are eating, and you can't have it. I've actually had situations at work where I've been offered doughnuts, said no, drove home, sneaked a couple of bars and eaten them so no one can see me,

and I don't feel like I've failed. It's stupid, even hid, gone outside and eating an extra snack and then you kick yourself and feel terrible. You really kick yourself it wasn't worth it at all.

**Me:** [00:06:20] Hiding from your own conscience, and then you have to go hang on I haven't killed anybody. (laughter)

**2:** [00:06:20] I don't realistically think it makes a grand deal of difference anyway. If you're ready 2 weeks out that is good enough I think.

**Me:** [00:06:34] Ok, so generally your wife's been quite supportive?

**2:** [00:06:38] I've always gone on my own because the children, I've always gone to every show on my own, done the whole process on my own. I sort of separate that from home because it doesn't need to get in anyone else's way really.

**Me:** [00:06:50] Yeah. So, she's quite understanding of your need to go and do whatever you need to do?

**2:** [00:06:54] Yeah, she's always never worried if I go training and has never really said anything. I don't have much of a social life anywhere, I don't go out drinking at weekends so it's kind of the only thing I do. I don't watch football, that is literally all I do.

**Me:** [00:07:20] Love Island? laughter. You could be doing worse right? What would you say your motivation has been? I mean other people have described it as a drive, and I mean it is like that, most people wouldn't get out of bed to go to the gym, not everybody is cut out for it so what would you say your motivation is?

**2:** [00:07:55] My motivation is just to be better, bigger and better. There're other people, other people motivate me, seeing someone else that's better than me drives me to be better again. I'll be honest with you, the comments help as well like if you go out on a night out, that drives me even more if someone says you're looking good. That and my kids as well. You go to go pick your kids up from the school and their mates, they're chatting more and that's another big thing. Standing out, you stand out.

**Me:** [00:08:43] in a good way. I'm trying not to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like for you the process is empowering?

**2:** [00:08:44] Yeah, it's a bit of an ego drive to be honest.

**Me:** [00:08:45] Ok. So, do you think that there was anything in your childhood or growing up that kind of impacted?

**2:** [00:09:14] Well I was always quite small because of my illnesses so whether that has spurred me on without me knowing wanting to be bigger, I don't know I quite like the attention as well.

**Me:** [00:09:14] Have you got siblings?

**2:** [00:09:14] Yes, yeah, 2 sisters, twins they're younger, 3 years younger.

**Me:** [00:09:27] So did they steal your limelight when they came along?

**2:** [00:09:27] Oh no, no, no because I've always been in hospital, probably the first 5 years of my life, so if anything, I kind of dominated over them, it's no one's fault, it might sound awful but they're always kind of been in the background.

**Me:** [00:09:47] I your shadow?

**2:** [00:09:47] Yeah, Mum and Dad always had to be at the hospital and stuff like that yeah.

**Me:** [00:09:51] It's like that as a parent, you know, you go with whichever one needs you most.

**2:** [00:09:54] Yeah. We've all had everything the same no one was treated any different, but I've been much more of a priority like because of my illness. That's probably another reason I never rent off the rails because my parents put so much time in me to start off with it would be a bit of a kick in the face now if I went a bit mental.

**Me:** [00:10:12] Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, there was nothing major that happened when you were growing up that made you....

**2:** [00:10:25] I think that perhaps because of my illness, I've always as a child been a lot weaker and in and out of hospital so perhaps it's because of that. It's made me want to be stronger and better than everyone else.

**Me:** [00:11:01] Okay so where do you think your strength comes from? Where does the strength come from to listen to the better version of yourself?

**2:** [00:11:26] I kind of switch a little bit, If I want something I will have it there's no stopping me, there's no reasoning with me. I can come to the gym, wait for it to pass, sleep at home, I don't mean to sound cocky, but I believe I'm mentally stronger than 95% of people. I don't need, from being led down to smashing it in here there's nothing I need to kick me up the arse.

**Me:** [00:11:27] Yeah, yeah, I get it. It doesn't sound arrogant at all.

**2:** [00:12:23] I can be really ill as well, I mean I trained all through my dialysis for 9 months. I really can just put everything to the back of my mind and do what I need to do.

**Me:** [00:12:29] So you haven't got any religious or spiritual beliefs, what would you say other than coming to the gym, it sounds like maybe your family, your parents...

**2:** [00:12:31] I don't really, I do it for myself more than anything, to keep myself happy, when I'm training I get so many positive comments that's what keeps me going really.

**Me:** [00:13:30] Ok so just going back to what you said about the transplant, that's sounds really important, so you were ill for most of your childhood did it get worse and jackknife for you to have the transplant?

**2:** [00:13:44] Yeah I've been having operations all my life every few years and usually there would be something wrong, like a twisted tube in my kidney, last year I had a hernia but I couldn't just have a hernia I had a cyst on top of it as well, things always seem to spiral but I don't pay much attention to it I just get on with it. It doesn't, a lot of people can dwell on things but I'm the opposite, a bit stupid really, well not stupid but. If someone says I can't do something I want to prove them wrong.

**Me:** [00:14:15] Yeah one of the themes that I have already noticed is, and I'm not even half way through my interviews yet is that bodybuilders, they won't listen, to anybody. There's just doing what they're doing.

**2:** [00:14:30] Yeah there's a guy on You Tube, CT Fletcher. One of the world's strongest men, he had a heart attack, I think he's ill again now, but he trains, think he ill now, if someone tells me I can't do something I'll purposely go out of my way to prove them wrong.

**Me:** [00:14:57] Yeah okay so the transplant. If you hadn't had it was your life in danger?

**2:** [00:15:04] Oh yeah definitely, my kidney, I was working and training on percent 9 % kidney function and still, I felt not too bad but usually they talk about dialysis at about 16%. Well I was running about 9. The reasons they let it go on was, I was knackered all the time, but I just kept going and switched off to it I suppose. I put dialysis off for probably 2 years longer than I should have. There was a mess up at the doctors, they kept saying I had a kidney infection, they just kept putting me off and it was ridiculous.

**Me:** [00:15:26] So do you think that spurred you or pushed you to compete?

**2:** [00:16:17] It gave me a goal, I've trained all my life, it was like, training is hard, don't really know why I wanted to do it, once you've competed once and seen yourself on that day, you look that good, a lot of it is to do with the lighting, then you find it hard going back to how you look normally and that's your next step up or next level to. Sort of focus on. Three or 4 days after a show you come into the gym and your tans worn off and you look like dog shit and mentally you think what's happened, a lot of it is to do with dehydration and lighting and tan. Anyone can look good on a stage with a tan, within reason.

**Me:** [00:17:08] ok so where are you now in relation to competing, you said you're enjoying your training and your health is steady.

**2:** [00:17:31] Maybe next year, I don't want all the factors and all the pressure of competing, I'm just training and getting good results. maintaining what I need to do. On the day, mentally it messes me up so much on the day. That I start to doubt myself, I don't know about competing anymore, I'd like to but at the moment it's a fashion thing, so I've dropped off at the moment as everyone wants to be competing. I've done physique and I've done bodybuilding and I've managed the transition of both. I'm not discounting it completely but it's not a priority at the moment. definitely not.

**Me:** [00:18:11] So, do you think that the emotion or anxiety about your own health had impacted your choice to body build? I've been interested in the link between grief and bodybuilding. But with you I'm wondering if it's more of a defiance?

**2:** [00:19:03] Determination. Pure determination. I've had a really good upbringing, it's just a personal thing for me.

**Me:** [00:19:24] Yeah that makes sense. I mean while everybody's story and driver are different there aren't many bodybuilders that I've met that don't have some story about something that's been emotional painful or scary.

**2:** [00:19:42] I don't think so, I mean maybe my health has contributed to me wanting to to be bigger because I've always been smaller but for me once you get a few positive comments that's my drive to keep that and not drop back.

**Me:** [00:20:00] Cool. That's it. My questions are done, amazing, thank you very much for your help.

**2:** [00:20:03] No problem.

## Appendix L

**Me:** [00:00:01] Okay so, we kind of covered it. But if we can just go, I've got a bit of a guide here. So. A little bit about you as a person. I know I've read the book and I've got some background information but whatever you feel is relevant to tell me would be good.

**1:** [00:00:30] Well I mean you know from the book and everything. Well I think my background, my upbringing probably had an affect on making me single minded and focused. So a combination of something innate and something from the environment I think is a bit of both. I don't if I think I had a really comfortable upbringing and you know like nice comfortable environment and career to go to or not maybe I would've never been you know you need something a little bit crazy a little bit driven to do something to this extreme. And I think I wanted to show the world that I could do something. It was just suited to me because I have a very individual character I would never like playing team games and stuff like that. I felt like when I was growing up like my parents weren't doing a great job and people were letting me down. I Just thought if I just fucking take care of everything myself it'll be alright. So. I mean bodybuilding gave me an opportunity to do that literally like okay a lot through the years I've had some advice off people maybe some supportive words in this and that but really that's it. I made up my mind to do it and I pursued it and I did everything myself from day one with with no support and it was like. The training I'm doing myself the eating I'm doing myself everything. I can control all that. And. The competition when I get on stage it's me up there and it's me that's done the the work it's me that's done the diet. And. Win or lose I take the responsibility and or the glory or whatever it comes out of it. Yeah it's me So. I think mentally very. Well suited to it. And I am capable. I knew I was capable. Of discipline. So I left home at 16 and a managed to like. You know. Kind of survive and not get in too much trouble. And that was because I had some kind of control and discipline. That's a lot of people of that age didn't have already. A little insight into the personality behind You know I was not wanting to be successful I was almost felt like I have to. Just a drive. Everything else had to take second place.

**Me:** [00:03:08] Do you know remember how old you were when you first felt that?

**1:** [00:03:10] I Can't exactly say but I know I always felt like I was destined for something different. I want to say special, different, something and I always felt like I didn't really fit in with the culture. And. The limitations and expectations. Just felt. Foreign to me. I knew I had to. Go somewhere else somewhere bigger and. I always kind of dreamed to America when I was a kid. I never settled there but you know I did end up going for bodybuilding that's where it's mainly based.

**Me:** [00:03:47] So what do you think was the biggest influence on you during your childhood? Was there a specific event that happened?



**1:** [00:04:03] I think when my dad died when I was 13 and that was a huge shock because just my whole world like. Changed at that point. Not just because I lost my dad at a very crucial moment for a young man because you just come into puberty and are everything and you know basically becoming a man and you want to know how to become a man and who is your role model as a father.

**Me:** [00:04:23] Know, it's not there you no and then there's a whole upheaval because shortly after that my mum another guy and we moved from where it was what was familiar to me to somewhere else. So this whole period was a big big shock and a big upside down. Who knows. We moved to Birmingham. So if we didn't move to Birmingham might not have found a gym and so on and so on.

**1:** [00:04:53] So it's all part of the story. Right.

**Me:** [00:04:55] Exactly. I couldn't agree with you more. So How did you start bodybuilding?

**1:** [00:05:03] I did a little bit when I was at school because my first thing was a huge Bruce Lee and kung fu fan. Everybody that's into physical, I mean who doesn't like Bruce Lee, he's an amazing individual. So I was doing karate, I couldn't find kung fu and I started doing karate and with that started doing some weights and got hold of these bodybuilding magazines and actually started enjoying the weights more like the physical more than technical moves and stuff like that. So that was our first experience. But I left school and I left home at 16 and I wasn't really in a position to go to the gym and train and our lifestyle was different. But I always had it in the back of my mind. One day I want to do this. And. That was reinforced as well when I got sent to detention centre when I was 18. And they had weights in there. And. I saw that I was kind of you know better than everyone else with stronger and got respect from anybody for that and at that point I said like when I get out of here I'm gone I just need to get a job I need to find an apartment I need to get stability and then I'm going to start training and I'm on the train I want to do bodybuilding I want to do competitions and I want to make a career out of it somehow. I didn't know how exactly but I just saw it as a way out of everything around me.

**Me:** [00:06:28] Was there anybody in particular that inspired you?

**1:** [00:06:32] Body Builder wise not anybody that I know. It was it was almost like these guys from the magazines were my surrogate fathers because I was reading about these guys in the magazines like you know maybe this is the model of a man and what you want to be read about these guys and I really like Mike Mensah because of his philosophy, logic and his writings. And training methods which I came to adopt so I guess Via via a magazine Mike Mensha was a bit of a hero and there's been a few people along the way that they've never really had. A mentor. Or one individual or coach or anything like that. Did it all myself really.

**Me:** [00:07:22] So we spoke a little bit about it already that I've got moving on to your experience of becoming professional. If we could go back over it that would be fab.

**1:** [00:07:34] So from that point I started training I think 1983. You know I'd won to have I was the best heavyweight in England 1988 won the British championship overall and got my professional status and then it was go to America and compete in the first professional contest.

**Me:** [00:07:55] This is a huge jump.

**1:** [00:07:56] It is a huge jump. So I went from British jump ship I took 18 months off. And just trained for that contest give it a hundred percent and of course the sacrifice in all areas of your life that you've got to do that and possible risks of taking steroids or whatever.

**Me:** [00:08:14] You know serious or not serious there might be we could debate that but there maybe some risks so all these things I wanted to be realistic and not like a lot of people around me that were giving up everything. Well they were not getting anything in return because they were not winning anything. So people around you as well that you're asking you know if you've got a family or kids you're a bit emotionally unavailable.

**1:** [00:08:43] Your sons 28, were you already married then?

**Me:** [00:08:45] We weren't married, we were together and had a young son. So people around you there making sacrifices as well your time your emotional focus and energy and all that stuff. So I said I'm going to give this hundred percent to the show and if I don't place in the top five to be realistic I haven't got what it takes to be a successful professional body builder. So I would at that point not compete anymore. Yeah I would train because I like to train and would probably open more gyms and that was the option that I gave myself.

**1:** [00:09:24] History shows that I got second and so on the story goes.

**Me:** [00:09:28] How was it for with your family during that period. Young son. Debbie how did you balance. How did you manage all of that?

**1:** [00:09:43] Well Debbie was very supportive. She came to the first contest up until the first contest. She really understood what was going on. Yeah just taking my time away. This is the first contest that I've and I had such a tremendous reaction from everybody. Like who the hell are you. Because basically like if you've come in this novice contest but to be honest with you. Probably like the best bodybuilder would get in the whole country like who the fuck are you and where did

you come from. So She was there to witness that so she knew like I'm not wasting my time I'm doing something serious and the possibilities here. Debbie was very supportive. she knew what I had to do and there was time I had to get the rest and You don't have time for everything or even focus.

**Me:** [00:10:43] so was Debbie ever into training herself?

**1:** [00:10:43] Yeah just for fitness.

**Me:** [00:11:06] How did you understand your drive or your motivation. I mean you describe it quite clearly. I just wonder what you made of it?

**1:** [00:11:13] Different things at different points. It changes when you become professional it changes because you're making money it's a profession then.

**Me:** [00:11:27] Is there much money in it?

**1:** [00:11:27] Not compared to major sports. a Mr Olympia in those times could be earning half a million dollars a year. But there's you know then it goes down. Yeah. If you're like tenth place you're lucky to be earning a living so it's only really at the top tier that really they can make some decent money or a good level of living. I don't know maybe there's more guys because of the internet people make money without even competing on Instagram and selling things and this and that and all the followers.

**Me:** [00:12:11] I mean I'm no expert but it looks like it's all very watered down these days.

**1:** [00:12:17] It's a whole fitness industry they call it now. It was just bodybuilding and it was more pure and it was more sport now It's like half a modelling competition and half of something else. So many categories because it's become a business. So the more people you can get in the net the more money so I understand that from a business point of view and nothing lasts forever. Everything always changes and adapts and so on.

**1:** [00:12:47] So yes it's different. A lot of categories and bodybuilding itself is not as good as it used to be. All the best people used to go into one category more or less with the weight classes but it was all bodybuilding.

**Me:** [00:13:02] We've already touched on a little bit but what got you through you know in those moments when you, you've kinda got those, one on each shoulder. What was the thing that had the final say?

**1:** [00:13:22] Just the fact that the goal is stronger than any of those you know any of those words. And I made those goals very firm and very strong and I did that by writing them down. Yeah. You know if you write something down if you say to yourself now. Say for instance I'm not going to drink any alcohol this weekend. Normally I have a glass of wine everyday. But you say I'm not gonna drink any alcohol this week and you tried to drink no alcohol. Or you write it down on a piece of paper and it's on your wall like in your house. I'm not gonna drink anything this week. Yeah I mean the one you got a much better chance when you've written it down it solely because those are your words you've broken down with your hands. So those were your intention that you wanna carry it through.

**Me:** [00:14:07] Yeah. What I'm hearing you say is your conscience it kind of almost.

**1:** [00:14:14] Yeah your better self yeah. I mean that's what you wanted right. You wrote it down. Yes. So why are you going to go against that because that's what you wanted. You know we've got different aspects of our personality. But the boss says we're not drinking this week.

**Me:** [00:14:28] So the boss, The boss, ok.

**Me:** [00:14:40] We've already again we already touched on it so so I've got we've moved on to where are you know in relation to bodybuilding?

**1:** [00:14:48] Well I don't train for bodybuilding anymore because of my injuries but I still really like training in the gym and I can train legs I don't really have any injuries there. But I don't train legs much but I do a lot of cycling. I do other activities because I'm injured so I'm limited to what I can do in the gym and if I try to work around as they say in the gym I feel like it's not benefiting me much. So I do more like activation movements core movements things my posture things like this they're going to be more practical as I'm getting older. People have spine problems and I'm very conscious of that. I've been doing yoga for about three years. I do a lot of mobility stuff. So my spine is good my health's very good. And this is what I'm looking at now. I'm not thinking like how big is my bicep. I'm looking what's my blood pressure. Is my heart right. Yes. It's my cholesterol. You know what's my flexibility. Number two. How's my cardio. Those are really more important not to say that weight training isn't important, of course it is. As you get older you want to maintain muscle mass. But as I've done weight training all my life its not as important for me. The other things are more important. So I do a very little bit of weight training because I'm limited by the shoulder injury. Shoulder is very weak I can barely do it like maybe 8 pushups because it's so weak just the joint is weak. And I have a tear on the tricep and a tear on the bicep so that means this whole side is weak. Anything I do is kind of imbalanced. And then that's bringing to

this side. It's nothing like. You know what I'm trying to do here maintain some kind of image of myself in the past. To keep me my ego or other people happy like. These people that say oh you're skinny now. Whatever. I do what's best for me. And what's best for me now is. Doing everything. For my health. And so that I can keep continuing to live this active lifestyle as I'm getting older I want to be hiking up mountains and swimming in the sea and all these things. That's what I need now I don't need ah 22 inch biceps anymore. Nobody ever died from small biceps.

**1:** [00:17:19] Passer by interrupts to stroke dog. With the family thing that you're asking about, you don't have focus. Like for Lewis most of the things at school like sometimes I would go to school but sometimes I wouldn't like sports day because I've got this to do now and this to think about. This kind of stuff so it's like the almost like their emotional energy you don't have left. So they they miss out on that. It's not that you're not there. You're there but you're not.

**Me:** [00:18:06] It would be worth it though to be able to say you dad was Dorian Yates.

**1:** [00:18:06] Yeah, hopefully.

**Me:** [00:18:10] Ok so it sounds like motivation was winning. Being the best, being number one?

**1:** [00:18:17] Yes being no.1, winning number two is just like almost, it's no no. at all it's worse than last.

**1:** [00:18:30] Yeah. And to change my life from the life that was around me you know.

**1:** [00:18:38] Get a kid get a council house get a job. It was all around them or if you want to get out risk going to jail. Like most of the guys if they wanted to you know somehow get out of that that's. Risking going to jail as well. so there was not that Many options. So. I used that as a huge motivation like get the fuck out of here, really. So that was a motivation. I've got no safety net, no family, nothing no one's coming to help me. You're going to do it yourself or that's it. A lot of my drive.

**1:** [00:19:19] If I had comfort and security maybe I probably wouldn't have that drive.

**Me:** [00:19:26] But now its shifted into a staying alive for as long as you can?

**1:** [00:19:32] It's about having a good quality of life. Like hey what's the point in living from 80 to 100 if you're a fuckin cripple or you're in pain.

**1:** [00:19:45] And I like learning and I like evolving so I don't want to stay in the same place and bodybuilding I've already done that, I've done it to the max. So what juices left in the lemon? nothing right. The lemons finished. So I do some other things I can do yoga and it's something I can do as old as I can get and it could also keep improving because you can always learn bodybuilding I couldn't top what I already did because the weights I used to move and the size I had and everything.

**1:** [00:20:16] Is a temporary thing. You can't keep that up forever. This is my wife Gal.(background chat)

**Me:** [00:20:42] You're a very lucky man.

**1:** [00:20:43] I won't argue that luck has had nothing to do with it.

**Me:** [00:20:46] So. We're get coming across to the questionnaire but you mentioned steroids very briefly. can we talk about that a little. Well. I mean what do you have any regrets?

**1:** [00:21:14] No I don't because I won 6 Mr Olympias and created a legacy, I was fairly calculated about what I did and perhaps not the healthiest thing in the world to do but I'm living a totally different lifestyle now. And I think your body can heal and adapt to pretty much anything. And. If you believe it also. Living a lifestyle now which is maybe a counterbalancing what I did before. Yeah. So a lot of little injuries and stuff that I acquired or tightness and all this stuff. I'm working them out now and improving them same thing with my general health. I'm pretty much. Now almost. Vegan. Pretty much plant based which is a lot healthier. And I can study. I get news letters coming all the time and I've got books so I'm studying all the time now natural health which I find very fascinating how diet affects your health. Yeah. So. Really that's what I'm doing now. I did my own bodybuilding experiment before. Now I'm doing my own health and wellness experiment which includes the spiritual side of things as well meditation and breathing exercises. I've done psychedelic experiences and you know continually on that path of trying to learn. So that's kind of where I'm out now and enjoying having a bit more relaxed lifestyle living in the sun and all that stuff.

**Me:** [00:22:54] From what I can make of it I'm no expert but from what I can make of it it's more the way that people use steroids that is risky?. I mean Professor Nutt actually ranked them as less harmful than tobacco and alcohol.

**1:** [00:23:06] (Dog interrupts) Well you smoke cigarettes (interruptions) Well there's a lot of you know because the Internet has a lot of the information on there a lot of it. It's not good information unfortunately, people go on there and people may go on there and you can find a Dorian Yates steroid course and half the stuff on there I don't even know what it is. And then the other stuff that I know what it is they put like ten times more than would be healthy. For anybody. I did some articles and spoken before and told people this is what I did. And. You know. I'm not saying what to do or not what to do. Yeah. I definitely didn't do what's on the internet. Please don't do that. Just try to be honest about it. Yeah if I had to compare it's probably like.

**1:** [00:24:45] You know it's like smoking or something like that you do it for 10 years and then stop and then lead a healthier lifestyle. Maybe you're not going to suffer in the long term. But the more you do and the longer you do it. The more negative it could be. Yeah.

**Me:** [00:25:01] How did you cope with the mental aspect? Did you find that there was an impact on your mental health from steroids?

**1:** [00:25:08] Year. Coming off definitely you feel very depressed because you got a high level of male hormones which makes you feel very assertive and aggressive and confident and then you've got you know levels of a 10 year old girl. Like. Once it comes out of your system and it takes a long time to adjust. And often it doesn't. So mine after I think it was about two years it wasn't rebounding So I just went onto testosterone replacement which I've maintained. To this day which actually. For most guys over 40 45 might be worth looking into anyway. It's healthier for your testosterone is in the normal to high range. It's actually. A lot of. Health. Age related diseases. For men due to low testosterone even diabetes can be remedied with. Testosterone is low when you put it normal. Diabetes would go way off arthritis many things like that so. So no I don't regret it. It's like I made a decision I calculated the risks and you know go with it and I'm going to be regretting. Afterwards. And I don't have any. Health. Negative health effects at this point. All my health results are very good. But I'm living a very healthy lifestyle. Great diet and the sun is, Just living in the sun makes you much more healthy. (Dog interrupts again).

**Me:** [00:27:03] There are some people that consider bodybuilding to be like a form of like addiction. Part of what kind of inspired me do this is I've met a lot of bodybuilders over the years and some of the kindest most helpful. Loving people that I've met. But I just think that society generally views bodybuilders very negatively which kind of upsets me a little bit because I just think actually you know you make a huge judgment based on someone's appearance when you know nothing about these people. So that's kind of part of the reason that I wanted to to try to chip into this a little bit.

**1:** [00:27:46] I don't worry about or what they think about anything really. I just don't give a fuck, I don't really care but I feel if somebody meets me then they're gonna lose totally this preconception they had in their mind. I don't mind. People that think that obviously their just making a judgment and we all do it all the time, every day. I think it's something with human

nature you have to catch yourself sometimes so people might think that. They might have preconceptions. I've never met anybody hasn't. Felt. You know they've got something positive out of talking to me because everybody would like to improve the way they look and they would like to improve their health. And. They would like to understand how to achieve things and to mentally do things so. People speak to me that's that's usually what they take away from it.

**Me:** [00:29:05] Yeah.

**1:** [00:29:05] And of course the stereotype does exist. Of course. It does exist as well. People are only concerned with how they look. Now it's got more like that with the social media people going in the gym more to take pictures and to show people that they are training rather than worrying about actually training. So It has got a lot more like that with the social media aspect. Any group of people or any culture or anything like that. You know you could have a general picture within that group you're going to have all kinds of people. Yeah. So yeah you have got that stereotype and sometimes it is a bit embarrassing but It's not the way I do it.

**Me:** [00:29:49] So. We probably skipped over this a bit earlier but what are your kind of, have you got any religious beliefs?

**1:** [00:29:58] I'm spiritual not religious. Religion kills spirituality it's just a manmade construct with negative consequences. So no, I'm not religious, but I am spiritual. I believe that. Everything is kind of connected in this world. Somehow and maybe some of the ancient religions that you can find all the in Buddhism and Hinduism and so on. So I'm interested in those and of course I follow meditation and so on. So I'm a big believer in the spirit and the interaction of your own thoughts with this gan, this reality we are in if you like. So yeah I'm spiritual and I'm spiritually concerned and. seeking more knowledge along that path. That doesn't include religion. Maybe I read a little bit a start and then just realize that this isn't helping.

**Me:** [00:30:53] Personally I think it's just a was of controlling the masses.

**1:** [00:31:02] Yes, that's what it is, control. A form of mind control because it puts restrictions around your thinking like you mustn't think this must do that immediately putting yourself in a box and they've been doing that to us all our lives the whole school system is constructed like it and everything they tell you is like this. So it's difficult to free your mind outside those boundaries. But. I'm quite good at doing that. You know. The psychedelic experience. As well which is has Blown the doors off situations.

**Me:** [00:31:35] There are some people that kind of view bodybuilding like a form of addiction.



**1:** [00:31:40] Well yeah t can be, anything can be addictive, you could get addicted to hamburgers or drinking coffee or. Masturbating or. Whatever. You know. Right. It's that sort of thing. So yeah. It could be an unhealthy addiction and you do get, you do feel high. Yeah cause that's what is interesting because I study alot about cannabis, I'm a big believer in the benefits of cannabis and I promote that. Now they're finding out, well they found out the human body has a kind of endocannabinoid system and our own body has a system made of cannabis that's why it fixes so many things with the human body. And they used to say that after exercise you produce endorphins which are natural pain killers. What they're saying now the probably that's not the case you produce something called andanamide, andanamide is a natural cannaboid that's made inside the body. So. It's like. Mostly after training you feel like you've smoked weed. Same kind of. Same kind of feeling. So yeah that could be addictive. And become unhealthy if you know. If it's interfering with the rest of your life and too much exercise it is physically destructive, it' not healthy and it's aging your cells because you're producing so many free radicals from the exercise. That you know the benefit of the increased cardiovascular strength or whatever is being outweighed by all these free radicals it's just aging yourselves. So some extreme athletes. I mean their life expectancy is lower than a sedentary person because they are just wearing themselves out with too much, marathon runners and so on.

**1:** [00:33:19] Yeah ill the time because their immune system's fucked. So yeah it can be addictive and unhealthy. But. I think most things have got that potential. It depends on the individual that's doing them, their mindset. Yes you could be addicted to going to the gym but that same person could go and do something else and find that they are getting addicted to that because their is some imbalance Yeah.

**Me:** [00:33:44] There are worse things you could be addicted to I suppose.

**1:** [00:33:46] I mean you've got that kind of nature to. If it's being destructive the it's a problem. Yes. If it's not, if it's being beneficial then there's no problem. Yeah. I think you call it an addiction when you don't have control over it and you're getting negative things now and you're still doing it. So that's. I think that's where. You cross the line. Generally of course it's a very positive thing to do.

**Me:** [00:34:12] So, just one last thing to talk about I think, when you reach the end and you realize that things needed to change you. You've spoken about a depression. How did you find your way through that?

**1:** [00:34:23] I don't think I even knew what it was at first, I don't think anyone really knew. And I can say now it was. Was down to circumstances because I'd retired. This is a major stress for anybody. Somebody very close to me died. This is another major stress. My marriage was going through problems like triple whammy at the same time as we decided to have like no male hormones in my system. So you know.

**Me:** [00:34:54] Sounds brutal.

**1:** [00:34:54] Yeah it was. They say never do anything in halves so yeah it was. It was horrible and. Combination I have medicine and then later on I didn't just realize myself that low testosterone was possibly a cause. So. Kind of remedied myself and. It was an acceptance of. You're not. Doing this thing that you were doing anymore which required 100 percent laser focus an all-consuming thing that you were doing and now you're not doing it it's like you don't really know who you are. But slowly I was able to look on the positive side, yeah but while we were doing this for all this time you couldn't do shit else man you couldn't do anything you couldn't I didn't even how to do anything and I had no social life. I cut myself off from friends I hadn't been out to a bar or a nightclub for like. 10 years. Like. I. Just didn't know how to be anyone else but slowly I learned first of all that's not who you are. That's not who you are. Secondly now you've done that and you've done that now you can do anything you want man you can stay up all fucking night. Want to just go to the other side of the world and go look at some elephants you can do that you can do fucking anything you want. And slowly slowly.

**Me:** [00:36:25] So do you think maybe it gave you the opportunity then to think about some other things that perhaps you haven't thought about.?

**1:** [00:36:33] Yeah because I was in this tunnel. So it took a lot of. You know. Time to get balanced. And rounded again. Probably. Till now. Who knows it's an ongoing process right. So it's ongoing but now I feel very comfortable like with that being there and with me being here and having different goals and different outlooks and so on. I feel good that I've been able to grow to this place and continue growing where most people just get stuck. If a guy has won a major competition as a professional normally he'll try to maintain this physique and this image and this lifestyle until the day he dies. Because that's his identity. So tied up with that but mines not. I did that but I can do other things as well. I enjoy doing other things and. Life is for experiences so why fill it with only one type of experience. So now I'm. You know I'm not really doing much weights myself. But I believe I have more knowledge about bodybuilding weight training and how it should be done for maximum effect. Than anyone else. So. I'm more like a mentor teacher for other people as well.

**Me:** [00:37:51] So if you think about yourself as you were back then in your peak how do you think that version of you would have felt about the Dorian that you are now? Do you think guys would have got on. How could you see that panning out?

**1:** [00:38:03] I think the young guy might have found this guy very fascinating. You know I was not one of those guys that thought if somebody is not like on my level of bodybuilding strength or something But if I could see something else so they could you know admire or learn I would do that. So I think he'd be very receptive but not developed enough or sensitive enough to understand some of it.

**Me:** [00:38:29] Yeah. that makes sense.

**1:** [00:38:33] I might have been talking over the head a little bit with some of the stuff. Now that I understand. That guy might have been like what the fuck is he talking about. Like that's a bit heavy for me. You know.

**Me:** [00:38:40] Yeah. Yeah.

**1:** [00:38:45] Because I didn't need to be that D. I needed to be just be focused and keep a certain level of aggression all the time. Like GRRR. But I kept it and used it for my workouts so it was not like flying around. You know.

**Me:** [00:39:03] I'll just share this with you when I went to pick this up from the university I went into the office and there was a guy in there that looked like a man that life had got on top off. He was moving stuff from one room to the other. And he said oh what are you using the recording equipment for. I didn't say who but I gave him a brief idea of what I was doing. And then he looked at me and I could just tell by his face that he was completely genuine and he said how does a person keep that amount of momentum for that long. And I thought actually that's a really good question because to do that six years on the trot. That's a lonnnngggg.

**1:** [00:39:43] But it's not the 6 years on the trot is not the hardest thing. The hardest thing was getting there. Because now you're Mr. Olympia and you're doing it now you're making all the money. Now you've got all the support. Everyone's got your back yeah. You know you've got more people chasing you of course and now you're up at the top so you're competing now with the top people. But how about when I was training and I told this story because this kind of sums it up. So I've gone to a British championship right with two coach loads of fans from Birmingham Wembley Arena in Wembley won the British championship crowds going crazy and they're. Flying. You know 2000 people going ape shit.

**1:** [00:40:30] So I've gone home to Castle Vale council estate in Birmingham. No car. No proper bed no carpet No TV people, no newspaper people outside my door. Yeah same as I was last week. Yep. And so it's just this huge anti-climax if you're not careful. Shana Yeah yeah. Nobody knows, people start supporting you because they want to be on you never wants to be associated with somebody that's doing well right it's just human nature so everyone starts. And you know you're struggling to pay your bills, struggling to buy your food. I'd say that's actually harder because there's once you there you're there right and you've got the support actually trying to get there. And have anyone around you believing that you will get there. That's the hard thing. Financially as hard as well. I didn't have a car until I got the gym I started making decent money and I was able to buy first of all driving lessons in. I didn't know how to drive. And a car. I got when I was 25 years old my first car. So. That. Required. Absolute. Total focus to get from there.

To the professional part. I would say that was much harder because at any point I could have just said fuck it and nobody would have anything, in fact, yes, you're one of us again now.

**Me:** [00:42:01] Yeah yeah yeah.

**1:** [00:42:06] So I say. And then of course being on top and so it wasn't six years of focus it was twelve years, six years as an amateur to get there, people forget about that, oh there's a new guy on the pro scene. He might be new on the pro scene but he's not fucking new he's been grafting on the pro scene for six or seven years in the gym to get there. So the two phases are different. And it's funny I didn't have any money or anything but don't ever really remember feeling stressed about that I felt like really confident about the future. Like I'm working for something I'm going there and I'm getting there. I felt you know it was going to get better and better and better whatever the outcome was.

**Me:** [00:42:44] It sounds like your mind was always the weapon.

**1:** [00:42:48] Yeah that's how I beat everybody else yeah. You know genetics, body, all that guys are really good at that level. Some of them are really good and I think damn they didn't even train that hard and were really good, I thought damn I hope they don't train like me and be even better Anyway they didn't. So.

**1:** [00:43:06] Yeah that's it. It's the mind. I kept myself focused. 100% all the time. Didn't take time off. Don't get distracted. Put everything else aside. Even my family. This is what I'm doing and yaah you're right. Once I got to be Mr Olympia it would have been easier then to be like, lets sit back and have some champagne. We got on money and this and that. I Was very aware of that I'm not even gonna have some. That's why I stayed in Birmingham. Because there's not alot to do in Birmingham and if I went to L.A. There's parties every day, there's hot girls at the gym there's social events that you get invited to maybe Hollywood parties and this and that it's easy to get you know. Yeah I might like it too much. I'd better not even try it. Yeah.

**1:** [00:43:53] So I kind of stayed in Birmingham. Although I was Mr. Olympia and very famous in certain circles. In Birmingham I'd just walk down the street nobody even knew who, even people on the street by the gym in Birmingham didn't know who I was. Ah there's a gym down there and some big guys.

**Me:** [00:44:10] Okay so what role did your friends play because you said about not really.

**1:** [00:44:18] Well I kind of developed new friends because anything social like going to the movies or going for dinner sometimes or something would be with new guys from the gym.

Because we're all yeah. Got a common goal here and our other friends members are going out drinking and stuff like. You know. What's the point. I can't come out drinking anymore. Hang around with them it's just like. More temptation. Do something like that and I can't do it so. Back and forth from the gym to home and if I went out it would be going to movies or. Something like that with the guys from the gym. And we used to work a little bit on the security a couple of nightclubs and wine bars on. First couple of years before I got the gym as well so it was like a new social circle. Well mainly it was just. Focus on getting out of here not flying around here.

**Me:** [00:45:15] What was I just thinking, I've got one more question and it's gone. We just. Talked. About friends. Where did that just go it's escaped me.

**1:** [00:45:23] Of course when you're Mr Olympia you get a lot of fake friends. Yeah. All the vultures come around. Yeah. Cause. They don't come round before because you had nothing to eat. And you know you think you're Mr popular and everybody loves you. But know they're all here to get there.

**Me:** [00:45:54] People are selfish. It was the grief thing, that was what I was gonna come back to. So do you think that that impacted. On your. Bodybuilding experience. The grief from your father.

**1:** [00:46:04] Yeah. Yeah I think it. Made me. Much more independent cus I had no role models so I had to create my own. Role. Male role model which was you know from the gym and all that stuff. If my dad was around then like maybe things would have been easier. You know like to get a job and I felt like I had nobody there so. I had to make it on my own. And I couldn't afford to slip up. As I said it was not I was not feeling like I wanted to do this. I was like I had to, It's almost like. It had already happened in my mind. A little bit. As. Well. You know. If I talk to a couple of friends that knew me before I started trying or just when I first started training. Not sounding cocky or anything like that. But we just it's of no surprise to us that you were very successful. No surprise because you always seemed like that you knew you would be somehow.

**Me:** [00:47:12] Where do you think that came from?

**1:** [00:47:14] I don't know I think I just felt different like I didn't fit in like I had some destiny. That was unusual. I just felt it. Like.

**Me:** [00:47:20] I know what you mean because I feel the same way. Personally, I just don't know what mine is, I feel like my reason for meeting you. Like there's something more to this but I haven't got a damn cable what.

**1:** [00:47:34] While that's the mystery of life isn't it, if we knew all the answers we wouldn't have to come here in the first place.

**1:** [00:47:39] If we already knew the script I got this theory that before we come here. Right. You're going to go and this is what you can do and this is your goal and this is what you're gonna do ok. When you get there you can have total fucking amnesia so you've got to try to find your way. To this path and it's going to be very difficult. And you'll have a lot of challenges and a you'll have a lot of pain and this will help you grow to be stronger in the light you know. So you want to do this challenge, yeah I wanna fucking do it then sometimes you're like fuck I wish I wasn't here. You know. What's It all about.

**Me:** [00:48:18] There's a lot of pressure that comes with it all isn't there.

**1:** [00:48:25] I think that's all coming from yourself. it's all your perception. I've been developed to a point now where I really don't let other people's opinions perceptions whatever like they're not mine they don't belong to me so I do what I want to do for my benefit and people that I love and. The World. I make my decisions based on that and not on what somebody else may or may not think be thinking. It's of no concerns to me. You lose power If you do that.

**Me:** [00:48:56] Yeah. you do. So It sounds like the process of bodybuilding was empowering for you.

**1:** [00:48:59] .Oh yeah. Just reinforcing. Reinforcing reinforcing because everything that you do becomes a habit. So if you step up to something and it's difficult. And you say fuck it I'm doing anyway I'm over it and you jump over. Next time something comes up that looks like that a little bit difficult I jumped over that before I can do it again. But the reverse is true as well. If this comes up you know. Aw no I can't do it Maybe the next time and you're not going to get anywhere. It's not easy but if it was then I guess we wouldn't learn anything. It doesn't matter who you are. Life is. Sometimes. Joy and sometimes hard, position money power doesn't protect you from that.

**Me:** [00:49:51] Doesn't protect you from being human does it.

**1:** [00:49:57] Brings its own different challenges.

**Me:** [00:50:00] And I guess being Mr. Olympia didn't protect you from being human either.

**1:** [00:50:04] Not at all, fucking got depression and felt like killing myself and showing myself the trophy didn't help me. Showed myself my bank account it didn't help me. It's all in the mind. Yeah.

**Me:** [00:50:15] I often think when people, I mean people generally don't talk about feeling suicidal because of the stigma attached to it.

**1:** [00:50:21] Well maybe we should because we might find out fucking hell I felt like that too. Yeah. Really. So do I fucking hell. Exactly.

**Me:** [00:50:29] Personally I think that people tend to feel like that when they reach a point that something needs to change. You know I can't carry on living like this.

**1:** [00:50:41] It's a struggle point. So I want to get out of here because I don't want to. Face this possible change or whatever. It's too hard. Yeah. Then you get to this point where you're struggling but you get over it and you're stronger again.

**Me:** [00:50:54] You've gotta let go haven't you. I've learned you've gotta keep letting go and keep rolling with it.

**1:** [00:50:57] What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Yeah. It gives you a twisted sense of humour. Okay. Well thank you I'm going to turn this off now.

***The Role of Bodybuilding in the Transformation of Grief***

**1. Research questions**

Is there a link between grief and bodybuilding?

How can we better understand bodybuilders?

**2. Themes to be explored**

Wider life experience/personal history

Bodybuilding experience

Motivations

Strengths

General wellbeing

**3. Questions directly related to those themes**

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

How did you start bodybuilding?

What was your experience of competing?

What was your driver/ motivation?

What got you through?

Where are you now in relation to bodybuilding?

*Participant Identification Number.....*



Appendix N

*Questionnaire for self-completion by participant*

How old are you?

.....

What is your relationship status?

.....

What is your employment status?

.....

What are your religious beliefs, if any?

.....

Do you have any dependants? If so, how old are they?

.....

How would you best describe your current health?

Excellent

Very Good

Good

Fair

Poor

Are you currently competing?

.....

Any current/historical use of steroids?

.....

At what age did you start bodybuilding?

.....

If you no longer compete at what age did you stop? If applicable, why did you stop?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Appendix O

### Participant Debrief

#### *The Role of Bodybuilding in the Transformation of Grief*

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this study. I hope that you've enjoyed taking part. It is my hope that the information you and other participants provide will help us to understand more about bodybuilding, grief and wellbeing.

I would like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw your data from the study, but if you do feel you want to we would ask that this is done within two weeks. If you think that you may want to do this, please remember to take a note of your participant identification number and the email address of the researcher.

If you have opted to provide an email address for us to share our findings with you, we'll email you as soon as we can when we've finished collecting and analysing the data. This may take a few months, but we'll send you a summary as soon as we can.

If any part of this process has caused you distress or concern, please contact your GP or The Samaritans (call 116 123).

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

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***This study has been reviewed and by the University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics committee. Should you have any concerns about the study, or wish to speak to a representative other than the research team, please contact Dr Emily Ryall – [email redacted].***