

ABSTRACT

MISCHKE, KELSEY JEAN. Body Dissatisfaction, Body Projects, and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem: Paths into Bodybuilding. (Under the direction of Dr. Michael L. Schwalbe).

Female bodybuilders defy gender conventions; they develop musculature, engage in activities, and occupy spaces usually associated with men and masculinity. While scholars have debated what women's participation in bodybuilding means for understanding gender, few studies have investigated the process through which women become bodybuilders. The current study examines this process through life history interviews with three female bodybuilders. The data reveal the importance of reflected appraisals and body dissatisfaction as catalysts for participants' entry into bodybuilding. Negative reflected appraisals and unfavorable social comparisons problematized each woman's body during adolescence. Each responded by engaging in body projects—an organized set of activities aimed at transforming the body. Through body projects, participants reshaped their bodies, generated efficacy-based self-esteem, and altered their self-conceptions—in turn altering their lives. However, despite the enhanced self-efficacy and higher self-regard that resulted from their body projects, the negative reflected appraisals the women received as adolescents had lasting effects. The women continued to see features of their bodies as problematic. This research contributes to knowledge regarding identity verification, emotion, action, and the self by demonstrating the central role of the body in shaping self-feelings. It also demonstrates the value of life history methods for uncovering the social psychological processes that affect life trajectories.

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Body Dissatisfaction, Body Projects, and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem:
Paths into Bodybuilding.

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all who struggle to accept their body.

BIOGRAPHY

Kelsey Mischke was born and raised in rural southwest Minnesota. In 2011, she graduated from Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU) with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology. While at MNSU, she focused on female athletes' relationships with their bodies and the influence of "fitspo" media images. She continues to focus on gender, the body, social psychology, and inequality (race, class, gender, and sexuality) as a graduate student at North Carolina State University. In her free time she enjoys lifting weights and running.

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INTRODUCTION

The first time I encountered a female bodybuilder, I was both mesmerized and perplexed. Studying her chiseled and tight body, I marveled at how her broad shoulders tapered into a narrow waist, at the separation in her leg muscles, and at how her back muscles rippled under her tanned skin. A regular at my college gym, I'd routinely gaze upon her body with feelings of admiration and disgust, desire and repulsion, as she expertly swept through the weight room. Who was this woman? How did she come to develop this body? And more puzzling, why would she want this body?

Many have fallen under the spell of the perplexing case of female bodybuilders. Sociologically, and specifically in terms of gender, female bodybuilders are an anomaly. By building muscular, lean, and defined physiques, participating in traditionally masculine activities, populating traditionally masculine spaces, and often voluntarily taking steroids and other performance enhancing drugs that lead to the permanent development of masculine features (e.g., more angular face, facial hair, leathery skin, pronounced Adam's apple, lower-pitched voice) female bodybuilders defy gender conventions.

Scholarly debate has ensued over what female bodybuilders' bodies mean for gender. Some scholars argue that female bodybuilders ultimately reify hegemonic masculinity through their idolization and embodiment of muscularity, and through activities associated with building a muscular, defined body (Brace-Govan 2002; Johnston 2010). Others suggest that female bodybuilders accomplish ideal femininity, evidenced by the control women exert over their bodies, their competition performances, and their accomplishment of the fit ideal—a body that is lean and defined yet still possesses curves (Grogan 2008; Grogan et al. 2004; Johnston 2010; McGrath and Chananie-Hill 2009). Many argue that female bodybuilders are gender outlaws,

rebels, and transgressors who both challenge and conform to binary gender norms (Bartky 1988; Bordo 1993; Boyle 2005; Johnston 2010; McGrath and Chananie-Hill 2009; Obel 1996; Shilling and Bunsell 2009).

Few studies, however, have actually investigated the motivation behind women's participation in bodybuilding. The focus on gender has limited sociological inquiry and produced "aesthetic judgements" (Roussell et al. 2010) about bodybuilders' bodies and activities. Those that have examined the experiences of women who bodybuild do not interrogate the meaning behind respondents' accounts of empowerment, self-confidence, control, community, sensations, and aesthetics (Brace-Govan 2002; Gilchrist 2008; Monaghan 2001; Probert, Leberman, and Palmer 2007; Roussell et al. 2010; Roussel and Griffet 2000; Suffolk 2015; Worthen and Baker 2016). While these *outcomes* help explain women's continued involvement in bodybuilding, they do not account for how women come to resist gender conventions and participate in what many people define as a masculine sport.

The question of how women become involved in bodybuilding initially motivated this research. I sought to discover the process by which women come to immerse themselves in a traditionally masculine activity, in masculine spaces, and build masculine bodies. How is it that they come to build bodybuilding physiques despite being socialized to perform femininity, being held accountable for performing femininity (West and Zimmerman 1987), and being sanctioned for not doing so (Chananie-Hill, McGrath, and Stoll 2012)? By what process do women come to defy gender conventionality and become bodybuilders?

To understand women's pathways into bodybuilding, I conducted life history interviews with three female bodybuilders—Mariah, Becca, and Ellie (all pseudonyms). Life history interviews allow for an in-depth understanding of how people's identities evolve over their

lifetime (Connell 1992; Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2008; Laslett 1991; McAdams and Adler 2010; Somers 1994). They also allow for exploration of whole persons and the historical, political, and social contexts that shape their life choices (Connell 1992; Laslett 1991; Maynes et al. 2008). Finally, life history methods often produce deeper understandings of meanings and processes, and can illuminate the stories of people in marginalized groups (Connell 1992; Ewick and Silbey 1995; Mayes et al. 2008). As such, it is an ideal method for examining the life events that shape women's trajectory into bodybuilding.

While the question of how women might become involved in bodybuilding motivated this research, my data reveal the importance of reflected appraisals—others' reactions to us, which we then interpret (Gecas 1982; Schwalbe and Staples 1991)—and body dissatisfaction as catalysts for participants' entry into bodybuilding. Negative reflected appraisals and social comparisons problematized each woman's body during adolescence and tarnished her self-views. Each responded by engaging in body projects—activities aimed at transforming the body. Through body projects, participants not only transformed their bodies; they also reformed their self-conceptions, coming to see themselves as efficacious actors across contexts.

I proceed by describing the social world of bodybuilding and briefly sketching the lives of my participants. I then situate my inquiry in the literature on the body, emotions, self, and identity. I next describe what I found by investigating the women's journeys into bodybuilding. I organize these findings temporally by respondents' life stages and bring them in conversation with the existing literature on identity verification, reflected appraisals, self-efficacy, and the body. The findings of this research contribute to knowledge of self-concept formation by illuminating the central role of the body in eliciting reflected appraisals and enabling efficacious action. This research also demonstrates the value of life history methods in sociology.

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF BODYBUILDING

The first men's bodybuilding competition was held in 1901 and the sport escalated in popularity during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. The first women's bodybuilding competition did not occur until 1977. While women were involved in men's bodybuilding competitions via sideline beauty pageants, it was not until the late '70s that popular demand prompted the creation of competitions with identical rules for judging men's and women's bodies (Bunsell 2013; Mansfield and McGinn 1993; Martin and Gavey 1996). Tensions arose, however, between expectations of muscularity—a traditionally masculine characteristic—and femininity. These tensions still affect women's bodybuilding today (Bunsell 2013).

Women's bodybuilding expanded across the U.S. and world in the early 1980s (Bunsell 2013). This began the “golden era” of female bodybuilding (Boyle 2005; Bunsell 2013). Backlash soon ensued, however. As bodybuilding began to be televised in the 1990s, concerns that women were becoming too masculine grew. Federations began incorporating criteria for judging not only women's muscularity but also their femininity. Competitors were expected to “display their femininity” while on stage, and judges were instructed to evaluate competitors based on how closely they embodied an ideal feminine shape—one that was muscular, but not too masculine; lean, but not emaciated (Bunsell 2013).

Judging criteria continued to be rewritten throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, briefly minimizing gender differentiation before moving toward guidelines that required of women a more feminine display. In 2000, guidelines instructed judges to score competitors—in addition to their symmetry, presentation, separation, and muscularity, “BUT NOT TO THE EXTREME” (emphasis original)—on the appearance of their face, make-up, and skin tone. “Whether or not they carry themselves in a graceful manner while walking to and from their position onstage”

was also an added criterion (Bunsell 2013:31). Additionally, 2005 saw the emergence of the “20% Solution” in the International Federation of BodyBuilding and Fitness (IFBB) judging standards, which called for a decrease by 20% in the muscularity of all female competitors for health and aesthetic reasons (Bunsell 2013; Romano 2015).

New categories for women also emerged in the 1990s and 2000s. Fitness, which combines the aesthetic judging of traditional bodybuilding with a choreographed gymnastics-like routine was created in 1995 and quickly grew in popularity. In 2005, Figure competitions were added. This middle division expects less muscularity and definition, but a greater display of femininity. Figure competitors are required to wear high heels and are evaluated on qualities such as their jewelry, hair, and make-up in addition to their physique. Finally, in 2010, the Bikini division was introduced (Bunsell 2013). The Bikini division calls for even less muscularity and definition than Figure, but requires a similar feminine display. Touted by supporters as a more “approachable” division (Owens 2013) for women who want a “natural” look (Bunsell 2013), Bikini competitors often have to do less weight training in preparation for a show. They instead focus primarily on fat loss.

These changes in the world of bodybuilding have led to claims that the sport has been declining since the 1980s (Boyle 2005; Bunsell 2013). Those who define bodybuilding as traditional Bodybuilding argue that the sport is mostly dead since the final Ms. Olympia show in 2014 (e.g., Romano 2015). While smaller women’s traditional Bodybuilding shows exist, few women continue to compete in the Bodybuilding division.

For those who define bodybuilding more broadly and include the other competitions—Bikini, Figure, Fitness, and Physique (the division between Figure and traditional Bodybuilding in muscularity)—the sport is growing in popularity and visibility. Women are increasingly

participating in Bikini and Figure shows across the United States. Since 2010, the number of bodybuilding competitors has nearly quadrupled around the world, including in the United States (Strader 2016).

Training and Competing in Bodybuilding

A typical training period or “prep” for a bodybuilding show is as follows. No less than two months before a show, competitors begin seriously training as prescribed by their coach. They follow strict meal plans and exercise routines to get their body to a certain size and shape by the show date. Competitors also begin designing and practicing a posing routine, seeking assistance from a posing coach to learn how to position their body on stage. The specific poses they are expected to do are determined by the division in which they compete.

As the show date gets closer, competitors “dial in” on their dieting and training to ensure that they get into the best possible form. Competitors order a specialty made competition suit, heels, and jewelry several weeks ahead of the show date. While judging guidelines often allow competitors to wear off-the-rack swimwear, most choose instead to wear bikinis especially designed for bodybuilding shows. To accommodate expectations of a feminine display, these bikinis are often embellished with jewels, sequins, sparkles, and other decorations.

In the final weeks before a show, competitors’ calories are further reduced to achieve the fat loss necessary to display muscle definition. This reduction of calories is often accompanied by an increase in cardiovascular training. It is not uncommon for competitors to begin “two-a-days,” or training twice a day, six or seven days a week.

The week of the show, or “peak week,” requires the most drastic diet regime. Carbohydrates are often eliminated and then reintroduced just before the show to help

competitors “fill out,” or help their muscles swell. Water intake also increases, often to three or more liters a day, until two or three days before the show when competitors begin their water cut. By the time they walk on stage, competitors are dehydrated and depleted, but their bodies are lean, firm, and defined.

Competitors also begin preparing their skin during peak week. The whole body is waxed or shaved to achieve a smooth look. Competitors begin applying layers of spray tan to create a dark brown tone. The darker color makes muscle definition and separation more visible under the stage lights.

The night before a show, competitors attend a mandatory “night meeting” at which they are briefed on the show’s organization and rules by a panel of judges. The next morning, competitors wake up early—often at 3:00 or 4:00 am—to begin preparing for pre-judging—the morning portion of the show. They often pay a show-hired professional to do their hair and make-up.

During the morning show, competitors are called out individually to perform a T-walk (Bikini and Figure) or their choreographed posing routine (Physique and Bodybuilding). After each competitor has performed individually, all competitors in the category line up and pose at the request of the judges. Judges then rearrange competitors to compare their bodies and determine placement.

The night show constitutes the entertainment portion of the event. While placements can be changed during the night show, the purpose is to delight the audience. Competitors are again called to pose individually and are arranged for comparisons while audience members for their favorites. Awards are then distributed by division and age categories (e.g., Novice, Open, and Masters) within divisions. Depending on the number of competitors and look of their bodies, one

or two competitors may be awarded a Pro (Professional) Card, which allow them to compete in shows at a higher level.

Upon the show's end, competitors often celebrate by feasting on foods that were prohibited during prep. It is not uncommon for competitors to begin prepping for another show a few days to a few weeks following the end of a show. After the season ends, bodybuilders begin the process of reverse dieting—slowly returning their body to a normal state by reintroducing food, resting, and slowly returning to exercise. While some take a complete break from disciplining their body, bodybuilding is an everyday lifestyle for many, especially those who compete at the professional level.

Participants

Mariah is a white, 24-year-old, unmarried heterosexual woman who makes \$50,000 to \$69,999 per year managing a specialty gym franchise in the southeastern United States. She holds a master's degree in public health. Mariah is new to bodybuilding. She began bodybuilding while completing her graduate degree and working part-time at a gym. There she met Eliza, a Pro Physique bodybuilder who convinced her to try a bodybuilding show. Mariah competed in her first Bikini show in October 2017 in both the Novice and Open categories. She competes in natural (i.e., drug-free) federations.¹

Becca is a white, 44-year-old, unmarried heterosexual woman who is completing her bachelor's degree at a large state university in the southeastern United States. She currently

¹ Bodybuilding federations can be divided into two categories. Natural federations test competitors for performance enhancing drugs prior to a show. This is usually done through a polygraph test and/or urine sample analysis. Mainstream federations such as the NPC and IFBB tend to *not* test competitors for drugs unless officials organize an explicitly natural show. The use or non-use of steroids in bodybuilding divides the community between natural competitors and non-natural or “natty” competitors, the latter of whom are often regarded as “real” bodybuilders.

makes between \$30,000 and \$49,999 per year working part-time as a pharmacy technician, but intends to pursue a professional degree in medicine. Becca is a Master bodybuilder, a category reserved for older competitors, and is the most experienced of the three women. She has competed in over eight Figure and/or Physique bodybuilding competitions, and is also a bodybuilding judge. She competes in a mainstream (i.e., not drug-tested) federation such as the National Physique Committee (NPC) or International Federation of BodyBuilding and Fitness (IFBB).

Ellie is the third of my cases. She is a white, 35-year-old heterosexual woman, and has been married for several years. Ellie holds a master's degree in education, but currently works at a company that manufactures electronic utility equipment and supplies. She makes between \$70,000 and \$99,999 annually developing and implementing process improvements that increase efficiency, reduce waste, and improve product quality. Ellie has more experience in the world of bodybuilding than Mariah, but less experience than Becca. She has competed nine times in the past three years, and recently received her Pro Card at the end of the 2018 season. Like Mariah, Ellie competes in natural federations and recently surpassed the age threshold to begin competing in the Masters division.

THE BODY AND THE SELF

This research brings the body to the forefront of sociological consideration. I show how the body plays a central role in processes of identity (non)verification, how identity nonverification—specifically nonverification of gender performance—generates negative self-views, and how negative self-views can motivate compensatory body projects that generate positive self-feelings. In this section, I discuss literature pertaining to the body and the self as it

relates to this study's findings. I argue that research on the identity verification process has neglected the body. By examining the paths women take into bodybuilding, I find a process that begins with reflected appraisals that fail to verify gender performances.

The Body, Self, and Identity

The body is central to social life. As an object, the body is layered with cultural, historical, and political meanings. It is a sign-vehicle (Waskul and Vannini 2006) that acts as a peremptory signifier (Schwalbe and Shay 2014) in interaction. Actors orient themselves to others based on information inferred from the appearance and performance of other's bodies. We also learn about ourselves through reactions to our bodies. Others' responses to our bodies tell us who and what we are. The body can thus affect self-conceptions and self-esteem.

Despite the body's centrality to social life, U.S. sociology has taken the body for granted until recently. While not totally absent, the body's role in social life is often overlooked, despite its relevance for understanding meaning, action, interaction, discourses, practices, behavior, power, and knowledge (Crossley 2007; Waskul and Vannini 2006). Although the American Sociological Association organizes a section dedicated to the sociology of body and embodiment, *Annual Review of Sociology* has yet to publish an article on the body.

I focus on how the body is involved in the identity verification process, and how it matters for self-conceptions. As a peremptory signifier, I argue that the body is central to identity verification. As I will show, identity verification significantly shapes self-views. Identity theory, however, has neglected to consider the importance of the body in this process. This research addresses the taken-for-granted role of the body for identity verification and self-concept formation.

Identity Verification

The identity verification process begins with information from reflected appraisals—that is, with others’ reactions to us. This information is interpreted as affirming or not affirming an idea we have about who we are. This idea, or self-image, is what Burke and Stets (2014) call an identity standard. If there is a match between reflected appraisals and the identity standard, the identity claim is verified (Asencio 2013; Cast and Burke 2002; Burke 2006; Burke and Harrod 2005; Stets and Burke 2014a; Trettevik 2016). Identity nonverification occurs when reflected appraisals do not affirm identity claims (Burke and Harrod 2005; Stets 2005; Stets and Burke 2014a; Trettevik 2016).

Identity nonverification can manifest in two ways: Positively and negatively. Positive identity nonverification occurs when actors’ identities are verified above and beyond the identity they hold (e.g., if a teacher is assumed to be a superintendent). In contrast, negative identity nonverification occurs when actors’ identities are challenged or contested by others’ reflected appraisals (e.g., if a doctor is assumed to be a nurse) (Burke and Harrod 2005; Stets 2005; Stets and Burke 2014a; Trettevik 2016). While ample social psychological research exists on positive identity nonverification and its effects, fewer studies have examined the consequences of negative identity nonverification.²

Studies that have examined processes of negative identity nonverification find that it leads to negative self-views and diminished self-esteem. Stets (2005), for example, experimentally tested the effect of identity nonverification on the worker role identity and found that negative identity nonverification led to strong, negative emotions. Stets and Burke (2014b)

² I specifically speak to the literature on identity verification. While studies may examine negative reflected appraisals and their effects on individuals, they do not connect their findings to the identity verification process.

also found that reflected appraisals falling below actors identity standards produced negative emotions about the self.

Gender is one realm in which identities carry physical expectations. Masculine and feminine body expectations are typically defined in opposition to each other with masculinity serving as the norm to which femininity is compared. While performing masculinity involves signaling the body's capacity to dominate by possessing a large, muscular physique, conventions of femininity demand that women signify submissiveness by being small(er than men), short(er than men), and weak(er than men). Signifying a submissive self also involves disciplining the body into meeting certain appearance standards (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993).

Since the expansion of the fitness industry, body ideals and meanings around the body have shifted (Maguire 2007). Women are still compelled to signify a submissive self by being thin while possessing sexual characteristics of femaleness—curvaceous hips and breasts. Women are now expected to display their youth, health, and femininity by possessing a slightly muscular, but still lean body with curves in the “right” places (Brumberg 1989; Bordo 1993; Grogan 2008; Markula 1995; Richardson and Locks 2014; Thomsen, Bower, and Barnes 2004; Homan 2010). While the shift from a slender to slightly muscular body may appear significant, women are still expected to possess less muscle than men. Furthermore, the value of the female body remains defined primarily by its attractiveness.

Combined, these expectations create a narrow image of what an acceptable, desirable, womanly body should look like—an image that many women find difficult or impossible to achieve (Bordo 1993; Grogan 2008). Gender therefore constitutes an identity where claims may not be verified in interactions and may lead to negative feelings.

How negative gender performance nonverification may manifest in interactions, its emotional consequences, and how actors respond over time has not been investigated. While Milkie (1999) shows how body-specific interpretations of reflected appraisals negatively impact adolescent girls' self-esteem, she does not examine their behavioral responses. Likewise, while Stets (2005) and Stets and Burke (2014b) mention identity change as a potential response to nonverifying reflected appraisals, neither study examines actors' actual responses.

Mustillo and colleagues' (2012) research shows how negative emotions about the body can persist overtime, but they also do not investigate actors' behavioral responses. Examining the effects of obesity stigma on female adolescents' body image and self-esteem across a 10-year period, they found enduring effects. White adolescents who were overweight or obese but later approached normal weight range continued to exhibit greater body-image discrepancy and lower levels of self-esteem compared to peers who were never overweight or obese.

Stets and Burke (2014b) also found evidence that emotions have enduring effects on moral identity over time. This conclusion, however, is based on emotional assessments before and after respondents participated in a survey. While studies have called for longitudinal, qualitative investigations of the effect of negative nonverifying reflected appraisals on self-esteem and future action, this call has mostly been unanswered.

This research fills this gap in the literature by showing how negative reflected appraisals spurred body projects that in turn affected self-conceptions. Though I began this study interested in female bodybuilders as a case of gender nonconformity, upon understanding the social forces that unfolded in each woman's life, I found connections between gender nonconformity and self-concept formation. My research thus speaks to sociological interests in how the body is

reflexively experienced, how the body and self inform each other, and how efficacious action can change self-conceptions and, in turn, lives.

METHOD

Life history interviews are ideal for understanding processes of identity formation and change (Connell 1992; Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2008; McAdams and Adler 2010; Somers 1994), examining how actors construct themselves and their worlds (Connell 1992; Laslett 1991; Maynes et al. 2008; Somers 1994), and capturing the intimate interaction between social context and individual decisions (Connell 1992; Laslett 1991; Maynes et al. 2008). Life history interviews are especially powerful for revealing subversive stories—stories that disrupt dominant and hegemonic narratives—and revealing processes that maintain inequality (Connell 1992; Ewick and Silbey 1995; Mayes et al. 2008). Furthermore, life history interviews allow for understanding of how race, class, and gender affect the unfolding of a person’s life, not just the outcomes that might be associated with membership in these categories (Mayes et al. 2008).

The three life histories I explore can be seen as “cases.” Each case allows a study of a path into bodybuilding. Comparing the cases reveals similarities and differences in these paths. The cases also reveal the social forces operating on the women’s lives and how the women dealt with these forces. The analytic goal in taking this case study approach is to open the “black box” (Becker 2014) of the process of social life (Small 2009).

The findings of this research are not intended to generalize to the population of all female bodybuilders. The purpose is to examine the processes through which bodies shape self-conceptions and through which those self-conceptions in turn shape life trajectories. This research thus aims to achieve analytic generalizability, providing insight into elements of a

generic process, not generalize to the characteristics of a larger population. The point is to examine women bodybuilders to learn more about processes that operate in multiple contexts and affect many kinds of people.

Recruitment

I began recruiting participants in January 2018 through personal contacts and an approved posting on a private Facebook page exclusively for female bodybuilders. Locating female bodybuilders not only presented a challenge, but recruiting women who were willing to share their life stories presented an additional hurdle. I sought participants who competed or trained to compete in a bodybuilding show in the Bikini and/or Figure divisions. Prospective participants contacted me to indicate interest. I subsequently provided more information about the study. The three women who agreed to participate were diverse in age, life experience, and bodybuilding experience.

Each participant was interviewed three times. Following Connell's (1992) approach, interviews were loosely organized around institutional transitions. The first interview focused on childhood, adolescent, and young adult experiences. Questions explored family background, childhood memories, elementary school, middle school, and high school experiences, play and extracurricular experiences, relationships with significant others, and college experiences. The second interview focused on experiences prior to bodybuilding and entry into bodybuilding. The third interview focused on bodybuilding experiences and future plans related to bodybuilding. Probes elicited detailed responses, stories, and emotional details, especially concerning the body. Although an interview guide was used to direct the conversation, participants were encouraged to tell their life story however it made sense to them.

I transcribed each interview verbatim, determining follow-up questions prior to conducting the next interview. Potentially identifying information was deleted or modified during transcription. Each participant was interviewed for a total time of over six hours. Participants also completed a short demographic questionnaire at the end of the final interview.

Analytic Procedure

I began analyzing each participant's story individually. I used line-by-line (open) coding to initially examine the data. I then explored emergent codes and the relationships between them in memos. I used this process for the first two interviews with Mariah and Becca before moving to focused coding as themes and patterns began to emerge across interviews (Charmaz 2008). Upon completing two interview waves, I began examining the similarities and differences across participants' life stories and trajectories into bodybuilding. I repeated this process upon completing the final interview with Ellie, my third participant.

In addition to coding interview transcripts, I wrote profiles to understand participants "from the inside out" (Harrington 1985:273). Writing profiles also helped me identify common themes across cases. I worked to preserve telling details, struggles, and seemingly important aspects of context. Memos and profiles eventually formed the basis of my analysis of body dissatisfaction. This process also yielded several emergent concepts: *body projects*, *control regimes*, and *body career*. These concepts are discussed in detail later.

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE BODY

Through negative reflected appraisals and unfavorable social comparisons, Mariah, Becca, and Ellie each learned that her body did not meet cultural ideals. As I will show, these

negative reflected appraisals and social comparisons damaged each woman's feelings about herself during adolescence and resulted in body dissatisfaction—negative feelings arising a perceived discrepancy between one's actual and desired body (Grogan 2008). Each reacted by undertaking body projects—an organized set of activities aimed at transforming the body—intended to fix what was perceived as problematic. These body projects also enhanced self-efficacy and self-esteem independent of reflected appraisals.

I begin by examining how reflected appraisals and social comparisons led Mariah, Becca, and Ellie to feel dissatisfied with their bodies. I then show how they responded to their feelings of dissatisfaction by working on their bodies. Through their initial body projects, each gained mastery over her body and experienced herself as a causal agent, in turn enjoying enhanced feelings of self-efficacy. Later, I show that the negative reflected appraisals that set the women on the path to bodybuilding have had lasting effects. Mariah, Becca, and Ellie continue to engage in body projects to maintain bodily control.

The Importance of Reflected Appraisals

Mariah's, Ellie's, and Becca's feelings of body dissatisfaction arose from critical responses from others for failing to perform femininity in specific ways. From an early age, Mariah's height was framed by others as a problem. Outpacing her peers, even as a toddler, others began to sanction her for her height. This first manifested in the form of being dissuaded from participating in gymnastics by coaches due to her rapid growth.

I was a little gymnastics girl, like a little toddler. I grew so fast—I was the biggest one on my little gymnastics squad and they were like, “Ah, yeah, she should do cheerleading or something.”

While, as a toddler, she was content to move to cheerleading, this experience of being encouraged to leave an activity she enjoyed because of her height remained a vivid memory for Mariah.

Mariah's height continued to be problematized by others as she grew older and became more aware of body ideals for women. Sprouting to 6 feet in high school, she towered over her peers, girls and boys. Through a combination of critical reflected appraisals and height comparisons, she realized that "I was just, like, not as normal to be—like, my friends that same age were, like, literally four inches shorter than me and all the boys were shorter than me. That was another problem."

Her experiences with her first boyfriend, Jerry, especially shaped her perspective on her height as a problem. Dating someone shorter than her, even slightly, Mariah defied the norm that women should be smaller and shorter than their male partners. This elicited sanctions in the form of teasing from peers, which led Mariah to feel like she was the man in the relationship.

[My first boyfriend, Jerry,] he was, like, maybe like a half an inch shorter than me, too. And I was like, "I feel like the man of the relationship." Like, that's how I felt. Like, I felt like I was the man of the relationship. And people did say stuff about it... they didn't make fun of me. It was more him. Like, "Hey, when are you having a growth spurt?" And I'd [jokingly] be like, "Yeah, when are you gonna have it? Because I'm waiting." So, it wasn't like, you know, they were giving him props for dating someone, like, tall, you know?

Even though Jerry was the target of the teasing, Mariah experienced stigma due to her height. This experience had lasting effects for Mariah. After Jerry, Mariah began dating "basketball guys, because they're always tall." By dating men as tall or taller than her, Mariah was able to avoid transgressing gender norms and negative feelings about her herself due to her height.

Along with her height, Mariah's weight increased. Despite understanding that this was part of growing up, Mariah was "very self-conscious" of her height and weight, especially in

contexts where these bodily features were salient. Comparisons with her friend Angie, who was both shorter and lighter than Mariah, also contributed to Mariah's self-consciousness about her body.

Like, my neighbor Angie—we'd always play with each other and her—she always had a scale in her bathroom, I remember that. And she's two years older than me, but I'm also—I was always like five or six inches taller than her, you know? I'm just a taller person. And I do remember, like, being really self-conscious about the way that I felt with her. Because she'd always, like, being small, you know, kind of have a judgmental [reaction], I guess you could say, that I was, like, 20 pounds heavier than her. I mean, if you're a half-foot taller, you kind of have to, like, weigh more.

As in the matter of choosing boyfriends, Mariah learned how to avoid situations where she would feel bad about her body.

I do remember, like, she'd [Angie would] go into her mom's bathroom and weigh herself and she was like, “Oh my gosh, I weigh 89 pounds” and I was like, “Interesting”... I was like, “I'm not gonna go step on that scale.” So, you know, that was kind of my mindset, you know, that way... it was just like, yeah, I don't wanna feel bad about myself going in there and weighing myself after she did, knowing that I would weigh more than her.

Mariah also remembers how strangers, especially children who “don't really have a filter,” would point out her size and call her “big.” While being called tall did not bother Mariah as much, being called big was distressing and made her feel out of place in her small, Southern home town.

Even though I was taller, I didn't, like, look like—I wouldn't say chubby—[but] back when, you know, you're little and, you know, kids don't really have a filter and they just say whatever comes. They'd say, “Wow, that girl is really tall and she's my age! That girl's”—we didn't use tall, but we used big. “That girl is big.” So the terminology, it does matter, you know?

While women can be tall as long as they are thin, being tall and of average or greater than average body size violates expectations that women be small(er than men) and short(er than men). For Mariah, “big” came too close to fat, and therefore too close to all the meanings associated with being fat: lazy, immoral, unhealthy, unclean, undisciplined, and repulsive. By

being called big, Mariah's body was stigmatized and, as a result, her feelings about her body and self were damaged.

For Mariah, negative reflected appraisals from the time she was a toddler in gymnastics through her experiences dating her first boyfriend, keyed on her height and overall size. These reflected appraisals problematized her size and led her to feel self-conscious about her body. Ellie was similarly sanctioned for not performing femininity as an adolescent. Like Mariah, these sanctions had lasting effects on Ellie's feelings about herself, especially about her body.

Ellie's story of body dissatisfaction in high school is linked to the reflected appraisals she received for failing to embody gender expectations. Specifically, Ellie received critical reactions from others because she did not shave in the right places at the right time, did not perform femininity by wearing make-up and styling her hair, and because her body was not the ideal shape and size for an adolescent female. As a result, Ellie, like Mariah, became self-conscious about her body.

I was definitely self-conscious and my mom never showed me how to do makeup or do my hair or anything... I was just not very stylish and, you know? I wanted to be, but I didn't have an older sister or anything to show me how to do that. So yeah, I was never confident with my appearance.

Ellie remembers how she received scrutinizing appraisals from her female peers for not shaving her legs. In the context of gym class, Ellie's body was placed on display and evaluated for both its appearance and performance. Despite having blonde leg hair that was barely visible, Ellie was still expected to engage in beauty work by shaving her legs, and was sanctioned for not doing so.

I remember in 6th grade, we were playing softball [in gym class] and I was sitting outside with some other girls on the bench—we were waiting for our time to bat or whatever. We had shorts on and the other two girls next to me were talking about when they shaved their legs, if they shaved, like, just their calves or if they shaved up to their thighs, too. And they looked at me and they're like, "What do you do?" And they looked down at my

legs and they were like [disapprovingly], “Oh, you don't shave.” And I remember that. And I remember, like, going home and, like, telling my mom, “I have to shave my legs.” I've always been blonde. Like, my hair was super light. Like, there was no reason why I had to shave, you know? Peer pressure says.

As West and Zimmerman (1987) argue, performing gender is an interactional accomplishment.

Ellie's gym class story demonstrates how individuals are held accountable by others for performing gender and how gendered performances are not just expected but compelled.

Like Mariah with her friend Angie, Ellie began to engage in body comparisons that led to feelings of body dissatisfaction in high school. Looking to others' bodies for information on how her body should look, Mariah further realized how her body did not meet conventions of femininity. Despite weighing less than 120 pounds at 5'2", Ellie was troubled by the size of her lower body, especially her thighs, hips, and butt. She remembers not only comparing herself to her same-sex peers, but also to idealized images of women's bodies in the media. These comparisons left Ellie with no doubt that she was “not one of the hot girls.”

In high school, I was more self-conscious, because at that point, you know, this is late '90s/early 2000s, so, like, the super skinny, like, Abercrombie [& Fitch clothing corporation] model type was what was in. So that's, like, how all the popular girls looked and they were all very put-together and had, like, the nicest clothes and, you know, perfect hair and whatever. And I just didn't have that. I've always had a butt. I've always had thighs, like, from skating, and that's just how I'm built. And that wasn't the desirable body type at that point in time at all... I was never confident with my appearance. I still don't feel great about it most of the time, but I'm a million times more confident than I was when I was younger.

Lack of attention and rejection from boys/men problematized Ellie's body and led her to feel dissatisfied with it.

I did have crushes in middle school and high school. I did ask the one guy my senior year that I did have a crush on if he wanted to go to one of the dances with me, but he ended up—he wasn't going to the dance anyway. Yeah, so we didn't go... I only went to dances my senior year and homecoming. Like, I went with—one of my mom's work friends had a son that was my age but went to a different school, and they, like, set us up together for the day. He was super nice and he was a great sport about it and everything, but I mean, it wasn't, like, a romantic spark or anything like that. And then the spring dance, I just went

with my girlfriends from work. And then for prom, one of my friends was going with this guy, and another guy that went to his school just went as my date. So yeah, I never—I didn't even have my first kiss until my freshman year in college. So yeah, I just never felt, like, super attractive or anything in high school.

Ellie did not have the kind of dating experiences that would make a girl feel good about herself, especially in high school. Through these experiences, combined with not being a part of the popular group and facing sanctions from peers for not performing femininity, Ellie learned from others' negative reflected appraisals that her body was inadequate.

While Mariah and Ellie received reflected appraisals that problematized their over-developed bodies, Becca received critical reflected appraisals because her body did not develop enough. As with Mariah and Ellie, the negative reflected appraisals Becca received led her to realize how her slenderness and lack of feminine curves posed a problem for embodying femininity.

I had no boobs [in high school]. Still don't have any boobs. My whole family had them and I'm just like, "I don't understand." So I think I was just a little self-conscious with the no boobs, but I was always very lean. I had, like, really skinny legs, like, going through puberty and stuff... If I look back now, like, my body was pretty much perfect at that time. I didn't view it as that. I didn't view it as that attractive.

Instead of experiencing satisfaction with a 100-pound body that more closely reflected thin body ideals, comparisons of her body to the bodies of peers and family members left Becca unsatisfied with her slenderness. Rather than desiring a smaller body—like Mariah and Ellie—Becca desired more shape, particularly when it came to her legs and breasts.

For Becca, cheerleading problematized the size and shape of her body. Though small and light in weight—desirable characteristics for flyers who are tossed into the air and caught during stunts—Becca was taller than most flyers. As a result, her body did not fit neatly into the roles on the cheer team in high school and posed a problem for her position in the team.

[My body was in] kind of like [an] in-between stage... I had the height or long legs, so I mean, I felt like my legs just were, like, going everywhere [when I was flying]. But I didn't have the size to go along with being a base.

Even today, Becca's legs remain a source of frustration. "Even now, that's the one thing that I have to fight... I'm still fighting those damn legs."

Finally, also like Mariah and Ellie, sexual rejection from boys, specifically her high school boyfriend, Keith, negatively impacted Becca's feelings about her body. Though she now understands that Keith's refusal to have sex with her, despite "beg[ging]" him, stemmed from his issues with women, at the time Becca saw his rejection as a response to her slender body and its lack of curves. Responding to my question "Do you remember how that felt [when Keith wouldn't have sex with you in high school]?" Becca said,

I think I took it personal... I think it kind of hit my self-esteem a little bit, because I already had a problem that I felt like I was too skinny, because I couldn't put on any weight. I mean, we're talking, like, I was like 99 pounds... Now I understand why he did it. But back then I didn't, and probably couldn't understand... Yeah, that hurt.

Combined, negative reflected appraisals from peers, position-specific body ideals in cheerleading, and rejection from Keith led Becca to view her body as a problem and fueled her feelings of unattractiveness and general dissatisfaction with her body.

In sum, during their adolescent years, Mariah, Ellie, and Becca each received critical responses from others that sanctioned them for failing to perform femininity in specific ways. Mariah's height and overall body size violated expectations that women should be small(er than men) and short(er than men). Ellie faced criticisms for not doing expected beauty work and being too shapely. Becca learned of how her slenderness and lack of womanly curves made her body unattractive and awkward to deal with in the context of cheerleading. Receiving negative reflected appraisals problematized aspects of each woman's body and provided them with

information to assess their own bodies negatively, leading to feelings of body dissatisfaction. These feelings would eventually fuel action in the form of body projects.

BODY PROJECTS AND THE JOURNEY INTO BODYBUILDING

For Mariah, Ellie, and Becca, feelings of dissatisfaction that arose from reflected appraisals and social comparisons characterized the adolescent phase of their body careers and led them to engage in body projects. (A body career is an evolving relationship with one's body; a body project is a set of activities aimed at transforming the body so that it more closely aligns with a socially constructed ideal or performance goal). Body projects require adoption of a control regime—a set of techniques employed to transform the appearance or performance of the body. Bodybuilding, for example, requires a control regime involving dieting and weight training to build a lean, muscular, and well-defined body.

While Mariah's, Ellie's, and Becca's trajectories into bodybuilding differ, each responded to feelings of dissatisfaction by working on her body. In learning the skills and accessing the resources necessary to alter the shape and size of their bodies, they experienced themselves as causal agents able to control their bodies. These experiences shifted their body careers and generated feelings of self-efficacy. These feelings in turn fueled the women's continued participation in bodybuilding. Here I describe how the women came to undertake these body projects in search of new feelings about their bodies and themselves.

The Path into Bodybuilding

Of the three cases, Becca's path into bodybuilding was the most direct. Wanting to add size to her slender frame, Becca joined a gym in her senior year of high school and began

reading *Muscle & Fitness* magazine to learn how to eat and train to build her body. At the gym, Becca encountered both male and female bodybuilders. While the image of a female bodybuilder “intrigued” her, it was the men in the gym who brought Becca into bodybuilding.

I think [I was] about 16 and when I started going to the gym... I started lifting in high school when I was cheering. So, like, school would be over, [and] I'd drive downtown, train, and then come back and go to the games... I knew one of the guys in the gym—it was a little downtown gym—and he showed me a couple of things. And then I just picked it up, and my form was just like frickin' amazing. And then before I knew it, I mean, I was in there training with, like, one of the biggest guys, too... His name was Darien and he was a Pro [Bodybuilder]... After, I'm like, “Hey, I can finally make my legs take some shape”... And I think that's what kept me going to the gym. It was probably a nice escape for me and it was something that I could succeed in that I was in control over.

These early experiences with changing the size and shape of her body, and being exposed to bodybuilding and bodybuilders led to Becca's decision to compete.

Becca continued lifting throughout her first semester in college. However, as a sorority member, and as memories of her dad's suicide began to surface, Becca gravitated toward partying, drinking, drug use, and late night eating. She also stopped lifting. The consequences quickly caught up with her in the form of weight gain.

Like, the first semester, I worked out and I remember I still had some size... I remember thinking like, “I'm surprised I'm eating all this and I'm not having a problem.” And then second semester, I noticed that I was keeping my legs and the muscle definition, but then I put on a bikini and I'm like, “Whoa, what just happened”... It was all in my stomach, because that's where I hold my weight is in my midsection. So when I would dress, I wouldn't have noticed it... [but] going out in the sun, when you buy that bathing suit and you finally get out in the sun or maybe like spring break time, yeah. That's [when I realized I gained fat in my midsection].

Looking in the mirror at her body in a swimsuit induced a crisis for Becca. She responded by recommitting to the gym with the goal of losing the weight she had gained. “I got it off really fast... [I] just went in the gym. I mean, my body just jumps back so fast the second I even get in the gym... I think I dropped it in probably not even a month.”

Though Becca responded immediately to the realization that she had gained “bad” weight in her midsection, she said, “I really didn't [feel bad about gaining weight].” While Becca might be trying to project an image of control, rationality, strength, and mastery over her emotions, she might not have experienced much distress over her weight gain due to her earlier success in reshaping her body. After years of monitoring her body, she knew to watch her midsection for signs that her body was getting out of control.

I know I'll hold weight in my stomach, so I can kind of gauge my body fat according to what my stomach looks like. I'm not concerned, because I can start dieting again and just get it right back... My body just responds really quickly... I don't let it get that much out of control.

Becca did not return to bodybuilding until her mid-twenties. She continued to focus primarily on school and partying throughout her second and third years in college. Just before her senior year, she married Dan, a businessman and cocaine addict. Dan quickly became emotionally abusive and controlling. Becca said her control was “taken away” as Dan banned her from going to the gym, dissuaded her from working, manipulated her into avoiding her friends, and convinced her to sell most of her possessions, including her car. Upon finally working up the courage to leave him, Becca began a five-year journey of finding herself again and repairing her self-esteem. She immediately returned to the gym and was competing within a year.

I threw myself into competing right afterwards, and I think probably succeeding with that helped with it and gave me the self-esteem to go for school... I just threw myself into competing. That's all I did was worked and competed.

Emerging from her prison-like marriage, Becca formed an all-male team of trainers and coaches—one for her workouts, one who programmed her diet, and another from whom she took posing lessons—and launched into her first prep. Though extremely depleted when she finally stepped onto the stage, Becca won her first show. She would go on to place first at many shows

throughout her eight years of competing. Becca later expanded her participation in bodybuilding, becoming a judge in addition to competing.

While Becca, who was exposed to the world of bodybuilding early in her life through others who lifted at her gym, quickly aspired to compete, Ellie's journey into bodybuilding was less direct and more protracted. Though dissatisfied with her adolescent body, especially the size of her hips and thighs, it was not until Ellie gained the "Freshman 15" during her first year of college that she initiated a body project to change the appearance of her body. As with Becca, weight gain induced a crisis. Cafeteria food, combined with a deep depression that set in while Ellie was home for winter break from college, resulted in a 10-pound weight gain.

Initially, freshman year, I lost a little bit of weight, and then as, like, we started to, like, actually eat [a lot of cafeteria food], I gained. I gained weight the second semester of my freshman year—a little bit first semester, but mostly second semester when I was so down.

Upon noticing her weight gain, Ellie's already negative feelings about herself and her body were exacerbated.

I just felt big... my clothes weren't fitting the way they used to and—so I was just like, you know, I need to do something about this. I need to feel better about myself and get my confidence back.

At home that summer, Ellie dedicated herself to a weight-loss body project. She employed a control regime that combined restrictive dieting with bodyweight and dumbbell workouts. Ellie recalled that she "felt a lot better about myself after I worked hard that summer and I was able to go back to school sophomore year and I had lost—was back basically where I was." This was Ellie's first memorable experience of how a successful body project could produce feelings of control and mastery.

When Ellie returned to school that fall, her restrictive eating habits came with her and became her sole control tactic. Returning thinner, along with a new hairstyle, Ellie received

validation and approval for her weight loss. She remembers a male friend who noticed her changed appearance.

They [my friends] noticed a difference. They definitely did... I remember seeing one of the guys who lived on the floor below us and he was like—he, like, didn't recognize me at first, because, like, my hair was different and I had lost the weight. Yeah, so, definitely I got some comments [but they were all] a mix of, like, surprised and good. Nobody was concerned. Nobody asked me, like, how I lost the weight or anything like that.

Ellie, however, continued to restrict her diet until she sought mental health services and began medication for depression and anxiety in the spring semester of her second year. Much like people with anorexia, Ellie created strict rules for what she could and could not eat.

I [restricted my eating] even more so when I was back at school... I created a lot of rules for yourself [sic]. Like, I can't eat cheese, because it has too many calories, you know? So there was certain, like, good foods and certain, like, bad foods, and then, like, when I was back at school, I was very focused on, like, the numbers of what I was eating and limiting as much as possible. So I ate a lot of, like, Slimfast bars. You know, so my dinner might be a Slimfast bar and then if I was still hungry I'd have, like, a 100-calorie bag of popcorn, you know?... So yeah, it was just really restrictive.

After beginning medication, Ellie's obsession over calories and fear of gaining weight again subsided.

The medication helped me not make that, like, the center of everything where it didn't make me feel, like—like, I still feel bad if I overeat, but at that point it was, like, a competition with myself, like, how little I can eat? I don't do that anymore. And it's not as constantly on my brain as it was before and I don't have as many rules for myself of, like, which foods are bad and I can never eat them and, you know, what I have to eat instead and what's okay to eat.

Nonetheless, Ellie did not cease her body projects all together. She began dancing as part of an ensemble group at her college to keep her body under control. Additionally, in her senior year, she joined the YMCA and learned how to work out by doing circuits—a continuous round of different exercises that are repeated following a brief period of rest. As she graduated from college, attended graduate school for her master's degree in education, and worked for several years as a middle school teacher, Ellie continued to follow various diets such as Weight

Watchers, South Beach, and Curves meal plans. However, it was not until she began working at Curves—a small, all-female gym chain—that Ellie discovered weight lifting.

At Curves, Ellie began incorporating weight training into her routines, albeit on the “little wimpy machines that they had.” Curves helped Ellie ease into weight lifting without the aggressive, masculine environment of most weight rooms. Being for women only, Ellie found Curves less intimidating. “I mean, now it doesn't bother me at all to lift around guys, but at that point I did not really like it.”

Ellie, however, did not continue to lift weights. After she finished her master's degree and began teaching, she found little time and energy to work out and instead continued to rely on occasional diets to control the size of her body. After leaving teaching, a change that gave her more time and energy for other aspects of her life, Ellie returned to the gym. Instead of following circuit workouts, though, Ellie specifically began looking for lifting programs.

So I had been doing various types of circuit training at the Y, at Curves, at home. I wasn't really working out much... I was doing Weight Watchers a couple of times, but not really working out. And then I was just looking around online and I was actually looking at some stuff on Reddit and I found Strong Curves [lifting program]... I got the book. And so I started doing that program just on my own, let's see, a little bit before I turned 30.

After completing the 12-week program marketed to women, Ellie did not feel that her body had changed much until she looked at her before-and-after pictures. “I didn't really lose any weight. I didn't think it made that much of a difference, but then I looked at my before pictures and my after pictures, and I looked a lot different.”

Encouraged by the changes she saw, Ellie continued to lift weights, progressing to a different program, one that many women complete after Strong Curves. “I tried Thinner, Leaner, Stronger for a little while. I didn't like that one as much.” However, her newfound interest in lifting inspired her to continue to learn about fitness, especially given the proliferation of

information available on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Reddit. In doing so, Ellie discovered bodybuilding.

So all during this time I was like reading stuff online about fitness and, you know, all that, and I saw a couple of things online about Bikini competitions, and kind of just started reading about them, get[ting] a little bit interested in it.

Intrigued, she sought out a local competition and attended with her husband, Andre.

We went, we watched it, and I was like, “I think I could do that”... It was a challenge for me. At that point, I knew I really liked lifting and I liked the transformations that I saw on my [now-]coach’s website, and I was just like, “You know, I think I can do this. I’d like to see what I can do in terms of, you know, lifting and getting stronger and getting more muscular”... I just liked the vibe of the show. It was fun, with music and everything. And I don’t know, I just got it in my head. I was like, “I can do this.”

And so began Ellie’s journey into bodybuilding. That fall, Ellie hired her sole trainer and coach, Cassie, who would formalize Ellie’s exercise program, customize her meal plan, teach her how to pose, coach her on competing, and guide her through reverse dieting. Ellie also began acquiring resources for competing: A \$50-125 federation membership, a competition suit, clear competition heels, jewelry, and supplements. She would go on to compete in two Bikini shows her first year before switching to natural-only (i.e., polygraph and/or drug-tested) competitions and competing in three of them her second year.

In her third year of competing, Ellie participated in four natural shows and finally accomplished her goal of becoming a pro, obtaining not one, but two Pro bodybuilding Cards. This, however, would be her final year for the foreseeable future as Ellie’s body project shifted to preparing to have a baby. Though Ellie might return to bodybuilding in the future, she said she thought she might first work on reviving her childhood ice skating skills.

While Becca and Ellie undertook projects to transform bodily features they learned were problematic through others’ reflected appraisals, Mariah’s story is different and reveals how context matters for meanings and evaluations from others. Though Mariah also learned how her

adolescent body was problematic through others' reflected appraisals and social comparisons, instead of trying to change her appearance, she first turned to basketball. While her height, specifically, was problematized in non-athletic contexts, when it came to basketball her height was an asset.

I kind of transitioned from upper cheerleading to upper basketball, and I loved it. I was always the biggest one, so I would just run little circles around them. But yeah, that's kind of how I started. When I started really enjoying basketball and realizing now that I was actually good, that I was actually getting a lot more positive feedback on my height just because you got recruited by the coaches, and so I knew a lot of coaches there like, "Ooh! I want her, because she's tall." So that kind of felt good, you know? ... All that positive reinforcement. I really started, like, being more confident, and that's how I really started to grow in basketball ... I started realizing that, "Oh, being this tall, like, isn't a bad thing. Like, I can actually use it for something." So I do remember that being, like, a big—like, "Oh, this is ok," you know? "Oh, it's fine. It's actually a good thing."

Within the context of basketball, Mariah's height facilitated her athletic success. A bodily feature that was once stigmatizing made her desirable on the court. Through positive reflected appraisals from coaches, fans, and teammates, Mariah learned to redefine her body.

Mariah, however, still engaged in body projects outside of basketball, albeit with different goals than Becca and Ellie. Accepting an offer to play basketball at a small college in the South, Mariah began to work on her body's performance capacity. Invested in her college basketball career, but with little playing time as a first- and second-year undergraduate, Mariah used running to maintain fitness. While running can be used to shape the size of the body, Mariah's goals were focused on improving and maintaining her body's performance rather than its appearance.

Like my freshman and sophomore year, like, I wasn't getting much playing time... I would actually go up there [to the gym] and run while the guys were playing, just because, like, my teammates who are getting, like, 40 minutes a game are going to be in great shape... like, I'm going to get out of shape. So I actually started going up there and, like, running... And then I'd feel like I actually played a game, you know?... So I kind of got into it that was just to keep up, you know? In that matter of, like, not for looks but to keep up with teammates who were actually playing, so I could play ... And then, like,

junior and senior year, as I was getting 30 and 40 minutes a game, I kind of backed it down, because it came to more of—I need to save myself for the game.

By her senior year, however, basketball became a chore for Mariah. Though she met the end of the season with a touch of sadness, she was also “ready to be done” and felt freed from the confining schedule and primacy basketball demanded, especially in terms of her body. After her basketball career ended, Mariah was free to explore and develop her body’s abilities in ways that would have hindered her performance on the court.

So, like, basketball ends at like the end of February. You have, like, March, April, May, and you literally have nothing to do except school, and by that time, you're a senior. You have everything done. Like, you're basically free. So actually when I started, like—I wasn't forced to go to practice anymore, because I didn't have to participate in postseason... I was so happy. I was like, “Oh my gosh, I get to do my own lifts now” ... That was actually my time to, like, go to the gym and, like, focus on, like, what I wanted to do.

No longer worried that exploring her body’s abilities through lifting might compromise her on-court performance, Mariah was able to pursue her own goals related to her body. With the knowledge and confidence gained from learning compound lifts with her team and the personal training certification she earned in her second year of college, Mariah began a period of physical exploration. Discovering strength imbalances from basketball, Mariah continued to focus on the performance of her body, specifically intending to address her strength differences.

[My routine] really just came from, like, what I was learning from, like, my training certification ... I really wanted to work on not only compound lifts but like—Because those, they don't really focus on the instabilities in your body, you know? You could be pulling more on one side than the other. So, like, splitting your workouts into, like, single body, like, halves, I learned that you can actually train your body to be more stable. Because I have scoliosis ... But it's not as bad, because I do—like I make sure I split everything up.

Mariah also changed her diet. No longer having to rely on carbohydrates for her on-the-court performance, Mariah decreased the amount of carbohydrates she was consuming and increased her protein and vegetables. Notably, however, unlike many people who intentionally

diet, Mariah did not track her calories or macronutrient intake with the goal of shedding body fat. That her clothes were fitting differently and that her body was changing came as a surprise.

I actually realized that, like, my body composition was changing. I wasn't even weighing myself or measuring myself. I just noticed that my clothes were fitting differently. Because, like, being an athlete, unfortunately, like, you rely on carbs for energy, and so that's, like, a lot of your diet. It's, like, making sure you have enough energy just to, like, make it out alive. That's why we'd always, like, carb load and carbs and carbs and protein and carbs. Overdo the carbs ... So, like, you know, eating that many carbs, you can tell, like, you're, like, fluffier. It didn't really bother me in my basketball uniform, but I could definitely tell, like, after I stopped playing and started working on my own, and actually, like, focus on, like, what I wanted to eat. Like, I ate more, like, chicken and veggies and I started realizing that, like, "Ok, I don't need to eat as many carbs now." That's when I started noticing that my clothes were fitting differently. And I was like, "Ah, I'm losing weight." Like, I literally didn't weigh myself, like, at all in college. Like, I had no idea how much I weighed ... but I realized that my clothes were fitting differently and I was like, "This is weird" ... They fit like they were bigger. I was like, "Interesting." So that's kind of when I realized that, like, muscle mass definitely, like, weighs more, but you're more, like, slim, you know? And so I was like, "This is interesting."

Lifting weights, combined with consuming fewer carbs and more protein, did not change Mariah's weight, but it did change the composition of her body. Though she continued to maintain roughly the same weight, the muscle she built replaced the fat she was losing and led to an overall change in the size and shape of her body that went unnoticed until Mariah noticed that her clothes felt looser.

Thus, throughout this period of exploration, Mariah, like Becca and Ellie, discovered her ability to transform her body. Learning that she could not only improve the performance of her body but also its appearance and composition, and now free to explore her ability to transform her body in new ways, Mariah was drawn to fitness work. "I didn't really expect to get in it so fast. I kind of just got sucked in." She first turned her interest in fitness into a personal project, then a career. After working at gyms as she earned her master's degree, Mariah was offered a managerial position after school, which she accepted. It was while working at a corporate gym

during graduate school that Mariah met Eliza and began her journey into the world of bodybuilding.

Mariah had heard about Eliza. As a local Pro Physique bodybuilder, Eliza was renowned around Cedar. “She’s really well known in Cedar for, I guess, [being] a trainer. I just knew she was a really jacked woman.” Intrigued by her reputation and physique, Mariah finally approached Eliza while they were both in the gym. After working out together, Eliza introduced Mariah to the possibility of bodybuilding.

So I just started talking to her ... We just kind of hit it off and I would see her every once in awhile. And then one day, she put me through, like, one of her small leg workouts. Absolutely murdered me. And so I was like, “I love you for this,” and so that’s kind of how we got started talking about—she was like, “Hey, so, you know, I think you’d be really good at this.”... She was like, “You know, you have a good body. You should definitely compete.” And I was like, “What?” I had no idea what competing was. And I was like, “Crossfit?” and she was like, (delivered flatly) “No.” She, like, showed me pictures and I was like, “Girl, I cannot go up there in a bikini and walk around. No thank you. I’m good.” And she was like, “Ok, well just think about it”... She’s like, “I coach down the street. I have my own little studio.” She’s like, “You should come check it out.”

Though initially hesitant to accept Eliza’s offer, Eliza’s compliments and the opportunity to learn to transform her body under the direction of an International Federation of BodyBuilding and Fitness (IFBB) Pro bodybuilder continued to swirl in Mariah’s mind. After doing more research, which left Mariah more confused than ever about bodybuilding—“Like, literally you just go up there and just walk around? I had, like, no idea; it was so confusing to me”—she was still drawn to the challenge. Mariah reconsidered Eliza’s offer, seeing it as not only “a different way to challenge myself,” but also an opportunity to expand her expertise as a trainer. A break between jobs at different gyms and before the start of graduate school provided what Mariah saw as an opportunity to try bodybuilding.

She really just talked me into it. And she had a little studio so I would—once a week I would go in and work out with her and all the other girls. There were, like, Figure girls, Bikini girls, and Masters Physique... Just, like, seeing them, working out with them, and

talking with them, it was how they were, like, connected more about, like, “Oh, it's not just about like going up there and showing your”—it's really more about networking and—I felt like I was on a team again. So, like, the competitiveness came back out and, like, that's kind of what sucked me in and I was like, “Oh! Ok, I think I can do this!”... I thought this was a different way to challenge myself.

As with Becca and Ellie, Mariah's interest was piqued by the bodies of women bodybuilders. Also like Ellie, Mariah saw bodybuilding as a new challenge. For all three women, their initial body projects helped them realize the capacity they possessed to transform their bodies. This “baseline” sense of self-efficacy then allowed them to look upon the bodies of female bodybuilders with appreciation and interest, and interpret bodybuilding as a new challenge for themselves.

Mariah's body project shifted after her first show. Mariah no longer wanted to be a “teeny-tiny little Bikini girl.” Her interest changed to a project emphasizing strength rather than appearance.

I don't wanna be that lean. I really wanna work on my strength and, like, I wanna be able to do, like, 20 pull-ups, you know? That's like, that's my goal. I wanna be able to, like, deadlift, like, 350 pounds, you know? Like, things like that. Or, like, hip thrust, like, 400 pounds. Some of these girls have gorilla glutes. Like, that is, like, my goal. So I think my mindset has changed.

Mariah has not ruled out returning to bodybuilding in the future, perhaps as a Figure competitor—a “happy medium,” as Mariah puts it, between the leanness required in Bikini and the muscularity in Physique.

BODY PROJECTS AND SELF-EFFICACY

Each woman's body projects generated self-esteem through reflected appraisals and self-perceptions of competence. Their early experiences with body projects to put on size (Becca), lose weight/control the size of the body (Ellie), and improve the performance of the body

(Mariah) led to praise from others and enhanced feelings of control. Pictures and the physical sensation of their clothes fitting differently were interpreted as evidence of their skills and mastery over their body.

Ellie, for example—discussing what she enjoyed about her first lifting program, Strong Curves—described the positive feelings her body projects produced, including early feelings of accomplishment as she realized she was getting stronger, and later feelings of accomplishment as she saw her body changing.

I liked the feeling of accomplishment of being able to, like, finish the workouts or see a difference where, you know, this exercise is easier for me today than it was before. Or I added weight, like that, seeing the improvement. And then over time it's also been seeing the changes in my body.

The sense of self-efficacy Ellie developed through her initial body projects and bodybuilding also extended to other contexts.

Some of the confidence and stuff that I've learned from that [bodybuilding] carries over into, like if I'm doing presentations at work or something like that. Again, it goes back to, if I can do the bodybuilding show, [then] I can stand in front of these people [coworkers] and talk about something I know about at work, you know?

In general, Ellie sees herself as “a million times more confident than I was when I was younger,” an outcome she attributes to bodybuilding.

Mariah also experienced feelings of satisfaction as she realized her clothes were fitting differently and that she had lost weight after making changes in the gym and to her diet after basketball ended. She also described with a mix of amazement and glee how her body changed during her prep. While prepping, Mariah fully realized the control she had over her mind and body, how she could “manipulate” both her body and mind through training.

For Becca, too, learning how to lift and eat to gain size, and altering the shape of her legs by increasing their muscularity, demonstrated her ability to control her body. When it threatened

to escape her control during college, Becca did not experience emotional distress, because she knew she could quickly regain fitness. “I’m not concerned, because I can start dieting again and just get it right back... my body just responds really quickly... I don’t let it get that much out of control.”

At the time of our final interview, Becca was the most out-of-shape she had been since before training for her first show eight years earlier. Despite the lack of definition in her arms—an area of her body (along with her stomach) that she monitors for evidence that it might be escaping her control—Becca said she was not worried. “I know what I can do with my body. I know what I can turn it into... I mean, I don’t really have that [arm and shoulder definition] now, but, I mean, I can get it back.”

Mariah’s enhanced self-efficacy was evident in the ambitious strength-based goals she set for herself. She aspired to “deadlift, like, 350 pounds... or, like, hip thrust, like, 400 pounds”—goals that are, by average standards of women’s strength, extraordinary. Having previously achieved both performance and appearance goals, Mariah did not doubt that she could reach these goals. Previously successful body projects gave her the confidence to undertake new ones.

My data suggest that actors may undertake body projects when their bodies are problematized by negative reflected appraisals and unfavorable social comparisons. Because negative reflected appraisals play a key role in shaping feelings of self-regard, especially for girls/women, critical reflected appraisals can lead to negative feelings about oneself. Mariah, Becca, and Ellie all experienced such appraisals in regard to their bodies. Moreover, they experienced these appraisals during adolescence, a time when they were searching for self-meaning, identity, and belonging.

Not everyone can succeed at body projects. Of those who undertake body projects, many fail to realize their goals. Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's journeys into bodybuilding demonstrate the importance of access to material and symbolic resources. Each had the physical ability, time, money, and access to technology to aid their efforts. Each also built important connections with insiders who brought them into the world of bodybuilding and helped them develop the discipline, attitude, and knowledge vital for success (cf. Chambliss 1989). The material and social conditions of their lives make their body projects possible.

For all three women, feelings of body dissatisfaction arising from reflected appraisals inspired body projects. These initial projects focused on changing features that were problematized by reflected appraisals and comparisons to peers and idealized images of female bodies. Through their initial body projects, each altered the physical appearance of her body in desirable ways, eliciting positive reflected appraisals and bolstering feelings of self-efficacy (cf. Brumberg 1989). The success of these initial projects made bodybuilding—when the women encountered it—seem like an intriguing and meetable challenge. As it turns out, they did meet the challenge, though they retained scars acquired earlier.

LASTING INJURY: DYSMORPHIC PERCEPTIONS

Despite the enhanced self-efficacy and higher self-regard that resulted from Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's body projects, each, to different extents, feared loss of control of her body. The women continued to see features of their bodies as problematic, even if the problems had been "fixed" through their body projects. Those features that were initially problematized by negative reflected appraisals and social comparisons remained sources of concern that affected the women's body images.

For Mariah and Ellie, both of whom felt that their bodies were too big, reverse dieting was emotionally and mentally challenging. Each perceived her body as larger than it actually was during the reverse dieting phase. For Mariah:

It's just completely different, like, seeing yourself like that [onstage] and expecting, like, that's how you're supposed to stay, you know? It is mentally challenging to see yourself at one point and expect like, "Oh, I wish I could stay like this forever," you know? And just see yourself three weeks later and literally I think I put on 10 more—I put on 10 pounds. But it was just, like, normal, you know, because those 10 pounds were gone in the last 3 weeks, so I was just putting that back on. So I was still way slimmer, but still in my head I was like, "I don't think I'm supposed to look like this," even though it was, like, completely normal. So that was really, like, difficult to deal with... That was hard to deal with. But I got over that eventually.

Despite understanding that the weight she was (re)gaining was healthy and merely returning her body to normal, the fear of becoming too "fluffy" remained.

Ellie also spoke of feeling that she put on too much weight too quickly while reverse dieting. She called this experience "body dysmorphia:"

It is like feeling like you've all of a sudden become, like, a gigantic person, even though you're not just because you're no longer stage lean. So it's like that body dysmorphia really kicks in after the show... It's this constant battle between my mouth and my head. My stomach wants one thing but my brain is seeing my body as being all fluffy... It's just this mental battle... You watch the scale to see it go down for so many weeks and then to see it start to go back up. And it's also a fear of, as you gain weight, like, going back to how you were before you started competing.

Ellie characterized reverse dieting as a "mental battle" between what she wants and knows she must do—eat and gain a healthy amount of weight again—and fear that her body will escape her control and gain too much weight. Like Mariah, Ellie struggled to manage her emotions as her body returned to normal. Ellie specifically feared re-experiencing her freshman year weight gain: "[I'm] probably just thinking that I'm going back to that. Going back to looking unhealthy, feeling unhealthy, not having control over my body."

While Mariah and Ellie feared becoming too big after their shows, Becca struggled with the perception that she is too small. Becca experienced this form of dysmorphia just before competing in shows and on other occasions where her body might be evaluated, such as prior to judging a show. She could become obsessive about her body, anticipating how others might evaluate her.

I have a show I have to judge in two months, so that stress has hit, because I can't, I can't go to the show looking skinny... I gotta start putting food in my body. So when I look at that then that obsessiveness, like, that will come back, because you don't want to go to the show, because everybody [is like], "Oh, you look great! Are you doing a show?" you know? So that's probably where more of the pressure is when, in reality, do they even realize whether I've put on weight or not, you know? So that is where a little of the craziness comes in.

To avoid obsessing about her body, Becca would wear baggy clothes, especially in the weeks leading up to a competition.

I'll wear baggier clothes to keep me from analyzing how I think I feel in an outfit... The more you cover up, the better you are... The more you're covered up, you won't let that image get the best of you, which is mostly what it is. I mean, it's not your emotions, it's the mirror. And what you see in the mirror and what your brain is seeing are two different things. That's what causes your emotions. So you just have to not look so much.

Though Becca realized that her image of herself was distorted and that she did not look as she imagined, she still experienced distress. To avoid these feelings, Becca hid her body from herself.

As Becca's body became increasingly lean and defined in the weeks leading up to a show, she also struggled with conflict between how her body looked and her image of a womanly ideal. The loss of her uterus and cervix due to a hysterectomy in her late 20s added to the emotional strain. Lacking fat above her pubic bone put her on a troubling borderline, she felt, between maleness and femaleness. She believed that slightly larger breasts would help her feel and look more like a woman.

When you get to a point in weight lifting that you know that you're, like, a little bit on the borderline, and when you start dieting for shows, you'll hit a point when you're there. Like, the little fat above your public bone is gone and things just even start to feel a little bit manlier. I think those times I'm kind of like, "Okay, now if I had boobs it would be better." Because I think you are seeing in the mirror not what society views as a female. And not that you care what anybody thinks, but I think that that little bit would also help to keep you a little bit more attractive, because you've lost everything. And I think the wanting boobs [breast augmentation surgery] now is more of a mental thing, because I know I don't have any female parts... That's when the boobs would help a little bit... I think it's a mixture of being that lean and then so much muscle definition all at once that there is no femininity there... It's just muscle. There's no fat and there's not much that's feminine about that at all.

Ironically, in pursuing bodybuilding to add shape and size to her body, Becca produced a body at odds with the conventions of femininity. She found that she could not reconcile one source of stress without exacerbating the other.

While body projects generated efficacy-based self-esteem—feelings that are not dependent on reflected appraisals (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983)—they could not repair past damage to Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's self-concepts. The features that were initially problematized by negative reflected appraisals during adolescence had lasting effects on their self-views, body images, and body careers. These effects included concern that the body would get out of control, continued vigilance about appearance, and distorted body perceptions. These lingering concerns led the women to carry on—or consider undertaking—body projects to maintain positive feelings about themselves.

In sum, data collected through life history interviews with three female bodybuilders highlight a path into bodybuilding that began with critical reflected appraisals evoked by the failure to follow conventions of femininity during adolescence. As one source of information for self-evaluation, others' negative reactions led to feelings of body dissatisfaction and diminished self-regard. Comparisons to peers and idealized images of female bodies also contributed to negative self-feelings. These feelings characterized their body careers during adolescence and

eventually motivated body projects focused on changing features that were problematized by reflected appraisals and social comparisons.

In learning the skills and accessing the resources necessary to alter the shape and size of their bodies, Mariah, Ellie, and Becca experienced themselves as causal agents able to control and master their bodies. Altering the physical appearance of the body in desirable ways elicited positive reflected appraisals, bolstered feelings of self-efficacy, and shifted their body careers, leading them to view their bodies as personal accomplishments rather than natural failures. Within this context, bodybuilding—when the women encountered it—became an intriguing and meetable challenge.

While body projects generated positive self-esteem, they could not repair past damage to Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's self-concepts. Experiencing negative reflected appraisals during adolescence had lasting effects on each woman's body image. The body's appearance continues to be a source of anxiety for each woman. This is not a surprising outcome in a society in which women's value is defined by their appearance.

DISCUSSION

Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's journeys into bodybuilding began in middle school and high school. Each received negative reflected appraisals for not performing femininity in specific ways. This led to feelings of body dissatisfaction that negatively impacted each girl's self-esteem. Each responded to critical reflected appraisals in different ways. We can see in these responses some of the processes highlighted by identity theory.

Burke (2006) argues that actors may adjust their behavior so that they achieve identity verification; selectively interact with those likely to verify an identity; or alter their identity

standards in response to reflected appraisals. All three women adjusted their behavior to achieve identity verification, specifically verification of their gender performance. Both Mariah and Becca adjusted their dating behavior by selectively dating “big” men. While Ellie initially conformed to peer pressure by shaving her legs, she also altered her gender performance by distancing her gender performance from femininity. Ellie defined and presented herself as less feminine to deal with her lack of skill in doing gender. Becca also adjusted her identity standard by playing with her performance of masculinity and femininity in college. Finally, Mariah selected herself into a group that valued her height and helped her reinterpret its meaning.

While these short-term solutions helped the women avoid further negative reflected appraisals, their self-esteem was already diminished from their previous experiences. Negative reflected appraisals problematized aspects of their bodies that did not align with conventions of femininity. These aspects remained a source of dissatisfaction despite behavioral, environmental, and identity changes. In response to their feelings, each responded by engaging in body projects intended to fix what was “wrong” with their bodies and elicit positive reflected appraisals.

Body projects are, of course, about more than bodies. They seek to transform the body so that it more closely reflects a subcultural ideal and, therefore, elicits positive reflected appraisals within that subculture. Body projects can also generate efficacy-based self-esteem. While Shilling (1993) argues that body projects constitute identity projects, this research demonstrates how self-views both motivate and result from body projects. Mariah, Ellie, and Becca each physically changed the size, shape, and appearance of her body to feel better about herself. By learning body transformation skills, each experienced herself as a competent, causal agent. In short, each enhanced her self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Body projects also exposed Mariah, Becca, and Ellie to bodybuilding. Though increasingly visible in an era that rewards people with fit-looking bodies—those that are lean and, for women, display subtle amounts of muscle definition—bodybuilding is a subculture that can be hard to penetrate. Entry into bodybuilding necessitated opportunity structures (Cast and Burke 2002). Becca and Mariah were invited and encouraged to try bodybuilding by current bodybuilders. Becca learned about bodybuilding and how to transform her body through the guidance of male bodybuilders at the gym she joined in high school. Similarly, Mariah met Eliza—a Pro Physique bodybuilder—while working at a gym during graduate school. Eliza praised Mariah’s body, encouraged her to try bodybuilding, and offered to coach her free of charge. Finally, though Ellie discovered bodybuilding through her research on how to change her body, a local bodybuilding show further piqued her interest. After discovering bodybuilding, the efficacy-based self-esteem each woman generated through her initial body projects led to seeing bodybuilding as a realistic new challenge.

The efficacy-based self-esteem Mariah, Becca, and Ellie developed through body projects has had wider effects. Ellie noted that the self-esteem she developed through bodybuilding boosted her confidence in work settings. Mariah has set new and ambitious strength-based goals. Finally, Becca’s self-esteem buffers her negative feelings about her body when she looks “a little manly” just before a show or when her body lacks visible definition and size between seasons. Though she experiences emotional discomfort because she temporarily does not look like a bodybuilder, knowing that “I can get it [my bodybuilding physique] back” reduces emotional distress. What this suggests is that successful body projects can do more than change bodies. They can also change self-conceptions and, in turn, lives.

Despite the positive emotional outcomes of bodybuilding, the body is still a source of concern to Mariah, Becca, and Ellie. The negative reflected appraisals they received during adolescence left lasting damage. Similar to the adolescents in Mustillo and colleagues' (2012) research, even after transforming their bodies Mariah, Becca, and Ellie continue to see discrepancies between their bodies and the idealized images they have internalized. However, unlike Mustillo et al.'s (1999) respondents, who were medically overweight or obese, Mariah, Becca, and Ellie recall being of normal weight in middle school and high school. This speaks to the power of negative reflected appraisals and unattainable body ideals even when bodies are not far from the norm.

This research corroborates existing theory and findings on the identity verification process, effects of negative identity nonverification on self-esteem, and how identity nonverification can motivate action (Cast and Burke 2002; Gecas 1989; Gecas and Schwalbe 1983; Stets and Burke 2014a, 201b). My findings also suggest that efficacious action can repair self-esteem (Cast and Burke 2002; Gecas and Schwalbe 1983) and buffer negative information about the self that comes from other sources (Cast and Burke 2002; Gecas 1989; Kaplan 2006). This research further contributes to theories and literature on identity verification, emotions, action, and the self—namely, by underscoring the importance of the body.

As I have shown, the body is central in Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's experiences of negative identity nonverification, self-esteem damage, efficacious action, and self-enhancement. Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's gender performance was not verified in interactions with others due to each woman's failure to perform conventional femininity. Each received negative reflected appraisals that problematized aspects of her body that did not match cultural ideals.

These negative reflected appraisals had lasting effects on Ellie's, Becca's, and Mariah's self-views. For each of them, even the mastered body remained a potential source of anxiety.

The women's stories also show how self-efficacy is an *embodied* experience. "We do not see control; we feel it... The experience of control is derived far more from touch and kinesthesia than from vision" (DeCharms in Gecas 1989:293). As Mariah's, Becca's, and Ellie's bodies escaped their control in middle and high school, their feelings about themselves also escaped their control. In learning the skills necessary to transform the body, each enhanced her feelings of competence similar to individuals who take up a craft (Schwalbe and Staples 1991). Through body projects, each gained a sense of control over her body, and also a measure of control over the feelings generated by the body.

Current research shows that adolescent girls/young adult women place greater emphasis on reflected appraisals, especially reflected appraisals from male peers (Milkie 1999; Schwalbe and Staples 1991) and similar others (Asencio 2013; Burke and Harrod 2005; Stets and Burke 2014a, 2014b; Waskul and Vannini 2006). Not only is the body and its appearance more salient during adolescence as girls' bodies begin changing shape, but this period, in general, is found to be detrimental to girls' self-esteem due to many bodily and environmental changes (e.g., the pressure to begin dating, changes from middle school to high school, and the pressure to be popular [Grogan 2008; Simmons et al. 1979]). Additionally, Wilkins (2008) argues that high school constitutes a critical time for identity development. Young adults are often searching for identity, meaning, and belonging. Women during this age might be especially sensitive to reflected appraisals. Combined, these findings suggest that the transition from adolescence to adulthood constitutes a critical period for adolescent/young adult girls' self-conceptions (cf.

Brumberg 1989). Future research might examine this period of life as a time when early body projects are undertaken to cope with body-related distress.

These findings also parallel findings on the influence of peers and media on body dissatisfaction. Decades of studies show that social comparisons to peers and ultra-thin, sexualized media images prompt upward appearance comparisons, which produce body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls (Daniels 2009; Grogan 2008; Howells and Grogan 2012; Tatangelo and Ricciardelli 2005; Thomsen, Bower, and Barnes 2004) and adult women (Brown and Tiggemann 2016; Daniels 2009; Fardouly, Pinkus, and Vartanian 2017; Grogan 2008; Homan et al. 2012; Howells and Grogan 2012; Thomsen 2002). Like Milkie (1999), numerous studies find that the relationship between viewing idealized media images and feelings of body dissatisfaction is mediated by the belief that male peers expect girls and women to look like idealized images of beauty (George 2005; Grogan 2008; Howells and Grogan 2012; Thomsen 2002). Consistent with Bordo's (1993) and Bartky's (1990) arguments, these findings shows that girls internalize the disciplining gaze and learn to evaluate their bodies first and most critically by comparing themselves to media images.

Studies that specifically focus on the effect of media images and peer comparisons among female athletes suggest that image content and social context matter. Images that are non-sexual, feature normative body types, and focus on physical performance prompt girls and women to focus on their body's physical abilities and lead to positive affect (Daniels 2009; Grogan 2008; Homan et al. 2012). Similarly, in athletic contexts, women's and girls' comparisons tend to focus on performance capacity, which is less likely to result in body dissatisfaction. Outside of these contexts, however, girls and women tend to compare their body's appearance to dominant images and definitions of beauty, and experience negative affect

(George 2005; Howells and Grogan 2012; Mosewich et al. 2009; Ross and Shinenew 2008). These findings suggest that images and comparisons that prompt comparisons of physical ability may diminish experiences of body dissatisfaction. My study corroborates other research that shows how athletic participation can diminish body dissatisfaction by placing greater importance on performance than on appearance (Alleva, Veldhuis, and Martijn 2016; Daniels 2009; Franzoi and Klaiber 2007; Frisen and Holmqvist 2010; Thomsen et al. 2004). It also suggests, however, that even female athletes are not immune to dominant definitions of beauty.

This study demonstrates the value of life history methods for revealing processes and the features of actors' lives that shape their decisions. By examining life trajectories, we can gain a deeper understanding of how self-conceptions matter for decision making at various points in time. One-shot interviews, in contrast, often only gloss the surface of people's experiences and identities, failing to get at the stories that give those experiences and identities coherence. Life history methods are more demanding, but are also more powerful for showing how social forces affect the unfolding of lives.

Because people's experiences are a result of social positioning, future research should examine how body projects may vary across social categories. There are many reasons why body projects might vary. Class and ethnicity can affect interpretations of the body. Injury, disability, disease, pregnancy, and other physical changes can also affect the meanings given to the body. Access to material and symbolic resources can enable and constrain the undertaking of various body projects. How and why body projects vary is thus a fruitful topic for future research.

Finally, this research generated the concept of a body career—an evolving relationship with one's body. This concept warrants further development in future research. Such research might examine, for example, stages of body careers, from the predisciplinary stage of infancy to

the mastery stage of adulthood to the post-mastery stage of decline in old age. Other life events such as illness, injury, disability, and pregnancy also warrant attention as shapers of body careers. I suggest that the concept of a body career may help to further understand the changing relationship between the body, body projects, and the self over a lifetime.

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