

**Exploration of Societal Notions of Body Creation and Hyper-Masculinity in the
Subculture of Bodybuilding**

By

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Abstract: This research presents Autoethnography and Visual Autoethnographic interviews as a method for exploring how amateur bodybuilders understand and identify with images of themselves. I use autoethnography to tell the story of my own experiences and describe how I construct my identity through personal images and performances as I train for the National Physique Committee state championships in High Point, North Carolina in April 2014. To give a greater perspective on the subculture of male bodybuilders I also perform six face to face semi-structured visual autoethnographic interviews with amateur male bodybuilders. Visual autoethnography mobilizes spaces of understanding; transcending limitations of verbal discourse and opening spaces for mutual appreciation and reflection. This form of autoethnography ignites connections and understandings as visuals become the bridge that connects the researcher and respondent within interviews. This study argues that autoethnography and visual autoethnography facilitate an enriched research space within which previously hidden embodied knowledges are shared through connecting readers with others experiences, emotions, understandings and reflections.

Introduction:

This research explores the subculture of bodybuilding and how male competitors form impressions and construct their identities through their images in a visual society. The central questions are how do male bodybuilders understand and construct their identities through images of themselves before and during bodybuilding competitions? How, if at all, do societal ideals of hyper-masculinity and ideal male body creation affect the identities of male competitors through images? How, if at all, do male bodybuilding competitors manage impressions and frame realities around images of themselves according to the hyper-masculine subculture of bodybuilding? In this study I use autoethnography as a way to study my own experiences as I train for the National Physique Committee state championships in April 2014 in High Point, North Carolina. Autoethnography is a combination of an autobiographic and ethnographic approach and is grounded in anthropology (Denzin, 2005). This methodology utilizes the observation of participation of the researcher (Denzin, 2005).

Through critical and self-reflective storytelling I used visual rhetoric and Erving Goffman's theories of impression management, framing, footing and face to illuminate societal notions of hyper-masculinity and body creation. This study also explores how visuals and images are affecting the identity construction of male bodybuilding competitors. By foregrounding personal embodied experiences I will provide a greater understanding of the training, diet, supplementation, time management and dedication that goes into competing in a bodybuilding competition to analyze how I answer the central questions of this research. The story shows how images and visuals of bodybuilding affect competitors and how they identify with the sport and themselves while putting their body on display for others to evaluate.

To give greater perspective on this research I also used visual autoethnography during my interviews with six male competitive bodybuilders. Visual autoethnography uses images in the interview process to create connections and understanding between the interviewer and interviewee through shared experiences allowing for a greater knowledge exchange and exploration into the topic being studied (Scarles, 2010). I use Corbin and Strauss' constant comparative analysis to make sense of this data (Corbin & Straus, 2007). This method analyzes interview transcriptions to find codes and themes amongst interview respondents that have shared experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

The overall structure of this study is designed to discuss the history of body creation in bodybuilding and define the concepts of hyper-masculinity and body creation. Then I apply visual rhetoric, impression management, framing, footing and face to this study to show how autoethnography and visual autoethnography serves as a window into the world of body creation and hyper-masculinity in bodybuilding. Once I have defined the theories, concepts and methodology, I discuss and analyze the results of my visual autoethnographic interviews. After discussing how other competitors form impressions and construct their identities through images I analyze specific experiences from my autoethnography for specific themes. The full narrative is in Appendix I of this research and broken up into three stages where I will discuss my experiences as I train for the North Carolina State competition. These three stages are separated to show how I transition from the end of my off season training and diet into competition preparation. During each stage I kept a daily log of my experiences and every seven days I took progress pictures of my physique in the seven mandatory bodybuilding poses. The first stage is from January 1st-31st. Stage one will examine my experiences as I am at my heaviest weight and highest body fat percentage. As I transition to stage two (February 1st-28th), I will begin my

contest preparation cutting diet and training regimen on February 12th which is eight weeks out from the competition. The final stage will examine my experiences from March 1st-April 12th, which is the day of the North Carolina State competition. In stage three, I will be in the midst of a strict diet where my body will make the full transition to my final on stage image. These stages will show the full spectrum of my images as they transition from a larger and fuller physique to smaller and more defined.

In analyzing my experiences during each stage I will find how, if at all, my answers to the following research questions change as my body goes from larger to smaller each month. Do images of male bodybuilders from before and during competitions affect how they understand and construct their identities and, if so, how? Do societal ideals of hyper-masculinity and ideal male body creation affect the identities of male competitors through images? How, if at all, do male bodybuilding competitors manage impressions and frame realities through images of themselves according to the hyper-masculine subculture of bodybuilding? This research argues that through autoethnography and visual autoethnography my experiences and understanding of bodybuilding images along with those of other competitors will allow the audience to connect with our stories and gain a greater understanding of how competitive bodybuilders identify with their body. In discussing how we identify with images of our bodies, I also aim to understand if ideas on masculinity change once men enter the hyper-masculine subculture of bodybuilding.

A Brief History of Body Creation:

This paper seeks to explore the role of autoethnography and visual autoethnography in the subculture of bodybuilding and society's ideals of hyper-masculinity and body creation through images and texts (White & Gillett, 1994). Body creation was brought into the spotlight in the late 1800's when Eugene Sandow put his physique on display as a vaudeville showman and strongman (Daley, 2002). As a child Sandow marveled at the Greek and Roman statues in Italy and asked his father why the average man in his society did not resemble these works of art (Daley, 2002). His father replied that in ancient Greek and Roman societies the rule of survival of the strongest had not been corroded by the cushioning effects of society that they knew all too well (Daley, 2002). As a performer Sandow broke multiple barriers for male athletes by putting his naked body on display while wearing only trunks and boots to show off his muscle definition (Daley, 2002).

Greek and Roman visuals inspired Sandow to mold and create his body into a work of art that was seen as the minority in male physiques during the late 1800's (Daley, 2002). In 1897 he opened his first gym in London known as the Institute of Physical Culture and later launched his own line of exercise equipment in 1898 (Daley, 2002). Sandow traveled throughout Europe and other countries where audiences flocked to see his performances and marvel at his physique (Daley, 2002). To most Sandow appeared to be a performer but he admittedly used these performances to convince the public of the benefits of his physical fitness system (Daley, 2002). He began every performance with a posing routine that had no music or words, instead he allowed the images of his body to speak to the audience (Daley, 2002). Sandow had a true understanding of the power of images and used photography to display his advertisements in magazines to reach audiences across the world (Daley, 2002). He later coined the term

bodybuilding and is still known as the father of the sport amongst amateur and professional competitors (Daley, 2002).

Later in the Early 1900's Joe Weider took the reins of bodybuilding and became the most successful businessman in the history of the sport (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Weider and his family immigrated from Poland to Montreal, Quebec where he faced multiple forms of religious discrimination growing up in a poor Jewish neighborhood (Shurley & Todd, 2012). As a young man Weider marveled at images of bodybuilder, John Grimek, and after years of harassment and bullying he decided to take up weight lifting so he could eventually stand up for himself (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Even in the early 1900's, before bodybuilding gained its current popularity, weight lifting and strength correlated into power and dominant ideals of masculinity (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Weider found that he was a natural and quickly became the strongest boy in his neighborhood (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Soon after he grew in size the harassment ceased and he noticed that adults showed him more respect and the young women began paying him more attention (Shurley & Todd, 2012).

Weider understood the importance of images and how they could inspire the masses to better themselves physically (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Joe and his brother Ben later published multiple magazines such as *Your Physique*, *Muscle Builder*, *Muscle Power*, *Mr. America*, *Muscle and Fitness* as well as *Flex* and *Men's Fitness* which are still two of the most popular weight training magazines in the world (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Weider used these publications and images of large muscular men to spread the word about weight lifting and later became the biggest advocate for the sport of bodybuilding by creating the International Federation of Body Builders in 1946, also known as the IFBB, which is the highest and most compensated status a bodybuilder can reach (Shurley, & Todd, 2012).

During this time period the Weider brother's faced multiple forms of adversity in growing the sport (Shurley & Todd, 2012). First, was Bob Hoffman who owned the York Barbell Company who did not believe bodybuilders were comparable to strength competitors and felt that men should not worry so much about creating their body (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Instead they should focus on how much weight they could lift in traditional Olympic workouts (Shurley & Todd, 2012). They also faced the universal ideal in North America during the 1900's that weight training was wrong headed and many of their magazines failed due to criticisms of physicians who felt weight training was hazardous to health and athletic performance (Shurley & Todd, 2012). As time went on more and more physicians began studying and documenting the benefits of weight training and these findings later diminished the negative notions surrounding the sport (Shurley & Todd, 2012). The Weider brothers later joined together the coveted Mr. America and Mr. Universe bodybuilding and strength competitions to form what is now considered the world cup of the sport, the Mr. Olympia competition (Shurley & Todd, 2012).

The first Mr. Olympia was held in 1965 in New York City, where Larry Scott became the first overall winner (Shurley & Todd, 2012). Weider later trained and developed a young protégé, named Arnold Schwarzenegger, who took the world and the sport of bodybuilding by storm using images of his hyper-masculinity to propel him to the top (Boyer, 2010). He went on to win six Mr. Olympia titles and is still considered the best bodybuilder of all time, even though other athletes have surpassed his accolades (Boyer, 2010). Schwarzenegger's images and visuals made him into the symbol for those who wanted to gain authority and control over the creation of their body's (Boyer, 2010). Boyer (2010) found that Arnold molded himself according to popular discourses in society through images and film by developing a hyper-heterosexual persona of a self-made man that fit the demands of what was considered masculine.

Body Creation and Hyper-Masculinity:

In his research Ben-Zeev found that hyper-masculinity encourages men to engage in masculine behaviors while eschewing what might be perceived as feminine communal behaviors (Ben-Zeev, et al, 2012). Males are taught at a young age to be assertive, decisive and not emotionally expressive to avoid being classified as members of a lower-status group (Ben-Zeev, et al, 2012). Boyer (2010) studied the evolution of hyper-masculinity beginning with the disappointment of American performance in the Vietnam War and the destabilization of the white, hetero-normative male as the subject of American citizenship by civil rights, LGBT activism and feminist movements. Along with the anxiety surrounding white male body image was the growing cultural consumerism of male bodies as objects in popular media (Boyer, 2010). This was evident in film during the 1970's and 1980's where masculine white males waged war on any others who could be seen as a threat to American freedom, democracy and normative manhood (Boyer, 2010). This was also subject to the realized muscle gap between America and European rivals that spawned reform to physical education programs in schools across the country and propelled the hyper-masculinity and homophobic ideals that considered soft white men vulnerable to communist penetration (Boyer, 2010).

Alan Klein was one of the first to research the subculture of bodybuilding through an ethnographic approach (Klein, 1986). He immersed himself in the Southern California world of bodybuilding at the Olympic Gym in Venice Beach, which has produced multiple amateur and professional bodybuilders (Klein, 1986). His research focused on the discrepancies between images that bodybuilder's project to those outside of their subculture and what actually goes on inside of this group of haves and have not's (Klein, 1986). During the 1980's Klein found that bodybuilding was growing immensely in popularity with an estimated 85 million Americans

engaging in some form of weight training and over 100 countries offered amateur and professionally sanctioned competitions (Klein, 1986). While only a small majority train with the intent of competing, each is participating in a form of body creation (Klein, 1986).

Klein (1986) found three themes in his interviews and observations of the bodybuilding subculture consisting of health, heterosexuality and rugged individualism. There was also a common misconception among non-competitors that bodybuilding was not a sport, rather a glorified beauty contest of male and female competitors prancing around the stage flexing their muscles (Klein, 1986). Coakley states that a sport must have physical exertion, competition and organization to be defined as a sport (Klein, 1986). All three of these characteristics are found in bodybuilding, but audiences only see the final product in visuals of these athletes on stage and in popular media (Klein, 1986). The organization and competition takes place in the months of training, dieting and practicing posing routines leading up to the shows (Klein, 1986). This transforms bodybuilding competitions into nonphysical events causing a divide in understanding between those inside and outside of the subculture (Klein, 1986). Most competitors, especially males, are drawn into the sport of bodybuilding because they desire to look and feel like the behemoths they see in magazines, advertisements and websites (Klein, 1986). While most will never achieve this ideal physique the continuous consumption of these images engrains in our minds what true masculinity and heterosexuality is (Klein, 1986).

Applying Communication Theories to the Study of Body Creation:

In order to explore competitors understanding of hyper-masculinity and body creation through images of themselves I incorporated multiple communication theories into visual autoethnography interviews and analyzed of my own experiences through autoethnography

(Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The first communication theory is visual rhetoric, which is defined as the explorations and acknowledgement of the powerful role that visuals play in shaping our public and symbolic actions (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). Rhetoric is commonly used to focus on language acts and researchers are finding more and more correlation between both visual and verbal symbols (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). Visual implies the cultural practices of seeing and looking as well as artifacts that are produced in different communicative forms of media (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). This is evident in the subculture of bodybuilding and the images surrounding the sport because these visuals create public audiences through symbolic identifications of life performances and drama (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). Images of competitors before, during and after competitions are made meaningful through culturally derived ways of looking and seeing that influence the audience and the athlete's understanding of body creation and true masculinity (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008).

I will also applied Erving Goffman's four concepts of Impression Management, Framing, Footing and Face to analyze how I and other competitors construct our identities as amateur bodybuilders through hyper-masculinity and body creation (Johansson, 2009). The authors of this text explain that Goffman focuses on the relation between interpersonal meanings and social structure in public relations (Johansson, 2009). Impression management consists of two kinds of sign activity, the expression one gives and the expression that is given off (Johansson, 2009).

These differing expressions are known as the front and backstage impressions (Johansson, 2009).

In this study the naked body and images of the respondents during their interviews are seen as the impressions being relayed to the audience in their front stage (Johansson, 2009). The backstage refers to how I or the other competitors actually understand and identify with our bodies and in most cases we will see intricacies or specific body parts that we do not feel are up

to par or developed to their full potential (Johansson, 2009). Grunig (1993) calls impression management one of the best developed theoretical approaches to the production and understanding of images.

Impression management has also been applied to the public relations of NCAA Division I Athletic Directors (Pratt, 2013). In this study Pratt found three common themes among Athletic Directors and how they managed their impressions consisting of image, message and action/interaction (Pratt, 2013). They indicated that everything they do is intended to give off a specific impression depending on the audience and their message and image directly coincide with one another (Pratt, 2013). As seen with Athletic Director's, male bodybuilders must manage their impressions to portray strong, heterosexual and hyper-masculine ideals to be accepted in their subculture (Johansson, 2009). Along with impression management Goffman points out that framing is used to understand communicative practices allowing audiences to interpret meaning (Johansson, 2009). Through autoethnography and visual autoethnography I will explore how I and other competitors answer the question of "What is going on here" (Johansson, 2009, p.123). This concept will help the audience understand the reality of body creation and the work that goes into training in order to create desired images of muscular male competitors (Johansson, 2009). Depending on how competitors construct their identity they may use multiple frameworks to form impressions for particular images (Johansson, 2009).

Goffman's concept of footing explains the participant's stance or posture in interaction (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). Footing can use both verbal and nonverbal signals which are typically marked by pitch, volume and rhythm, but for the purpose of this study the expressions, facial features, location and context of body images will serve as footing markers (Johansson, 2009). This concept is also sectioned into three parts, the animator, author and principal of

information (Johansson, 2009). This study shows that images and visuals of my body and the other competitors incorporate the athlete, coach, teammates and the audience into these three roles (Johansson, 2009).

Goffman's final concept is face and this is defined as the public self image that individuals want to claim for themselves (Johansson, 2009). Face is constantly negotiated in verbal and nonverbal interaction and is evident in the choosing of bodybuilding images that competitors share with others and how they prepare for competitions (Johansson, 2009). Face is intertwined with power and personal prestige while also allowing for the trace of hidden or overt conflicts within each bodybuilder (Johansson, 2009). Male bodybuilders work and attempt to pull in the audience to complement their physique with hopes of being considered big, strong and masculine (Johansson, 2009). Face has also been applied to an autoethnography of communication between college students and live chat interactions with on campus librarians (Radford et al, 2011). In this study the researchers found the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his or her psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among acts of different persons mutually present to one another (Radford et al, 2011). The purpose of this autoethnography and visual autoethnography is to understand how we as competitors identify with images of our body's according to our understandings of societies thoughts of what the ideal man should be and what we should look like (Johansson, 2009).

Autoethnography as a Window into Body Creation:

In their study of sport subcultures Donnelly and Young found that the behaviors of athletes depended on insider information (Donnelly & Young, 1998). They broke down the identity construction of athletes into the following stages, pre-socialization, selection and

recruitment, socialization and acceptance/ostracism (Donnelly & Young, 1998). Once a member is introduced to the subculture and asked to join they take on the characteristics of others and eventually accept or deny the required persona, attitude and dedication that the greater group asks of them (Donnelly & Young, 1998).

June Bianchi (2008) explored young people's construction of visual identity and found that younger individuals matured into adulthood, developing and formulating identity through exploration and mediation of a constantly shifting streams of visual data that impact personal constructs of themselves. The physical body becomes a site of discovery and creation where incoming stimuli can be interrogated, evaluated and addressed through different forms of experimentation that constructs visual appearance (Bianchi, 2008). In the subculture of bodybuilding visuals and images are the primary source of identity construction for competitors (White & Gillett, 1994). White and Gillett (1994) studied images in Flex magazine where they found the resurgent cultural ideal of the muscular body in contemporary culture and the increased popularity of body creation practices are symptomatic of a trend in our culture seeking to reestablish an ideology of gender. There is an increasing number of men who feel unsure about their masculine identities and experience a lack of power and control over many areas in their everyday lives (Donnelly & Young 1998). This is referred to as the crisis of masculinity resulting from the increasing gap in capitalism between institutional and personal forms of power (Donnelly & Young 1998).

This gap creates a disjunction between the facts of public male power and feelings of private powerlessness (Donnelly & Young 1998). Hegemonic masculinity is being challenged in social arenas such as work, family and interpersonal domains, causing men to desire the building of a muscular physique (Donnelly & Young 1998). Their physique provides men with a

compensatory means where they can construct and validate, through their bodies, a specific masculine identity (Donnelly & Young 1998). Bodybuilding has become a truth game where discourses are related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves (Donnelly & Young 1998). The workout and diet routines of bodybuilders are disciplined routines that society considers as masculine (Donnelly & Young 1998). The visual ideal of masculinity represented in consumer culture is directed at male readers of popular magazines which use muscles as a sign of dominance, control, authority, physical strength and power (Donnelly & Young 1998). They found that the representation of the muscular body as a symbol of a man's true masculine identity only confirms their perceived insecurities, the same insecurities that drew them into the body creation process in the first place (Donnelly & Young 1998).

The desire to become the ideal masculine and muscular male has also brought about certain medical conditions in extreme cases (Mosely, 2009). It has been recognized that women typically suffer from body image related anxieties ranging from unhappiness with shape and weight to eating disorders such as anorexia (Mosely, 2009). Muscle dysmorphia, also known as bigorexia, has emerged mainly among bodybuilders (Mosely, 2009). These individuals obsess about being inadequately muscular and their compulsions include spending hours in the gym, squandering excessive amounts of money on ineffectual supplements and performance enhancers and abnormal eating patterns (Mosely, 2009). Muscle dysmorphia is known as the opposite of anorexia. Similar to those suffering from anorexia, these men are concerned with gaining muscle and losing fat at the same time and their body tends to be the one thing they control in their life (Mosely, 2009).

Roberto Olivardia (2001) found that males who participated in weight lifting but were not diagnosed with bigorexia reported spending 40 minutes per day thinking about being too small muscle wise. On the other hand, those who were diagnosed with bigorexia reported spending 325 minutes per day thinking about their insufficient body image (Olivardia, 2001). It was also found that on average 46% of those suffering from bigorexia had past history of steroid use while those not suffering from the disorder reported only 7% of usage (Olivardia, 2001).

Autoethnography is a combination of an autobiographic and ethnographic approach and is grounded in anthropology (Denzin, 2005). Barbara Tedlock explains that participant observation was created during the late 19th century as an ethnographic field method for studying small homogenous cultures (Denzin, 2005). Ethnographers were expected to live in a society for an extended period of time, actively participate in the daily lives of its members and observe themes in their culture (Denzin, 2005). This method produces documentary information and shows what is true and reflected in native cultures and subcultures (Denzin, 2005).

Recently ethnographers have modified ethnography by utilizing observation of participation, which has become autoethnography (Denzin, 2005). This allows the researcher to reflect and critically engage with their own participation within an ethnographic frame (Denzin, 2005). Autoethnography gives the researcher an opportunity to blend public and private realms by connecting inward gazing autobiographical impulses and outward gazing ethnographic impulses that emphasize relational patterns, interconnectedness, translucence as well as dialogue and performance (Denzin, 2005). Chang (2008) defines autoethnography as a mixed bag full of narrative inquiries which has brought about criticism among quantitative researchers. The key to using this method is understanding the role of the researcher, which is to be the informant and author, but not to forget that others are visible in the story (Chang, 2008). Muncey (2010) found

most researchers rarely begin their studies intending to use autoethnography as their methodology, but they resort to this approach as a means of getting across intangible and complex feelings and experiences that can't be told through quantitative data analyses.

During the 1980's scholars became troubled by social science's ontological, epistemological and axiological limitations (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). This began the realization of understanding the relationship between the author and audience where stories present complex arguments and perspectives that help readers connect with their own personal experiences (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). Rebekah Nathan (2006) used her time on sabbatical to take an autoethnographic approach to becoming a freshman college student at her university. Nathan and her colleagues were concerned with the lackadaisical mindsets of college students as well as their parental dependency and lack of respect for university staff (Nathan, 2006). In order to understand the differences in this generation of students compared to when she was in college she applied for admission, paid for her own tuition, registered for classes, lived in the dorms and even ate in the dining hall to tell the story of an American college student through her own lens (Nathan, 2006).

Tamy Spry (2013) looked deeper into how to perform an autoethnography in her research on social work and found it is important to understand that this approach is continually being deconstructed and put back together. It consists of going back and forth through time and experience to piece together a story for the audience to understand (Spry, 2013). When writing an autoethnography the audience should feel the body of the author on paper so they can reflect on our relationships with words and try to tell a different story through their own experiences (Spry, 2013). Liggins and Kearns (2013) used autoethnography to study mental health research, specifically patient privacy power dynamics. Liggins (2013) was able to tell the story of her

experiences as a mental health professional and incorporate the experiences of underserved patients that could not be understood through quantitative methods.

Amani Hamdan (2012) used autoethnography to examine her personal narrative as a Saudi woman and student and the struggles she faced with gender discourse in her native society and in her transition to becoming a professor at a Canadian university. Her story informs readers that in Saudi Arabian culture women are not allowed to pursue engineering, law and other male dominated professions (Hamdan, 2012). She highlights her childhood and how she was taught that these fields did not suit women's natures because they would be forced to comingle with men (Hamdan, 2012). Hamdan (2012) analyzes her transition to Canada where it was perceived that academia afforded more opportunities for women, but she still saw a scarcity of females in engineering and other STEM focused degrees (Hamdan, 2012). By sharing her experiences through stories she shows readers that while it may appear that women have more opportunities in Canadian education the same limitations and barriers are evident, but the discourse is covert and hidden from the naked eye (Hamdan, 2012).

Purdy and Jones (2008) use autoethnography to chart the relationship between Purdy and her rowing coach as they trained for an NCAA championship. This study exemplifies how this methodology can explore individual experiences while also incorporating the perspectives of others. Shellie McParland (2012) recognizes autoethnography can be a messy form of methodology but it allowed her to explore the realm of feminist sport history through her lens as an aspiring basketball player. She focuses her writing on specific experiences of playing pickup basketball in open gyms with all male players (McParland, 2012). Her writing pulls the reader in to understand the adversity and criticism she faced while wanting to play the sport she loves (McParland, 2012). The audience is able to connect with her emotions as she runs up and down

the court and it almost makes your adrenaline rush even though you are not the one playing the game (McParland, 2012).

Denshire and Lee (2013) discuss autoethnography as a conceptualization of assemblage by using excerpts from an autoethnographic study of an occupational therapist working with young people at the Sydney Children's Hospital in the 1980's. David Carless (2012) employs autoethnography to explore issues around sexual orientation, sexual identity and masculinity in school sport. He tells the story of his own experiences as a young rugby player in high school and how encounters with heterosexism, homophobia and hegemonic masculinity affected his identity development as a homosexual athlete (Carless, 2012). Writing his story through an autoethnography allowed Carless to break the silence and point out the pitfalls in society of labeling true masculinity and its correlation to extreme heterosexuality (Carless, 2012). Just as in bodybuilding Carless explains that sports remain an arena that produce a desire for the toughest masculinity, where men are men and where homosexuality and femininity are signs of weakness (Carless, 2012).

Method:

In this study, I have discussed the history of body creation in bodybuilding and defined the concepts of body creation and hyper-masculinity. I have also shown how I applied visual rhetoric, impression management, framing, footing, face and identity construction to prove that autoethnography and visual autoethnography served as a window into the world of body creation and hyper-masculinity. In this study, I have written an autoethnography on my own experiences in the subculture of bodybuilding and incorporated the perspectives of others by performing six visual autoethnography interviews with male competitors. Visual autoethnographic interviews mobilize spaces of understanding; transcending limitations of verbal discourse and opening

spaces for mutual appreciation and reflection (Scarles, 2010). This form of autoethnography ignites connections and understanding as visuals become the bridge that connects researcher and respondent experiences within interviews (Scarles, 2010). For the purpose of this research, I asked each respondent to bring two pictures of themselves—one from before a competition and one from during a competition (Scarles, 2010). This allowed for semi-structured interviews to commence where we discussed why they chose the pictures and how they identified with them (Scarles, 2010).

Cederholm (2004) also drew upon this form of photo-elicitation to allow the respondent to lead discussions based on the photographs brought to his interviews to explore tourism research. In an interview setting allowing the respondents to produce and talk around their own visuals afforded insights into practices, behaviors, cultures, social and political relations as they expressed reality as it was significant to them as male bodybuilders (Scarles, 2010). With my experience as a competitor, I connected with the respondents by resituating the ‘I’ in this research in order to generate affiliation and insights to develop a fuller sense of self so my understanding of others was not fractured (Krieger, 1996).

I performed six in-depth face to face audio recorded visual autoethnographic interviews with four male amateur bodybuilders, one IFBB professional bodybuilder and one physique class competitor. The interviews began on January 24, 2014 and ended on February 22, 2014. Each interview took place in the private personal training office at the Energy Sports and Fitness gym in Charlotte, North Carolina. I found the respondents through convenience sampling as I have gotten to know each competitor through competing in my first bodybuilding competition and training at the Energy gym. The six respondents all identified as current or former NPC competitors and their experience ranged from one competition to thirty five bodybuilding

competitions. Three of the respondents identified as African American and the other three identified as white males. They also indicated that they critiqued visuals of themselves between 3-6 times per day.

Each interview respondent was asked to bring one picture from before a bodybuilding competition and one from during a competition of their choice to discuss in the interviews. I allowed the respondents to choose to bring a picture from before a competition with no specific time constraints to see what images they would use and if the selection of either images utilized forms of impression management in our discussion of the images. Before each interview the respondents completed a demographic questionnaire and signed a consent form informing them that I would not use their personal information and would assign each a pseudonym to provide anonymity in the research process. The consent form also gave each respondent the option to allow me to use their images in my final presentation and that in no way were they required to participate in the interview process based on NPC regulations. After the consent form was signed and the demographic questionnaires were complete, I audio recorded each interview and saved them on my password protected computer. After the final interview was complete I transcribed each interview and saved this information on my password protected computer. I was the only person to have access to both the transcriptions and audio recordings.

Once the transcriptions were complete I deleted the audio recordings from my password protected computer and analyzed each interview using Corbin and Strauss' constant comparative analysis. This uses open and axial coding to find common codes and themes between respondents (Corbin, & Strauss, 2007). Open coding allows the researcher to analyze transcribed data from interviews to identify common terms and sayings, referred to as codes in this study that respondents use when responding to the interview questions, or in the case of this research in

analyzing pictures of their own body creation and masculinity (Corbin, & Strauss, 2007). The codes that were found during the open coding stage can be found in table 1.2. Once open coding was complete, I used axial coding to cross reference the commonalities in responses from each respondent to find underlying themes in the interviews (Corbin, & Strauss, 2007). These themes provided evidence in understanding how the respondents answered the main research questions of this study. The results of the constant comparative analysis are in the discussion portion of this study and the demographic information per respondent is in the table below. I have also included the interview questions in Appendix II as they are noted in the open coding stage (table 1.2) of my analysis documenting which codes were associated with certain questions. Below is specific demographic information pertaining to the male bodybuilders that participated in the visual autoethnographic interviews in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Demographic Information:

Age	African American or Caucasian	Current or former NPC Competitor	Hours spent critiquing personal images per week	Length of training for last competition	Experience on a scale of 1(beginner)-10(top level competitor)	Does bodybuilding make you more masculine?
31	African American	Yes	10-19	Multiple Months	6	No
32	Caucasian	Yes	0-9	One Year	10	No
41	African American	Yes	10-19	Multiple Months	10	Yes
48	Caucasian	Yes	0-9	Multiple Months	10	No
49	African American	Yes	0-9	Multiple Months	9	Yes
52	African American	Yes	0-9	Multiple Months	10 (IFBB Professional)	Yes

I have also provided my full autoethnography in Appendix I of this study. In order to document all of my experiences as an amateur male body builder and understand how I answer

the research questions of this study I sectioned my narrative into three stages spanning from January 3, 2014 to April 12, 2014. During each stage my coaches and I took weekly progress pictures every seven days of my half naked physique practicing each of the mandatory bodybuilding poses required by the NPC. Along with the progress pictures, I kept a daily log of my experiences as an amateur male bodybuilder to combine an autobiographical approach with an ethnographic approach in this research (Denzin, 2005). I sectioned this time period into three stages because at the beginning of stage one I was at my largest bodyweight and muscle build of 240 lbs. As I transitioned into stage two I began my cutting diet focused on losing body fat and refining my definition on February 12th in preparation for the competition. This diet continued for eight weeks and led all the way to the North Carolina State Championships on April 12th. In my daily log I analyzed how I understood and identified with my progress pictures and the subculture of bodybuilding. Analyzing this data over a period of three months allowed me to see how recreating my body caused me to form desired and undesired impressions as I changed from a large and muscular competitor to a lean and conditioned bodybuilder. In table 1.3 I describe each experience that is marked with a footnote in Appendix I. The footnotes highlight specific experiences where I used forms of impression management, framing, footing and face or instances where I understood my personal identity construction and views on hyper-masculinity in bodybuilding through images. In the discussion section I use these experiences to describe the four themes that I found in my autoethnography. After discussing the results of the visual autoethnographic interviews and my personal narrative according to the central questions of this research I meld both methodological forms together to find similarities among my experiences and the interview respondents.

Visual Autoethnographic Interview Results:

In analyzing the visual autoethnographic interviews I used Corbin and Strauss’ method of constant comparative analyses. This method begins by breaking down the transcriptions of each individual interview using open coding to find specific codes with each respondent. Below in table 1.2 I have documented each code by respondent interview. Each of these codes refers to specific interview questions labeled as Q1, Q2 or Q3 for example in Appendix II. After reviewing these codes I used axial coding to find common themes amongst the respondents which helped me apply the theories of visual rhetoric, impression management, framing, footing and face to answer the following research questions of this study. How do male bodybuilders understand and construct their identities through images of themselves before and during bodybuilding competitions? How, if at all, do societal ideals of hyper-masculinity and ideal male body creation affect the identities of male competitors through images? How, if at all, do male bodybuilding competitors manage impressions and frame realities around images of themselves according to the hyper-masculine subculture of bodybuilding?

Table 1.2 Open Coding:

Josh Interview:	Andrew Interview:
Interview Questions Q1/Q2/Q3: Seeing the difference, women pay more attention to me, skinny as a child, discipline, dedication, mandatory, challenge of being judged by tattoos, frustration, considered tattoo removal	Interview Questions Q1/Q2/Q3: Develop more power, ectomorphic body frame, Challenge of gaining size, everyone does not like the way bodybuilders look, finding what image you’re comfortable with, will power, self determination
Interview Questions Q5/Q6/Q7/Q8: Pre-Competition Image- Beer gut, no chest, fat and water, would not take shirt off at the beach, never go back to this, would not get on stage or go to the gym	Interview Questions Q5/Q6/Q7/Q8: Pre-Competition Image- Not enough muscle mass, needs more legs, chest, shoulders, thickness and back, I don’t look like everybody else
Interview Questions Q9/Q10/Q11/Q12:	Interview Questions Q9/Q10/Q11/Q12:

Competition Image- Confident, satisfied, excellent, best image, loves this image, bragging, insecure about calves and shoulder width, shows body progression, look like me but you can't	Competition Image- Confident, trophy, still needs hamstrings and calves, diet was not spot on, positive identity, I look better than you
Interview Questions Q17/Q20: Self-esteem issues began after competing, am I too heavy or eating too much, if I can't see 4 abs I am upset, you can have the perfect body, perfect body is inside each person, open minded, magazines show impossible images, cannot look like that year round, images taken when competitors are in top shape, diet is not healthy, leave alone at the gym	Interview Questions Q17/Q20: Bodybuilders are sculptors of clay, could train my entire life and not get the image I want, lifestyle, governs your life, bodybuilders are not normal people, did not like team sports, bodybuilding saved my life, bodybuilding has made me more critical, impression management, look better than others, self-confidence, trophies are a monument of vanity
Interview Questions Q14/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22: Masculinity is a hard question, always masculine, cocky, head high, personality, the way you walk and talk, muscle does not make you masculine, critiques images 4-5 times per week, manhood, impressions- you need to look like me, muscles do not make or break me, disciplined or disappointed	Interview Questions Q14/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22: Bodybuilding didn't make him more masculine but different than others, looks better than others, male models are feminine, not bodybuilders, critiques images 2-3 times per day, images make me more masculine in the eyes of others, retiring from bodybuilding will make me less masculine
Jacob Interview:	Dean Interview:
Interview Questions Q1/Q2/Q3: Coach telling me to gain weight, passion, envying the physiques in magazines, not hard to get respect but it's hard to keep respect in bodybuilding, challenge of people outside of the subculture, normal people, envy from others, people look at you differently	Interview Questions Q1/Q2/Q3: A way to feed competitiveness, individual sport, genetics, enjoyed the process of body creation, muscle and fitness magazine, glorified images of bodybuilders on beach, fun
Interview Questions Q5/Q6/Q7/Q8: Pre-Competition Image- College, not afraid of the image, skinny, was not unhappy, but this is not the best my body can look, hurt, pain, sore muscles, never look like that again, positive identity, great life, no point to go back, I look like I got leukemia, peeked at that image	Interview Questions Q5/Q6/Q7/Q8: Pre-Competition Image- Proud of accomplishments, sacrifice, progress, confidence, years of experience, training with a purpose, balance, critical of hardness
Interview Questions Q9/Q10/Q11/Q12: Competition Image- Best image, side tricep, delts, hamstrings, but shows weakness in chest, great abs and shoulders, small waist, why would I share a shot that is not my best?,	Interview Questions Q9/Q10/Q11/Q12: Competition Image- Driest, couldn't have stepped on stage any better, best I've ever looked, critical of detail in my back, height of competitive career, gives a false impression to

confidence, not too big, proportional, symmetrical, chest is lacking, night and day	the public, we do not always look like this, trained, dieted, airbrushed, warped self- image for others
Interview Questions Q17/Q20: Only competitors understand the images of bodybuilders, conforming to help others understand images rather than impression management, drop to their level, lonely, you're supposed to look better and be stronger than normal people, judging from those outside of subculture, how do clothes fit on me, people look at you differently, competition, looking the best you can	Interview Questions Q17/Q20: Challenge of nutrition and diet, discipline, done competing, images are a perk, moderation, comfortable, identity in the perspective of others changed, encouraging
Interview Questions Q14/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22: Images do not make me masculine, doesn't make you a man to be bigger, do you respect your mom, open the door, work hard at everything you do, never thought masculinity was connected to being big, being a man at the gym doesn't make you masculine, critique images 5 days per week, you can manage impressions by choosing a picture but 99 times out of 100 you don't look like that image, managing others minds, images on magazines do not last, bodybuilding helps build confidence, even if I could recreate my body I would find something else to critique	Interview Questions Q14/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22: Competing is not about masculinity, health, taking care of yourself, balance of mind, lifestyle, can't become an obsession, if you miss a day you miss a day, guys who train chest and arms for women, I don't critique anything, maintenance, genetic limitations, only so much muscle you can put on, muscle head, freaks, intelligence, bullied, some people always want attention, to be on display, older, loose fitting clothes, one foot in the subculture and on foot in the general public
John Interview:	Kyle Interview:
Interview Questions Q1/Q2/Q3: Individual sports, not being the bigger guy growing up, highlight the individual, genetics, fell in love, Mr. Universe, having fun	Interview Questions Q1/Q2/Q3: To get bigger, girlfriend, lack of information, how do you pose, your own research, no one to talk to, VCR tape, change, 12 shows, not ready for first show, beach ready, thought guys in magazines stepped out the shower looking like this every day, unhealthy, 2-3 days
Interview Questions Q5/Q6/Q7/Q8: Pre-Competition Image- Lack of knowledge, groundwork, welding dumbbells, underground, not a sport, stigma, not accepted in mainstream, developed, discipline, comfort happiness, hard work, where I started, smile, passion, shaped my life forever	Interview Questions Q5/Q6/Q7/Q8: Pre-Competition Image- Hated posing class, not fitting others images, when I'm in shape nobody's there, you have to get out of shape to get in shape, people think you're supposed to look a certain way, goals, offseason, building, really out of shape, sitting in car, look the part, respect, those in shape get respect, I don't look like this all the time, we try to look like this to please people, passion, a means to get where I

	<p>gotta get, process, no shortcuts, down the line, learning about my image, see myself 6-7 months after, love being the big guy, mental game, trying to get a certain look, clothes tight, biggest guy in the gym, leaning out brings good and bad, lean but weak, critical about stomach, if I had abs I'd walk around naked</p>
<p>Interview Questions Q9/Q10/Q11/Q12: Competition Image- Separation, muscle bellies, full, vascularity, proud, nothing negative to say, accomplished, side chest, world championship, best photo, favorite, confidence, hamstrings, fierce, symmetry proportion, delts, chest, best package</p>	<p>Interview Questions Q9/Q10/Q11/Q12: Competition Image- Most Muscular, big traps, guns, vascularity, man that guy is shredded, a lot of mass, commenting about hard work, clapping/applauding, I am complete now, I did what I had to do to look like this, strong, powerful, overcomer, overachieved, it was worth it, discipline, to start something and finish it, critical about legs, black man syndrome, can never be too big, perfection,</p>
<p>Interview Questions Q17/Q20: Loss of wife, outlet, journey, ego, bragging rights, nothing more valuable than bodybuilding, passion, health, take care of yourself, roman gladiators, judged on my own accord, show your best highlights and hide your weaknesses, critical of tricep and bicep fullness and holding water, subjective, controversy, individual opinion, politics, you don't make it to the pros by being lucky</p>	<p>Interview Questions Q17/Q20: Just now feeling like a bodybuilder, knowledge, never take pictures before, those who know the subculture understand, poke me in the belly, relate bodybuilding to life, can't go by what people see, how you see yourself, dumb jock, don't have to prove myself anymore, character, some only concerned with their body, better than last time, others say you look great but you're not satisfied, critical, on stage weaknesses are exposed</p>
<p>Interview Questions Q14/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22: Images make me masculine, public views these images as masculine, extreme, everybody doesn't want that look, doubts</p>	<p>Interview Questions Q14/Q15/Q16/Q21/Q22: Guidelines, put anything in their body, limits, no division with wife, boundaries, health, I obtained the body I wanted, flesh always wants more, morals, happy with myself, happy in what I did with my body, balance, masculine before bodybuilding, society says masculinity is different, maturing, masculinity isn't the toughest or hardest dude, the man that can walk away, masculinity is not what the media says, we try everything, masculinity is who I am, big bodies and punks, disciplined in one area but not the others, want to be big, people just look at images, critiques image twice a day, choose the best picture to post, society wants to see the monsters, extreme, sport changes how people look at you, everybody</p>

	thinks you look good outside of the subculture, try to hide flaws, masculinity is encouraging others, enjoy the journey, on stage for a short amount of time
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In my data analysis I used looking at language and looking at emotions to elicit meaning in the open coding phase (Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2007). Looking at language and emotions among interview respondents are two of Corbin and Strauss' methods of analyzing data in the open coding stage of qualitative research (Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2007). In reading through the interview transcriptions I focused on specific language terms or phrases used in discussing pre-competition and competition images as well as the emotions that corresponded with their responses (Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2007). Looking at the language used in these four interviews I was able to find specific codes that were prevalent for each interviewee (Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2007). An example of this is in Kyle's interview where he referenced images of bodybuilders in magazines and popular media. Before he assimilated into the subculture he thought male bodybuilders always looked big, muscular, ripped striated. He thought they got out of the shower each day looking like they do on the cover of magazines, but after he began competing he realized that the images that inspired him to become a competitor were a hoax. After his first competition he found that it is impossible and unhealthy to diet, train and cut water to embody these visuals year round. In Josh's interview he stated that he had over 200 fitness magazines in his home, but now he rarely looks at them. He understood that the bodybuilders on the cover of popular magazines take photo shoots when they are at their peak conditioning, usually right before they step on stage or after a competition similar to the one below of Sean Rhoden who is an IFBB professional on the February 2013 cover of Flex Magazine.

These magazine photos are seen by men all over the world, but the animators have dieted and trained for weeks to look as defined and muscular as possible. Each of the younger competitors, excluding Dean and John who seemed to be at a higher level of experience in the sport, identified more positively with their images from during a bodybuilding competition than the ones they shared from before. The respondents highlighted that the images they chose to share showed them at their best physique. Josh and Jacob made the point that their images from before a bodybuilding competition showed their progress or journey to where they are now. Jacob indicated that he was not afraid of his image, which is a very strong code word, and Josh said he wouldn't even come to the gym to train if he looked like he did in his before image.



(Flex, 2013)

Looking at the emotions in these interviews I was able to see how these competitors understood their images during a bodybuilding competition (Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2007). Their identity construction around these images seemed to bring about happiness, confidence and a sense of satisfaction. In discussing his competition image Dean stated “I could not have stepped on stage any better than what that picture is”. John, who is an IFBB professional bodybuilder and two

time former Mr. Universe said “It shows the development, the mass and it shows basically confidence and happiness in my face because you know you don’t do a crappy pose and smile about it”. While the competition images brought about positive emotions for the participants when I asked if there were any parts of their physique that they were insecure or critical about in these photos they each identified one or more body parts they wanted to improve. After John discussed how confident his competition image made him feel he said “I felt like my tricep and bicep could have been fuller”. Josh told me that the image he chose from during a physique class NPC competition was “an excellent image it’s probably one of the best images I’ve ever had and the picture speaks for itself”. Later in the interview when discussing this image Josh told me he posted this image on his Facebook page and his friends complemented his physique. He responded by saying he needed bigger calves and that he could have flexed them more. He also wanted wider shoulders to create what we refer to in bodybuilding as the V-taper. This is where competitor’s physiques form a V shape starting wide and thick at the top of the body and shrinking into a small waist line. While these competitors each found something that they felt was insufficient or could be improved in their competition images, they recognized that those outside of the subculture did not understand their images in the same manner that they did. Kyle also stated that he became more critical about images of his body after he entered the subculture because he is now fixated on creating himself into what he sees as a complete bodybuilder with bigger quadriceps, hamstrings and wider calves to match the size of his upper body.

Looking at emotions also helped me to understand how competitors’ images affected their understandings of personal masculinity (Corbin, J. & Strauss, A., 2007). Five of the respondents, Josh, Jacob, Dean, John and Kyle paused before responding to my question on if becoming a male bodybuilder made them more masculine. Each indicated that they felt they

were masculine before they assimilated into the subculture and that their notions of masculinity have not changed. Jacob stated that “Being masculine being a man is what you do as a man not what you look like as a man so these images mean nothing to me to make me feel like a man or a boy”. Josh told me he knew plenty of competitors that were not masculine. He also stated “I think muscle definition and form doesn’t make you a masculine person. You can get the skinniest and smallest guy and he can uphold himself like a real man”. John and Dean also made it clear that they believe being massive does not correlate into being masculine.

They also saw themselves as different from non-bodybuilders or “normal” people. The participants used the word “normal” in each interview as they described their competition images. Jacob saw this difference as a challenge and stated “The challenge is the people that don’t know the subculture, when they hear you finished third they say you lost, yeah you lost you didn’t finish first but if you’ve ever done bodybuilding shows when you’re on stage finishing top three is as gratifying as it becomes because placing is challenging enough but trying to convince normal people that top three is something special that’s the challenge”. Jacob felt that non-body builders did not understand the process and the work that went into his competition image and in turn he felt that he was no longer like everyone else. Andrew also stated that he identified more positively with his image from during a competition because he did not look like a normal person, he looked better. This was a driving factor in his career as he did not want to be seen as normal. I found it very interesting discussing Andrew’s competition image because he acknowledged that he looked great, but he could tell his diet and posing was not up to par but only other competitors would see that in his image. He said that normal people look at this photo and are surprised to see how he is able to dramatically re-create his body.

Axial Coding:

After analyzing the codes in table 1.2 I found 8 major themes in the participant's responses to the interview questions in Appendix II. These include progression, critical, lonely, confidence, massive does not equal masculine, different, showing strengths and hiding weaknesses and balance. These are explained below along with two of the most relevant examples from the interviews. I have also documented the number of instances where the themes were evident in the interviews.

I: Theme #1- Progression

In all, there were 7 instances of “progression” discourse among each of the 6 participants throughout the interviews.

John Interview- John discussed his two images (pre-competition and during competition) and indicated how proud he was of his progress. While he admitted that his pre-competition body was not as developed as he is now, he stated “It gives me the feeling of comfort and happiness because I know where I started from”. After more than 25 years of competing he's realized that pictures from his past tell the story of “a journeyman in the sport of bodybuilding.”

Jacob Interview- Jacob analyzed his pre-competition photo and said he was not afraid of that image, but he would never go back to looking as he did at 5'8” 125 lbs. He said “I look like I got leukemia man it's freaking terrible”. He also told me he chose to share this image because he wanted to show how far he had come in recreating his body as an amateur competitor.

II: Theme #2- Critical

In all, there were 22 instances of “critical” discourse among each of the participants throughout the interviews.

Andrew Interview- When I asked Andrew if he was insecure about any parts of his body in his image from before a bodybuilding competition he said his size affected him the most. His image was taken on a beach with no shirt on and he indicated that friends who he shared this

image with thought he was in great shape, but he admittedly was not happy with his body. In looking at his image from during a competition where he won the All Natural Mr. Connecticut competition he immediately noticed his diet was off. He stated that he was not insecure about this image but now that he is a bodybuilder he feels more critical about body parts that others outside of the subculture may not notice. In this image he said his hamstrings and calves needed more definition and even if he could recreate these body parts he would eventually find other areas of his physique to critique. Andrew also said “I could train my entire life and not get that look that I want and that’s the thing about it, it’s a constant never ending seeking of achieving that goal you’ll never really get cause you’ll never really be satisfied”.

Josh Interview: In discussing his image from before a bodybuilding competition he admits that at that time he thought he looked great, but now that he has compared this image with his preferred competition image he would never go back to this. He stated “In this image I think I was 225 had a beer gut, no chest, I had the arms but no muscle just fat and water. That’s an image that I wouldn’t have taken my shirt off at the beach”.

III: Theme #3- Lonely

In all, there were 8 instances of “lonely” discourse among 3 of the six participants in the interviews.

Jacob Interview- This theme was evident in multiple interviews. Jacob said he loved the sport of bodybuilding but became lonely because he had to isolate himself from others to create his desired image. He stated “There’s a lot of people that help you get to where you want to be but when you’re on stage it’s only you. You neglect friends, girlfriends and family it’s lonely as hell man that’s just it you’re the only one on the stair stepper for an hour you’re the only one that

sits in the sauna and eats the food”. He does this because it is what he feels he has to do to recreate his physique. He described the road of a bodybuilder as a lonely road.

Andrew Interview- Andrew also indicated how lonely he became during the process of creating desired images as a competitor. He stated “When you’re a bodybuilder that’s your lifestyle that bodybuilding it governs to a larger extent your life”. While he forces himself to spend countless hours in the gym opposed to socializing with friends he knows that he can train his entire life and never create the image he longs for.

IV: Theme #4-Confidence

In all, there were 24 instances of “confidence” discourse among each of the participants in the interviews.

Dean Interview- Dean analyzed his image from before a bodybuilding competition and said it made him feel proud of his accomplishments. It made him think about the sacrifices he made and what he put himself through. In looking at his image from during a bodybuilding competition he said he couldn’t have stepped on stage and looked any better. He said it is the best he had ever looked at the height of his competitive career. When asked if the pre-competition and competition images made him confident he stated “Yes sir because I did my homework and stayed on point and focused”.

Kyle Interview: When I asked Kyle to describe his image from during a bodybuilding competition he said “That to me that’s the most muscular. I mean you you’ve got to have big traps big guns legs you’ve got to have vascularity it just tells everybody if you can pull off that one you know everybody can’t pull off a most muscular. If you don’t have a lot of muscle it’s hard to pull it off that’s showing that I’m the boss and I’m the man.” As he looked at the image he said he could hear the people in the crowd at this show clapping and applauding him. This

image made him feel powerful and strong and that he overachieved. Kyle also stated that looking at that image made him realize all of the hard work and discipline was worth it even though he only looked this way for a period of 2-3 days.

V: Theme # 5 Massive Does Not Equal Masculine

In all, there were 21 instances of “massive does not equal masculine” discourse among each of the participants in the interviews.

John Interview- In discussing if muscle size correlates with being masculine John said “I don’t think it has a lot to do with the look, how much muscle you have on yourself because I think masculinity is how you carry yourself how you present yourself. People get that twisted people think to be more masculine you have to be more massive”. He did not feel that his competition image made him feel more masculine than he was before he entered the subculture but he had noticed that his images made others see him as being masculine. He said the public views bodybuilding as the extreme of the fitness industry and while not everyone likes to the look of bodybuilders there are many men that criticize images of competitors because they don’t think they can create themselves in the same manner.

Dean Interview- Dean noted competing and forming his body into the image from his competition had nothing to do with his masculinity. He stated that there are men who become obsessed and train their chest and arms because they were bullied, skinny or overweight in their youth. According to Dean “There’s some people that always want to be the center of attention, they want to be on display where they always come in here with a string tank top and skin tight shorts. That’s their identity of masculinity where they’re trying to throw it in everybody’s face.” Dean also felt masculinity is how a man carries himself and treats others.

VI: Theme # 6 Different

In all, there were 16 instances of “different” discourse among each of the participants in the interviews.

Jacob Interview- Jacob repeatedly referred to those outside of the subculture as normal people. It was apparent that he saw a clear distinction in how competitors and those who do not compete understand images of him. He mentioned an incident where he went to the beach and saw an acquaintance from his home town who looked at him and said “Oh I thought you were bigger I thought you’d be more cut than that”. He knew that others outside of the subculture do not understand that he will not always look like he does in his competition image and found himself forming impressions about his physique at certain times of the year so they understood why he looked the way he did.

Andrew Interview- Andrew defined bodybuilders as being different from normal people. In looking at his images from before and during a competition he stated “The goal is to change your body to look different than everybody else”. In discussing his plans for retiring from the sport he said he sat at home and cried when he realized his career would be over this year. He cried because he loves the sport but once he was no longer a bodybuilder he feared being like everyone else.

VII: Theme # 7 Showing Strengths and Hide Weaknesses

In all, there were 8 instances of “showing strengths and hiding weaknesses” discourse among 3 of the 6 participants in the interviews.

Kyle Interview: Before he became a bodybuilder he was drawn in from images on magazines and stated “I didn’t know I thought these guys stepped out they shower looking like this every day and then as I said as I started getting more knowledge you can’t even contain that

kind of conditioning it's unhealthy to be honest you can only be that kind of in shape for 2-3 days at the most cause it's just not health". He realized after he had entered the subculture that all of the images he saw in popular media of male bodybuilders were taken right before or after a competition and that they did not always look this way.

Dean Interview: Dean stated that while he looked the best he could in his image he realized that sharing the image gave false impressions to the public. He knows he does not always look as big, defined and ripped as he did in his competition image, but those outside of the subculture do not understand the process and training your body and recreating it for a short period in time. For example, Dean stated "Unfortunately with always showing bodybuilders in competition shape I think it does give a false image to the general public of what these guys look like all the time and all those pictures are take right before and right after a competition".

VIII: Theme #8 Balance

In all, there were 10 instances of "balance" discourse among 4 of the 6 of the participants in the interviews.

Kyle Interview: Kyle stated that in order to be a successful bodybuilder and create the best image possible you must be disciplined. He felt discipline was not just in his training but in all aspects of his life. While others saw his images from during a competition and identified him as a male bodybuilder he said that is not what defined him as a person. It is his passion but he is also a husband and family man who had a full time job. He stated "There's a limit that I have and I told my wife we started training together and I said that if this ever causes division between me and you I'm done". Kyle felt balance was enjoying the journey in the sport, instead of focusing all of his energy on recreating his body for that one final image on stage he wanted to enjoy the relationships and experiences he had throughout the last twelve years. Kyle felt this

kept him grounded and allowed him to not completely identify with the subculture of bodybuilding.

Dean Interview: Dean stated that in order to create his body into his image from during a competition he had to have a balance of mind. He was not paid to train and diet but he did it because he enjoyed the process of changing his physique and trying to be better each time he stepped on the stage. Dean stated “The thing that will always stick with me from my bodybuilding competitive years is where you’re always training with balance in mind”. He felt it is about finding time to train while not neglecting family, friends and loved ones in the process.

Discussion of Visual Autoethnography Interview Results:

In using constant comparative analysis to analyze my six in depth visual autoethnographic interviews and documenting key instances and experiences in my personal autoethnography, it is evident that these methods have provided rich qualitative data to help answer the following research questions of this study. How do male bodybuilders understand and construct their identities through images of themselves before and during bodybuilding competitions? How, if at all, do societal ideals of hyper-masculinity and ideal male body creation affect the identities of male competitors through images? How, if at all, do male bodybuilding competitors manage impressions and frame realities around images of themselves according to the hyper-masculine subculture of bodybuilding? In order to answer these questions I applied visual rhetoric, identity construction, impression management, framing, footing and face to the themes from the visual autoethnographic interviews. Then I applied these theories to my personal narrative using the key experiences noted above in table 1.2 from Appendix I. Lastly I discuss similarities among my experiences and those of the respondents in

understanding and identifying with images of ourselves before and during bodybuilding competitions.

In analyzing how the respondents understood and constructed their identities through images from before and during bodybuilding competitions I used visual rhetoric to analyze their responses beginning with the theme of progression. All six participants noted that their pre-competition images showed where they began and that their competition images showed their progression in the subculture. Three out of the six respondents identified negatively with their images from before a competition. Josh stated that he would not even come to the gym if he looked like he did in his image. Kyle felt so insecure about his image from before a competition that he reflected to moments of not getting out of his car to teach his posing classes because he was embarrassed of the size of his stomach. Jacob stated “That’s the image I am not scared to look like again that doesn’t scare me to look like that. Cause I was a skinny kid that’s all it doesn’t scare me to look like that but it drives me not to. I know I can look better that’s what it does”. Dean and John both identified positively with their images from before a competition and felt that their years of experience taught them to be critical of their physiques opposed to feeling insecure so they could correctly analyze their personal progress.

Each respondent felt confident in their photos from during a competition and it was evident in their emotions that they were happy with their re-defined physiques. While they were satisfied with their competition images, each respondent identified one or more body parts that they felt could be improved to turn them into complete bodybuilders. In discussing their images the participants also indicated that they felt their images made them different than non-competitors. Four out of the six competitors referred to those outside of the subculture as normal people and stated that only bodybuilders understood or shared the same experiences. I asked

Jacob if he thought those outside of the subculture of bodybuilding understood images of the sport. His response was “No if you ask anyone outside of the sport we’re a bunch of steroid freaks that are veiny and look like cartoon characters. That’s 90% of what you’re going to get most people don’t like it. It’s not jealousy I don’t call it jealousy when people say that because it’s not. People truly believe that but at the same time there is a little bit of envy where they don’t have the drive to do it and wish they did”. Josh stated that he posted the picture from during a competition to Facebook. While his friends praised his physique he informed them that his calves were not big or defined. This began an online dialogue between him and others telling him he did not need to worry about his calves. Josh told me “It made me feel bad because I got people that don’t look half of what I look like and they’re like you don’t need calves and I am like how can I tell this fat this obese guy hey man I need calves”. Jacob described his competition image as his best shot that is now seen on *Muscular Development Magazine’s* website, but he pointed out that his chest was not big enough to match the size of his shoulders and that he is taking a year off from competing to build that body part. John noted that he could never achieve the completely dry look on stage because his genetics did not allow him to use diuretics or water pills to lose excess water weight before competitions. The dry look refers the how thin a competitor’s skin looks on stage at a competition showing more muscle definition and striations. Many bodybuilders take water pills or diuretics the week leading up to competitions to cut out extra pounds of body fluid which gives the illusion of tightening up the skin. In his eyes if he were able to make himself appear drier in his competition images he would’ve been even more complete as a bodybuilder.

The competition images that were discussed in the interviews depicted visual performances using poses to highlight strengths and hide weaknesses of these respondents

(Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). In discussing these photos I found the theme of confidence where the visual dimensions of each competitor's physique changed their personal attitudes to where they felt happy and confident with their images. While these images revealed positive and confident identities among respondents it was evident that entering the subculture of bodybuilding changed how they viewed images of themselves. For example in describing his competition image Kyle stated "It makes me feel strong, makes me feel powerful, makes me feel like I'm an overcomer that I overachieved so many things". The participants constantly looked for areas of their body that could be improved because they understood the subculture and what NPC competition judges are looking for in order to be successful at competitions. I then asked Kyle if there were any parts of his body that he would recreate, he said "My legs it's my masterpiece I always had big legs but I always errored and had to bring up, now I have an image in my head and how I want to be with my legs so that's the image that I keep and I train those super hard."

Each participant stated that they viewed their pre-competition and competition images differently than non-competitors and they felt this caused a distinct boundary in understanding the subculture of bodybuilding. They no longer looked at images of professional bodybuilders in magazines and media and dreamed of looking ripped, striated and defined year round because they understand it is impossible to look that way twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. In Dean's interview I asked if he felt his identity had changed since he became a male bodybuilder. He stated "Identity probably for myself not really to others possibly because you're sort of known as the competitive guy or the competitive bodybuilder." Kyle said "I think like I said once you start being successful in this sport your identity will definitely change. People look at you different you know you win and people recognize you because even though it's such a

small culture you know you'll see the same people show after show so when you start getting a name and people start recognizing you it does feel good. So of course I'm not gonna lie and say that my...the more I compete the better I do yeah I do feel better about myself. I'd feel better about myself in that culture you know people outside always think you look great. You walk to the average gym and the average everybody thinks you look great." This is where they felt they differed from men who do not compete.

While some of the respondents looked at images of themselves before they competed and identified negatively with these visuals, they chose to share these images to provide a context for where they began. Showing their competition images allowed them to describe their progression and what they did to recreate their bodies. They rhetorically socialized about both images with me during the interviews so I understood why they chose to share their pre-competition and competition photos. Using a convenience sampling group of competitors that knew I also competed, allowed them to open up and talk about the body parts they were critical about in their images. Discussing these images with someone else who was in the subculture of bodybuilding helped them to take a step back and reveal thoughts and feelings about themselves that others outside of bodybuilding would not understand. As I previously stated the cultural implications and standards that the NPC describes as what makes a complete bodybuilder is what caused these competitors to identify with their images in this manner. In Jacob's interview when discussing how often he critiques images of he stated "I critique myself everyday but in a way never a negative way always it's coming its coming it takes time it's coming, you know as well as I do you've been in the sport you know you've worked out long enough where you've got weeks where you feel like you are that guy in the image". The NPC focuses on proportion and symmetry of all body parts regardless of height and weight class and these principles seemed to

guide the thought processes of the respondents. Including Jacob four of the participants referenced how my experience in the sport made it easier for them to discuss their images because they knew I had gone through the process of creating similar images.

In discussing societal ideals of hyper-masculinity and ideal male body creation in bodybuilding, each bodybuilder stated that they had never thought that being a bodybuilder made them masculine. Each respondent also stated that their thoughts on their own masculinity had not changed since entering the subculture, but they did view bodybuilding as being a hyper-masculine sport based on the images seen in popular culture. Three out of the six competitors stated that they entered the subculture of bodybuilding to get big and that they were enticed by images of muscular competitors in popular media. Now that they have assimilated into the subculture they no longer focus their attention on these hyper-masculine images as they are more attentive to their personal progress. The consensus among the respondents was that being massive does not make them masculine, especially since their body size and physique change so frequently throughout the year as they are competing or taking time off to train.

In the open coding stages of analyzing the interview transcriptions I found that the participants described a masculine bodybuilder as someone who respects others, takes care of his family, carries himself professionally and is disciplined in all aspects of his life not just in the gym. I found that these competitors did not view themselves as being less or more masculine based on their images or the subculture. It was interesting to find that once they became male bodybuilders, they felt that others outside of the subculture viewed them as being more masculine. They even highlighted that this perception is causing men who do not understand the subculture of bodybuilding or who may be intimidated by joining to attempt to change their personal images to look like those who are in the subculture. These men look at images of

competitors similar to the respondents of this study and believe that if they can change their body's that they will feel more masculine and potentially gain a source of power within themselves. The respondents that have already gone through the process of creating their physiques to model what is seen in popular culture each acknowledged that while their competition images bring them happiness and satisfaction they did not change the men that they are. Their masculinity comes from within themselves and not through their images.

In order to analyze how male bodybuilders manage impressions and frame realities around images of themselves in a hyper masculine subculture I applied Erving Goffman's theories of impression management, framing, footing and face. Again in discussing my experiences as an amateur male bodybuilding competitor they viewed me as someone who was a part of their subculture and they opened up to me about their images. When I communicated with these respondents on what images to bring to the interviews, I did not stipulate that the images from before a competition needed to be within a certain time frame from before a show or that they needed to be associated with bodybuilding. The purpose of this was to see what image they would share and why. Three out of the six respondents supplied an image that was not during a training preparation time period for a competition. Jacob shared an image of himself in college, Andrew shared an image of himself at the beach and Kyle shared an image of himself in the offseason while teaching a posing class for other competitors. These respondents chose specific images of themselves showing their half-naked physique at what they described as their worst images. They each indicated that they chose these images to show me how far they had progressed as amateur competitors once they compared this image to those from during a competition. Without knowing, they were managing their impressions in order to give me a context of where they began. Jacob and Andrew's images were from before they began training

for a bodybuilding competition. Once they showed me their images from during a competition they formed confident impressions on their front stage, but as I asked if they were critical about these images, specifically with certain body parts, each picked apart their physique. The front stage refers to the initial impressions given off to the audience (Johansson, 2009). In describing his pre-competition photo Jacob said “I peaked at that image, if I looked like that on stage I would feel very insecure. There’s nothing there it’s a stick I mean I couldn’t even do physique”. Andrew looked at his pre-competition image and stated “If I look at that shot I say he needs more legs, chest, shoulders and definitely lacking in lats”. This is when I found that each respondent identified very positively with their competition images, and these visuals brought them great satisfaction. However, now that they are assimilated into a body creation focused subculture they were never completely satisfied with images of themselves.

It was also evident when discussing the topic of masculinity in bodybuilding that each respondent formed the impression on their front stage that they always felt masculine even before they began competing. Before this study began, I expected participants to hesitate when answering this question. However, as I continued to discuss the topic of hyper-masculine images in society with Andrew he told me that one of his biggest concerns with retiring was that he would see himself as being less masculine. He stated “Bodybuilding is so much I mean I thought about just the training, the sacrifice, the sites the sounds, the smells and the oil. All that and I thought about it and it came back to me I was saying to myself I was going to be just like everybody else and I just cried. I didn’t want to do it I didn’t want to just be anyone else. In my mind it made me less masculine. I don’t know but I know that when I thought about giving that up was just it was just overwhelming.” He initially did not reveal this thought to me but as I asked if he had anything else to share about his experiences and how he identified with images of

himself he opened up by sharing this thought from his backstage of impressions during our conversations. He felt he would see himself as being less masculine not because he would not be ripped and defined, but because he would not have anything else left in his life to compete in. Andrew was one of the respondents that completely identified with bodybuilding and said, "I love being a bodybuilder".

As we delved deeper into discussing their images I found that each respondent framed a reality around their images and what it took for them to create their physiques. According to Goffman framing refers to understanding communicative practices allowing audiences to interpret meaning (Johansson, 2009). Three of the respondents said they felt positive about their images from during a competition, but when they thought about everything that went into this image they felt lonely. Jacob stated that he would never go back to his image from before a competition where he always had friends and girlfriends and was happy, but in order to become what he describes as the best image of himself in a side tricep pose he had to isolate himself from others. He described the concept of being lonely as follows "You feel lonelier when you're a bodybuilder a competitive bodybuilder. You're supposed to look better than the average Joe you're supposed to be bigger, stronger you're supposed to be all of these things." Andrew also agreed that part of being a successful competitor meant he had to force himself to eat the same meals over and over seven times per day, train multiple times per day and not partake in many of the activities with friends and family that would interrupt his lifestyle as a bodybuilder.

On the other hand John, Dean and Kyle each framed the reality of a balanced lifestyle. Each of these respondents have competed on a national level and it was evident that their lengthy experience in the sport taught them that part of understanding their own images and how to create themselves into works of art time and time again without separating themselves from the

rest of society was by keeping one foot in the subculture and one foot out. Ken stated that part of being balanced is enjoying the process of training for each show. Dean continually said that bodybuilding is something he enjoyed doing to keep himself healthy and competitive but he will never say that bodybuilding is who he is. These two processes of framing are critical in understanding how older and more experienced competitors analyzed images of themselves as opposed to younger less experienced competitors. I purposely used a convenience sample of competitors that had competed in anywhere from 2-5 shows to 35-40 to provide these differing perspectives.

Throughout the interviews I also found the majority of the respondents had a principal and author of their images and that they had assumed the role of the animator by stepping on stage at competitions. The author chooses the information content and the principal is behind the public relations stance in communication while the animator relays the information chosen by the author and principal through verbal or non-verbal modes of communication (Johansson, 2009). Each participant had one or two coaches, trainers or training partners that pieced together their meal plans and training regimens that helped them to decrease their body fat and gain muscle in the areas they felt they needed to improve for their competition images. In analyzing their pre-competition images, three out of the six respondents had coaches or trainers in these roles and after weeks of posing they taught them how to animate their images through nonverbal signals. While animating these images, they attempted to pose so that they could hide the body parts that they felt were insufficient and highlight those that were their stronger points. Dean referred to this form of animation on stage as an “optical illusion” because he was able to force the judges to focus on his abdominals and striations in his legs so that they did not notice that his back was not as detailed as the other bodybuilders he was competing against.

I also found that the respondents constantly negotiated their use of face in discussing their images and views on masculinity in bodybuilding. Face refers to the public self-image that participants claim for themselves (Johansson, 2009). Negative face is a straight forward hierarchical approach where participants must buy in to the communication or get out (Johansson, 2009). Positive face refers to a coercive and relatable approach that wants each participant to desire what is being communicated to them (Johansson, 2009). Dean and John employed positive face to talk about how good they felt about their genetics and progress during their photos from before a competition which made me acknowledge that their physique looked great. The other four competitors utilized negative face to describe their images from before a competition and stated that they would never go back to looking like they did before, but they wanted to show how far they had come in their training. In discussing masculinity, I found that each respondent stuck firm to their answers on if they felt more masculine as a bodybuilder and if their thoughts on masculinity have changed since they entered the subculture. Each competitor took a negative face approach and stated that they have always been masculine and whether they were competing or not their ideas on what masculinity is would always be the same. I found this to be a form of impression management. Each participant agreed that they viewed bodybuilding as a hyper-masculine subculture, but they did not feel comfortable discussing whether or not they considered themselves to be masculine. Now that I have analyzed the results of my visual autoethnographic interviews, below in table 1.2 I documented each experience from my autoethnography in Appendix I that corresponded with one or more of the theories and concepts used in this study. I then discuss my experiences and how I answered the central research questions of this study.

Table 1.2 Autoethnography Experiences:

Stage/Footnote	Concept/Theory	Description
One-Footnote 1	Visual Rhetoric	When I shared my posing video with Dr. Carreiro I compared my physique to Jacob's based on what others in the subculture had taught me about how I should look to fit in.
One-Footnote 2	Impression Management	After months of working with Dr. Carreiro I waited until I was comfortable with my muscle size in images to share my posing video with her. I was forming the impression that I was confident and satisfied with what I had created.
One-Footnote 3	Hyper-masculinity/Homo-eroticism	In discussing my posing video with Dr. Carreiro I began to realize that competitors exude hyper-masculine ideals but we practice what others would see as stereotypical homo-erotic forms of analyzing each other's physique's.
One-Footnote 4	Identity Construction	I began to realize that the way we critique and analyze each other's physique is opposite of typical hyper-masculine subcultures, but now that I have assimilated into the subculture I have become obsessed with critiquing my physique.
One-Footnote 5	Visual Rhetoric	As we began taking progress pictures before I trained I began to feel insecure about my body and its progress. I felt overweight and out of shape but to others I was huge. I had to keep in mind the context of why I gained so much weight at this point in my training.
One-Footnote 6	Footing	After Jacob decided to take the year off from training he and Dean assumed the role of my coaches. Dean became the principal in teaching me how to train and diet. Jacob in the role of my principal by overseeing my evening workouts and facilitating progress pictures each week. This allowed me to focus on animating the images they helped me create.
One-Footnote 7	Framing and Face	As I increased my food intake I was faced with the dilemma of disliking my images more and more. I framed a reality that it was necessary to look bigger and less defined and found myself socializing with other gym members letting them know that I was not going to be big for long. I used positive face to get them to think about the transformation my body was getting ready to go through.
One-Footnote 8	Visual Rhetoric	John pulled me to the side and complemented my size and potential. I expressed my worries about how I looked and he told me I was in a good place and that eight weeks out from the show would determine exactly what I needed to change with my diet and training, but he reaffirmed with me that I was in a good place.
One-Footnote 9	Framing	I opened up to Dean about my thoughts on steroids and human growth hormones. Having him as the principal of my image helped me realize I do not need to supplement this way, but I know I will be faced with this decision as I progress further into the subculture.
One-Footnote 10	Hyper-masculinity	The pinky comment invoked a sense of timidity and implied that I was feminine for not pushing myself to do more repetitions. I found occurrences like this to be common as we trained and it made me feel as if I had to push through all feelings of pain and fatigue to not embody this ideal. This is

		also where I started to realize that the sport portrays hyper-masculine ideals but everything we do outside of weight training is stereotypically homo-erotic and feminine.
Two- Footnote 11	Visual Rhetoric	My college teammates criticized my images from the competition in August, but marveled out how I had changed myself. It gave a few of them hope that they could come to me for training and diet advise so they could change their images to resemble the athletes they once were.
Two-Footnote 12	Questioning the Hyper-Masculinity of Bodybuilding	After discussing my images with college teammates I came to the realization that bodybuilding is nothing like other hyper-masculine sports. If anything we embody more feminine and homo-erotic traits through our rituals and practices of shaving, tanning and posing with other men.
Two- Footnote 13	Impression Management	I found myself having to form impressions that I was confident in my images but that it was not something to brag about during my time in Virginia. The more my images change the more I am managing my impressions for others whether I want to or not.
Two-Footnote 14	Homo-Eroticism	After I left the posing class at my gym I came to my final conclusion that bodybuilding is a homo-erotic subculture. I didn't even notice the women in the room. All of my attention was paid to two men in their boxer briefs, but while we may not see this as being abnormal I now understand why those outside of the subculture have conflicting ideas about our sport.
Two-Footnote 15	Identity Construction	During the posing class I also faced the realization that my height was a disadvantage in bodybuilding. I began to worry more about my upcoming show because I would be in a more advanced class with high level competitors that are going to be shorter than me.
Two- Footnote 16	Femininity	As I finished up a workout with Dean and Jacob on a snow day I was told it was time to start shaving and tanning. We train and diet to look like behemoths but in a way we pamper and prepare ourselves to be visually pleasing to others when we step on stage.
Two-Footnote 17	Framing	Even midway through stage two I am still framing the reality that I do not completely fit into the subculture of bodybuilding because of my height. I envision looking like Tony Freeman and think to myself that I will not be complete until my physique resembles his even though I know I may never look like him.
Two- Footnote 18	Impression Management	My body was not cutting fat or dropping weight as quickly as it did for my first competition and I found myself forming impressions for my principal and author that I would transform quickly once my body adjusted to the new diet. On my backstage I was nervous and insecure that I wouldn't be ready in time for the show.
Two-Footnotes 19	Identity Construction	Not only do I find myself struggling with understanding my physical images during this stage but I also begin noticing I am living a double life. At first I think I am successfully balancing my person and professional life with competing but I realize that the boundaries are spilling over into each other.
Two-Footnote 20	Identity Construction	After being told my body fat was still too high my mindset changed from wanting to be the biggest guy at the gym to becoming as ripped and lean for my show as possible. It was

		not until I reflected on my experiences of trying multiple supplements for different results that I realized it is not the hyper-masculine ideals that are driving my obsession it is the fact that I am not happy with my physical image at this point in my training.
Two-Footnote 21	Balance	My obsession with images began spilling over into my personal life and it took an argument with my girlfriend and interview with Kyle to put things into perspective.
Three-footnote 22	Framing	I found that I entered the subculture to change parts of my physique that I wasn't happy with. I also enjoy the opportunity to compete with myself opposed to my time in team sports.
Three- Footnote 23	Identity Construction	Finding balance has also helped me let go of my bigorexia and become happy with my images even though I am losing size.
Three-Footnote 24	Masculinity in Images	I found that as my images changed others outside of the subculture exposed their doubts of being able to compete. While I began to see myself as being normal they saw me as different from them.
Three- Footnote 25	Bodybuilding is not hyper-masculine	Coming to an understanding that bodybuilding is not hyper-masculine relieved me from stressing over my weekly images to fit into the subculture. Letting go of these ideals gave me a sense of comfort.
Three-Footnote 26	Difference	Finding balance between my domains showed me that being a bodybuilder does not make us different. Others may see us as being different but I found that I am still the same person I was before just with different images.
Three-Footnote 27	Visual Rhetoric	Each time I look in the mirror I feel that I am coming together more and more as a bodybuilder. I am developing my physique according to the standards of the NPC.
Three-Footnote 28	Impression Management	I changed the impressions I was giving to my girlfriend in stage 3 by listening to her and spending less time focusing on my images which changed our relationship for the better.
Three-Footnote 29	Femininity	I've accepted the homo-erotic practices of bodybuilding but I still struggle with the stereotypical feminine practices of shaving and tanning before a competition.

Discussion of Autoethnography Results:

Now in looking back on my key experiences documented in table 1.2 from Appendix I my personal narrative provided an even greater insight into understanding the mental and physical struggles of being a male bodybuilder as I transitioned from my offseason training into contest preparation for the North Carolina State Championships on April 12, 2014. In order to analyze how I answered the central questions of this study I melded together my experiences from stages one, two and three and applied visual rhetoric, identity construction, impression

management, framing, footing and face. In reflecting on my experiences the following themes immersed obsession, insecure, balance and deception. I have provided an explanation for each theme below showing how understandings of my images changed from stage one to three.

As my study began I began I analyzed images of my physique over and over. During stage one I was at my heaviest body weight of 240 lbs. and my muscles were larger and fuller than in stage two and three. Without knowing my bigorexia took over my daily thoughts and all I focused on in stage one was recreating my physique to be as big and proportional as possible. I socialized nearly every day with Jacob, other gym members, my girlfriend and family about my progress and I found that I was happy that others saw me as a bodybuilder. When the study began I had already fully assimilated into the subculture of bodybuilding, but because I lacked muscle symmetry in certain areas based on the standards of the NPC I felt that each day I had to focus on recreating my image to fit the visual mold of the subculture. It was my first full off season of training and I spent months eating high amounts of protein, carbohydrates and fat to build my physique.

I described stages one and two as a whirl wind of emotions because one day I found myself feeling happy with being large and muscular and absorbing the complements of friends and former teammates about how I had grown, but as we began taking progress pictures before I trained once per week my feelings of insecurities set in. This was the second theme of my study and in looking at my weekly images from stage one and two my insecurities made me obsess about my images. I enjoyed being 240 lbs. but I missed the lean muscle definition in my abdominals from my first competition in August 2013. I only felt confident after I had trained and my muscles were full of blood making me look bigger and stronger than I would the other 23 hours out of the day. My obsession caused me to completely identify with my images and in

socializing with others at the Energy Sports and Fitness gym, work and home I found myself allowing the sport of bodybuilding to take over my life.

During the first week of stage one when Jacob and I filmed the video of us going through our mandatory poses I felt great about my image and I wanted to show everyone my progress. Two of my experiences distinctly showed how I identified with my images in the first two stages of this research. The first was in stage one when I decided to share my posing video with Dr. Carreiro. At no point prior to stage one had I shown her any images of myself. She only knew me as the young professional who participated in this sport outside of my work domain. When I shared this image with her she immediately asked why I chose to show this to her after months of us working on my research together. At this moment I realized that I had become so obsessed with my images that I did not even think of the unprofessional impressions I was forming with a professor at my institution. Before assimilating into the subculture of bodybuilding I would only have shared images of myself half naked with those who were in my personal boundaries. I was so pleased with my physique that I assumed she would interpret this video as if she was in the subculture of bodybuilding. I showed this video to another competitor at my gym and he didn't even think twice about seeing me shirtless next to another man. Instead he complemented the fullness of my muscles and how developed my back had become since my first competition.

At this point I realized that my images had become a part of me and even though I realized how awkward it must have been for Dr. Carreiro to see this video and that it was forming the impression that I identified completely as a bodybuilder I allowed this obsession to continue through the end of stage two. Each week I looked forward to my progress pictures but I dreaded it at the same time because I wanted to see if anything had changed in my physique, but since my offseason diet continued from January 3, 2014 to February 12, 2014 these images

caused conflicting emotions within myself. I was big but no definition showed. My coaches convinced me that critiquing images before training was the best way to see what my body would look like on the day of the competition and I bought into this approach. They were correct but even so I hated seeing the excess body fat drooping over my boxer briefs and I felt more than insecure when I looked at my front abdominal pose.

These images caused me to form undesired impressions in the first two stages in this research. My approach to personal public relations made others see me as only a bodybuilder. The second experience that served as a turning point in understanding how I identified with images of myself from before and during a bodybuilding competition came at the end of stage two. After two months of me obsessing over my images my girlfriend and I found ourselves in an argument that spanned 48 hours over my obsession with images and bodybuilding. My weekly images had changed the person I was prior to entering the subculture. I found myself using visual rhetoric to make sense of how I looked each time we took images of my posing based on how I understood the subculture. I had convinced myself that my daily habits of posing in front of the mirror at home and at the gym 10-15 times per day was because I wanted to perfect how I showed my physical strengths and hid my weaknesses. Jacob and Dean had engrained in my mind that I had to create and show my body based on what the NPC judges were looking for in a complete bodybuilder. In my mind I was attempting to understand my images according to the context of bodybuilding where at certain points in your training you must be full, symmetrical and each body part matches. I wanted my arms and back to match the size of my chest and I wanted my hamstrings to be as defined as my quadriceps.

This argument with my girlfriend came at the perfect time in my study because during the weekend of February 22-23, 2014 I went from utilizing a negative face approach in my personal

public relations to positive face. On Friday February 21, 2014 my girlfriend broke down and told me she was tired of constantly hearing about my training and diet and seeing me shirtless and posing in every mirror in our house. In my voyeuristic conceit I tried to convince her that in order to find true data in this form of qualitative research and to create my body to continue to fit into the subculture of bodybuilding I had to socialize about my images and take every opportunity to look at my progress. She was upset that I stopped asking about how she was feeling or her daily experiences and felt that my obsession with images was forcing us apart. My first approach to public relations was to form the impression that she did not understand what I was doing because she was outside of the bodybuilding subculture (Johansson, 2009). I actually found myself believing these thoughts on both my front and back stage of impressions (Johansson, 2009). I had framed a reality that in order to be a researcher and a participant in my study I had to pay more attention to my images than anything else (Johansson, 2009). As I transitioned from stage one to stage two I had acquired a principal of information in Dean and an author in Jacob who trained me each day to become the animator of my final on stage image (Johansson, 2009). I felt that since these two men were willingly giving their time and expertise to me with no financial charge and because they believed in my potential I had make sacrifices in my personal domains to show them I was dedicated and disciplined. Finally I found that at this point in my research I used a negative face approach where I tried to force my girlfriend to accept that focusing on my images twenty four hours a day and seven days a week was the only way to succeed in my research and in my competition (Johansson, 2009).

On Saturday February 22, 2014 I went to the gym to interview Kyle who was the final respondent in my visual autoethnographic interviews. Discussing his pre-competition and competition images proved to be the most influential conversation I had during this entire study.

Kyle had competed for over twelve years and was now known on the national level in the subculture of bodybuilding. What drew me to Kyle was his whole hearted and calm approach to bodybuilding and his life. I was at the lowest point in my research and I wanted to understand how he managed his impressions with those in his personal life especially his wife who he talked about multiple times during the interview. Kyle informed me that when he first began competing he found himself hating his photos from before competitions. They made him feel insecure and he was constantly worried about others losing respect for him because he did not look like his competition images year round. When he entered the subculture of bodybuilding he thought all of the competitors on covers of fitness magazines always looked big, defined and striated but he quickly found that those images are taken right before or after competitions where bodybuilders are at their peak of conditioning.

Once he came to the realization that his final competition images would only last for 2-3 days he accepted who he was during the other 362 days out of the year. He also informed me that bodybuilding was his passion, but it was not who he was. He identified very positively with his images from during a competition and openly shared these photos for my research, but no matter how far his career goes in the sport he is a husband, family member and friend before being a bodybuilder. Kyle stated that if bodybuilding ever caused conflict between himself and his wife that he would quit the sport because nothing was more important than his relationship. During his time in the subculture he had seen men who were disciplined and dedicated in the gym but lost control in all other aspects of their life and he was determined to never be that way so he could maintain balance.

After speaking with Kyle I found his words resonating with me throughout all of stage three. I had lost balance between my personal, social and work domains at this point in my

research and after I walked out of the interview with Kyle I realized how wrong my impressions were with my girlfriend. She had supported me in every aspect of my life for five years and was my best friend. I had become more disciplined and dedicated to my social life in the gym than in my personal and work domains. Not only did my girlfriend see me at this point as just a bodybuilder but my former college teammates and friends no longer saw me as the baseball player or coach I was before. This was because of the images I chose to share on social media and in conversation I formed the impressions to others and to myself that I was now an amateur bodybuilder and I wanted everyone to know. The boundaries between all of the domains in my life had gone from permeable to nonexistent and my personal identity had changed.

I had worked so hard to become a young professional in pursuit of higher education over the last three years and the last thing I wanted was to be seen as a stereotypical bodybuilder. Kyle's interview made me realize how wrong I was and that I had to find balance in order to continue to pursue my passion of bodybuilding and maintain positive relationships with others. From that point on I made a conscious effort to stop critiquing my images at home and spend more quality time with my girlfriend and friends outside of the gym. I stopped talking about my training with others and only answered questions when I was asked about the sport. I began scheduling time to train in the morning and evenings and when I left the gym I left the subculture of bodybuilding behind to keep one foot in and one foot out. Within the first week of stage three my relationship with my girlfriend was great and even though I had more outside stressors in my life than in stage one or two I felt more confident in every aspect of my life. Focusing on balance helped me let go of my obsession over progress photos and my new approach to personal public relations proved to make others around me let go of my full identification as a male bodybuilder.

In forcing myself to separate my personal and work domains from my research and training I formed positive impressions with my girlfriend, friends and work colleagues. I framed the reality that I was no longer just a bodybuilder and in scheduling my days around each of my responsibilities as a boyfriend, professional and competitor I was able to put more trust in the process that my principal and author of information had provided for me (Johansson, 2009). Changing from a negative face approach to positive face where others began asking more about my competition and training because I was no longer telling them each day about my experiences made them want to know how I was feeling and see how I looked (Johansson, 2009). I found that keeping one foot in the subculture and one foot out allowed me to enjoy the process of training for the competition. Jacob and I continued to take weekly progress pictures in stage three but I stopped looking at them each day and analyzing how I looked. We discussed where I was in my training and decided on what needed to change in my diet or cardio and put the images away. This made me feel more confident in how I looked because as we entered the third week of stage three my body had begun to lean out and become more defined. My bigorexia faded away and instead of focusing on being the biggest man in the gym I only thought about being in the best condition for my physique on April 12, 2014. I no longer compared myself to others in the gym or professional competitors in magazines because I knew my final image would only last for a short time but my principal and author continued to inform me that I was on pace to look great and animate my best image at the competition.

The final theme of my personal experiences was deception. The large majority of studies I analyzed before beginning this research labeled bodybuilding as a hyper-masculine subculture. Ben-Zeev found that hyper-masculinity encourages men to engage in masculine behaviors while eschewing what might be perceived as feminine communal behaviors (Ben-Zeev, et al, 2012).

Hyper-masculine subcultures teach men at a young age to be assertive, decisive and not emotionally expressive to avoid being classified as members of a lower-status group (Ben-Zeev, et al, 2012). As I reflected on my personal experiences in preparing for the North Carolina State Championships I found that bodybuilding is not a hyper-masculine subculture. Many competitors that I have met and trained with came from hyper-masculine athletic backgrounds such as football, baseball and basketball and translated their ideals to bodybuilding.

During stages one, two and three I observed other competitors making jokes about those outside of the subculture for not understanding why or how we trained and dieted to recreate our physiques. I saw myself as being different from those who did not compete because they did not understand why I was fatigued from eating low amounts of carbohydrates or why I was lifting lighter weights than them but still looking differently. As other gym members labeled me as a competitor they openly admitted that they did not have the drive or discipline to train or eat like me. I felt that they saw me as more masculine than them because of my upcoming competition which initiated daily questions on how I was feeling or tips for them to lose weight and tone their bodies. I found myself explaining the process of gaining weight to lose weight to those outside of the subculture and that my on stage image would only last for a certain period of time. The attention I was getting from other men and continuous praise for the changes in my images made me feel I was no longer normal. I was willing to sacrifice the foods I loved and going out to have a drink to step on stage and put my naked body on display.

I believed that I was more masculine and different than others until I attended my first posing class at the Energy Sports and Fitness gym in the middle of stage two. This is when I realized I was deceiving others into thinking I was more masculine than them based on my images. I walked into the glass walled aerobics room in the gym and saw eight women's bikini

competitors, two male bodybuilders and six men's physique competitors practicing their poses. After weeks of taking my progress pictures in just my boxer briefs I had become more than comfortable showing my entire body in front of strangers. I walked right over to the bodybuilders and stripped down to practice my poses with them. In reflecting on this I found it interesting that in a room full of attractive women I did not notice any of them. I was so focused on the two male competitors in their boxer briefs who were critiquing how I posed and what I needed to work on with my training. I hung on every word and before I knew it the forty minute class was over and I had no recollection of what anyone looked like in the room besides the bodybuilders. Three years before this study I would've looked at the male bodybuilders in the room and wondered why they were in their underwear and why they were so comfortable talking to other men in the same attire. To most outside of the subculture these practices of critiquing images of other men may seem homo-erotic opposed to hyper-masculine and I would agree.

After the posing class I began to think more in depth about the hyper-masculine subculture of bodybuilding and found that our final competition images create an aura of hyper-masculinity to those outside of the subculture. Even though we only wear trunks to cover up our private parts, men who have never competed see our muscle size and definition and confidence in standing on stage in front of complete strangers to show our physiques as the extreme. In my conversations with others outside of the subculture in this study they identified my ability to stay disciplined and show my physique in a manner that fits the mold of ideal body image in society as masculine. At this point in my research I realized being an amateur bodybuilder did not make me more masculine than others, but I did feel I was different than the norm. I trained and dieted for a purpose that was different than the larger population of males working out at the Energy

Sports and Fitness gym. Other men labeled me as a bodybuilder boosting my ego and in a way segmenting me from others who trained just to stay in shape.

I began to see bodybuilding as a subculture that uses stereotypical feminine and homoerotic practices to perform ideal body creation images. Standing in a room in my underwear with another man watching me flex my muscles in certain poses is not hyper-masculine. As I entered stage three I was instructed by my principal and author of information to begin shaving my body and tanning so I could show more muscle definition in my final progress photos. Before I became a bodybuilder I saw tanning and shaving as something only women did. As a former baseball player I was used to being dirty, hairy and not worrying about how others saw my muscular definition. Now that I have accepted all of the practices of bodybuilding I understand that some view the subculture as hyper-masculine through images, but deep down what we do to create our desired images is not hyper-masculine at all. I still feel uncomfortable shaving my entire body, sitting in tanning beds and being spray tanned before competitions but these practices help create the illusion in my final images of looking more defined and bigger than I actually am.

After accepting the fact that bodybuilding is not a hyper-masculine subculture I felt more comfortable in analyzing and understanding my images. While the training and diet is harder than anything I have done for other athletic pursuits I let go of the tough and assertive notions that had been engrained in me over the years. I am not surrounded by others who consistently degrade women or men that label other men as soft or not masculine. I am around men who are comfortable with their images and throughout this process they've taught me how to critique my personal images according to the sport. This realization came to fruition at the end of stage two and directly correlated with Kyle's interview. Viewing bodybuilding as a non-hyper-masculine

subculture also helped relieve my stressors of trying to fit the mold of what society is portraying in popular media as the ideal male physique. I found a principal and author of information that surrounded me with other competitors that understood the subculture better than I did.

Bodybuilding is also the first individual sport I have participated in and I found that gaining a better understanding of the subculture also contributed to my balance and control. Finding balance and control also helped me to feel more comfortable with how I looked leading into the final week of my contest preparation. My training, diet and cutting of water turned me into my final on stage image where I weighed 214lbs. with lean muscles and striations. I was very satisfied with the image I created but during the day of the competition I felt exhausted and dehydrated. I trained my body for three months just to feel my muscles cramp on stage as I went through my poses and individual routine, but it was more than worth it because I had gained a true understanding of how to change my physique and how to identify with images of my body as an amateur male bodybuilder. While my competition images did not last for more than three days I found myself mentally preparing for the next time I will step on stage and how I can improve myself based on the subcultures standards.

Making myself the focus of this narrative was truly eye opening. In analyzing my personal experiences the themes of obsession, insecurity, balance and deception highlight the journey I embarked on and how I answered the main research questions of this study. In the following section I combined the results from my visual autoethnographic interviews and my autoethnography to find similarities in my understandings and those of other competitors.

Conclusion:

As research continues to explore male bodybuilder understandings of identity construction and masculinity through images, this study has explored the role of visual autoethnographic interviews and autoethnography as contributing to qualitative forms of methodology. This research highlights that visuals and images along with personal narratives provide quality evidence in understanding how male bodybuilders identify with images from before competitions and during. Their experiences as well as mine highlight the misunderstandings that men outside of the bodybuilding subculture have of images in popular media of the sport and the fitness industry.

This research found that images from during a bodybuilding competition brought about positive emotions and the themes of progression and confidence in how respondents identified and understood their images. While these images showed the progress of each participant in their body creation compared to their images from before a bodybuilding competition I discovered that assimilating into the subculture made them more critical of their images more so than before. The respondents and I looked at our images from before bodybuilding competitions and analyzed where we were in our journey to our final image more critically based on the cultural context of the NPC and the subculture of bodybuilding. In sharing images from before and after competitions I also found that we formed desired and undesired impressions to others outside of the subculture, but it was evident that the images from during a competition segmented these respondents causing them to feel different than who they categorized as “normal” people or non-competitors.

In analyzing my experiences I found that from stage one to stage two of my autoethnography I also began to see myself as different and it was not until I found the correct balance in all domains of my life that I saw how the images I chose to share affected my approach to public relations with others. I became obsessed with progress pictures of my physique and this obsession let feelings of insecurity cause my personal life of bodybuilding to spill over into my life at home. This conflict pushed loved ones and friends away from me and in discussing this with other competitors in the visual autoethnographic interviews I came to the realization that I had to manage my impressions with specific individuals and groups pertaining to my relationships with them so I could successfully keep one foot in the subculture of bodybuilding and one foot out.

I also found that the respondents did not feel that entering the subculture of bodybuilding and creating their on-stage images made them more masculine. On the contrary the six respondents I interviewed felt that they were masculine before they became amateur bodybuilders and that their images deceived others into viewing them as more masculine. In my experiences and discussing the topic of bodybuilding being considered as a hyper-masculine subculture I came to the conclusion that the images that male bodybuilders create and share with others creates an aura of masculinity. I believed men outside of the subculture saw me as being more masculine because I was able to challenge myself and recreate my body into images that model what they see in advertisements for the fitness industry and the sport of bodybuilding. Men who did not compete openly admitted to me that they wish they had the will power and dedication to change their bodies and that they were not happy with the way they looked. I accepted these thoughts and complements until multiple experiences caused me to view bodybuilding in a different light than other researchers. I found that bodybuilding is not hyper-

masculine and that it embodies more feminine and homo-erotic characteristics such as tanning, shaving and practicing posing with other men who are almost completely naked.

This understanding of how I viewed the sport and how I was forming impressions to others allowed me to let go of hyper-masculine ideals from past athletic experiences. Accepting the stereotypical feminine and homo-erotic practices of the subculture made me feel more comfortable about my own personal masculinity to where I did not fear standing in the gym in my boxer briefs and wondering what others would think of me. As I moved into the final stage of my personal narrative I decided to dedicate specific times each day to my training where I could step away from the subculture and be normal. I found that allowing myself to believe that I was different than others created boundaries between those in and out of the subculture. Once I balanced my responsibilities in personal, home and work domains I did not view myself as being different from others.

Utilizing these two methods of qualitative research allowed the respondents to talk about their bodies and give me a greater understanding of how they understood their images and how they have become successful at balancing all aspects of their life as male bodybuilders. Their experiences also showed that men who are uncomfortable with their images are often deceived by images in popular media making them believe that being massive correlates to being masculine. At the end of each interview the respondents thanked me for taking the time to discuss their experiences and felt that this research would truly benefit those in and out of the subculture of bodybuilding. I feel that listening to these competitors and writing and reflecting on my own experiences also changed my life for the better. I now understand my images from before and during bodybuilding competitions and I see that it is a process. In order to succeed at this process over a period of years the most important theme to this study is finding balance and

not allowing images to dictate who you are or who you want to become. As I completed stage three and entered the final week of my contest preparation I felt that I was in complete control of my images and all aspects of my life. Before I knew it I was in High Point, North Carolina at the weigh in on April 11th. I had been spray tanned and I was surrounded by 220 other competitors preparing for the same event. I was surprised at how calm I felt as I stepped on the scale in my trunks to find that I was 15 lbs. heavier than my first competition. I was not the biggest competitor in the junior division but I was confident in my image and I stepped on stage and posed to the best of my ability placing 4th in the junior heavyweight class. Accepting the practices of the subculture and focusing only on the instructions from my principal and author of information created my physique into the best image that I could embody. In looking back at how my physical images changed from January 3, 2014 to now it is evident that understanding how and why I looked the way I did during each stage played a pivotal role in my life. At the end of this study I was confident in my images and happy, but I know that I will go through this process again. As I continue my amateur bodybuilding career utilizing impression management, framing, footing, face and visual rhetoric to find balance in my identity construction will ensure I do not let my images dictate who I am in the future.

Challenges, Limitations and Research Benefits:

While these methodological forms of research provided strong points of data I did face multiple challenges and limitations in this study. In the visual autoethnographic interviews I found it difficult to get the participants to open up about their views on masculinity in the subculture of bodybuilding. The competitors I interviewed were happy to have an opportunity to discuss their images from before and after bodybuilding competitions, but when asked if their images from during a bodybuilding competition made them masculine they each paused before

responding. It took three strategically scheduled interview questions to truly understand what they felt made them as well as other bodybuilders masculine and I believe this was difficult for them to discuss due to the non-hyper-masculine practices of the subculture. While I found that utilizing a convenience sampled group of participants was helpful in arranging the interviews I felt I was limited in the perspectives of only speaking with six competitors. I believe that future research on studying how male bodybuilders understand and identify with images of themselves will benefit from including the perspective of a larger sampling group of respondents preferably from different geographical locations. Each of the participants competed in the NPC during their careers and it would be beneficial to open this research up to male bodybuilders in other amateur organizations including all natural bodybuilders in organizations where you cannot have any prior use of performance enhancing supplements such as steroids or human growth hormone.

Another limitation of the visual autoethnographic interviews was that only one of the participants competed in the men's physique division. This is a newly added division to the men's side of bodybuilding competitions in the NPC and I also feel future research would benefit from including more of these competitors in the research process. Now in looking at my personal autoethnography I felt challenged in analyzing my own experiences as a researcher and participant. It was difficult to analyze my experiences and let go of my hyper-masculine ideals and accept the conclusion that bodybuilding is not hyper-masculine. I found myself struggling with this at times during the research because until I joined the subculture of bodybuilding hyper-masculinity is what I knew and understood. I was also challenged with writing and analyzing my daily log of experiences while putting myself through an intense training and diet regimen. There were multiple moments during stages one, two and three where I found myself training multiple times per day, eating eight scheduled meals and working on this research until

late at night. I felt that documenting my experiences as an amateur bodybuilder and utilizing a qualitative form of methodology in autoethnography allowed for my story to be told, but I would suggest for future research that researcher participants planning to document their experiences in training for bodybuilding competitions schedule to compete well in advance of finalizing their data analyses to allow ample time to reflect on their narratives.

I found the benefits of this research came from using qualitative forms of methodology. My experiences and those of the participants could not be fully understood through quantitative methods. In using autoethnography I gained a true respect for the method and I believe that combining a biographical and ethnographic approach helped me take a step back and look at myself in the mirror as well as what was going on around me to retrospectively make sense of how images played a role in my identity construction and how I fit into the subculture of bodybuilding. Visual autoethnographic interviews also allowed my respondents to open up and discuss their personal images with me and in discussing my personal experiences in the subculture they viewed me as one of them instead of a researcher studying them from outside of their group. I also benefited from listening to the participants in the interview process and found myself using forms of impression management to find balance in my own life. I believe allowing male bodybuilders to discuss their pre-competition and competition images helped shed light on the issue of male body image in society. Their perspectives showed that this is a larger issue affecting male competitors and non-competitors and that research needs to continue on this topic of ideal body creation.

This study found that male bodybuilders who have successfully created their physiques to resemble magazine and fitness advertisement images are still critical and in some cases insecure about parts of their bodies. They also indicated that after entering the subculture of bodybuilding

they found that images seen in popular media depicting what a man should look like are portraying unrealistic results and creating false impressions. Documenting the understandings that these images only last for short periods of time will help non-competitors and those aspiring to become bodybuilders understand their images and know that body creation is a process and that bodybuilders do not always look like their final images. Further research will need to continue on understanding how male competitors and non-competitors understand and identify with images of themselves. I believe that qualitative forms of methodology, specifically face to face interviews or autoethnographies, will provide rich data and allow for others to tell their stories.

Appendix I:

Introduction

In this section of the Autoethnography I provide background context explaining how and why I joined the subculture of bodybuilding. Once in the subculture I became fixated on images of my physique and found myself trying to fit in by training and dieting to recreate my body. My past experiences have molded me into the amateur bodybuilder I am today, but as my narrative continues I will analyze my experiences in Stages 1-3 leading up to the North Carolina State Championships in April, 2014.

I grew up in Columbia, MD just outside of Baltimore and sports have always been an intricate part of my life. Most that know me assume I have always been a competitive athlete, but deep down I know the true story. Between the ages of 8-16 I was overweight and envious of the amateur and competitive athletes I saw everyday on the television and in magazines. I can still remember the day I realized my weight was hindering me from even participating in high school athletics. During my sophomore year in High School I broke my right wrist in the first football game of the season. I was 5'4" and 200 lbs. wide and too slow to play a skilled position so my junior varsity football coach put me on the defensive line to play nose guard. I dreamed of being a quarterback but because of my weight and inability to keep up with the thinner and faster athletes on the team I was put in a position based on my size. This injury ended my football season and gave me an opportunity to not exercise for over a month. During this lackadaisical time period I sat back and ate all of the food I wanted. I knew basketball tryouts were coming up but I figured that my coach, who was also my football coach, would give me a pass to be on the team due to my injury. I was sadly mistaken as the first day of practice rolled around in November of that year. I finished my mile time in last place and 3 minutes behind the next player. I couldn't do one pushup or pull up and still remember the embarrassment I felt as we ran sideline sprints each night. I just wanted to be on the team, but I did not fit in. No one

wanted to have the 5'4" 215 lbs. shooting guard whose face turned as red as a strawberry after running up and down the court four times.

After the first week of practice my coach pulled me into his office and informed me that my talent and athletic ability had worsened from the previous season and even though he cared for me as a person it was not beneficial for the team to have me on the roster. I went home that night and cried like a child. I was embarrassed for not making the team, but I was even more embarrassed at who I was. I was so tired of being the fat coordinated kid that was just good enough to try and be an athlete. There were many times that I just wanted to be someone else. I longed to be thin, fast and have muscles and abdominals, but I didn't know how to change. Two days later my father and I were sitting in his car in the driveway and he asked me if I wanted his help. It took a few days of looking in the mirror and hating the image that looked back at me to accept his offer. I was tired of not being able to see my feet when I looked down and the ridicule from teammates for never being able to keep up in conditioning. From that point on my life completely changed. I began running every day after school. It started with 1 mile and each day I tried to go farther. My family even changed their eating habits to cater to my regiment with only chicken, fish, rice and vegetables for every meal. Each Sunday my father and I would step on the scale to see my progress. After the first week I dropped from 215lbs to 213lbs, and it was the confidence boost I needed. I looked in the mirror and saw an obese boy, but something was different. I was an obese boy who knew he could change and that feeling of the unknown excited me. For three months I continued to run and stuck to my meal plan and before the first baseball practice of my sophomore year I lost 35 lbs. of body fat and began to grow.

I gained more respect from my friends and others at school and this change in my physique eventually helped me get recruited by multiple colleges and universities to play

baseball. I was always a baseball fanatic and even as an overweight adolescent I was able to succeed in playing corner positions such as first or third base, but in college I was put in the outfield and given an opportunity to show my athletic prowess. The once overweight boy became the fastest sprinter on a top 25 Division III baseball team. I lead my teammates through lifting workouts after practice and took on a hyper-masculine demeanor where weakness and quitting was not acceptable for me or anyone that wanted to be associated with our program. After my playing career ended I coached for three years and eventually stepped away from the game to pursue a career in higher education. It was hard leaving the game I loved for so long but it was even harder not having anything to compete in outside of my work and family domains. As time went on lifting weights went from a hobby to my new sport and once I moved to Charlotte, North Carolina I found my competitiveness again.

It all began at a ZX Fitness gym that was three miles away from my place of work. It was in the basement of an office building and while it was not the prettiest place to train it was perfect for me. All of the weights and machines were old, but they worked and the people and employees did not care that I liked to lift as much weight as possible. I could carry my water jug and talk to others about training ideas and new techniques. This was my paradise and after the first year I befriended one of the personal trainers. Jacob had been training members there for 5 years and had just gotten into bodybuilding. I will admit at first I did not have much respect for bodybuilders because their muscles were so big it looked as if they couldn't move, but I still marveled at their physique and wanted to become as big and as strong as them. While I admired their images I did not understand the need to stand on stage in a pair of bikini trunks flexing every muscle.

This past May Jacob approached me outside of the aerobics studio after he competed in the North Carolina state competition in April. He said I had the potential to compete and that he would work with me for free, but under one condition, I had to do whatever he said and I had to cut out the beer that I enjoyed to drink on the weekends. In my front stage I appeared confident and told him I would think about it. As my college outfield coach used to say, “Jon you got to act like you’ve been there before”. I went home and told my girlfriend and at first she thought this idea was just a training fad that I was into. To be completely honest I was unbelievably appreciative of him offering to assist me, but I did not want to give up my weekend drinks and being able to eat any food I wanted. I liked being 245 lbs. and while I was not ripped or striated I was strong. I was benching 225lbs. for 28 repetitions and deadlifting 520 lbs. for 5 repetitions. I had always been an athlete but I was intimidated by a sport that did not depend on pure athleticism. I can still walk into a basketball gym and dunk a ball off of two feet. I played college baseball and hit a walk off homerun in a conference championship game to beat the #5 team in the country. Many ask why I did not join the cross-fit epidemic and my reply is that I have proved my athletic prowess to myself and lifting light weight for 50-100 reps doesn’t seem functional and surely will not build the large and muscular physique I long for. I thought about Jacob’s offer for nearly two weeks and during that time I took an opportunity to look at myself in the mirror.

It hit me that all of the supplements and different training routines I have tried have not worked. I’ve taken anabolic supplements, over the counter human growth hormones, testosterone boosters, pre-workouts and all of the different strands of protein imaginable. I’ve had the opportunity to take steroids multiple times, but I promised myself I would never go down that road after watching a close friend and teammate of mine end his college career because he

doubled up on the dosage he was taking during my junior year in college. I also thought about my girlfriend, she admittedly did not like the fact that I was getting so big that my close did not fit anymore and I saw bodybuilding as a way to truly change my visuals for others and myself. In the middle of May 2013 I walked into the gym and told Jacob I was doing a show. He was ecstatic and you could see in his eyes that he was elated to have a teammate. I had already planned a trip to visit family and an old college friend in California during the first week of June and we decided that my diet and true training would begin immediately upon my return to the East Coast on June 10, 2013.

We decided that my first show would be the NPC Muscle Heat in Greensboro, NC on August 26, 2013. We began my training on June 10th and I weighed in at a hefty 236 lbs. Both Jacob and our former coach, Stan, realized I had a lot of work to do in two months. They recommended I consider doing a show later in the fall to give myself more time to train, but I refused. As they analyzed my half naked body during a posing practice I could see the disappointment in their eyes from the amounts and types of food I ate on my trip to California. I was not confident in my body image that day, but once I set my mind to a goal as a competitor there is no straying away from the plan. While I was a big guy Stan and Jacob knew that my back was not wide enough, my rear deltoids were not developed and my arms did not match the size of my chest. I felt inferior to my coach and teammate as we began to train because we were doing workouts similarly to how I had in the past but the intensity and time intervals between sets were much quicker. We began training my back twice a week with lat and middle back area specific movements. There was no way for me to gain the muscle size needed in these areas in two months so we made the joint decision to make me as defined and striated as possible.

After the first month my body changed dramatically and Jacob and Stan took me into the aerobics room for a posing practice to see my progress. Stan took a picture of my back double bicep pose and became speechless. I thought something was wrong because normally he would have a quick analysis of what I needed to improve, but instead he handed me my phone and said you look great and it's time for a cheat meal. I had refrained from looking at images of myself and wanted to only see the final product in August, but I actually was satisfied with how my body looked in this picture. For the first time in my life I was happy to look at myself with no shirt on and my confidence flew out of the roof of the gym. My metabolism had sped up dramatically and created rips and striations that looked like an athlete out of a magazine. The visual rhetoric I experienced from this image was through the socialization with my coach and teammate (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). We were immersed in the subculture of bodybuilding and looked at these images according to what the competition judges would see rather than those in the audience.

Later on that evening my girlfriend decided to post my progress picture to Facebook as she was proud of my progress. When I initially showed it to her she said "who is that, is that you?" The comments that ensued from one image were very intriguing. Most praised my physique and said good luck, but one of her friends who competes in cross fit and is physically inferior to my build made the comment that I needed to do more leg workouts. Instead of being frustrated and responding in defense of my image I waited a full day to respond. I decided to keep a strong confident front stage impression and told him we will have to see what the final product looks like in 4 weeks. I was proud of myself because even with my body being on display on a social media site before I stepped on stage I felt comfortable. While I knew there were areas that needed drastic improvement to place well at the show I knew that with time,

correct training and diet I would be able to mold myself into the visual that I wanted to see. Bodybuilding has given me a chance to use my body to form impressions for others through images and this was evident at the NPC Muscle Heat competition (Johansson, 2009).

Two weeks before the show Jacob and I went to a bodybuilding supplement shop in Rock Hill, SC to order my trunks. The manager was excited to hear I was entering into the Muscle Heat competition and allowed me to go into the back to check my weight on their scale. Stan, Jacob and I assumed I would be competing as a heavyweight, which is anything above 198 lbs. as a novice competitor, so instead of worrying about weight we focused on the visuals of how my body looked each day. I weighed in at 211lbs. and felt full and confident. As the week of the show approached we performed our last lift on Wednesday and used Thursday and Friday for rest and preparation for Saturday.

In order to look as ripped and striated as possible we began to cut my water 3 days out. I was drinking 2 gallons per day and on Wednesday we went to 1.5 gallons, Thursday 1 gallon and Friday one 8 oz. glass. I also purchased water absorbing pills called expel to pull out my water weight. I experimented with them earlier in the week to see what they did and now I realize that was a mistake. These pills are full of caffeine and literally soak up as much water as possible in your body to make your muscles look tight. As Friday came around my coworkers gave me a good luck card before I left the office because Jacob and I decided to drive to Greensboro and stay the night so we could weigh in early and eat a carbohydrate load meal to look full on Saturday for the prejudging portion. I will be completely honest that my nerves and butterflies were in full effect that evening. The moment of truth had finally arrived and I was excited to feel nervous, it was as if I was getting ready to play my first college baseball game all over again.

Before the weigh in we met Jacob's favorite competition spray tan woman at the Marriot Hotel across from the show venue.

We were staying at a friend's house 15 minutes away instead of driving in the morning to deter our bodies from holding any excess water weight. We walked into her hotel room and she had multiple camping tents set up for privacy and other competitors just finishing up. Jacob went first and when it was my turn I stepped into the tent and she told me I had to strip. I was not expecting to be completely naked in front of a stranger while she sprayed my entire body with synthetic tanner, but Jacob swore it would help show my muscle definition on stage. It was a very awkward situation to be in, but my shame and insecurities went out the window. As she sprayed me she complimented my abs and I tried to focus on the little league world series that was playing on the television. I figured that if I was going to step on stage in front of hundreds of people in 12 hours then standing naked in a tent with a stranger would help me get over my fears. At this moment I realized that the subculture of bodybuilding requires you to put your body on full display. You have to form impressions of confidence in all situations whether on or off stage (Johansson, 2009). Even if your backstage is full of insecurities of certain body parts no one, especially the judges and other competitors can see your emotions (Johansson, 2009). You must embody the hyper-masculine ideals our society has formed for men even if you feel as emasculated as I did while I was asked to bend over so this woman could spray my inner hamstrings.

Shortly after I air dried in my tent with a make shift fan blowing on me Jacob and I walked up to the next floor where the competition check in and early weigh in was taking place. The room was full of competitors, all of the guys were scoping each other out and listening to the judges declare what weight class each person was in. My heart was racing and I tried to focus on

myself instead of the other people in the room. As I walked to the scale the judge told me to strip down to my trunks to get an exact weight. In my head I was saying why do I need to where my man thong to weigh in with 50 people in the room? On the outside I said “ok” and hopped on without hesitation. He slid the scale back and forth and it felt as if I stood there for 5 minutes. The judge said 199 lbs. heavyweight novice. I was shocked, how did I drop an extra 12 lbs. in two weeks. I was 1 lb. away from competing in the smaller middle weight class where I could’ve dominated, but it was too late. I turned and looked at Jacob and even he was surprised. Thoughts of that 1 lb. ran through my head over and over, but eventually they subsided. I knew that I would not be able to cut this much weight for future competitions so the experience of going against guys who had 5-10 lbs. on me would eventually be beneficial. This weigh in room was full of men checking out each other’s physiques and listening to what class they were in just in case they would be competing against each other. Everyone exerted strong assertive attitudes, but in all reality the visuals of this environment would not be classified as hyper-masculine. I was surrounded by half-naked men with who seemed concerned about showing everyone how their body looked.

I found myself checking out other men who were in my class and picking apart the areas I thought I was stronger in. In doing so I did not realize that I was participating in a stereotypical feminine act of analyzing same sex body images. After we left the hotel we went back to our friend’s house. The only carbs I had eaten that day was 1 cup of oatmeal in the morning with my egg whites. My day time meals consisted of 3 chicken breasts and our secret to spike our insulin levels and fill up our muscles was 2 giant slices of dark chocolate cake. I was so hungry by the time I took my first bite and it was a welcomed break from the stress of being naked in front of a spray tanner and standing in my trunks at the weigh in. I swallowed the cake as quick as

possible, but it was not easy to keep down without any fluids. Our bodies had been deprived of water for a long enough period of time that even a few sips would fill up unwanted areas making us look bloated the next morning on stage. To keep ourselves from experiencing severe cotton mouth we sucked on ice cubes and spit out the water once they melted.

After getting four to five hours of sleep it was show time. We woke up early and drove to the theatre where the competition was taking place. I was nervous but excited and patiently waiting to see what my competition looked like. Bodybuilding competitions are broken down into two events, the morning prejudging and the evening posing routines. As my class was called to the backstage area to get pumped and oiled up my nerves set in. Inside I felt like a rookie ball player following the veterans, but luckily I had Jacob backstage to help calm my nerves and walk me through different exercises to get prepared. After the novice middleweights walked off stage the judges called us out. My right leg was shaking uncontrollably as we stepped under the bright stage lights and faced the crowd. I was actually walking on stage in my trunks and inside I was petrified. The judges called out each mandatory turn and pose and in the blink of an eye we were done. My adrenaline was going crazy and immediately after exiting the stage a photographer got our attention for pictures for the NPC website. I walked off stage and shook the hands of my competitors then departed for the afternoon. I wanted badly to see pictures of myself but Jacob's phone could not get any images because the stage lighting.

After lounging around and eating Wendy's French fries and a frosty to again spike our insulin levels we came back for the evening portion. Before I went on stage I had a chance to meet Dexter Jackson, IFBB professional and former Mr. Olympia, who was guest posing after my weight class finished. I have marveled at this man's physique for years and he is one of my idols in the sport. In looking back on this experience I have realized how bodybuilding has

changed my thoughts on body image. Growing up I loved Cal Ripken because he was a great baseball player, but I idolized Dexter Jackson because of his muscular physique and dedication to making himself the most symmetrical competitor in the last 15 years. To others outside of bodybuilding this may seem homo-erotic but as I become more and more immersed in this subculture I become more comfortable in complementing the physiques of other men in ways that women may complement each other. By that point I had become so comfortable with showing my body I didn't even realize I was only in my trunks. Dexter complemented my build and wished me good luck then took a picture with me. As I looked at this picture I immediately sent it to my girlfriend, family and friends not only because I was with one of the best bodybuilders of all time, but I looked great. My abs were defined, my chest looked strong and my arms and traps were full. I had never seen my body look this way and out of all of my competition pictures from that day I share this photo more than any other. As I analyze why this photo has become one of my preferred images I feel it shows how far I have come physically and standing next to a well-known professional competitor shows everyone that I have made it. I may not be an IFBB professional, but I know Dexter complemented my physique and after going on stage to perform my individual posing routine I felt more confident in my body than I ever did. This image allows me to connect with others outside of our subculture because they see how good I looked on that day. Even though I am in turquoise trunks I am generating strong masculine impressions saying to everyone that I am confident in my body and I want you to see what I identify with. While there is no way I can look like this year round I want people to understand why I train so hard and what I will be each time I step on stage.

I have played baseball games in front of hundreds and thousands of people at a very high level, but no game ever compared to the feeling of confidence I had once I stepped on the stage

in front of 300 people showing my naked physique. After that evening my girlfriend took the liberty of posting all of my images to Facebook from the NPC website photographer and I received more positive reinforcement for creating my body into a work of art than anything I have done before. The socialization of others that ensued from viewing my images helped me form the impressions of being a superior athlete and I truly enjoyed it. Prior to entering the subculture of bodybuilding I never posted shirtless pictures of myself on social media, but after the Muscle Heat competition I had no problem showing my body in turquoise trunks to anyone. The way I understood images of my body and my identity changed and I felt happy with who I was, but I realized that I could be better. While everyone complemented my images I critiqued the width of my back and size of my arms.

The subculture of bodybuilding has altered the way I see myself when I look in the mirror every day and now that I am training for my second competition in April and I am more critical than before. From September 2013 to January 3rd I set a new training and diet routine for me to better analyze my body each week in progress photos. These photos and my daily journal of experiences guided my autoethnography and in the following section I will discuss what I experienced in the first stage of my training and preparation for the North Carolina State Championships.

Stage One

Now that I have provided background context on why I chose to enter the subculture of bodybuilding I will analyze my personal experiences in stage one of my training for the North Carolina State Championships on April 12, 2014. Stage one began on January 3, 2014 and ended on January 31, 2014. During this time I discuss how I view and understand images of myself as I near the end of my offseason training regiment and prepare to enter my contest preparation routine. At this point in the process I am at the largest weight and overall body size of 240 lbs. As I train and diet throughout the three months leading up to the competition I will lose weight and size and highlight key experiences using visual rhetoric, identity construction, impression management, framing, footing, face as well as concepts of hyper-masculinity and hetero-normative behaviors documenting how I identify with my images as I change through the process.

I began documenting my experiences on January 3, 2014, exactly three months and eight days out from the North Carolina State competition on April 12th. Up until this day I had been in my off season training mode. For bodybuilders the offseason is just as important as the contest preparation because we increase our protein, carbohydrate and fat intake to gain more muscle size. Along with gaining more size your body will increase its fat percentage. This was my first time taking this approach to training and after being in the best visual shape of my life in August 2013 it was hard to see the body fat increase around my mid-section. During this stage my diet consisted of 300-350 grams of protein and 400-500 grams of carbohydrates. Fulgoni (2007) found that the average protein intake of adult's ages 19-30 is 91 grams per day. To put this into perspective one 6 oz. chicken breast has 35 grams of protein. That means I would have to eat close to twelve chicken breasts a day to reach my daily goal. Eating that many solid meals would be almost impossible for my body to digest so I supplemented protein shakes, eggs, lean red meat, peanut butter and fish to have more variety. From August 26, 2013 to January 3, 2014 my weight increased from 199 lbs. to 240 lbs. I trained very hard to build the width and symmetry in my back, increase the size of my arms and define my quadriceps and hamstrings. I knew in looking at images of the competitors that beat me at my first competition that these areas

of my body were the ones that needed to be improved going into the North Carolina State Championships.

In looking back on my experiences during this time frame there were specific instances and experiences that affected the way I understood my images as a bodybuilder and really made me think about how I would answer the research questions of this study for myself. As my training began, I felt confident in my size and muscle fullness as I looked in the mirror and walked around the gym. Jacob and I began taking my progress pictures during the week of January 6th. Each week he would call out the seven mandatory poses including front double biceps, front lateral spread, side chest, side tricep, rear double biceps, rear lateral spread, hands over the head abdominal and favorite most muscular for us to document. When I first entered the subculture of bodybuilding I assumed that if I could be the biggest and leanest competitor I gave myself the best chance of winning, but the truth is that posing wins competitions. In the NPC there are eight mandatory poses and during the morning prejudging portion of competitions the judges evaluate individual body parts in each weight class compared to other competitors. Each of these poses gives bodybuilders an opportunity to show their strong points and if they are trained correctly they know how to hide their weak points. In many cases the competitor that executes each pose the best and creates the optical illusion that they are the most symmetrical on stage has the best chance of placing in the top three or winning their class. Learning how to pose according to visuals of your body is intense and exhausting because you are forced to contract and tighten all of your muscles for extended periods of time. During this stage my endurance is low from not keeping up my cardio. Focusing more on my weight training and decreasing my cardio has allowed me to gain size, but holding each muscle as tight as possible in front of the mirror makes me feel like I am going to pass out. While I may not enjoy this part of my training

I look at posing like batting practice. If I had trouble hitting the ball to the right side of the field the only way to perfect this skill is to practice over and over. I know am not going to be the biggest competitor on stage in April and in order to get the judges to focus on me and how I create my body, I have to show it to the best of my abilities.

Along with the progress pictures during the first week Jacob and I also recorded a posing routine video to analyze my movements. In looking at these images I liked how my body looked after I finished a back workout. I had a serious pump, every muscle looked full and being 240 lbs. makes my body parts appear to be symmetrical. I am considerably tall for a bodybuilder so during my heavier stages everything looks bigger and stronger. I know I will not look this big once I start cutting weight eight weeks out from the show, but I had never seen my arms match my chest and my lats. I felt so good about my images that I decided to share them with my project advisor, Dr. Carreiro. We met on January 9th to discuss my progress on my research and I began describing the changes my body had been going through.

In all of our conversations from October to January I had not realized that she had not seen a photo of me from before or during a competition. I felt so confident in the video that Jacob and I had taken and I wanted to share it with her to get more ideas on how I could approach my research. As I began the video Dr. Carreiro made the comment that Jacob must have felt embarrassed standing next to me as we posed because he is more than 50 lbs. lighter than me. This thought had not crossed my mind because Jacob competes in the smaller middleweight class and is very comparable to other competitors in the NPC with his physique and stature. When I look at him I see a symmetrical build rather than a smaller competitor. I also see how much more developed he is than me in his shoulders and arms giving him a wider look even at a shorter height. At times I wish I was his height so I could fit the desired mold of a

thick muscular bodybuilder. Even if I had to drop a weight class I would feel more comfortable as a shorter competitor. Before entering this subculture I would've never seen my height as a disadvantage, but as I said before it doesn't matter how athletic you look rather it's how symmetrical your images appear to be¹.

After we got halfway through the video Dr. Carreiro asked me why I chose to share this visual with her². As I sat back in my chair I realized that bodybuilding has completely changed how I identify with images of my body. In choosing to share these images with her I was forming the impression that I was confident in my body and what it had become. This experience made it clear that I was finally comfortable with looking at myself and this gave me the confidence to share my image. Three years ago I would have never shared a video of me and another shirtless man with anyone especially professor, but I have assimilated into a subculture where showing images of my body and its progress is the norm. To those outside of the subculture, these images may seem homo-erotic and contradict the hyper-masculine ideals the sport portrays. I have been taught to identify as a strong masculine heterosexual man and sharing images of myself moving step by step through what appeared to be a choreographed routine does not coincide with these values. In a way the images themselves are not homo-erotic but the subculture of bodybuilding is. We push each other to lift heavy weights, do long sessions of cardio and eat things that would turn the stomachs of most to feel that we are stronger and more disciplined than the average man. These hyper-masculine characteristics and how I have learned to segment myself from others who do not compete make me feel like a man, but when I think about how we analyze each other's half naked body's we use images and visuals in a

¹ Example of Visual Rhetoric, see table 1.2.

² Impression Management, see table 1.2.

homo-erotic manner to critique ourselves³. Being an amateur bodybuilder has blurred the boundaries between my personal, social and work domains and many times I find myself talking about competing or training with colleagues. The permeability of these boundaries has made images of my body the centerpiece of how I construct my identity⁴. During stage one I critique images of myself at least ten times per day. I even find myself looking to see if my arms are showing through my dress shirts at work. When I wake up in the morning I feel confident or insecure depending on how my poses look as I brush my teeth.

As stage one continued, I had a conversation with an older gentleman that spotted me on a set of dumbbell incline presses. He asked me if I was a competitor and I told him I was training for the North Carolina State show in April. He used to compete in his younger days and after the second set he asked me if I was all natural. This is code in the bodybuilding subculture for asking if you have ever used steroids. During my days as a baseball player I would have been offended by this question, but now that I am a bodybuilder I am flattered by it. If someone looks at your build and thinks you have used steroids when you haven't it means that you have created your body into a strong muscular visual. I laughed at his question and told him I have never used before and thanked him for the complement. Even though a former competitor sees me as being a bigger guy, for some reason that day I did not see what he did in the mirror of the gym. I felt strong during the workout, but I have an ideal physique in my mind of what I want to become and until I get there I will not be satisfied.

Later on that week Jacob set up a meeting with Dean, his new coach, who wanted to determine if he saw enough potential to train me as well. Before he looked at my posing in

³ Hyper-masculine/Homo-eroticism, see table 1.2.

⁴ Identity Construction, see table 1.2

person he asked Jacob to take my weekly progress pictures before I trained so we could see how I looked before I had a pump. The term pump refers to the increase of blood in your muscles during and after a workout. If I train arms then look in the mirror I will appear bigger than when my body is fully relaxed at any other point in the day. By examining my physique before I train I will have a better idea of how I am progressing and how I will look on stage. As Jacob called out the different poses in the aerobics room I felt awkward and insecure because my body looked soft and small. My mentality completely changed as I turned from side to side and gazed in the mirror. I looked completely different than I did in the first week. A layer of fat drooped over my boxer briefs and I did not see any abdominal definition. It was an ego shock because I was so used to looking at my body after I had trained where my muscles were big and strong. I looked completely different, but it is the best way to analyze my progress⁵. After a workout the body parts that I train look enlarged and strong due to blood flow, water intake and supplementation. During this stage I used a highly caffeinated pre-workout supplement called Napalm that is full of creatine and nitric oxide. This combination inflates my muscles and fuels my workouts, but when I step on stage at the competition I will not have this flowing through my veins. The way I look when I wake up that morning is how I will look on stage and even with a quick pump up behind the stage curtains I need to focus on becoming as lean and muscular regardless of the time of day. As if that wasn't enough of a blow to my confidence, Jacob also informed me that he had decided to take the year off from competing to work with Dean and gain more size. It is the right decision for him because he is farther along in the sport than me and he has made it to the open class, which is the highest amateur level of competition. Once amateurs reach the open class they are one first place win away from going to nationals and possibly receiving a professional card. I on the other hand have only done one competition and before I worry about

⁵ Visual Rhetoric, see table 1.2

taking a year off to train I need more on stage experience. Throughout this entire offseason I had been training with Jacob. I knew I would have my teammate in my corner at the show because he was going to be competing too and deep down this comforted me because I knew he was going through the same struggles of dieting, training and perfecting his physique. For a brief moment I panicked because I realized I would be prepping for this show on my own. I looked in the mirror and did not feel confident that I could do this on my own.

Even with Jacob not competing at the show he later reassured me that he would assume the role of one of my coaches along with Dean in preparation for the state show. When he said this my demeanor changed for the better and I was ecstatic to know that Dean saw enough potential in my physique to take me under his wing. Not only did I have Dean coaching me but I also had Jacob focusing specifically on my training⁶. It's not every day that an amateur competitor has two knowledgeable coaches without paying a large sum of money for their expertise. Dean was honest and critical about the body parts I needed to build and that I may not be where I need to be to win a show for a year or two years as a natural competitor, but I really connected with his philosophy. Instead of training hard every day of the week I needed to train less and train smarter. I was so used to lifting weights I never focused on how to train really each muscle group. Dean has competed for 15 years at the national level and is close friends with John the IFBB professional at my gym. Not only will he be able to show me how to train and diet correctly but he will also be able to introduce me to other competitors and network in this subculture. Dean and Jacob decided that my protein intake needed to increase an extra 100 grams per day and that I needed to up my carbohydrates with each meal until we reached the eight week mark in stage two. I was huge, but when we took progress photos I began to dislike

⁶ Footing, see table 1.2

my body more and more. I knew that I needed body fat and high caloric intake to gain more size before I began to cut weight, but my personal views on how I saw myself began to change. I grew tired of being large and muscular and I wanted to see the striations and abdominals again. I found myself in conversation with other gym members about my training and even though they complemented my size I retorted by saying I was putting on the extra weight before cutting⁷. For some unknown reason I felt I had to reassure others in and out of the subculture that I was not going to look this way for much longer. The more and more I focused on my images and visuals the more I became obsessed. While I portrayed a strong confident persona around others I found myself framing a reality for them and myself that I would look even better as time went on (Johansson, 2009).

When others look at me doing deadlifts with my weight belt on they only see what they want to see. The amount of weight I am lifting or how my arms look, but in the mirror all I saw was a roll of fat protruding over my belt as I went through my sets. Even if someone noticed this excess they didn't say anything because on the outside I give off strong assertive impressions that I am all about business when it comes to my training, but it drove me crazy. As time went on I tried to embrace my larger body because I knew my cutting diet would be coming soon enough. My nerves were beginning to set in about this competition and I wanted to speak with someone who would be just as honest about their thoughts on my physique as Dean and Jacob. I approached John, the IFBB professional, during one of my back training sessions and asked his thoughts on how I looked and if I should take some time off to develop after the state competition. As the words rolled off my tongue I thought to myself this could turn into a disappointing conversation, but John looked at me and said he thinks I should do his competition

⁷ Framing and Face, see table 1.2

in late April to get two more shows under my belt and more experience. He also said I have good size and a lot of potential.

This was the conversation I needed. Someone who is not coaching or training me, but well known in the bodybuilding subculture just complemented my physique. How I identify with visuals and images of my body during stage one has wavered back and forth like a pendulum and after this conversation with John I took a step back and put everything in perspective. If an IFBB professional said I have good size and potential and that I would be able to take a more realistic look at my body when I was eight weeks out, then I was going to listen to him⁸. This was definitely a high point in stage one and it was one of the first instances where a compliment changed my perspective on how I saw myself.

Once I began training with Dean and Jacob they showed me a new approach to lifting. The focus changed from lifting as much weight as possible to lifting correctly to increase blood flow into the specific muscle groups we were training. By dropping the weight and changing my range of motion I looked bigger and my joints hurt less. We also began focusing on the negative movements of each exercise. The negative is the movement that comes after the contraction of the muscle. Most people speed through their exercises to show off how much weight they can pick up and put down, but bodybuilders pride themselves on form and contraction. Before training with these two I thought I was doing this correctly, but I was mistaken. I usually lift 225 lbs. on the incline barbell bench press for 12 repetitions. After Dean changed my grip and the angle of my arms I realized my chest was stretching and contracting and the pressure was not on my shoulders. My pectorals felt as if they were going to explode and we had dropped the weight to only 135 lbs. The best part was when I looked in the mirror I was fuller than before and when

⁸ Visual Rhetoric, see table 1.2

I made it through my first week of training every body part in this manner I saw my physique changing. Now I had someone to learn from and with Jacob focusing on preparing me as well instead of training himself for a competition I am able to pick his brain too. It took some time to get used to this new method as other gym members stared at me lifting lighter and lighter weights, but I saw the changes happening for the better. I carried on and formed impressions that I knew what I was doing and it was almost like I had discovered the true secret to recreating my body.

As I neared the end of stage one I went to a college basketball game with my colleagues. Our Vice President for Enrollment held a holiday party and got us all tickets to the game. During the party multiple coaches and our Athletic Director asked about my training and diet, but one of my former classmates who works in the Health and Wellness Department asked about my thesis project. She introduced me to her staff of counselors and psychologists and they were all intrigued to hear about my research. As I described my goal of exposing how muscular men identify with their bodies in a hyper-masculine subculture to help others who may feel insecure about their visual and masculine identity they became entranced. It was as if I had brought up the topic they were waiting for someone to explore. Two of the counselors informed me that they were seeing growing numbers of young men with body image issues and it was great to hear that someone was researching this topic. After I left the basketball game I felt strongly that using myself as a participant in this research and being honest in the process may actually help another man understand his visual identity. If I look at images of myself, whether it be when I am big, muscular and full or when I am ripped and striated I will always see areas that I am either insecure or critical about.

This stage was full of highs and lows in understanding my body and its images, but each day that I train with Dean and Jacob the more confident I become. After Jacob told me he was taking time off to gain more size I found myself thinking about when that time would come for me. Dean and I went through a leg workout and after we finished I asked him about steroids and growth hormones. I have decided to take an over the counter product called, HGH Up, which activates growth hormones for recovery purposes but is not the same as the Human Growth Hormones that can be prescribed and administered by a doctor. Even though I was opposed to certain anabolic supplements before entering the subculture deep down I began thinking about certain forms of steroids, because the deeper I go into this subculture the more I find out how common this is. Dean explained to me how doctor's check athletes blood levels to see if they are healthy enough to use and if approved they administer 100% testosterone through injections on monthly cycles. This helps with dramatic gains in muscles size and definition and clinically prescribed growth hormones help for recovery and fat burning. I told him I was not opposed to the growth hormone, but somewhat unsure about the testosterone injections. He advised that I not think about using steroids any time soon and look at developing my body as long as I can by staying all natural. So many male competitors want to make it to the top of this subculture so quickly to become that desired image seen in popular media and in order to embody the visuals of bodybuilding they begin cycling these supplements too early in their career. Without proper instruction they hurt themselves and ruin their bodies for the rest of their life. I needed to hear this from Dean because compared to the average male weight lifter I see myself as being on somewhat of a different level, but in the subculture of bodybuilding I am a beginner and I want to create my body into a masterpiece and even though I am somewhat opposed to steroids I know

they can get me to where I want to be. For now I am going to resist this temptation and continue on my current path⁹.

On the last day of stage one I managed to get into the gym during the afternoon to train with Dean and Jacob. It was my first back session with them and in looking at my body it is also the area I want to grow the most. Before our contest preparation began I was adamant about training back twice a week, but Dean told me I was “training too much, too often and not intelligently”. Instead of focusing on just my lats, we worked all of the different curves and crevices of my back so that when I cut weight I will look shredded in the upper, middle and lower sections of this body part. We moved to the squat rack to begin racked dead lifts. When done correctly this exercise focuses on all of the areas in your back with one movement. On the first set I did 225 lbs. for 12 repetitions. Then John came over to talk with us and tell a few jokes and to be honest I felt I needed to show how much I could do in front of the IFBB professional. It is hard to resist this temptation when you immerse yourself in a so called hyper-masculine subculture and it was definitely a childish thing to do, but I put on 275 lbs. and did 15 repetitions. Dean and Jacob realized I moved more weight for more repetitions than with 225 lbs. and immediately called me out. John even joined in on the commotion and asked if I wanted to be in the middle of the stage when the judges called out the top competitors in April or if I wanted to show my pinky from behind the curtain on the stage. I was called out for not doing as many repetitions as possible and they wanted me to understand that they are training me to develop my physique into the best shape that I can be. It took a moment to register as I thought through the insult because this is not a joke or phrase I was familiar with but I quickly realized that showing my pinky from behind the stage curtain implied softness and weakness. If I spent my time going

⁹ Framing, see table 1.2

through the motions I wouldn't deserve to be in the middle of the stage where the crowd and judges could praise my physique. In bodybuilding the closer the judges place you to the middle of the stage with the other competitor's means you have a better chance of placing and possibly winning. The goal is to be the one everyone is focused on in the middle of the group. The pinky comment also implies femininity in the sense of timidity and being afraid of pushing myself to the limit¹⁰. Those who are not willing to go the extra mile don't want to be under the lights with their body on display for hundreds of people to see

This really hit home and even though it was embarrassing, it is exactly what I needed. I have become accustomed to these forms of motivation but now that I am analyzing my experiences I see that implying feminine and homo-erotic characteristics is a common trait of hyper-masculine groups. It is evident in bodybuilding because most of our preparation and training is not considered masculine. It also shows others in the gym that we are serious about what we do and even though we get on stage in trunks, with shaved body's and spray tans our training is about outworking others and competing with ourselves. While I am able to analyze this environment and its masculine and at times feminine qualities, such as shaving and tanning, I must admit that I thrive under these circumstances and it makes me want to compete more and more. The more I reflect on my experiences the more I question whether or not bodybuilding is a hyper-masculine subculture or if it is not. No sport that I have ever participated in has required me to shave my arms and legs or spend multiple hours analyzing what I can change about my physique. I am no longer worried about hitting a baseball or stealing a base, now all I think about is how I look. You can become a professional baseball player and have a beer gut, but in order to win an amateur bodybuilding competition you must spend large sums of money on

¹⁰ Hyper-masculinity, see table 1.2

groceries, supplements, tanning, gym memberships, trainers and competition fees. The end goal is to show others that we are confident in our bodies on stage and even though we are large muscular men who have worked hard to become what we are we still put our own twist on a beauty competition where the most symmetrical and best looking competitors win. Maybe I am fascinated and intrigued with this sport because the mentality of competitors seems to embody the hyper-masculine ideals I am accustomed to, but the stereotypical feminine and homo-erotic qualities provide me with a new experience. As I stated before I identify as a heterosexual man but I enjoy when others praise my body and I feed off of the rush of showing audiences and judges what I can create myself into.

Stage 2

Stage two commenced on February 1, 2014 and ended on February 28, 2014. During this phase I come to the end of my offseason contest preparation diet and begin changing my entire regiment to cut body fat and prepare my image for the North Carolina State Championships on April 12, 2014. This stage is very important in my analysis because I begin to see drastic changes in my body and find myself becoming conflicted with losing muscle size in order to fit the desired images of the subculture of bodybuilding.

At the beginning of stage two I was at my heaviest weight and I knew that during the second week of February I would have to begin my cutting diet to get rid of as much excess body fat as possible. During the cutting stage of contest preparation I usually drop my carbohydrate intake to 100-150 grams per day and this time I plan on keeping my protein consumption around 400 grams per day to offset the muscle loss I experienced before my first show in August 2013. After eating an unbelievably fattening meal of fried calamari, mozzarella, steak, ravioli, chicken marsala and cheesecake with Dean and Jacob on January 31st I hit the road to Virginia to visit my undergraduate alma mater. I promised my college baseball coach months ago that I would be present at his induction into the hall of fame at the university and I knew that I would have a

chance to reconnect with my college teammates and old friends that knew me when I was only 190 lbs.

Once I got to the hall of fame banquet the images of me from my first show became the hot topic of discussion. I did not bring up my training during any conversations but the guys were fascinated with my transformation. I was immersed back into another hyper-masculine subculture of former college baseball players I knew very well. My teammates joked about my turquoise trunks, shaved legs and spray tan and mocked me for doing something they thought to be homo-erotic. While they mocked me they also complemented my body creation and asked for tips on how to become as ripped and striated as I was¹¹. I took this opportunity to step back and analyze the dialogue that ensued from my images. This was a perfect example of visual rhetoric as each person looked at the pictures I chose to share and culturally interpreted their own meanings and understandings based on what the other guys at the reception thought (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). The majority of my teammates said they would never get on stage and display their bodies in the way I did because they felt it was weird, but they all wanted to look like me.

I smiled and enjoyed the conversation that ensued because I was fascinated to hear their thoughts. I know each of them so well that their jokes and insults were not taken to heart, but no one said that I looked bad. They saw my images as homo-erotic but my training and work ethic to turn myself into what I looked like as masculine. This made me begin to think more about the subculture of bodybuilding and while our images portray a sense of hyper-masculinity, maybe the sport itself is not that masculine. I embody the work ethic, drive and perseverance that others stereotype as characteristics of masculinity but after all of the training, dieting and personal

¹¹ Visual Rhetoric

sacrifice I go through I step on stage and go through a series of poses showing of my naked body. I am beginning to see the subculture of bodybuilding as an anomaly in the sports realm. Once you enter the subculture you feel like a man because you are able to put yourself through the training, carbohydrate and water cutting to look different from the average person so that others can marvel at your physique or critique it but you do it in a way that does not fit in with other team or individual sports where you are fully clothed and judged on whether you can hit a jump shot or throw a ball¹².

Later on that evening my teammates and a good friend of mine from college went out on the town to socialize. Everyone was enjoying their drinks, but unlike in my younger days I was the sober one. I am in my contest preparation mindset where drinking does not help me to attain the muscle size and symmetry I need on stage. My old coach, Steve, told me that one alcoholic beverage stops your body from metabolizing fat for 48 hours. While I do not know if this is factual evidence or not I do know that alcohol consumption breaks down muscle fibers and that's something I couldn't risk. We went to a local bar and ran into a few people I knew during my college days. Two of the women I knew from my time as an employee at my alma mater were very interested in me bodybuilding and as they talked to me and asked questions I noticed that their eyes would jump back and forth from looking at me to my arms. It was flattering, but after some time it became uncomfortable, especially because I am good friends with the boyfriend of one of the women. He on the other hand had too much to drink and became very obnoxious in asking me over and over again about working out and kept saying "man you are so huge look at your arms". At first this was comical, but after the tenth time in a public place I had to tell him to relax. I came to visit with my old teammates and friends not to talk about my body and how

¹² Questioning of hyper-masculine label of bodybuilding, see table 1.2

others saw it. One guy that I had never met approached me in the bar and asked me to put my jacket back on because I was making him and other guys feel uncomfortable.

I had to think is this what I am training for? I have become so obsessed with changing my physique and deep down I do not feel that I have changed but to others I am different because of the way I look. It is nice to receive complements on my hard work, but I am doing this for myself not to impress others¹³. I am more than an amateur bodybuilder but the visual rhetoric that ensues from my images makes others who are outside of the subculture identify me completely with this sport. I found it very interesting that someone who I had never met felt comfortable in asking me to put my jacket on. Even though he did it in a joking manner it seemed to be a heterosexual way to complement my body. By saying I was making him and others feel uncomfortable but smiling and laughing he was implying that I looked good and did not want me to take this as a homo-erotic statement. If he had of come up to me and said man your body looks great keep your jacket off I am sure his friends would've questioned his approach.

If I continue to recreate my body as an amateur competitor I am sure this wanted and sometimes unwanted attention will increase, but I have to manage my public relations approach and not let this consume me or change who I am deep down. After I returned to Charlotte from this trip I was ready to get back to the gym and continue my training. On February 4th we tested my body fat with the hand held machine and found that I was 21% body fat. Both Jacob and I did not agree with this test and decided we needed to use the calipers that hook on to your mid-section to see exactly where I was in my progress. We didn't have the availability to do it that day but regardless I knew it was time to cut back on my diet and begin thinking about my

¹³ Impression Management, see table 1.2

cutting. When I looked at this number I formed the impression that it had to be wrong but to be completely honest I was freaking out inside. I had framed this reality of having plenty of time to prepare for the competition, but now I realized I was 9 weeks away from stepping on stage. Even if I was less than 21% body fat with the caliper test I had to pick up my training.

Later on that week I interviewed my teammate Jacob for the other piece of this research and his point of view truly resonated with me. He said being a bodybuilder is lonely, you find yourself training differently than those outside of the subculture. You also eat meals that no one else wants to eat, chick, fish and rice with no seasoning or sauce. When your friends are out partying you are at the gym or waking up early to do extra cardio. In order to create the desired image that you want you have to isolate yourself from others and become different. I felt this way when I went to Virginia and spent time with my teammates. Now that I have assimilated into the subculture of bodybuilding I am so focused on creating my body that I have no desire to become intoxicated and while I love to eat cheesecake, pasta and burgers I know there is a time when I can eat these foods and not feel guilty about it after I have deprived myself for long periods. In listening to his point of view I did feel a bit worried about the concept of loneliness because I love this sport and I love the images of myself that it creates but I don't want to be lonely. I don't want this to affect my relationships with my girlfriend, family and friends. Up until this point I haven't even thought that this might already be happening. I am becoming more and more obsessed with my training and now that I am getting ready to cut weight I know my time and energy will be focused specifically on this lifestyle.

I will admit that after this interview I jumped right back into my training and thought to myself that I would be able to balance my identity in work, social, family and bodybuilding domains. I had come so far in this process that I had to keep going. Two days after my

interview with Jacob I was invited to participate in a posing class that John was holding at our gym. Dean suggested I attend because it would be a great experience for me and I would have a chance to pick up on pointers for posing at the show. As I walked into the aerobics room for the class I noticed there were eight women in shorts and tank tops practicing bikini class poses, two male bodybuilders and six men's physique competitors. Each group was in different areas of the room but the biggest difference was that the two bodybuilders were only wearing boxer briefs and no shirts. I saw this and didn't even pay attention to the women in the room as I stripped down to my royal blue briefs and hopped into line to practice my posing. Looking back on this experience I am amazed at how comfortable I was being half naked in front of strangers. Before entering this subculture I would have looked at the competitors as if they were crazy for walking around in their boxer briefs in a public place. After a month of taking progress pictures in my underwear to see how my legs and the rest of my body were changing I knew this was considered normal amongst bodybuilders. Not only was I comfortable in posing in my boxer briefs but I spent more time looking and listening to the two male competitors I was practicing with¹⁴. As a heterosexual male most would expect my eyes to drift towards the women bikini competitors, but after I finished the class I could not tell you what any of the women looked like. I didn't even feel awkward to have another man who I had just met in his underwear stand a foot away from me and move my arms and legs into positions that made my poses more efficient. These images and visuals of the subculture of bodybuilding are not hyper-masculine, they are completely homo-erotic. This is fascinating to reflect on because even though myself and others who train with me and compete laugh and joke about how hard our sport is and we've discussed what we feel is masculine and what makes a male bodybuilder masculine we have become

¹⁴ Homo-Eroticism, see table 1.2.

completely comfortable participating in acts and rituals that society would deem the complete opposite of masculine.

Why would heterosexual men walk around a glass walled room full of women and only focus on each other? I am able to understand this sport more and more each day and while there are voyeuristic qualities to concentrating on your body and perfecting the symmetry and proportion of each muscle you are also focusing on creating visuals that judges and audiences will marvel at. Whether I justify my constant critiquing of personal images when I wake up in the morning or when I am at the gym by saying I am practicing or seeing what body parts need improvement I am still assuming the role of a voyeur. At the same time I am forming desired impressions to those around me that critiquing is part of bodybuilding, but deep down I am really worried or happy with how I look. I am spending more and more time looking at my body as I get closer to the show and at this point I am hoping I feel more confident in my body as I begin to lose more body fat. When I was outside of the subculture posing looked like large muscular men flexing and saying I am bigger than you, but now it's like practicing a swing in baseball. In order to gain points at competitions you must understand your body and what your strengths and weaknesses are and you gain or lose points based on how you show yourself with each mandatory pose. During this posing class I was focused on myself and the other male competitors more so than the women in the room because I want to create the image of my physique that fits in with the bodybuilding subculture. While I am committed to my girlfriend it doesn't make sense that I didn't even notice the women in the room. I am focused on training and dieting but in order to feel confident in all of my hard work I also have to practice how I show myself to others. I personally understand this but to those outside of our subculture posing with other men in boxer brief's is not masculine it is homo-erotic. Looking back on this

experience my posing coach and the other more experienced competitor used visual rhetoric to socialize about each pose and movement as we simulated the pre-judging portion of a body building competition. I felt somewhat out of place once the class started, not because we were all half naked, but because these competitors were smooth and experienced with their posing. I did my best to keep up with them for the first 20 minutes of class, but I eventually had to take a step back and have them walk me through each move. By the end of class I had caught on and both competitors complemented my attention to detail. I realized that being a relatively tall bodybuilder puts me outside the norm of the typical bodybuilder¹⁵.

The average competitor is between 5'3" and 5'10". I am 6'2" which makes me look longer and skinnier even though I weigh more than most in my weight class. We practiced getting low in my poses by bending my knees and flexing my hamstrings and calves to emphasize my strong legs, but outside of feeling confident in my progress with the posing instructions I started to worry about my upcoming competition. My first show was in the novice class for first time competitors, but in April I am moving up to the junior class which is one step down from the Open class. Juniors will be much more competitive and bodybuilders will be competing from all over the state of North Carolina. I did not express my feelings of anxiety during the class rather I pushed through the strain and exhaustion of holding my muscle contractions for an hour.

During the following week Dean and I met up to check my progress on my lunch break. He admitted that he was worried about the body fat around my midsection and that my abs were not showing and I tried to reassure him that at my last show abdominals were one of my strongest parts. I know with cardio and my cutting diet I will be able to shed these pounds but at

¹⁵ Identity Construction, see table 1.2

this point in stage 2 my abs are definitely the weakest part. One of my interview respondents said it best you have to get out of shape to get in shape in bodybuilding. I spent the offseason eating 350-400 grams of lean and fatty protein and eating 400 grams of carbs. While I felt confident in my size when I looked in the mirror or at my progress pictures deep down I felt very insecure about my abdominals. Even though I know the images I see in Flex magazine are of professional competitors right before or after a competition where they look huge and ripped I still feel insufficient when I look at my midsection. Every bodybuilder wants to have big full muscles and abdominals, but I am learning that I cannot look like I do during competitions year round. Even if I attempted to use my cutting diet to stay lean and cut my water to show my abdominals it wouldn't be healthy. At this point I suck up my pride and tell myself that my abdominals will come back once I get into stage three, or at least I hope they do.

Later on that week I received an email early in the morning informing me that the university I work for was closed for the day due to an expected snow storm. As the morning went on the snow began to come down and Dean sent me a text message asking if I wanted to train shoulders with him and Jacob at 11:00am. I jumped at the opportunity and told my girlfriend I would be back as soon as possible. On my way to the gym I slid multiple times on the thin layer of snow on the road, but I was determined to get my workout in. It looked like the campus would be closed the next day and I was so obsessed with my training that I refused to let anything stop me from changing my physique. As I got to the gym they announced that they would be closing at 11:30am so gym members could get home safely in the snow. We decided to stay because Jacob had the keys to lock up after everyone left. We trained shoulders and triceps and as we neared the end of the workout Dean complemented my muscle fullness and vein vascularity. It was great to hear this complement after the embarrassment I felt during our

last meeting to check my body's progress. Dean also made the comment that it was time for me to begin shaving my entire body and tanning in a tanning bed so my skin could get used to both processes¹⁶. Even though I shaved and used a tanning bed and spray tan before my first show I still feel this concept is somewhat weird. I never tanned or shaved my body before I became a competitor and always associated this as something women do. My girlfriend even laughed at me as I attempted to shave my legs last August because it was difficult for me to reach the back side of my legs. I know this has to happen before I get on stage but I find it so interesting that bodybuilders shave and tan without second thoughts, or at least they don't express that these practices seem feminine. While I am not comfortable with shaving or tanning I know I will not fit in with other competitors when I step on stage if I have hair all over my body and if my skin is pale. Shaving the excess hair and darkening my skin with the tanning beds and spray tans actually makes me look more defined on stage. I admitted this to Jackson after I saw pictures from my first show. Not only am I now focusing on changing my body through training and dieting but I am also dolling myself up to fit into the subculture. After processing this comment and sucking up my pride in agreeing with Dean that it is time to start shaving and tanning I realized that the snow fall had accumulated to almost 4 inches outside. We were the only people in the gym and I had become so entranced in our workout that I forgot there was a winter storm going on outside. I was happy that I did not miss this workout, but I was worried that I wouldn't be able to make it home safely because there were no snow plows out clearing the roads near the gym. After driving 10 miles per hour with my wind shield wipers on full speed I eventually made it home safely. Later on that night my girlfriend asked if I wanted to walk over to the aerobics room in our townhome complex to do cardio and I thought to myself why not? I have to start losing the body fat around my mid-section so we both ventured through the snow and I

¹⁶ Femininity, see table 1.2

worked out for a second time that day. Sometimes I wonder if there is something wrong with me, I am so dedicated to my training and changing my body image that I am willing to drive through a winter storm and then go back out into the snow to work out again. Even when no one but my girlfriend is around I feel that I have to constantly work and train not matter what the weather is. Now that I am looking back on this experience I am realizing that this dedication is not just because I am competitive but I have framed a reality around what I have to do make the image I hope to eventually be satisfied with. I would love to place in the top three at my upcoming competition but I just want to like the image I see in the mirror.

I want to be like Tony Freeman, who is a 6'2" professional bodybuilder that has been competing for close to 15 years. I imagine that he looked like me at one point in the beginning of his career and even though he is taller than most competitors on the professional stage he has huge arms and a wide back and his abdominals are defined. I know I have a lot of training ahead of me and I will not look like Tony Freeman in April, but I don't feel like I will fit into the subculture of bodybuilding until I am 250 lbs. of muscle when I step on stage¹⁷. This is the image I hope to one day become a reality and until then I feel like I have to sacrifice relaxation and free time because I cannot reach this goal if I do what everyone else does.

As stage two continued I began making more progress with my training and began my cutting diet on February 10th. Dean and Jacob were worried about by body fat percentage and even though I got up to a solid 240 lbs. I definitely had at least 20-25 lbs. of body fat to lose before I was ready to get on stage in April. I figured I would be able to cut weight quickly because I dropped 36 lbs. in six weeks before my first show. Within the first week of changing my diet for the first show I dropped 7 lbs. unfortunately I only dropped 1 lb. during the first

¹⁷ Framing, see table 1.2

week of my cut this time. I found myself reassuring Dean and Jacob that my body would transform quickly but to be completely honest I began to panic inside. What if I don't lose weight like I did for my first show? I thought something was wrong with my training and diet¹⁸. The only comfort I had at this point was that we began my diet eight weeks out this time and Dean has planned for me to begin doing continue eating 400 grams of protein but only cutting my carbohydrate intake to 150-200 grams per day. We are hoping that the high protein intake, which is 150 more grams than I was eating before my first show, will offset any muscle loss and keeping my carbohydrates higher will keep me fuller. The only catch with this diet plan is that I will have to do extra cardio sessions to burn more of the extra calories I am taking in. I am confident in Dean's plan because everything he has taught me until this point has changed my physique for the better and his experience speaks for itself. I don't want to feel insecure when I step on stage again. I know I can make myself ripped and defined but I want the perfect balance of big ripped muscles. I don't want to look like a physique competitor on stage. I want people to know I am a bodybuilder. People outside of the subculture identify me as a bodybuilder because they know I've competed and I tend to socialize about it, but I am frequently asked if I am training for a physique competition. It's a slap in the face because physique competitors do not look like body builders. They are defined and have great abdominals but they typically don't have striated legs and wide backs and their board shorts hide much of the development in their lower half. I want others to see my images and frame their own reality that I am a bodybuilder, no questions asked.

After the first week of my cutting phase my body felt as if it was going through withdrawal. I had spent six months eating foods full of sodium and at least one cheat meal per

¹⁸ Impression Management, see table 1.2

day. Cheat meals can vary in meaning by individual competitors, but for me this could be a pork barbeque sub with provolone cheese or a burger with all of the fixings and a large batch of sweet potato fries. It was not until I competed in my first show that I realized how hard it is to cut sodium out of your diet because almost everything I enjoy on a daily basis has sodium. Even a cup of almond milk has 150 grams per serving so needless to say after five days straight of three chicken breasts per day, four 6 ounce tilapia filets, twelve egg whites, one cup of brown rice, one cup of quick oats and three 50 gram protein shakes I was ready to indulge. On Valentine's Day my girlfriend and I ordered take out from my favorite burger and sushi restaurant. I ordered an 8 ounce burger on a wheat bun, two orders of sweet potato fries and three orders of sushi. I was in heaven for the 25 minutes it took me to eat this food and afterwards I felt full and awful at the same time. I am now in the mindset of daydreaming about this once a week opportunity to feel normal and eat what everyone around me is eating. Most of the people that I talk to ask why I eat one cheat meal per week and while it is because I am usually dying to have something I will enjoy the goal is to actually see how my body reacts. Cheat meals help competitors with fast metabolisms create images that show us in a different light for 24-48 hours. After your body gets used to eating low amounts of sodium, carbohydrates and high protein you begin to lean out and take the risk of becoming flat, as I discussed earlier, to drop body fat percentage. The high protein intake provides my body with the nutrients to hold the muscle I spent the entire offseason building and decreasing my carbohydrates and sodium while increasing cardio training burns the unwanted body fat. Having one cheat meal a week early in my cutting phase will show me how long it will take my body to fill out and look bigger than I actually am. I will also try different foods such as cheese pizza and dark chocolate cake to see what works best as I near closer to the show. When I get to stage three and my body fat percentage should be at its lowest so one cheat

meal will help me look 10-15 lbs. heavier in the final competition image. I am training so hard just to trick the judges and anyone who I share my images with by using a cheat meal to create an optical illusion.

As I analyze images of myself and experiences during this stage I find myself relating much of what is discussed in my visual autoethnographic interviews to my life. I was ecstatic to get a call from John, the resident professional competitor at my gym, saying he was available to participate in my research. He has competed in almost every major NPC and IFBB bodybuilding competition over the last 25 years and he is someone I secretly idolize at the gym. I find myself checking my form and speeding up the time in between my sets when he walks by because I want him to take me seriously and know that I am passionate about this sport. I believe that my growing relationship with Dean helped John realize my level of commitment as they competed and trained together over the years so this network I have created is truly working to my benefit as a competitor and researcher. He emphasized that as he went farther into the sport he critiqued images of himself more and more and he competed because he enjoyed the process. It was no longer about being the biggest guy or the toughest rather it was about gaining knowledge and sharing it with others to help bodybuilding grow and carry on as a sport. I hope that one day I can get to a place where I am as confident and comfortable with my own images as he is. My images at this point have become a part of me and in a way I feel like I am living a double life. During the hours of 8:30am-5:00pm Monday through Friday I am a young professional working in higher education, but early in the morning before I go to work and after I leave campus and head to the gym I become a bodybuilder¹⁹. To a certain extent I enjoy this because it forms impressions to others that I am different and that I am doing something that not many others are

¹⁹ Identity Construction, see table 1.2

doing. Even people at my gym see me as one of the competitors rather than an everyday member. Deep down I enjoy this attention because others are acknowledging my dedication and perseverance.

This feeling of perseverance and dedication comes with the good and the bad. Some days I am happy to be different but as I entered the second week of my cutting diet I hit the point of pure exhaustion. After all of my years in hetero-normative subcultures I've always found myself pushing my physical and mental limits. On February 17th I hit a wall where the low carbohydrate intake made it difficult to get out of bed and even harder to go to the gym and train. One day you feel like you can take on the world and the next you feel like every part of your body has been destroyed. As I sat in my office at 5:30pm and thought about going to the gym to get an extra workout in I thought about what Dean or Jacob would say. After being lectured for overtraining during my offseason I decided to fight my urges and went home to rest. I woke up the next day feeling like a new man and I decided that I would have to force myself to take a step back and allow my muscles to grow if I wanted to create my desired image. Over the last year I have learned that lifting weights and training is 20% of the process and 80% is the diet and rest.

After this reality check I got back on schedule and started my cutting regiment of taking a daily thermogenic supplement. These supplements are also known as fat burners which contain high dosages of caffeine that when taken on an empty stomach help your body's metabolism to speed up. I had half of a bottle of oxi-elite pro that I used for my first competition and while it incinerated all of my body fat I found out recently that the FDA had forced USPLabs to take this product off the shelf because there were multiple instances of consumers dying and acute liver failure from over using the product. Even with this knowledge I used it because it worked. As I reflect on this choice I don't know why I put this substance in my body. Most supplement

companies make their own thermogenic product but I was happy with how it helped me create my previous images and at the time I felt I was different than those who were harmed by consuming it. I allowed myself to create a false sense of invincibility where I saw myself as different from those people that I didn't even know. It is as if I am creating a reality around my images in work and social domains that I can do and take things that others should not. Luckily to my knowledge I haven't experienced any detrimental effects from using this supplement but now that I am able to analyze my choices I feel as if I have to think more about my health and what my bigorexia is doing to me.

After Jacob showed Dean my progress pictures from the third week of February he asked for me to meet him at the gym so he could see what I looked like after one and a half weeks for himself. At this point I had dropped from 240 lbs. to 233 lbs. and I felt confident. After I stripped down to my boxer briefs he crushed my ego by saying my body was holding too much excess and that I needed to definitely up my cardio for the next seven weeks to two sessions a day beginning with 20 minutes in the morning and 25 in the evening after I trained. On the outside I agreed with everything he said because I trusted his judgment but I couldn't show him how insecure I felt when I looked in the mirror and saw the layer of body fat covering my abdominals. I tried to reassure him that at my first show my abdominals came in strong and were probably my best body part, but inside my heart sunk. At this point my thoughts on wanting to be big and full dissipated and I realized that if I stepped on stage at a show looking like I did on February 19th I would embarrass him, Jacob and myself. I went home that evening and set my alarm of 5:50am so I could get up early and start my extra cardio sessions before work. Bodybuilding allows men to recreate their physiques into images that they are satisfied with for a brief period of time and I am now realizing that images are like a drug. I've become

hooked on what I once created and how I can possibly improve my body, but it is mentally draining spending the majority of the year worrying about not being big enough or being too big. In the end I still look at images from my first show and only share the ones that hide my skinny arms and small back because I want others to believe I am different. I am the guy who is not afraid to step on stage showing my naked body, but I am afraid of showing my body parts that I see as weak or underdeveloped.

After a few days of doing two cardio sessions a day I see my body changing. The striations which divide muscles fibers and definition are starting to come in and I have a moment where I realize I am not taking a hardening agent like I did at this time for my first show. These supplements are anabolic in nature and help your muscles become denser showing more definition and leanness. I previously used a product called Compound-20 which gave me great results but I gravitated to a BPI product called solid. I sped over to the vitamin shop after a workout while my girlfriend was at work to avoid her questioning my decision on taking another supplement and hid it in my gym bag. I felt as if I needed it and since I am all natural, which really means I am not taking steroids or human growth hormone I knew I needed an edge. This feeling of needing an edge to create my physique into something I am happy with stems from my self-diagnoses of bigorexia. Mosely (2009) found that individuals diagnosed with bigorexia obsess about being inadequately muscular and their compulsions include spending hours in the gym, squandering excessive amounts of money on ineffectual supplements and performance enhancers and abnormal eating patterns (Mosely, 2009). This is why I keep trying supplement after supplement to change how I look but it is not until now that I am truly able to realize how this is affecting my life. Maybe I don't necessarily feel different from others because of my hetero-normative and hyper-masculine ideals, but because deep down I am not happy with my

images²⁰. I am becoming more and more obsessed with creating my body that it took a harsh realization from my girlfriend to realize that my training is spilling over into my personal life. She has always supported me in my athletic endeavors even when I was a college baseball coach. I later came home from working out and before I showered I went right into practicing my poses. She said I am constantly checking myself out and all I talk about is my training. I immediately became defensive and told her I had to immerse myself in this process because my training and experiences are part of my research and that when I pose in the mirror I am actually practicing my mandatories. The truth is I was forming impressions and trying to get her to buy into what I wanted her to think when deep down I realized I have been going a bit overboard. In thinking back to my experiences in baseball I always put athletics first and now that I have a significant other that I love and see as my best friend the last thing I want to do is push her away because I talk more about my images than about our relationship.

This confrontation turned into an argument as my stubbornness kicked in and I kept telling her she just didn't understand because she was not in the subculture. I felt as if I needed to take every opportunity I had to practice showing my strengths and hiding my weaknesses until I was able to pose correctly with my eyes closed. After a full day of us not speaking to each other I went to the gym to perform my final visual autoethnographic interview with Kyle. I actually met Kyle at my first posing class at the Energy Sports and Fitness gym. He has been competing for 12 years and is now on the national level and potentially in the running for receiving a professional card. I wanted to include him in my research because he seemed to really enjoy the sport. He coached me during class with such ease and had such a positive attitude about bodybuilding. Kyle's interview could not have come at a better time and was

²⁰ Identity Construction, see table 1.2

probably the most influential discussion I had with another competitor during this study. His wife also competed as a figure competitor and every time I see him at the gym they're training together with a smile on their face. In the interview he informed me that earlier in his career he struggled with his body image particularly in the offseason. Even with all of his success other bodybuilders tended to criticize him for gaining so much body fat and in some cases did not show him the respect he deserved because they never saw him compete at the national level. The people he teaches at posing classes are beginners like myself who are doing state wide shows so when they are cutting and prepping for their competitions he is at his largest size.

He trains with John at my gym who taught him early on you have to get out of shape to get in shape in bodybuilding. So now when he looks at his images and younger competitors make jokes about his physique he brushes it off. He is one of that the competitors that said he no longer takes images of himself leading up to competitions because he has refined his process. One of the most important pieces in his process is balance and discipline. He identified as a man who was masculine before he entered the subculture and felt that a masculine man is someone who is disciplined in all aspects of his life not just the training piece. If you are disciplined and dedicated to bodybuilding but you still have a job, family and friends but you spend all of your time focusing on your image then you lose sight of what is important in life. You have to enjoy the journey on your way to creating your final on stage image and no one gets on stage without others helping them along the way. Kyle also said that if bodybuilding ever caused division between himself and his wife that he would quit. His relationship was more important than being the biggest and most ripped person at a show and I could tell how serious he was when he said this.

Kyle's interview could not have come at a better time because even though I didn't want to admit it I was allowing the bodybuilding to take over my life. I had to find balance and I started by having an honest conversation with my girlfriend. I sucked up my pride and apologized for how I had been acting and told her I would stop posing in the mirror and spend less time talking about my training. Over the next week I had to check myself multiple times but as the stress alleviated from our relationship I found myself enjoying more of my life each day. On nights I was not training or working on my research I came home and watched movies with her and played with my dog. I made myself focus only on my work between 8:30am-5:00pm so I could have a break from thinking about what my body looked like under my suit and tie. While these may seem like minor changes they made a world of a difference in how I felt each morning. Every time I felt tired, hungry or stressed I repeated Kyle's quote, "enjoy the journey", and found myself smiling²¹.

This was a real turning point for me in my preparation for this show because I had spent all of stage one and the majority of stage two panicking about my muscle size or body fat percentage. I have two coaches in my corner that truly have my best interests in mind and I have a supportive girlfriend who wants to see me succeed. Trusting my team allowed me to think about what I will become as long as I stick to the plan. One of the toughest obstacles for me in this process is thinking about my end result. I can't spend each day analyzing my progress pictures from the week before, instead of feeling insecure I need to think more critically and identifying my weaknesses so I can focus on training my weak body parts so that I feel positive about the recreation I am going through.

²¹ Balance, see table 1.2

As I neared the end of stage two I felt better and better about my image each time I looked in the mirror. The two cardio sessions a day and low carbohydrate intake were truly changing my body. I had a presentation in my Monday night class and I initially thought it went well. My classmates were entertained and involved in my discussion but after I finished and we discussed the topic of film authorship further and all of my comments related back to food. The next day I had a meeting set with Dr. Carreiro to discuss my research and she told me that if she did not know what I was training for she would've assumed I came to class drunk. At first I laughed and told her I have not had an alcoholic beverage in over two months, but it hit me that I am improving my images and impressions with those closest to me but to my classmates and colleagues still identify me as the bodybuilder on campus. In a way this is a complement but I am not just a bodybuilder. I am a graduate student in a leadership position at a University. I formed these impressions by socializing about my bodybuilding pursuits. In order to be completely balanced I can't just change the way I carry myself at home or at the gym but I have to think about the images I am portraying to others everywhere I go. In order to successfully analyze my experiences and also understand how I identify with images now that I am in the subculture of bodybuilding I have to keep one foot in the subculture and one foot out.

Stage two has been full of highs and lows, but as I write this story I am learning more about myself. Retrospectively reflecting on my daily journal entries is allowing me to look at my images differently each week. On the last day of February I went to the gym for the final set of progress photos with Jacob. I will admit I looked the better than I did 6 weeks out from my first show and I weigh more, which means I am holding more muscle. My abdominal definition is coming in and the diet and cardio is proving to shed off my body fat. These images definitely will not be my best during this process but it's the first time I feel excited about my physique. I

am finally enjoying the process and looking at the context of my images from where I began in January and where I am now. As I become more defined I am also realizing that my ideals on masculinity are changing. I no longer want to be the biggest guy in the gym. I want to be as big and defined as I can be without comparing myself to others.

Stage 3

This is the final stage of my training beginning on March 1, 2014 and ending on the day of my competition April 12, 2014. As I began to lose more weight and body fat I documented how my mindset and understanding of images changed as I neared the North Carolina State Championships. I began to find balance in my life and found that the positive visual rhetoric that ensued from my images during this time period caused me to form specific impressions that are much different than seen in stages one and two.

At the beginning of stage three I truly felt good about my physical and personal image. Kyle's interview resonated with me and every time I found myself questioning why I was training so hard or eating all of the foods that I didn't want to eat I kept thinking to myself, enjoy the process. As I said earlier in this narrative I did not enter the subculture of bodybuilding to impress others or because I had something to prove. I decided to do this for myself and to be completely honest my initial intent was to change the image of my body that I was not happy with, but now I am finding that I enjoy competing with myself. In my interviews respondents highlighted that they enjoyed the individual nature of bodybuilding and I have always competed in team sports. The solidarity I feel at times as a bodybuilder comes from competing with myself when I have the urge to eat pizza, cake or burgers or even when I think to myself I can sleep in this morning and not do an extra cardio session²². I have two coaches but they are not always around to push me to do the little things that have the greatest effects on my final image. They

²² Framing, see table 1.2

have given me the road map and I have to follow every twist and turn to get to my destination. When I played baseball I always had a set schedule for practice, training and games but as a bodybuilder I have to find time each day to make myself better. In the beginning of March I began feeling more and more comfortable with my body and I am noticing that Jacob and Dean are very pleased with how I am progressing.

During the first week of this stage I went to the gym on my lunch break so Dean could analyze my posing. When I walked in he said that Jacob showed him my progress pictures from the week before and he was very pleased to see the lines and striations showing in my shoulders, chest and back. That immediately made my day and as I changed into my boxer briefs in the aerobics room I felt more confident than any week prior. I am more than comfortable showing my entire physique now that I am enjoying the process and seeing my body change each day. Hearing my principal and author of information complement my images gave me the drive to keep going. It doesn't even dawn on me that any other member of the gym that is outside of the subculture could walk in at any time and see me flexing my muscles in front of a 49 year old man. I can only imagine how this would look to someone who doesn't understand what we are doing, but I am comfortable with my masculinity and I am slowly accepting the feminine and homo-erotic practices of the sport because I know seeing all of my legs and upper body as I go through the quarter turns and mandatory poses shows me the image of what I will look like on stage. Dean is teaching me how to tweak my poses so that I show my strengths and hide my weaknesses. He does not want me to worry about being an all-natural competitor and going against guys on steroids in April so to feel as confident as possible he is teaching me to embrace my height. Being over six feet tall is not the norm in bodybuilding but with my developing physique I can use my height to my advantage. By pushing my shoulders out as wide as possible

and staying tall as if I am going through military cadences and flexing all of my muscles I actually look huge. These posing techniques will create the optical illusion I am looking for so that the judges and anyone who I share my competition photos with think that I am 10-20lbs. heavier than I actually am.

It is truly fascinating to see how my mentality has changed from stage one to now as my clothes are getting looser and my face is thinning out. My bigorexia seems to be leaving my day to day thoughts and my focus is on finding the balance between muscle mass and lean definition in all areas of my body. A few days after I work with Dean on my poses I met him at the gym to do a back workout. He is teaching me how to lift weights as if I am going through my posing motions. Everything I do in the gym mimics the movements I will be doing on stage in turn creating more definition. I feel and see the difference even though we are using lighter weights and training differently than everyone else in the gym. As we train he counsels me on all of the other stressors in my life and he knows I am in graduate school and working full time, but he keeps checking in on me with weekly phone calls and text messages to reinforce what Kyle talked about in his interview with finding balance. I can't just think about bodybuilding in order to succeed in all of my daily domains. I have to find time to focus on each. Hearing this from my coach pushed me to make a real effort in thinking through what I have to accomplish each day. If I can execute proper training, diet, work responsibilities and relationships at home I will be happy and even though it may take more effort on my part it will be worth it in the end and I won't burn out²³.

To find this balance and keep my personal passion of bodybuilding from further affecting my relationship with my girlfriend I found myself practicing poses when she was not home or

²³ Identity Construction, see table 1.2

when she wasn't looking. I felt like I was getting it all out of my system and even though this is a form of multitasking I was making myself happy and those around me were pleased. Even though I am feeling better about how I look and seeing my end goal approaching at five weeks out from the competition waking up each morning to train is getting harder and harder. At the end of the first week of stage three Jacob and I met to take more progress pictures and before we started a lady in the aerobics room next to us cut through the room we were in to enter the women's locker room. After she left I dropped back down to my normal bodybuilding attire of boxer briefs and as I started a front double bicep pose she walked back in and panicked. The look on her face was priceless as she probably felt she had just walked in on two men checking each other out. Jacob and I laughed it off and continued with our practice. Once I walked out of the aerobics room fully clothed she was on a workout machine nearby blushing and looking away. Reflecting on all of my experiences up to this point I've seen a real transition in how I understand the so called hyper-masculine subculture of bodybuilding. When I began this study I thought bodybuilding was hyper-masculine, but I am finding that the images of the sport specifically from during a competition where competitors are in the best condition form impressions to others that we fit this label. Everything we do to create our final on stage images is the opposite of hyper-masculine. We tan, shave and practice our posing nearly naked with other men, but we are comfortable with ourselves. The sport itself has made me more critical of my images than before I assimilated into this culture but it has given me the opportunity to recreate myself over and over to refine areas of my body I am unhappy with. I have always been comfortable with my masculinity and I found myself intimidated by my misconceptions of the sport before I began competing but in a way utilizing stereotypical feminine and homo-erotic practices has made me more comfortable with the man I am.

While others at my gym approach me and complement how I look I feel as if they see me as being different. I am not fitting into the stereotype of a male bodybuilder who tries to lift heavy weights and yells or grunts as I train. I focus strictly on what Dean and Jacob tell me to do each day and in doing so I am separating myself from the overall gym subculture by not socializing about supplements and diet fads. Being seen as different from other men creates an aura of masculinity amongst audiences because they don't truly understand why you are doing things differently than them. They acknowledge that you look great and some openly admit to me that they do not have the drive or discipline to put themselves through what I am doing but they would love to see what they looked like if they gave the training and diet a try²⁴. From what I have observed at my gym these men are the ones who train obsessively and try supplement after supplement, but are never willing to make all of the daily sacrifices it takes for me and other competitors to step on stage.

As stage three continued my life became more and more hectic. I was in the midst of transcribing interviews, writing this story, working full time, training and focusing on my relationship at home. I knew that I would hit a point where all of my responsibilities and domains collided in performing this study but ironically I felt more in control of my life and my image than in stage one or two. Having the opportunity to have open dialogue with other competitors in the visual autoethnographic interviews definitely provided great insight into how others have managed multiple responsibilities in life while competing, but feeling satisfied with images of myself is proving to be my biggest accomplishment. I feel as if coming to an understanding of how I view bodybuilding as a subculture has relieved me of the hyper-masculine ideals that have been instilled in me over the years as a competitive athlete. While

²⁴ Masculinity in images, see table 1.2

there are moments in conversations with other competitors where jokes or comments are made about men having feminine or homo-erotic traits and qualities I force myself to take a step back and not identify completely with the sport. Recognizing that what we do may be viewed as different or weird by others doesn't bother me at this point because I am finding the happy medium with my physique and enjoying my relationships with those who are supporting me²⁵.

As I entered the second week of stage three I decided to take a break from my research and training and go out with my girlfriend and some friends. We had a nice clean dinner and watched basketball at a local bar and this was the most relaxed I had felt in months. My friends were surprised that I let myself out of the house because up to this point I have been so driven with training and school work that I unknowingly cut them out of my life. The only time they saw me was at the gym and as I discussed in stage one and two I was in a mindset where all that mattered was recreating my physical image. While this experience may not seem too important in my research it was the moment where I felt normal again. In my interviews with other NPC competitors I found that they saw themselves as being different from those outside of the subculture. In discussing their images from before and after competitions and analyzing how they identified with their body's multiple respondents referenced how those who have never competed criticized or downplayed their efforts at recreating their physique. At the time I agreed with them that we were different but now I am finding that the notion of other's being normal and bodybuilder's being different is all in our minds. I am still the man who jokes around with his friends and enjoys watching basketball and talking about sports other than bodybuilding. The only difference is that I train to compete in bodybuilding competitions at certain points in the year. In stage one and two I believed that I was different and this notion caused me to separate

²⁵ Bodybuilding is not hyper-masculine, see table 1.2

myself from friends and those close to me so I could focus on my images and what I needed to do to improve what the sport identifies as weaknesses in my physique. Finding this balance and choosing to keep one foot in the subculture and one foot out in stage three made me feel like the person I was before I began competing²⁶.

How others understand images of myself are based on those that I choose to share. After I competed in my first show I posted the images that I felt showed the best parts of my body on Facebook. At the time I didn't realize I was using images to form desired impressions with friends and loved ones. This worked and everyone praised my physique and hard work which started the process of me seeing myself as being different through images from bodybuilding. When I decided to share my posing video with Dr. Carreiro I chose to share images of myself where I felt comfortable with my muscle size. I was attempting to create the same desired impressions but now I see that how I identified with images prior to this stage was largely based on how I wanted others to see me. I wanted to be known as the bodybuilder with large muscles and a defined physique but forcing myself to reflect on these experiences has changed who I am and how I view myself as a person not just through images.

As I entered the third week of March I felt more and more excited about the competition. I am just under four weeks away from stepping on stage and Dean and Jacob have stepped up the intensity of my training. We have changed my repetitions for legs, shoulders, back and chest to 20 for each workout and I am only taking 30 seconds in between each set. We have kept my repetitions for arm workouts low with higher weights to ensure I don't lose any muscle size but training as fast and furious as this after dieting for a month is making each day harder and harder. The realization of stepping on stage and sharing my images with hundreds of people in four

²⁶ Difference, see table 1.2

weeks is not as stressful as it was in August of 2013. I am bigger, more developed and as long as I stick without regiment I will look very conditioned.

On March 16th I stepped on the scale to see what I was weighing. After eating five meals and drinking over a gallon of water I weighed in at 225 lbs. This meant I was closer to 222lbs. without the excess weight from food and water. I was right on target with my final goal of 215 lbs. and it feels so much better to be bigger than 190 lbs. like my first competition. Each time I look in the mirror I feel that I am looking more like a bodybuilder than ever before²⁷. I am creating the symmetry and proportion that the NPC judges look for and while it will take years of training create myself into a physique that could potentially win a competition I feel good about where I am. Each day I am continuously asked about my progress and how far out I am from my competition from other gym members and I answer politely but instead of divulging about how I am feeling or how I think I look I continue on with my training. I am attempting to alter the perceptions to others even in the gym subculture itself that I am different from them. I am in the zone and focusing on getting to my final image and seeing how my identity and understandings of hyper-masculinity in the subculture have changed.

While my inner drive to keep training and dieting each day continues on into the fourth week of stage three I find myself fantasizing about food more than anything. I am starting to live for my cheat meal each week and I am planning exactly what I will eat when I walk off stage April 12th and what I will eat the next day. Dean and Jacob now have me eating my cheat meal each Wednesday so that my muscles will look fuller on Friday and Saturday and we will do this during the week before the show. Each night I watch Diners, Drive In's and Dives on the food network and find myself thinking more about the food I can't eat than what is happening in the

²⁷ Visual Rhetoric, see table 1.2

news. As March 19th rolled around I sped home from the gym and pick up a thai-chicken pizza and dark chocolate cake from the grocery store near my house. I savored every bite because I knew I wouldn't taste flavors like this again for another seven days, but all of the daily sacrifices made this meal feel so good. The next morning after I finished my cardio session before going to work I could see how different I looked. My physique had become so conditioned and my metabolism was burning so fast that the junk food I consumed the night before made me look better. Without lifting any weights my legs were full, striated and with veins showing and my abdominals were more defined than the morning before. In the grand scheme of body creation in bodybuilding I am finding that this trick is one of our best kept secrets. Those outside of the subculture think all I do is eat chicken and rice and while I do consume this each day I am also allowing my body to have something it will enjoy each week. Not allowing myself to feel rewarded for all of the hard work each week would be torture and even though it is only one meal it makes me think of how good pizza and Gatorade will taste on the evening of April 12th.

During week four of stage three my girlfriend was out of the country visiting her father for ten days. I took this opportunity to focus on my research and training but I also made sure that when I picked her up from the airport on March 22nd I didn't talk about my training or the competition. I wanted to hear about her experiences and look at her pictures because while she was gone I realized how much I enjoy having her around each day and how I was neglecting her during stage one and two because of my focus on images. She even noticed how I have changed because she finds herself asking me more and more about my preparation for the show because I keep it separate from our relationship. My attempts at changing my previous impressions with her worked and we were happy together which makes those hours out of the day that I segment

for bodybuilding feel even more productive²⁸. I can see how solidifying boundaries between certain domains in my life is benefiting how I identify with myself and understand my images. When it comes time to take my progress pictures or go through a posing practice with Dean and Jacob I know I can focus strictly on where I am in relation to my final on stage image. When I leave the gym and go home I give myself an hour or more to work on my research and then the rest of the evening is spent with my girlfriend and my dog. Even though this may only be an hour or 45 minutes each night it is just enough time to take my mind off of all the stressors from each day and recharge to get up the next day and do it all over again.

On March 26th I headed to the gym to meet Dean and Jacob on my lunch break so they could see how I looked exactly two and a half weeks away from the competition. I was immediately called out by Dean for not shaving my legs and not tanning. I told him I had been so busy from work and my research that there just was not enough time in the day. He made it clear that from this day forward I needed to be completely shaved, tan 2-3 times per week and bring my competition trunks to the gym for posing practice. To be completely honest I had put off the shaving and tanning because it is the part I dread the most about contest preparation. While I have acknowledged my acceptance of the stereotypical feminine and homo-erotic practices of the sport such as critiquing my naked images with other men I still feel awkward having to shave my body and sit in a tanning bed. Dean and Jacob are pleased with my progress and after posing for 40 minutes I nearly collapse to the floor. As I change back into my work clothes Dean drills into me that while I may not like to shave or tan it will get me into the right mindset of preparing for a show. The lifting, dieting and other sacrifices are all important but darkening my skin and being hairless shows more of my definition and development.

²⁸ Impression management, see table 1.2

Later that evening I came back to the gym to train legs and sat in the tanning bed for the first time since August 2013 and when I got home I shaved my legs. When I woke up the next morning I saw that Dean was right and the tanning and clean shaved physique definitely showed more of my progress as I went through my mandatory poses. No matter how long I decide to compete I don't believe I will ever feel fully comfortable with tanning and shaving. Analyzing my experiences up until this point has definitely opened my eyes to how I understand the subculture of bodybuilding and my images, but these two factors definitely make me feel less masculine²⁹. The only other sport I know of where men where trunks and shave their bodies is swimming, but they do not have to tan. I think that my exposure to seeing my girlfriend tan consistently over the last 5 years has caused me to label this practice as feminine and I used to joke about other men that tanned but now I am set to tan multiple times per week and will be spray tanned the night before my competition.

After making it through the fourth week of stage three I hit a wall of physical exhaustion. I am now beginning to practice my 60 second posing routine for the evening portion of the competition and trying new poses other than the seven mandatories after training is not easy. After picking up some tips from Dean and Jacob this week I went to the gym on Thursday to train shoulders then I spent 30 minutes listening to potential posing songs and trying new routines. I had been so focused on my diet and perfecting my mandatory poses with Dean and Jacob that I didn't even worry about my posing routine until now. Now that I have a better understanding of how the judges evaluate competitors I know that the evening posing routine is more for spectators and fans that come out for support. During the morning when the judges tally up points based on how I stack up against other competitors in each mandatory pose is

²⁹ Femininity, see table 1.2

where I stand the best chance of placing in the top three. Those who are new to the subculture or outside of the subculture tend to think the competitor with the best song and posing routine will win.

In preparing for my first show I spent weeks perfecting my routine and I had each movement timed perfectly with the beat of my song. Now that I am preparing for this portion of the competition I see where images of bodybuilding can give feminine impressions to those who don't understand the sport. Most spectators come to the evening portion to see the routines and announcements of who has won their class. If people only see the evening portion of competitions and not the prejudging in the morning then it looks like we each have practiced a choreographed dance where we strut across the stage flexing our muscles. One bodybuilder after the next shows their best poses to songs that fit their personalities while trying to get the crowd to applaud their physique. In a way this part of bodybuilding competitions is very similar to beauty pageants. Videos of my routine will be posted on YouTube for everyone to see and anyone who chooses to watch will rhetorically make sense of these visuals and form their own impressions of me as a competitor and the subculture of bodybuilding. I wish there was a way to show spectators that the competition images are just our final product and that we actually win competitions based on our performances during the morning prejudging but now I understand why bodybuilders and those outside of the subculture do not understand each other. This is where this research will benefit others in understanding how images of male bodybuilders are created. By sharing my progress pictures and highlighting my experiences over the last three months I have found that the true competition in bodybuilding is between each competitor and themselves. All of my work, preparation and training is equivalent to the nine innings played during a baseball game leading to the final out or final at bat of the game. I have only shared

images of myself before a competition with other competitors, my girlfriend and Dr. Carreiro in this study, but discussing how different my body looked just two months before I stepped on stage will show readers of my research that I will not always look like I do in my preferred competition images.

As I entered the final week of training leading up to the North Carolina State Championships I felt more than prepared. I perfected my mandatory poses and evening routine. My weight dropped to 220lbs. and Dean has implemented a plan to cut my water weight without drinking less water before I weigh in Friday before the show. My body was exhausted from just over seven weeks of dieting and training but to feel confident in my image and balanced at the same time I know this was all worth it. I went through two more lifting and three more cardio sessions this week and starting on Monday April 7th I began taking prescription water pills called aldactones that serve as a diuretic. Dean was focused on balancing my body so while I am taking these I will also continue drinking two gallons of water per day to offset what is being pulled out of my body. I did this so my muscles looked as defined as possible. If you do not take any forms of diuretics your stomach and certain body parts can look bloated on stage. We also kept my diet the same it had been throughout stage three on Monday and Tuesday then Wednesday and Thursday I ate 300 grams of carbohydrates along with one cheat meal to fill up my muscles. On Friday April 11th I went to a tanning salon in Charlotte to get spray tanned. They had to use a specific tanning solution to get my skin as dark as possible and after standing in my posing trunks in front of a complete stranger and attempting to let the spray dry I realized Jacob and I had to get on the road to the weigh in. I couldn't put my shirt on because the tanner had not dried so I walked out into the parking lot with no shirt on looking as if I had been extremely sun burned.

Jacob, myself and his girlfriend then met at my house and headed down the road to the High Point Plaza Hotel. As we walked into the front lobby the stench of spray tan and perfume filled the air. There were at least 100 male and female competitors in line to weigh in, tan and get their NPC card. Once it was my turn to step on the scale I stripped to my trunks and could feel the eyes of other competitors glaring at me to see if I was in their class. The judge said my final weight was 214 lbs. which is exactly where Jacob said I would be in early January. I felt great, while I was noticeably not the biggest or most muscular man in the room I didn't care. I knew I had done everything I could have throughout stages one, two and three to weigh 15 lbs. more than my first competition and still look as defined. After we left the weigh in we realized that the tanning salon I had stopped at did not spray my entire midsection under my trunks so once I began to pose I had white streaks of skin showing, which would not be pleasing for the judges. Our only option was to pick up women's make up and have Jacob's girlfriend touch up my bright tan lines that evening. We laughed as I stood in the hotel bathroom that evening and she dabbed me with make up because this was just another example of how the subculture of bodybuilding uses feminine practices to create our final images. I was surprised to see that this idea worked and after a long day of work, driving and preparation we fell asleep to get rest for the big day.

The next morning we woke up and I immediately took extra water pills and ate an 8 ounce sweet potato. We walked over to the High Point Theatre for the pre-athlete meeting and after the judges informed us of the order of events the head facilitator informed us that this was the biggest state competition they have ever hosted, with 226 total competitors. Even with that being said I was not nervous. I later walked into to the lobby to meet Dean, my girlfriend and my father who came to town to see his first competition. They surprised me by bringing my

mother as well who I thought was going to be in Richmond, Virginia visiting my grandmother. I was ecstatic to see them and it reminded me of the fond memories of them coming to watch me play baseball in college. I was already motivated to get on stage but seeing my family and surrounding myself with those who had supported me in all aspects of my life made getting on stage that morning more enjoyable than I could've imagined. I was later called back to pump up and get oiled for my classes pre-judging portion. As I stretched and went through my workouts I saw the frantic looks of nervousness and anxiety on other competitors. To calm their nerves I began speaking with all of the competitors in my class and wished them good luck. Then before I knew it we were on stage in front of hundreds of people going through the mandatory poses. I smiled and nailed each pose. As I turned from side to side I couldn't make out any faces in the audience other than the judges, but I could hear Dean, Jacob and my family cheering in the stands. The rush of adrenaline was amazing and while my time on stage only lasted for 2 minutes the eight weeks of cutting and cardio were all worth it. I had created myself into 214 lbs. of lean muscle just for the brief period in time. After the prejudging ended we went to IHOP and ordered pancakes and eggs to fill me up for the evening portion. While other customers at the restaurant stared intently at my dark orange spray tan I relished in the moment of almost being done with the competition.

This meal was delicious and after we finished we headed back to the theatre for the evening portion and announcement of class winners and places. My division did not go back on stage until 9:00pm and nearly all of the competitors were asleep or delusional due to the low water and food intake back stage. It was absolute mayhem because the theatre was sold out for the evening portion so all 226 competitors had to stage back stage until their class went on. At one point I was surrounded by 80 men's physique competitors and 50 women's bikini

competitors as they were being spray tanned and oiled up. I had to keep moving as I listened to my music for the posing routine so my muscles would not tense up. After 3 hours of waiting it was time to go back on stage. Even after the IHOP meal my body was exhausted, the judges called my name and number and I walked on stage and hit every pose of my routine. After I finished I found out that I placed 4th in the junior heavyweight class. I was excited to have placed in such a competitive division and even more excited that the competition was over. After I exited the stage I met Dean, Jacob and my family in the lobby and was greeted with hugs and Gatorade and cupcakes. I was in heaven but after putting my body through the pain and suffering it took to create this final image I was ready to eat unhealthy foods and begin planning for my next competition.

In reflecting on everything I have gone through to this point I have realized that telling my story and how I understand and identified with images of my body has truly changed the person I am. In stages one and two I struggled with looking at myself in the mirror even though I was big and muscular. I could not find the perfect mix of lean muscle and body fat, but now after weeks of dieting and training I have recreated myself into an image that resembles a bodybuilder. This is what I wanted all along, but now I understand that I do not have to just be a bodybuilder. I can be myself and have balance in my day to day life as long as I understand the process and journey. If I had not used this research to think in depth about how my progress pictures and daily images were affecting me I probably would still believe the impressions I initially tried to form to my girlfriend at the end of stage two. Bodybuilding has given me the tools to change my physique but I have decided to not let my physique define who I am. While it feels great see my abdominals and receive complements from others in and out of the subculture I know that within two to three weeks after the competition I will not resemble my on

stage images. I hope that my experiences will help male competitors and non-competitors understand that images do not define who you are and they do not define masculinity. I also hope my experiences show others that they can change their images and while the training and diet is not easy the key to balancing personal, work and social domains is to think critically about the impressions that are formed in the sharing of images and body creation process. I look forward to preparing for my next competition and using my experiences and those of other competitors will ensure I enjoy the process and keep one foot in the subculture of bodybuilding and one foot out.

Appendix II:

Visual Autoethnographic Interviews of Male Bodybuilding Competitors
Exploring the Understanding of Body Creation and Hyper-Masculinity in the
Bodybuilding Subculture

1. Tell me about your experience as an amateur bodybuilder and how did you join the subculture of the sport as a competitor?
2. How many bodybuilding competitions have you competed in and what was your first competition?
3. What challenges did you face in assimilating into the subculture of bodybuilding? Can you provide a specific example?
4. What, if any, forms of adversity did you face in entering the subculture of bodybuilding?
5. Could you describe the image you have provided from before a bodybuilding competition you competed in and how this image makes you feel?
6. How, if at all, do you identify with this image? Please provide a specific example.
7. In looking at this image what makes you feel confident? Please provide a specific example.
8. In looking at this image is there anything that makes you feel insecure or insufficient as a male bodybuilder? Please provide a specific example.

9. Could you describe the image you have provided from during a bodybuilding competition you competed in?
10. How, if at all, do you identify with this image? Please provide a specific example.
11. In looking at this image what makes you feel confident? Please provide a specific example.
12. In looking at this image is there anything that makes you feel insecure or insufficient as a male bodybuilder? Please provide a specific example.

Section 4

13. In looking at both of these images do you feel you have sufficiently created your body to fit into the subculture of bodybuilding?
14. Do you feel that these images make you masculine?
15. How would you define masculinity and have your notions of masculinity changed since you began competing as an amateur bodybuilder?
16. How often do you critique visuals and images of your body? Please be specific.
17. In looking at these images do you feel you are managing the impressions that may be given to others who view these pictures? If yes please provide a specific example.

Section 5

18. In looking at these images, if you could recreate any part of your body what would you create? Please be specific.

19. If you could change could change specific areas of your body do you think you would identify with images of yourself any differently?

20. Do you feel your identity has changed since you began competing as an amateur bodybuilder?

21. Do you think recreating your body would make you more masculine?

22. In your opinion what makes a male bodybuilder masculine? Please provide a specific example.

23. Before we conclude out interview is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experiences as a male bodybuilder and how you understand and identify with images of yourself?

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