



DOI: 10.18427/iri-2016-0084

Research of the Bodybuilding Subculture-Specific Lifestyle Characteristics, and their Impact on Social Situation among Competing and Leisure Athlete Bodybuilders

Petra NÉMETH

University of Physical Education, Budapest, Hungary

"The subculture is the culture of smaller groups living within a larger society. This culture has its own norms, beliefs and values that may differ from the cultural values of the majority (...)" (Gál, 2009:5) This research as well, conducted during my doctoral studies, is focusing on a subculture, the bodybuilding subculture, the representatives of which are well recognisable, but we do not know them and their lifestyle deeply, furthermore we do not know what the sociological consequences are on the individual's lifestyle, in addition to the physiological changes.

Bodybuilding as a sport, requires not only a strong body and mind, but also a committed person. Its physiological consequences are evident, but we don't know what sociological consequences it might have. Nowadays more and more people practise bodybuilding either as a competitive sport, or as a leisure activity, therefore I consider it important to research this subject. I have been practising this sport as a hobby for about 10 years and I have seen at first hand average people entering into this world and transforming into a bodybuilder. I think it is very important to investigate what social impact bodybuilding might have on the individual's lifestyle.

The novelty of the research is that while many publications deal with bodybuilding as a sport, describe its establishment, concept and development, but on academical level no doctoral thesis has been dedicated so far to the research of this subculture within sports, where it is not the athletic performance, but rather the body itself is the product. My aim is to carry out a sociological investigation of the effects of participation in this sport, as the topic is quite actual, in fact the scene of bodybuilding is growing, both in the media and in the magazines (bodybuilding magazines), we can meet it every day. In *Rudolf Andorka's* interpretation, lifestyle is the system satisfying the needs (Andorka, 1991). In order to be able to consume, one of the most important criteria is fitness and healthy lifestyle. Bodybuilding subculture strives for the perfect appearance, but it is a question whether this perfection helps or pulls back the integration into society. According to *Péter Fritz*, in lifestyle, material and spiritual parts make an inseparable unity. This is a complex sociological system, in which the emphasis is put on the "how" of the

activities (Fritz, 2009). In bodybuilding, the aforementioned "how" is the key, as all factors influencing lifestyle are done in an extremely different way, than an average person, therefore the consequences of their actions may have unusual outcomes in the social field. Bring about change, the question is to what extent and which direction?

The aim of my research is to discover the characteristics of bodybuilding subculture and their impact on the athletes. During my research, I wish to study bodybuilders' lifestyle – following the aspects of the population's lifestyle-time balance method – in the following dimensions: physiological needs (e.g.: sleeping, eating); activities with socially fixed timings (gainful employment); leisure activities (e.g.: cultural programs). Besides the above, I shall study the stereotypes and prejudices related to bodybuilding. Its importance lies in the fact that continuing bodybuilding lifestyle has an impact on the individual's social realisation and assessment, which affects the lifestyle of the individuals who have been observed, as the place in society and lifestyle are inter-related. My research questions are divided into four groups, based upon the dimensions of the lifestyle-time balance method. For example, has the self-confidence gained through bodybuilding contributed to self-management, realisation in other areas (e.g.: business, personal relationships) in your life? What impact has bodybuilding on your gainful activity? Do you need additional financial resources to support bodybuilding lifestyle? To what extent does bodybuilding influence relationships? How does bodybuilding influence your personal relationships, your cultural consumption habits? Is there any difference between competing and non-competing athletes' circle of friends? What positive and negative stereotypes do you face in everyday life? Have you ever experienced discrimination because of bodybuilding? Is there a link between bodybuilding and deviance? (For example, good physical condition is used to frighten other people, to have a firm appearance.)

I consider it important to talk about women's presence in bodybuilding in a separate chapter. Female bodybuilders hack the social norm system of genders; the question is what impact it might have on their judgement by others, on their social status. A body that is very different from the average – either we speak about fitness or bodybuilding competing women –, may change their judgement by others, and as such, their assessment and possibilities in social fields. Female bodybuilders take care of their own nutrition and needs, rather than of others', therefore they turn against culturally accepted values and roles of women. (Richardson, 2012)

What identity-maintaining tools do female bodybuilders use in order to reduce or dissolve the weight of stigma put on them by the society? Furthermore, my aim is to compare the two target groups of my research in each question: competing or retired professional bodybuilders and non-competing leisure athletes dealing with bodybuilding for minimum three years. During my research, similarly to the lifestyle-time balance method, I shall first investigate the bodybuilders' activity structure organised in a hierarchical system, as well as all of their actions during 24 hours a day

and the amount of time spent on it; among competing and leisure athlete bodybuilders. Individuals participating in the research will write the time-balance diary on a weekly basis. Activities and time scales will be indicated in three blocks: physiological needs, activities with socially fixed timings and leisure activities. The sample will be 70 people per group. In addition, I shall complete the aforementioned study with paper-based questionnaires (with a sample of 70 people per group), and I also wish to make interviews with the leaders of bodybuilding alliances.

In terms of the practical usage and the results of the research, by the help of the lifestyle-time balance method, we will be able to have a full overview of bodybuilding lifestyle and its impact on the athletes' social status. Stereotypes related to this sport might be influenced, or mitigated by studying this special lifestyle. Researches that discover the values of this subculture, as well as promote to accept and understand the unique lifestyle of bodybuilders, may influence their social judgement positively. Bodybuilding is not only a sport, but also an activity requiring a complex, full day physical and mental engagement, which does not terminate at the end of the training. Instead, it affects nutrition, relaxing and involves all other activities, as the bodybuilder adapts his life to sport and not sport to his life. We can get a response to how much time has been spent on each activity, as well as to the reasons, motivation, the "why's", the "how" and also the consequences, therefore from sociological point of view we will be able to get a complete overview about the representative of the bodybuilding lifestyle and the possible changes in his environment, lifestyle, relationships. Furthermore, to which direction the life of the representatives of this closed world takes due to the combined effect of the aforementioned factors.

References

- Andorka Rudolf (1991). *Bevezetés a szociológiába*. Budapest: Aula.
- Fritz Péter (2009). Életmód – értelmezés és meghatározása. In Szatmári Zoltán (Ed.), *Sport, életmód, egészség* (pp. 857-858). Budapest, Akadémiai.
- Gál Attila (2009). *Szubkultúra-felfogások, szubkultúrák vizsgálatának lehetséges irányai, módszerei*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem.
- Richardson, Niall (2012). What is the „Practice” of Bodybuilding? In Locks, Adam, & Richardson, Niall (Eds.), *Critical Reading in Bodybuilding* (pp. 21-29). New York: Routledge.