

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Energy, Minds, and Muscle: The Frame of Social Cohesion in Bodybuilding

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6ng0k8qk>

Author

Victoria Torres, Pablo

Publication Date

2021

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Energy, Minds, and Muscle: The Frame of Social Cohesion in Bodybuilding

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

Pablo Victoria Torres

Dissertation Committee:
Professor David A. Snow, Co-Chair
Professor Ann Hironaka, Co-Chair
Professor David John Frank
Professor Stanley R. Bailey
Professor Raul Fernandez

2021

DEDICATION

To

David A. Snow

knower, fellow burger lover, and mentor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
VITA	v
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	xi
CHAPTER 1: Introduction, Methods, and Theory	1
CHAPTER 2: The Positive Energy Frame	22
CHAPTER 3: The Negative Energy Frame	33
CHAPTER 4: The Mobile Energy Frame	43
CHAPTER 5: Conclusion	58
REFERENCES	63

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My dissertation is infused with the *positive energy* I received from:

Agustin Victoria (*mi papá*, my dad), Alma Victoria (*mi mamá*, my mom), Andrew Noymer, Ann Hironaka, Anna E. Tan, Bonnie Bui, Bradley Campbell, Brian David Harris, Brian Wiley, Burrell Van Jr., Chuck O’Connell, Cristina Bodinger-de Uriarte, Dana M. Moss, David A. Snow, David John Frank, David Swanson, Duke W. Austin, Edelina Burciaga, Ekua Arhin, Elijah Anderson, Hector Y. Martinez, Hiroshi John Ishikawa, Isaac “Caco” Victoria (my favorite brother), Jacob Avery, Jake Alimahomed-Wilson, Jason Mueller, Jayson Hunt, Jennifer Gerson, Jessica Kizer, John Sommerhauser, Jonathan Calvillo, Juanita Price, Kaitlin Ruiz (my Bunny), Kobe Bryant, Little Sadq Hall, Leticia Keenan, Maliq Hall, Martín Jacinto, Maryann Zovak-Wieder, Miles Davison, Millie “Mom” Hall, *Mis Abuelos* (my grandparents), *Mis Primos y Primas* (my cousins), *Mis Tios y Tias* (my aunts and uncles), My Baristas, My Students, My Study Participants, My Teachers, Nes Parada, Nolan Edward Phillips, My Race Research Workshop Family, Patrick Marquez, R. Tyson Smith, Raul Fernandez, Raúl Pérez, Ray (from Ray’s Pizza), Richard Nguyen, Roberto G. Gonzales, Roy Kwon, Sadq “Pops” Hall, Scott N. Brooks, Sean Drake, Seth Abrutyn, Sharon S. Oselin, Sheefteh Khalili, Stacy McGoldrick, Stanley R. Bailey, Stephanie Pulles, Teresa “Tere” Ruiz *y su familia* (and her family), Tony Cisneros, Tyson Patros, UCI COSMOS Family, Vanessa Kauffman, Wai Kit Choi, Xuan Santos, Yang Su, and wonderful you.

Thank you for inspiring and guiding me!!! *¡¡¡Gracias por inspirarme y guiarme!!!* ☺

VITA

Pablo Victoria Torres

EDUCATION

University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, March 2021

Qualifying exam fields: Culture, Inequality

Dissertation: *Energy, Minds, and Muscle: The Frame of Social Cohesion in Bodybuilding*

Committee: David A. Snow (Co-Chair), Ann Hironaka (Co-Chair), David John Frank, Stanley R. Bailey, Raul Fernandez (Chicano/Latino Studies)

University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA

M.A., Sociology, December 2020

California State University, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA

M.A., Sociology, June 2011

University of California, Riverside, Riverside, CA

B.A., Sociology (with honors), June 2009

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Social Cohesion, Culture, Identity, Sport

TEACHING INTERESTS

Social Constructionism, Introductory Sociology, Sociological Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Social Psychology, Philosophy, Identity, Gender, Sexuality, Race, Politics, Spirituality, Religion

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

2019-2020, Intercollegiate Athletics Recognition of Appreciation Award, Cal Poly Pomona.

2016, Dissertation Year Fellowship, University of California, Irvine.

2012-2016, Sociology Summer Research Fellowship Award, University of California, Irvine.

2010-2011, Sally Casanova Predoctoral Scholarship, California State University Los Angeles.

2010-2011, Richard and Erika Nahrendorf Award, California State University, Los Angeles.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Undergraduate Student Research, Perceptions of collective efficacy and bullying perpetration in schools, Dr. Kirk Williams, Department of Sociology, University of California, Riverside. 2008-09.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Lecturer, Sociology Department
College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Cal Poly Pomona
Classic Sociological Theory, Spring 2021

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands
Intro to Sociology, Spring 2021

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills
Research Methods, Spring 2021

Lecturer, Sociology Department
College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Cal Poly Pomona
Classic Sociological Theory, Fall 2021

Adjunct Professor, School of Continuing Studies, University of Redlands
American National Government and Politics, Fall 2021

Adjunct Professor, School of Continuing Studies, University of Redlands
Theories of Human Nature, Fall 2021

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands
Social Construction of Reality, Fall 2021

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands
Research Methods: Interviewing, Fall 2021

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands
Principles of Sociology, Fall 2021

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands
Principles of Sociology, Fall 2021

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills
Modern Sociological Theories, Fall 2021

Lecturer, Sociology Department
College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Cal Poly Pomona
Classic Sociological Theory, Spring 2020

Adjunct Professor, School of Continuing Studies, University of Redlands

Introduction to Sociology, Spring 2020

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands

Introduction to Sociology, Spring 2020

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills

Modern Sociological Theories, Spring 2020

Lecturer, Sociology Department

College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Cal Poly Pomona

Classic Sociological Theory, Fall 2019

Adjunct Professor, School of Continuing Studies, University of Redlands

Theories of Human Nature, Fall 2019

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills

Modern Sociological Theories, Fall 2019

Adjunct Professor, School of Continuing Studies, University of Redlands

American National Government and Politics, Summer 2019

Lecturer, Sociology Department

College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Cal Poly Pomona

Classic Sociological Theory, Spring 2019

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,

College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands

Introduction to Sociology, Spring 2019

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,

College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands

Inequality in Education, Spring 2019

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills

Sociology of the Helping Professions, Spring 2019

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills

Modern Sociological Theories, Spring 2019

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills

Understanding Social Relationships in a Global Perspective, Spring 2019

Adjunct Professor, School of Continuing Studies, University of Redlands

Theories of Human Nature, Fall 2018

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands
Gender and Sexuality, Fall 2018

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Redlands
Inequalities and Identities, Fall 2018

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills
Modern Sociological Theories, Fall 2018

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, CSU Dominguez Hills
Modern Sociological Theories, Spring 2018

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology, Chapman University
Introduction to Sociology, Fall 2017

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology, Chapman University
Introduction to Sociology, Spring 2017

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology, Chapman University
Field Research, Spring 2017

Adjunct Professor, Department of Sociology, Chapman University
Field Research, Fall 2016

Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Sociology, and Women's Studies Santa Ana
College
Introduction to Sociology, Fall 2016

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of California, Irvine
Introduction to Sociology, Summer 2016

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Irvine Valley College
Introduction to Sociology, Spring 2015

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Saddleback College
Introduction to Sociology, Fall 2014

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, California State University, Los Angeles
Social Psychology, Fall 2014

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, California State University, Los Angeles
Classical Sociological Theory, Summer 2014

Lecturer, Department of Sociology, California State University, Los Angeles

Contemporary Sociological Theory, Summer 2014

Teaching Assistant, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine

Computer-Based Research in the Social Sciences, Paul Shirey, Fall 2017

Introduction to Sociology, Jacob Avery, Spring 2017

Introduction to Sociology, Charles O'Connell, Winter 2017

Introduction to Sociology, Charles O'Connell, Spring 2016

Introduction to Sociology, Charles O'Connell, Winter 2016

Introduction to Sociology, Jacob Avery, Spring 2015

Introduction to Sociology, David Snow, Winter 2015

Introduction to Sociology, Charles O'Connell, Fall 2014

Introduction to Sociology, Charles O'Connell, Spring 2014

Film in the Latino/a Community, Gilbert Gonzalez, Winter 2014

Introduction to Sociology, Jacob Avery, Fall 2013

Introduction to Sociology, Jacob Avery, Spring 2013

Chicano Studies I, Gilbert Estrada, Winter 2013

Introduction to Sociology, Charles O'Connell, Fall 2012

Chicano Studies III, Glenda M. Flores, Spring 2012

Introduction to Sociology, Charles O'Connell, Winter 2012

Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology, James Egan, Fall 2011

Guest Lecturer, Department of Chicano/Latino Studies, University of California, Irvine,

Chicano Studies I, Winter 2013

Lecture: *Cultural Capital in the Chicano/Latino Bodybuilding Community*

PRESENTATIONS

"Beyond the brawn: Identity work and boundaries in bodybuilding," paper accepted, American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, August 2014.

"Beyond the brawn: Identity work and boundaries in bodybuilding," panel presentation, Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD, February 2014.

"Identity work in prison bodybuilding," panel presentation, Midwest Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL, March 2013.

"Bodybuilders: A comparative analysis between two cities," panel presentation, Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA, March 2011.

"Social learning theories and the use of illegal steroids in bodybuilding," poster presentation, The American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, November 2010.

"Applying elements of the social psychological perspective to bodybuilding," panel presentation, Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Oakland, CA, April 2010.

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Graduate Student Advisor, UCLA CC2Ph.D. Program, 2017-2018

Planning Committee Member, Department of Sociology Ph.D. Recruitment Weekend, 2012.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Member, UAW Local 2865 (2011-present)

Member, Chicano/Latino Graduate Student Collective, University of California, Irvine (2011-present)

Volunteer Tutor, Youth Opportunity Center, Riverside, CA (2009-2012)

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Member, American Sociological Association

Member, Eastern Sociological Society

Member, Midwest Sociological Society

Member, Pacific Sociological Association

Member, The American Society of Criminology

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Energy, Minds, and Muscle: The Frame of Social Cohesion in Bodybuilding

by

Pablo Victoria Torres

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2021

Professor David A. Snow, Co-Chair

Professor Ann Hironaka, Co-Chair

Based on participant observations and naturalistic interviews I conducted with male bodybuilders at two fitness clubs, I contribute to the literature on social cohesion and frame theory by conceiving of social cohesion as a frame that exists in two modalities: as the *positive energy frame* and as the *negative energy frame*. The *positive energy frame* characterizes social cohesion as the collective harmony that occurs when *positive energy perceivers* adhere to nonjudgmental, supportive, and celebratory interaction principles. The *negative energy frame* conceives of social cohesion as something that exists outside of *negative energy perceivers* in a *community of haters* (i.e. perceived envious others who are perceived as wishing for the downfall of the negative energy perceiver) that negative energy perceivers do not see themselves being a part of *even though* they themselves engage in the same negative behavior they criticize *haters* for. This results in a competitive and unfriendly environment where negative energy perceivers do not trust one another, thus perpetuating the negative energy frame. In addition, I introduce the *mobile energy frame* to describe the process whereby energy perceiving bodybuilders “take with them” the respective energy frame of their fitness club and use it to inform bodybuilding activities outside of it.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, METHODS, AND THEORY

Can social cohesion be observed? Yes, but only by the observer. What the observer sees is social energy which is reflective of her or his personal state of consciousness in relation to what he or she observes as society. In short, social cohesion exists for those who believe it exists. It is a socially constructed frame that requires attention and belief on the part of an actor. Using bodybuilding as a case study, I found that the social cohesion frame exists in two modalities: via the *positive energy frame* and the *negative energy frame*. Each mode presents a different view of what social cohesion is.

The positive energy frame of Monster Gym conceives of social cohesion as the collective harmony that occurs when positive energy perceiving bodybuilders – or simply, *positive energy perceivers* – adhere to nonjudgmental, supportive, and celebratory interaction principles. This results in a cheerful environment that promotes acceptance of everything as it is and an awareness that one means all.

The negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym conceives of social cohesion as something that exists outside of negative energy perceiving bodybuilders – or simply, *negative energy perceivers* – in a community of *haters* (i.e. perceived envious others who are perceived as wishing for the downfall of the negative energy perceiver) that negative energy perceivers do not see themselves being a part of even though they themselves (i.e. *negative energy perceivers*) engage in the same *hating* behavior they criticize haters for. This results in a competitive and unfriendly environment where negative energy perceivers do not trust one another.

I also introduce the *mobile energy frame* to describe the process whereby energy perceiving bodybuilders “take with them” the respective social cohesion frame they experience

inside their respective gym – i.e. the positive energy frame at Monster Gym or the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym – and apply it to bodybuilding-related activities outside the immediate confines of the gym, namely to steroids use and dieting.

Finally, I introduce *energy talk* – a type of identity talk (Snow and Anderson 1993) – energy perceiving bodybuilders engage in that serves as the mechanism through which an energy frame is both announced and reinforced by energy perceiving bodybuilders of both the positive and negative variety.

SETTING THE SCENES

My field sites for this study were two commercial fitness clubs that belong to the same parent corporation – “Fitness 365.” I chose these sites based on convenience since at the time I conducted my field research I lived centrally to both gyms and worked out regularly at each site. The clubs are located in Southern California – one in affluent Graceville; the other in working class Countryside. According to the U.S. Census, in 2014 the median household income was approximately \$112,000 for Graceville, and 53.2% of adult residents had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. That same year, the Countryside median household income was approximately \$55,000, and 14.9% of adults had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. By comparison, the U.S. median household income in 2014 was \$53,657, and 29.3% of adults had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. I call the club located in Countryside, “Monster Gym” and the club in Graceville, “Aesthetic Gym.” I mention the socio-economic characteristics of each community simply to point out the demographic context in which each gym is embedded not to make causal claims apropos class.

As mentioned above, both clubs belong to the same corporate company, thus each can be thought of as a satellite location of Fitness 365. As such, the sites are similar in size, equipment,

and layout. Each has about 6,000 square feet of space. Both carry a variety of cardio-training machinery (treadmills, ellipticals, stair-masters, cycling machines, rowing machines, and skiing machines) as well as weight-training tools (benches, dumbbells, barbells, cable stations, abs machines, chest machines, back machines, arms machines, legs machines, glute machines, and smith machines). Additionally, both have a number of other amenities including a 25-yard lap pool, a full-sized basketball court, a racquetball court, a sauna, a steam room, a whirlpool, a turf functional training area, personal viewing screens on cardio equipment, and between 12 and 14 one-hour-long group exercise classes that cover everything from cardio-strength training, to cycling, boxing, mixed martial arts, yoga, Pilates, and Zumba®.

The physical similarities between the two clubs are an important component in my analysis as this allowed me to control for the physical structure and layout of each facility. The analysis that I present here, using the grounded theory approach (as prescribed by Charmaz [2006]), then, cannot be attributed to the physical dissimilarities of the two facilities because such divergences did not exist.

DATA AND METHODS

Over the course of 32 months I immersed myself in my two field sites logging 1,120 hours of working-out with the participating bodybuilders at each club totaling 2,240 hours between the two. During each approximate 2.5-hours-long training session, I conducted unstructured conversational interviews with energy perceiving bodybuilders (Burgess [1984] 1990). These naturalistic interviews allowed me to employ what Snow, Zurcher, and Sjoberg (1982) call the interview by comment technique in which statements made by the interviewer prompt clarifying or elaborating verbal responses by the interviewee(s) on a particular topic or subject. During the course of my more than two years in the field, I used all of the types of

comments Snow, Zurcher, and Sjoberg (1982) identify including “puzzlement, humorous, replay, descriptive, outrageous, altercasting, motivational, and evaluative” (p.293).

My hope was to audio record these naturalistic interviews during my field encounters with bodybuilders, but it became evident during consensual trial runs that the audio would be distorted and unclear due to the loud ambient noise in the gym. One option I considered to resolve this issue was to have bodybuilders and myself wear clip microphones during our workout sessions, but ultimately I felt like this would disrupt the flow of the natural interactions I sought to capture. The clip microphones would be a constant visual reminder that my participants were being observed and recorded, potentially resulting in a type of Hawthorne effect. Thus, the conversational interviews became part of the overall field notes I took during each session. If I needed clarification or elaboration on a statement made by a bodybuilder or bodybuilders, I simply politely asked them for it.

Gaining Access

I was easily able to gain entrée into each setting as I was already a member of Fitness 365 prior to initiating the research process for this study and regularly worked out at both Monster Gym and Aesthetic Gym. Being an insider at both gyms and within the bodybuilding community allowed me to build strong rapport with my informants and privileged me with an immense amount of access into their insights and lives as bodybuilders. For the entirety of this research, then, I assumed what Adler and Adler (1987) call the opportunistic complete-member-researcher role whereby the complete-member-researcher is a “native” member of the community they are studying prior to embarking on their research journey. Having insider status in the community afforded me several advantages including fluency in the colloquial language and familiarity with the bodybuilding culture in each space (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

Sampling and the Bodybuilders

My insider status in each community allowed me to ask bodybuilders that I already knew or that I was meeting for the first time, if they wanted to participate in my study. Additionally, I employed the snowball sampling technique by asking those bodybuilders if they knew other bodybuilders who might be interested in participating (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). Those who did, would then personally introduce me to friends or acquaintances of theirs who might be interested in participating in my study.

In keeping with the naturalistic approach, I did not schedule workout sessions with the participating bodybuilders. Instead, over the 32 months the research lasted, I rotated working out at each gym every two weeks. In addition, I also rotated the time of day I worked out at every month. Every four weeks I switched from working out in the mornings to working out in the evenings. Thus, for two weeks I would work out at Monster Gym in the mornings and the following two weeks I would work out at Aesthetic Gym in the mornings. I would then switch to evening workouts the following month. During these visits, I asked whoever I ran into at the gym (whether I had previously met them or was meeting them for the first time) if they wanted to get a workout-session in together. If they agreed, then during 2-5-minute breaks between sets, I jotted down notes from our naturalistic conversations as well as other observations. Each workout lasted approximately two and a half hours.

All in all, I had 30 energy perceiving bodybuilders participate in my study. Sixteen of them, however, were more central to my study than others. These key informants shared more details about their lives and were more generous with information. I also had more contact with these individuals. The following are brief biographic descriptions for each energy perceiving bodybuilder organized by gym and type of energy perceiver.

Monster Gym's Positive Energy Perceivers

Positive energy perceivers are bodybuilders who either consciously create or abide by the positive energy frame of Monster Gym. I found three types of positive energy perceivers: *positive energy attributers*, *positive energy generators*, and *positive energy converters*.

Positive Energy Attributers

The first category of positive energy perceivers is what I call *positive energy attributers*. Positive energy attributers describe themselves as positive people outside the gym who bask in the “additional” positive energy they experience at Monster Gym. As with all energy perceiving bodybuilders, positive energy attributers engage in *energy talk* in order to reify their identity vis-à-vis the positive energy frame of Monster Gym. James, Isaiah, and Augie are exemplars of this type.

James

James, 33, is a custodian for the local public-school district. James played high school football but was not really passionate about the sport. He always gravitated more towards the physical fitness aspect of it. After high school, he didn't have an interest in pursuing higher education and instead opted to look for a full-time job that could pay the bills and allow him to continue to body-build. He got his wish when he was hired by the school district he is still currently employed by. There, he met his wife, who is a teacher at one of the district's local high schools, and together they have two daughters – ages 5 and 10.

Isaiah

Isaiah, 26, is a deputy sheriff is for the county where Monster Gym is located. Isaiah got into bodybuilding because his dad and older brother practice the craft as well and he grew up

watching them and emulating them. He thus describes bodybuilding as something that is second nature to him. His wife is a nurse and together they have two daughters, ages 3 and 1.

Augie

Augie, 20, is a supplement store worker and college student who attends the local state college. Augie grew up watching super-hero movies and reading super-hero comic books. His favorite super-hero is Batman, or as he refers to him – “The Batman.” His major is criminal justice studies and wants to be a detective. For Augie, bodybuilding is fun and also ensures that he “looks the part” of working in law enforcement one day.

Positive Energy Generators

Positive energy generators attest that they are positive all the time regardless of the environment they find themselves in and attribute their positivity to their own agency. Positive energy generators take it upon themselves to create through their actions and positive energy talk the positive environment they experience at Monster Gym. Jared, Cristian, and Richard are representative of this type.

Jared

Jared, 28, is construction worker who is a self-proclaimed “life-of-the-party” everywhere he goes. Jared got into bodybuilding at the age of 16 after a friend took him to the gym with him. Initially, he says, he only did it to get muscles and to impress “the girls,” but as his journey progressed, he fell in love with the sport and it gave him another avenue through which to inspire and motivate others.

Cristian

Cristian, 36, works in construction and is finishing up his bachelor’s degree through an online program. Cristian grew up playing a variety of sports including soccer, baseball,

basketball, and mixed martial arts. His interest in bodybuilding was piqued when he was told by his high school soccer coach that he had a well-rounded frame that reminded him of old school, classic bodybuilders. Cristian then asked his coach if he could give him some tips about what he could do to “fill out.” His coach agreed to mentor Cristian and to this day continues to serve as an inspiring figure in Cristian’s life. In fact, it was his coach who suggested he attain his kinesiology degree online so he could continue to work and provide for his wife and 3 kids.

Richard

Richard, 19, attends the local community college and works at a fast-food restaurant. Richard lives at home with his parents by choice and is the oldest brother and cousin in his family. He started working out at 17 because he wanted to set an example for his 2 younger siblings and 10 cousins. His family never preached physical activity of any kind, so he took it upon himself to trailblaze that uncharted territory hoping to motivate and inspire others in his family.

Positive Energy Converters

Positive energy converters are bodybuilders who are struggling at life and the only thing getting them through it is the positive energy of Monster Gym. For this group, Monster Gym and its positive energy frame serve as their “anchor” which serves a dual purpose: (1) it helps take their mind off their external problem(s); and (2) it affects their own behavior towards others and themselves in a positive way. Prince, David, and Ray represent positive energy converters in my sample.

Prince

Prince, 35, is a plumber who gives thanks every day after being shot twice in the chest when he was in his early 20s. With his second chance at life, Prince signed up for a gym

membership after landing the plumber gig he still holds. Nowadays he leads an easy-going life that revolves around his work, the gym, and his live-in girlfriend.

David

David, 42, is a construction worker who started bodybuilding during a short stint in a juvenile corrections facility when he was in his teens. He says, “I didn’t have anything else to do so I just started working on my body hitting those burpees, pushups, sit-ups. I’d go non-stop for 2-3 hours a day. It kept my mind off the fact that I was locked up.”

Ray

Ray, 22, is a community college student studying to be a paramedic. He is also a nutrition specialist at a local supplements store. Ray hits the gym every night to “unwind from his busy schedule.” His interests in health and fitness stem from a history of health issues throughout his family. Two of his grandparents (maternal grandpa and paternal grandma) are diabetic and his maternal grandma has heart issues. They are all very supportive of his chosen path. His favorite superhero is Spider-Man.

Aesthetic Gym’s Negative Energy Perceivers

Negative energy perceiving bodybuilders do not see that their own actions reify the negative energy frame. This *community of haters* is composed of two groups of *negative energy perceivers*: *negative energy attributers* and *negative energy generators*. But, because in my sample all negative energy perceivers perceived being *hated on* (envied by others) and at the same time all of them admitted to engaging in *hating* behavior (even though they did not recognize it as such), all negative energy perceivers belonged to both groups. Kasey, Clement, Kyle, Donny, Lorenzo, Collin, and Lane are exemplars of negative energy perceivers.

Kasey

Kasey, 29, is a professional photographer and videographer whose clientele is mostly made up of high-end fitness industry personalities. Kasey's passion for bodybuilding began when, for a high school photography class, he saw himself in a full-body photo a friend took of him. He was shocked at how skinny he was and decided right then and there to "pick up the weights." His journey led him to merge his two passions: photography and bodybuilding.

Clement

Clement, 42, is a restaurateur who grew up idolizing professional wrestler Hulk Hogan. When his own dream of becoming a professional wrestler fell through due to a back injury, Clement focused on making money, which lead him to investing in the stock market and opening up several American cuisine restaurants that he owns and manages. Though his own wrestling days are over, he enjoys teaching his kids, two boys ages 7 and 10, moves in their backyard wrestling ring.

Kyle

Kyle, 25, is a military veteran who served for 7 years and an elite personal trainer at a private training facility. Even though he works at a training facility, he makes Aesthetic Gym his "home gym" because he takes "great pleasure in showing them motherfuckers whose house it is."

Donny

Donny, 27, is a software engineer who has a keen interest in the "psychology of staying motivated." His interest in bodybuilding was sparked when he was in college and was into the "party life" and his only concern was "impressing the ladies." As he got older, he became more interested in honing his craft to "prove the haters wrong."

Lorenzo

Lorenzo, 34, is a police detective who has been bodybuilding since the age of 13. He uses bodybuilding as a way to “look the part” of somebody who works in law enforcement and feels bad for his colleagues who look like “stereotypical donut eaters.”

Collin

Collin, 20, is a full-time college student majoring in aerospace engineering. Collin contends that bodybuilding fits his lifestyle as he is “very private.” He sees his body as a vessel that gets him around in this world and he takes great pleasure in trying to perfect it.

Lane

Lane, 23, is an accountant who was raised by a single mother. When he was little, he promised her he would take care of her financially when he got older. He kept his word. Immediately after earning his MBA through an accelerated program, he landed his dream job with a high-ranking firm. He got into bodybuilding in college as a way to deal with his “life-long battle” with anxiety.

Coding and the Grounded Theory Approach

As mentioned above, during each training session I took jotted field notes of my observations and interviews on the “notes” application of my phone. Then, no later than the evening of a field visit, I fleshed out my jotted observations into detailed, full-fledged field notes. These resulted in a total of 422 typed double-spaced pages of notes that I then coded.

I initiated the coding process with open coding (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Here, I identified broad themes as I combed through my field notes line-by-line while answering the following sets of questions suggested by Charmaz (2006:51):

- What process(es) is at issue here? How can I define it?
- How does this process develop?

- How does the research participant(s) act while involved in this process? " What does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in this process? What might his or her observed behavior indicate?
- When, why, and how does the process change?
- What are the consequences of the process?

I then proceeded to the focused coding phase where I analyzed and refined my initial codes. These resulted in more sophisticated subcategories of the broad open codes in which I was able to “compare people’s experiences, actions, and interpretations” (Charmaz (2006:59). Ultimately, Charmaz’s (2006) iteration of the grounded theory approach facilitated my ability to make the interpretive theoretical claims I make in this dissertation.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Frame Analysis

The concept of frames has existed in the social sciences since the early 1970s with the works of Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974) being instrumental in its inception. The following is a review of this literature:

Bateson

Although the term “frame” did not explicitly appear in Gregory Bateson’s work until his 1972 *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, he made mention of other theoretical ideas that lead to its development in his work with the Iatmul of Papua New Guinea (Bateson 1958). In *that* work, Bateson developed theoretical concepts that emphasized the social relativity and condition-based circumstances that could explain why individuals in that society behaved the way they did. In his formal formulation of *psychological frames*, as he called them, Bateson (1972) noted that “the

psychological concept which we are trying to define is neither physical nor logical. Rather, the actual physical frame, is, we believe, added by human beings to physical pictures” (187). He went on to list the characteristics of psychological frames as he saw them. For him, psychological frames were (1) exclusive (“by including certain messages [or meaningful actions] within a frame, certain other messages are excluded”); (2) inclusive (“by excluding certain messages certain others are included”); (3) inversive, in that different sets of meaning are to be applied inside and outside given frames; (4) metacommunicative; and (5) tautological in that messages derived from the frame also define the frame; and (6) necessary of gestalt in order to avoid abstraction paradoxes.

Goffman

In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman (1974) took on the task of conceptualizing what philosophers like William James (1890) and Alfred Schutz (1945) had written about for years: a multiple realities paradigm. While acknowledging Bateson (1972), Goffman (1974) set out to conceptualize *his* framing perspective. For Goffman, frames are the response to the question: “What is it that’s going on here?” (p.9). Via frames, Goffman (1974) found an answer for how multiple lived realities could co-exist in a single moment. What frames offer is a system through which reality can be interpreted and made sense of. Indeed, frames allow users to “locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly number of concrete occurrences” (21). Thus, frames “contain within them the situation-relevant meanings” (Snow 2001).

Frame analysis was not without its critics with Denzin and Keller (1981) being chief among them. Since Goffman’s frames analysis integrates Blumer’s (1969) three premises of symbolic interactionism [i.e. (1) “that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;” (2) “that the meaning of such things is derived from, or

arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;" and (3) "that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (p. 2)] – Denzin and Keller (1981) questioned his theory's practical utility.

Snow

Since its inception, frame analysis has been refined and tuned to analyze a variety of social phenomena in a plethora of disciplines. Most notably, frame analysis has helped explain social behavior in the social movements/collective action arena. This theoretical and research program has been commandingly spearheaded by David A. Snow and his colleagues (See: Snow 1979; Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow and Benford 1992; Snow and Oliver 1995; Snow 2001; Snow 2004; Snow and Corrigall Brown 2005; Snow, Vliegenthart, and Corrigall-Brown 2007; Snow, Benford, McCammon, Hewitt, and Fitzgerald, 2014).

For Snow (2019), frames impact "how we see, what we make of, and how we act toward the various objects of orientation that populate our daily lives" (p.393). In the context of social movements, framing "refers to the signifying work or meaning construction engaged in by movement adherents (e.g., leaders, activists, and ran-and-file participants) and other actors (e.g., adversaries, institutional elites, media, social control agents, countermovements) relevant to the interests of movements and the challenges they mount in pursuit of those interests" (Snow and Lessor 2010:286).

In their 1986 canonical paper, Snow, Rochford, Woerden, and Benford (1986) identify four frame alignment processes that they recognize as necessary conditions for movement participation: (1) frame bridging, (2) frame amplification, (3) frame extension, and (4) frame

transformation. Frame bridging refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (467). The social movement organization, then, is responsible for creating a “bridge” that connects unorganized constituents and supporters to the movement. Frame amplification refers to the “clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events” (p. 469). In other words, an “issue” or “problem” is presented as an urgent matter by social movement organizations. Frame extension is the process whereby “an SMO may have to extend the boundaries of its primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents” (472). In other words, the goal is to peak the interests of individuals or groups who would otherwise have little or no interest in joining an SMO. Frame transformation refers to transforming the meaning of a frame. Snow et al. (1986) write, “Such transformation ‘redefines activities, events, and biographies that are already meaningful from the standpoint of some primary framework, in terms of another framework, such that they are now ‘seen by the participants to be something quite else.’ What is involved is a ‘systematic alteration’ that radically reconstitutes what it is for participants that is going on (Goffman 1974:45)” (474). Underlying each of these processes is an interactive and meaning-making component that squarely situates each condition within the symbolic interactionist tradition.

Snow and Benford followed up *Frame Alignment* (1986) with *Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization* (1988). In this piece, Snow and Benford identified the “conditions that affect or constrain framing efforts directed toward participant mobilization”: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing (199-201). Diagnostic framing identifies the problem, and places blame or causality on some entity. Prognostic framing sets out

a plan of action when solutions are suggested. Motivational framing provides a rationale for participation. Snow and Benford (1988) concluded that “these activities are fully accessible only through ongoing encounters with participants in movement activities and by firsthand contact with the international working and operations of movement organizations as they unfold and evolve over time” (214).

In the final piece of what Snow, Benford, and their colleagues (2014) have called a trilogy of papers that conceptualized the social movements framing perspective, Snow and Benford (1992) distinguished between *collective action frames* and *master frames*. Collective action frames “serve as accenting devices that either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable” (137). On the other hand, “the punctuation, attribution, and articulation” of master frames “may color and constrain” those of social movement organizations (p. 138). Master frames, then, serve as overarching paradigms in the story that is being projected by social movement organizations.

With these three papers, sociology was equipped with a theory to analyze social movements. What followed was an explosion of scholarship that sought to extend the framing perspective on social movements or use it to analyze social movements-related phenomena. For a review of this material see Snow, Vleishenart, and Katelaars (2019) and Snow et al. (2014).

Frame Analysis in other Substantive Arenas

The framing perspective has been wildly successful and has been utilized in fields beyond social movements. These include religious studies (e.g. Johnson and Weigert 1980); psychology (e.g. Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1981); media and mass communication (e.g. Iyengar 1987; Scheufele 1999; McQuail 2005; Entman 2007); linguistics

(Hymes 1974); management (Kennedy and Fiss 2009); political opinion (Chong and Druckman 2007); and the health arena (Snow and Lessor 2010).

Social Cohesion Literature

According to Durkheim ([1893] 1997) the collective conscience is “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society [which] forms a determinate system with a life of its own” (38-39). This linkage between the self and society is asserted by Durkheim ([1897] 1951) when he describes social cohesion as “a constant interchange of ideas and feelings from all to each and each to all, something like a mutual moral support, which instead of throwing the individual on his own resources, leads him to share in the collective energy and supports his own when exhausted” (210).

Since Durkheim’s definition and conceptualization – via his study of suicide ([1897] 1951) – there has been a good amount of research pertaining to social cohesion. What has resulted is an abundance of definitions and operationalizations of the term. In their work, scholars have enacted a number of ways that arrive at these. Indeed, scholars have approached social cohesion from many different theoretical vantage points, dimensions, and perspectives. These domains include the subjective and objective perspectives; the micro, meso, and macro levels; and the dimensions of interpersonal trust (micro), social support (micro), openness (meso), and institutional trust (macro) for the subjective perspective; and density of social relations (micro), participation (meso), and legitimacy of institutions (macro) for the objective perspective (Bottonni 2018). Such characterizations and measurements of social cohesion are all valid given the available tools at the disposal of researchers.

Elijah Anderson and Micro Level Social Cohesion

Given the scope of sociology, I contend that every study in the field is a study of social cohesion. In recent years one that has stood out to me, and that is relevant to the present study, is Elijah Anderson's (2004) analysis of what he calls *canopies*. Anderson writes:

There remain numerous heterogeneous and densely populated bounded public spaces within cities that offer a respite from this wariness, settings where a diversity of people can feel comfortable enough to relax their guard and go about their business more casually. A prime such location is Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market. In this relatively busy, quasi-public setting, under a virtual cosmopolitan canopy, people are encouraged to treat others with a certain level of civility or at least simply to behave themselves. Within this canopy are smaller ones or even spontaneous canopies, where instantaneous communities of diverse strangers emerge and materialize—the opportunities or openings provided by fascinating tidbits of eavesdropped (or overheard) conversation. Here, along the crowded aisle and eating places, visitors can relax and feel relatively safe and secure. Although they may still avoid prolonged eye contact or avert their glances to refrain from sending the 'wrong' messages, people tend to positively acknowledge one another's existence in some measure. At times, strangers may approach one another to talk, to laugh, to joke, or to share a story here and there. Their trusting attitudes can be infectious, even spreading feelings of community across racial and ethnic lines (15-16).

What Anderson observes in the canopy is a type of social cohesion that is reminiscent of Durkheim's ([1906] 1974) assertion that "the human personality is a sacred thing; one does not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others" (37). This type of social cohesion is the result of actors reifying what I call in the present study the *positive energy frame*.

CONTRIBUTION

I define social cohesion not as a feeling but as a frame that is capable of generating feelings of connectedness in individual actors. These feelings may be positive or negative depending on whether bodybuilders adhere to the *positive energy frame* or the *negative energy frame* of social cohesion. The observed homogenous behavior patterns of others create the frame in individual bodybuilders' minds and through interaction with each other they acknowledge its

existence and affirm it with their actions and what I refer to as *energy talk* – that is, language that speaks to the existence of an energy frame. Additionally, I find that *energy perceiving bodybuilders* “carry” the energy frame they use to make sense of bodybuilding activity inside the gym to make sense of the bodybuilding activities they partake in outside of it – namely steroids use and dieting.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Kathy Charmaz (2006) writes that “interpretive theory calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon. This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as inextricably linked; truth as provisional, and social life as processual” (126-127). The perspective on social cohesion I expound in this dissertation is necessarily interpretive. The following paragraphs provide an overview of my findings and subsequent theoretical claims.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the positive variant of the social cohesion frame which I call the *positive energy frame*. The positive energy frame characterizes Monster Gym and conceives of social cohesion as the collective harmony that occurs when individuals adhere to nonjudgmental, supportive, and celebratory interaction principles.

The positive energy frame manifests through different clusters of action or *currents*. These include the *verbal greetings current*, the *encouraging compliments current*, the *helpful tips current*, and the “*spotting*” *current*.

Additionally, the currents are carried out by *positive energy perceiving bodybuilders* – or simply, *positive energy perceivers* of whom I found three subtypes: *positive energy conformers*, *positive energy attributers*, and *positive energy generators*. This *community of winners* utilizes *positive energy talk* to reify the *positive energy frame* at Monster Gym.

In Chapter 3, I illuminate how the frame of social cohesion takes the form of the *negative energy frame* at Aesthetic Gym. The negative energy frame conceives of social cohesion as something that exists outside of *negative energy perceiving bodybuilders* – or simply, *negative energy perceivers* – in a *community of haters* (perceived envious others who are perceived as wishing for the downfall of the negative energy perceiver) that negative energy perceivers do not see themselves being a part of *even though* they themselves engage in the same negative behavior they criticize *haters* for. This results in a competitive and unfriendly environment where negative energy perceivers do not trust one another, thus perpetuating the negative energy frame.

The negative energy frame too manifests through different pathways or currents. These include the *non-talk current*, the *lone-wolf mentality current*, the *careless confidence current*, and the *fear of being criticized current*.

As mentioned above, a *community of haters* emerges at Aesthetic Gym which reinforces the negative energy frame. This community of haters is made up of two groups: *negative energy attributers* and *negative energy generators*.

Negative energy attributers label others as *haters* and thus blame *them* for creating the negative energy they experience at Aesthetic Gym. However, negative energy generators admit to engaging in *hating* behavior, though they do not acknowledge it as *hate*. Consequently, negative energy attributers and negative energy generators are the same negative energy perceivers in my sample.

In Chapter 4, I explore what I call the *mobile energy frame* which is the energy that “leaves” with an actor from a place (in this case the gym) and is then activated in an external place when the actor engages in activity that is complimentary to the activity of the original

place. The mobile energy frame manifests as the *positive mobile energy frame* and the *negative mobile energy frame*. I find that in the case of bodybuilding, energy perceiving bodybuilders approach and make sense of the external bodybuilding activities of steroids use and dieting with the respective *energy frame* of their gym – i.e. the *positive energy frame* of Monster Gym or the *negative energy frame* of Aesthetic Gym.

Throughout each chapter, I highlight the *energy talk* energy perceiving bodybuilders use to reify the respective energy frame of their gym.

CHAPTER 2

THE POSITIVE ENERGY FRAME

For positive energy perceiving bodybuilders (henceforth positive energy perceivers) at Monster Gym, the frame of social cohesion takes the form of the positive energy frame which conceives of social cohesion as the collective harmony that occurs when individuals adhere to nonjudgmental, supportive, and celebratory social interaction principles.

The positive energy frame manifests through different pathways or currents. These include the *verbal greetings current*, the *encouraging compliments current*, the *helpful tips current*, and the “*spotting*” *current*.

Every quote that resulted in my analysis from my larger data set is an example of what I call *energy talk*. The positive energy frame is carried out, or “spoken into existence,” by *positive energy talk*.

THE POSITIVE ENERGY FRAME CURRENTS

The positive energy frame of Monster Gym manifests through a number of modalities, or currents, which reinforce the supportive and jovial environment that is characteristic of Monster Gym. The currents include the *verbal greetings current*, the *encouraging compliments current*, the *helpful tips current*, and the “*spotting*” *current*.

The Verbal Greetings Current

The first current through which the positive energy frame manifests is through the verbal greetings current. Verbal greetings are part of the everyday culture at Monster Gym where positive energy perceivers see each other, as well as others, as family. Cristian explains:

Everybody here is family. When family comes over to your house, what do you do? You greet them. You say, ‘what’s up.’ Same thing here. We treat everybody like family because that’s just how our community is. No matter what somebody looks

like or what they're wearing. We all understand that the gym is a place where people go to escape whatever they have going on in their lives. So when we get here it's like we're all just genuinely happy to see each other because it's all about that positive energy.

Verbal greetings let others know that they are seen and appreciated. These greetings are weaved into the culture of Monster Gym and they are instrumental in the reproduction of the positive energy frame.

Positive energy perceivers understand the importance of making others feel welcomed at the gym. On this, Jared has the following to say:

It's all love here bro – listen, you go other places and not even the receptionist will greet you, you know? Which I guess it's cool because at least she's not being fake. But what I'm saying is here we show LOVE to everybody because that shit's important. There's no point in being a dick and making people feel awkward at the gym. Nah that's not what we're about here. It's all love. So if I see somebody who needs an energy boost, I'll go say what's up. Sometimes too what will happen is they'll be working out with someone and same thing I'll say what's up to them and now every time I see them, I'll say what's up to them too.

For Jared, verbal greetings are instrumental in reproducing the positive energy frame at Monster Gym. Verbal greetings also create a snowball effect whereby the more people a positive energy perceiver meets, the more opportunities he will get to reproduce the verbal greetings and thus the positive energy frame.

In a comical fashion, this effect may also prolong positive energy perceiver's workouts which could get them in “trouble” with their life partner as James explains:

I actually see it like a duty you know, because me being one of the biggest dudes here and this being my home gym, I don't want there to be any negative vibes, so I'm always saying what's up to everyone. My girl gets pissed at me because I spend like 3,4 hours at the gym, and she knows how I am, so she knows it's because I spend most of the time talking to people.

James understands that beyond the actual working out, what makes bodybuilding fun is the connection he makes with others. This sentiment is in line with Emile Durkheim's (1906/1974)

assertion that “the human personality is a sacred thing; one dare not violate it or infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others” (37).

The Encouraging Compliments Current

In addition to greeting others, it is also common to hear Mass Monsters verbalize encouraging compliments to others. Encouraging compliments reify the positive energy frame at Monster Gym and make others feel good about themselves, which creates the recurrent effect of paying back those encouraging comments to the complimenter and paying them forward to others.

Richard provides a description of the encouraging compliments current:

Dude, literally everybody here goes around giving each other props. I’m serious. It’s funny as fuck to me when I have friends work out with me here because they’re like “Dude, why is everybody here on each other’s dick?” So it can definitely be a little different than what people are used to at other gyms, because, you know, it’s the gym and usually guys are hating on each other and trying to best each other.”

It is not uncommon for outsiders who work out at Monster Gym for the first time to be thrown off by the graciousness positive energy perceivers embody. Based on my observations, such compliments are always appreciated.

The encouraging compliments current also serves as a boost to the morale of individual positive energy perceivers which in turn brings the community together as Augie explains:

The vibes here are unbeatable for sure. You don’t get this type of energy at other gyms. People here are extremely supportive of each other and it just feeds into everything else. It’s seriously crazy, you walk around the gym, doesn’t matter what time, and you literally have people picking each other up talking about how good they look, or how strong they are, or whatever. And it’s just dope to see people build each other up instead of trying to tear each other down.

At Monster Gym, positive energy perceivers celebrate everyone’s victories. They do not see each other as each other’s competition, but rather as brothers whose passion for bodybuilding unifies

them. Put simply, they want to see each other win, be successful, and most importantly, be happy.

The Helpful Tips Current

The helpful tips current involves the willful sharing of bodybuilding information by positive energy perceivers with others and at the same time, the graceful acceptance of that information on the part of the receiver. Whereas at other places bodybuilders might be reluctant to accept advice from another bodybuilder because they might think doing so makes them look “weak,” at Monster Gym it is a welcomed practice. The practice of sharing information is described by Ray:

One thing about this place that I notice is people don’t trip when you give them little tips here and there. At other spots, you might have guys take little pointers the wrong way, but not here. I actually think guys appreciate it. It’s like “Oh shit, the homie is huge, but he doesn’t want to keep all that knowledge to himself.” Like they say, you know, sharing is caring.

The helpful tips current manifests through the acceptance of the sharing behavior. Without acceptance of the advice the transaction of knowledge would not be able to occur. In giving and accepting advice, the positive energy frame is reinforced.

As already alluded to, positive energy perceivers do not get offended or feel inferior when somebody offers helpful tips. In fact, they embrace them. Says Isaiah:

For me, I actually appreciate it when another dude comes up to me and mentions something that he thinks will help me. This was mostly when I first joined, but it still happens once in a while where a guy will suggest a little tweak to a movement or a different exercise for the body part they see me working on and I still appreciate it.

Ego is effectively nullified by the positive energy frame, which, in turn, allows sharing and learning to take place. This creates a joyous atmosphere where everybody celebrates each other’s knowledge about bodybuilding and what they each bring to the table. Another feature of the

helpful tips current is that it does not operate based on a hierarchy. Everybody gives and accepts advice from everybody. Jared explains:

What I think makes this place special is that guys aren't afraid to talk to each other and give each other advice. It doesn't matter if you're a new member or if you've been here a while, there's a good line of communication between everyone. The big guys helping the little guys, the little guys helping the big guys. Because guys understand that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. There's a lot of different factors involved in bodybuilding, genetics being one of them. Just because you don't look a particular way, doesn't mean you don't know your shit. And guys know that and help each other out.

These sentiments exemplify the positive energy frame. The open-mindedness that is practiced by positive energy perceivers gives them opportunities to learn new things. At the same time, this open-mindedness creates an environment where positive energy perceivers feel comfortable interacting with others because they know they will not be met with contempt – therefore, there is no fear of them being able to be themselves.

The “Spotting” Current

“Spotting” or “a spot” refers to assistance given on a lift when the weight is too heavy for the lifter. A “spotter” is the person who assists the lifter. The spotting current is instrumental in manifesting the positive energy frame. Prince provides a description of this current:

Imma tell you something, every gym you go to in America if you ask for a spot, the person you ask will 10 out of 10 times give it to you. But what's different about Monster Gym is that guys will literally go out of their way to ask YOU if you need a spot. They won't wait for you to ask. And what's really dope is the reason they feel comfortable asking first is because they know you won't get offended. They know that you know they're not asking because they think you look weak or something. That ain't it at all. There's no disrespect involved. It's all love. The reason guys ask is because that's the type of guys we have here. Straight up.

Positive energy perceivers understand that the community of bodybuilders at Monster Gym are truly interested in seeing everybody there succeed. There is no ego and there is no fear of either

asking for help or offering it. This is how the “spotting” current both influences and reinforces the positive energy frame at Monster Gym.

Through the positive energy frame “spotting” is conceived of as a transaction of love and appreciation. Richard explains how “spotting” interactions transpire at Monster Gym:

Usually when a guy is done spotting another guy, the guy who just got spotted will tell the guy who just spotted him to let him know if he needs a spot, but most of the time this is just something that guys say to each other as a courtesy and nobody actually takes them up on the offer. Here, they actually fucking do! Two exercises later or something, you’ll see the guy that was spotting earlier getting a spot from the guy he was spotting.

“Spotting” is a way of life at Monster Gym and it is deeply woven into the fabric of the positive energy frame. As seen here, the “spotting” current lets positive energy perceivers know that they can always count on others for an assist and more importantly for the positive energy that is reinforced through it.

“Spotting” is also not just for show. There is no performance involved. It is genuine. Ray explains:

One thing I’ve noticed here about the spotting is that yeah, it does happen a lot, but also, guys actually mean it when they do it. Like, they actually get into it and know how to do it. They know not to help too much, and they also pump you up during the set saying shit like “all you” or “you got one more in you, let’s go!”

The words of encouragement that accompany a “spot” are indicative of the genuine support positive energy perceivers have for each other. “Spotting,” then, is not a mindless act, but rather a purposeful one that reinforces the positive energy frame of Monster Gym.

POSITIVE ENERGY PERCEIVERS: A COMMUNITY OF WINNERS

There are different types of positive energy perceivers that are instrumental in reifying the positive energy frame through the *currents* mentioned above. I discuss them in this section.

Positive Energy Perceivers

Positive energy perceivers make up the majority of energy perceiving bodybuilders at Monster Gym. Positive energy perceivers are those whose personal energy are responsible for propagating the positive energy frame of Monster Gym. The three types of positive energy perceivers that exist at Monster Gym are *positive energy attributers*, *positive energy generators*, and *positive energy converters*. I discuss each of them in greater detail in the sections that follow as well as the *energy talk* each group engages in in order to reify the positive energy frame.

Positive Energy Attributers

The first category of positive energy perceivers is what I call *positive energy attributers*. Positive energy attributers describe themselves as positive people outside the gym who bask in the “additional” positive energy they experience at Monster Gym. As with all energy perceiving bodybuilders, positive energy attributers engage in energy talk in order to reify their identity vis-à-vis the positive energy frame of Monster Gym.

As a positive energy attributer, James describes his experience partaking in the positive energy at Monster Gym:

Man listen, energy is real and I’m not bullshitting you – I’m always in a good mood no matter what. You can ask my girlfriend, my family, friends, my co-workers, and they’ll tell you. I love life. But there’s something extra special about this place man. I come here and I feel the love and it takes me to another level, you know?

For positive energy attributers such as James, the positive feelings they experience at Monster Gym unquestionably emanate from the gym itself no matter how else they make sense of their optimistic and jovial outlook on life.

Isaiah is another positive energy attributer who experiences the positive energy frame at Monster Gym and considers himself fortunate to be able to do so:

I’m blessed. I enjoy what I do for a living, have a good family, good kids, a loving wife, and I’m able to provide for them. And on top of all that, I get to do what I

love in this place man. And it's like holy shit man, what did I do to deserve this? Everyone encourages and uplifts each other. I'm lucky bro.

Positive energy attributers like Isaiah give credit to the positive energy they experience at Monster Gym to the gym itself. As a recipient of this "additional" positive energy he receives at Monster Gym, Isaiah is able to enjoy a positive experience working out at Monster Gym.

Positive energy attributers also frequently conceive of Monster Gym as "a place of worship." Says Augie:

"Weights and faith. That's my motto. For me, those two things are indistinguishable. I always tell people, I have a place of worship on Sundays and I have a place of worship every other day. Only God could've ordained someone to build this gym because it brings out the best in people.

For Augie and other positive energy attributers, Monster Gym offers a space that serves the same purpose conventional places of worship serve – namely communion with others in an uplifting environment. These types of faith-based testimonials about the power of Monster Gym to "bring out" the best in people are common at Monster Gym.

Positive Energy Generators

Positive energy generators claim to be positive all the time regardless of the environment they find themselves in and attribute their positivity to their own agency. Positive energy generators take it upon themselves to create through their actions and positive energy talk the positive environment they experience at Monster Gym.

Some positive energy generators see it as their responsibility to uphold the positive energy frame at Monster Gym. This sentiment is exemplified in the following quote by Jared:

"Oh yeah baby – I'm literally pumped before I even step into the gym, you know what I'm saying? That's my lifestyle already. I come here and it's like how can I make this experience better for everyone? So you know, I do my part – I say what's up to everyone, smile on my face. Because you know what? I'm happy. I'm happy to be here. I'm happy to be alive and why am I gonna fake that shit?"

Jared is the type of guy who goes around high-fiving everyone at the gym. I witnessed this behavior many times. He fist-bumps and communicates brief encouraging comments to people as he passes by them. Things like: “Good shit, youngin!”: “Get it, old-timer!”; “Show him who’s boss young lady!” The impact of his cheerful and confident demeanor and his short uplifting messages was not lost on their recipients. Most people reacted by reciprocating the gesture and continuing to smile moments after Jared had already done the deed.

Some positive energy generators attributed their positive demeanor to a realization that their life has a purpose and part of this purpose is to just be happy and share that joy with others. To this end, Cristian explains:

“A house does not make a home, bro. I learned that a long time ago. If you want to be a part of something meaningful, you have to work at it and keep doing your best. I see this whole fucking planet as my home, I see my body as my home. Everywhere I go I’m home. And I love my home. I love my life. And when you love something, you want to share it – so that’s what I do everywhere I go. I don’t keep that shit to myself – I share my blessings with all; and when they soak it in, man there’s no better feeling.

Indeed, oftentimes I witnessed Cristian share life advice with others. And it was not limited to bodybuilding-related activity. He goes beyond “gym talk” to genuinely ask people how they are doing. He addresses people by their name, and people always walk away from a conversation with Cristian with a smile on their face. Upon being thanked by others, Cristian, always replies with the same message: “Pay it forward.”

Many times during the course of my research, I found myself being a recipient of some of the advice spread by positive energy generators. Below are some words that were shared with me by Richard on what he calls “mental gains:”

“It’s all up to you bro – the building gets lit because *we* make it lit. No different than a party. It’s a domino effect. Appreciate the gift of bodybuilding and you can’t help but project it into space. It’s all love bro – don’t be ashamed to be you, Pablo!

Underlying all positive energy talk at Monster Gym is the theme of “being you.” The idea is that a person cannot be happy unless they are unapologetically them. This “them,” according to positive energy perceivers, does not adhere to other’s expectations, ever. This “them” does not need anybody else’s permission to be happy. To promote this ideology, positive energy perceivers accept others as they are and positive energy generators, specifically, take it upon themselves to consciously create the frame of positive energy at Monster Gym.

Positive Energy Converters

Positive energy converters are bodybuilders who are struggling at life and the only thing getting them through it is the positive energy of Monster Gym. For this group, Monster Gym and its positive energy frame serve as their “anchor” which serves a dual purpose: (1) it helps take their mind off their external problem(s); and (2) it affects their own behavior towards others and themselves in a positive way.

Much of the energy talk that is generated by positive energy converters revolves around the topic of Monster Gym being a sanctuary and a beacon of hope for them. Indeed, some positive energy converters state that the gym “saved” them. Such was the case for Prince who explains:

“Plain and simple the gym saved me, brother. If it weren’t for this place I don’t know what I’d be doing. Probably lying out in a ditch somewhere with some of my buddies. I was doing a lot of fucked up shit and then I got into bodybuilding and I kept doing a lot of fucked up shit. But then I moved out to California and ended up in Streamdale and started working out here; and I shit you not – it was the first time in my life I felt genuine love. No hate, no bullshit. I still have bullshit I gotta deal with on the outside, but at least when I’m here all that noise goes into the background and I just focus on the love that my brothers give me here.”

It is common to hear stories like Prince’s at Monster Gym. There are many positive energy converters who attest that the positive energy frame at Monster Gym has indeed provided comfort in their lives.

On another occasion David, another positive energy converter, told me a story about how he was slamming weights throughout his workout one day because he was angry due to a fight he had had earlier with his girlfriend, and another bodybuilder at Monster Gym walked up him to ask him if he was okay. This is the impact that moment had on him:

“If it was anywhere else, I would’ve immediately come at that motherfucker, but because it took place here, and he wasn’t afraid to speak to me like a brother in front of others, it made me respect him and that’s when I knew that the power of this place was real. So I kept coming back for the positive energy.”

David has fully committed to the positive energy fame at Monster Gym. For David, the gym isn’t escapism – it’s a place where he feels like he can trust others in addition to feeling understood.

Other positive energy converters note the healing and therapeutic qualities of Monster Gym describing the place as “magical.” Such is the case for Ray who has the following to say:

“It’s like a sigh of relief coming in here. The best way I can describe it is: You remember your favorite high school teacher? You know that class you’d go into and automatically no matter what the fuck was going on in your life, you knew that for that hour or whatever you were going to have a blast? Yeah that’s the vibe I get here – straight up. This is the time of day when I turn into somebody who believes in himself because there’s something magical about this place, just like there was something magical about that class.”

The analogy Ray uses is one that many positive energy converters allude to in one way or another. Some positive energy converters I spoke with claim that they are “transported” to a different world when they step in through the doors of Monster Gym – a world where they can be themselves and are happy because they are doing what they love in the company of others who share that same passion.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEGATIVE ENERGY FRAME

Through the negative energy frame, negative energy perceivers see bodybuilding and the gym as competitive arenas. Those who submit to the negative energy frame see social cohesion as an external thing taking place outside of them within a *community of haters* (perceived envious others who are perceived as wishing for the downfall of the negative energy perceiver) that negative energy perceivers do not see themselves being a part of even though they *themselves* engage in the same *hating* behavior they criticize haters for. Put differently, even though *negative energy perceivers* at Aesthetic Gym participate in this *culture of hate* by exhibiting the same behaviors they criticize others for – namely, displaying an arrogant demeanor and not recognizing other’s accomplishments – they do not see themselves being part of this community. The negative energy frame, then, creates a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby negative energy perceivers at Aesthetic Gym keep to themselves and refuse to engage with others because they think others are *hating* on them. In other words, their perception of others being jealous or envious of them and wishing on their downfall reinforces the hypercompetitive environment that is prevalent at Aesthetic Gym. Negative energy perceivers’ logic is “If I know you’re a hater, why would I want to help you?”

THE NEGATIVE ENERGY FRAME CURRENTS

The negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym manifests through a number of modalities, or *currents*, which reinforce the hyper-competitive environment that is characteristic of Aesthetic Gym. These currents include the *non-talk current*, the *lone-wolf mentality current*, the *careless confidence current*, and the *fear of being criticized current*.

Every quote that resulted in my analysis from my larger data set is an example of what I call *energy talk*. The negative energy frame is carried out, or “spoken into existence,” by *negative energy talk*.

The Non-Talk Current

At Aesthetic Gym a culture of “non-talk” emerges in which sociability, small-talk, and other forms of perceived inconsequential conversation are frowned upon and “horseplay” is expendable. Non-talk helps generate a culture of individualism and isolation at Aesthetic Gym in which negative energy perceivers keep to themselves. This individualistic culture, then, inevitably leads to tension and mistrust between negative energy perceivers and their “haters,” giving rise to the negative energy frame. Lorenzo speaks on this ethos:

The way I see it, the gym is a place to put in work. This does create a bit of an icy environment, I’ll admit. But I’m not here to make friends. If you want to socialize, then go to a bar for that shit.

The consequences of labeling a place as “serious” are serious, and an outcome of this type of labeling is that the place may end up becoming uninviting and perhaps even hostile for those who adhere to this designation. It is in this way that non-talk reinforces the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym.

Non-talk may also result from seeing others as “competition” and not wanting to engage with them. Non-talk, then, becomes instrumental in the reification of the negative energy frame. On this, Donny has the following to say:

As far as I’m concerned all of these guys are my competition, I mean that’s why I come here because everybody is in tip-top shape. This is it, this is one of the premier spots for the top physiques in the world – so you don’t want to give anybody an edge or have them feel like you think they’re better than you. If you train here it’s because you know you’re hot shit, so just keep to yourself and do what you need to do and let your physique do the talking.

Indeed, it is a common belief at Aesthetic Gym that one should allow their physique “do the talking.” This is a departure from the positive energy frame experienced at Monster Gym where the focus is on making others feel good about themselves regardless of their physique.

The Lone-Wolf Mentality Current

Another current that is derived from and contributes to the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym is what I call the *lone-wolf mentality current*. Similar to non-talk, the lone-wolf mentality current manifests as an attitude whereby negative energy perceivers, for the most part, work out solitarily. Collin explains the lone-wolf mentality current:

I’ve worked out at other gyms where guys will train in groups and here that’s not the case. At most you’ll see like pairs but not really anything beyond that. And for the most part, it’s just guys hitting the weights by themselves putting in work. That’s definitely something that I notice here, and I actually appreciate that because I don’t think the gym is a place where you should bring your buddies and have a ball. I’m here to accomplish my goals and I think most guys here are like that.

It is easy to imagine, then, that in an environment where most individuals keep to themselves, the atmosphere of such a place might be a bit dismal. Such is the case at Aesthetic Gym. An analogous environment might be an office space where employees keep to themselves because they see the work-space as serious, and socializing as a distraction. Without much socializing, the place is devoid of joy and positive energy.

Indeed, some negative energy perceivers point to the fact that bodybuilding is an individual sport and as such, individuals should keep to themselves in this endeavor. Donny explains:

You come into this gym and you know what you’re gonna get. Not a lot of chitter chatter. Guys just pushing themselves to the limit. And, yeah, here we tend to go solo a bit but isn’t that what bodybuilding is? It’s an individual sport. Meaning, I’m coming at you and you don’t even know it, but you do.

For Donny and other negative energy perceivers at Aesthetic Gym, bodybuilding represents the epitome of a solitary sport. As such, they contend, bodybuilders should focus on their craft, especially while at the gym. They feel like it is crucial to give their undivided attention to their training in order to maximize the mind-muscle connection – that is, the ability to mentally isolate the muscle being trained and make it the sole focus of a bodybuilder’s attention, “feeling” every contraction and muscle fiber being engaged. From their perspective, it is inconceivable that bodybuilders could have fun and still focus on their sets and repetitions.

“The Careless Confidence” Current

The negative energy frame also manifests via the *careless confidence current* which equates to a strong sense of arrogance at Aesthetic Gym, but as Lorenzo puts it:

Arrogant people would never label themselves as “arrogant.” That just sounds terrible. I would say we carry ourselves in a “carelessly confident” manner. As if to say “yeah, I run this bitch.”

This attitude is accompanied by arrogant gestures and demeanor. Negative energy perceivers walk around the gym as if they “own the place” – elevating their noses and never making eye contact with others. This “careless confidence” invigorates the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym.

Lane theorizes about why this behavior is prominent at Aesthetic Gym:

Guys here basically think they’re the shit. It’s true! [laughs]. And I mean, come on, can you blame them? They all look like GQ cover models. They have the dream body: washboard abs and proportional physiques. So of course these dudes walk around like they’re hot shit! [What do you mean?] Dude, look around you, nobody laughs and when they do, it’s totally fake. And everybody pretty much wants to show off their chiseled six-pack every opportunity they get. Like the guys that literally lift their tanks over their heads before doing hanging leg raises.

Indeed, there is a strong air of superiority at Aesthetic Gym that manifests in negative energy perceivers’ unfriendly demeanor. This demeanor, in turn, “puts out” the negative energy which

helps create an environment where bodybuilders feel uncomfortable and don't want to socialize with one another.

The Fear of Being Criticized Current

The *fear of being criticized current* also reinforces the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym. Negative energy perceivers at Aesthetic Gym are always concerned about what others think about them and experience a fear of being criticized. Specifically, negative energy perceivers share the belief that others have a negative opinion of them, and do everything they can to mitigate that. Collin's sentiments are indicative:

"There's definitely this pressure of living up to a reputation. And to be honest with you, I don't even know what that reputation is or where it comes from, but I put in the work to not give anybody a chance to talk shit about me."

Negative energy perceivers' fear of being criticized contributes the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym because in not wanting to be criticized, negative energy perceivers avoid speaking with others due to their belief that socializing could lead to criticism. In their mind, then, not interacting with others is the best course of action to take in order to avoid criticism.

Fear of being criticized may also stem from negative energy perceivers' realization that they cannot control the behavior or actions of others. But instead of letting go and not letting other's behaviors and actions affect them, they get riled about hypothetical situations involving criticism. Such is the case for Clement as his negative energy talk demonstrates:

No way! Fuck that! Nobody has that right to talk about my physique. If I ever heard somebody talking shit, you know what I'd do? Go beat their ass, that's what I'd do. You got *me* fucked up if you think you're gonna get away with that high school gossip bullshit.

Clement's assertion that "nobody has the right" to speak about his physique sheds light on his constant concern over others' opinions and exposes his insecurities. He never considers that he has the right to not care.

A COMMUNITY OF HATERS

While energy currents are the different modes through which the negative energy frame manifests, individual actors are ultimately responsible for its dissemination and regeneration within Aesthetic Gym. The negative energy frame, which creates the hyper-competitive environment of Aesthetic Gym, is reinforced through the actions of a *community of haters* (i.e. perceived envious others who are also perceived as wishing on the downfall of the negative energy perceiver) which negative energy perceivers do not see themselves being a part of even though they exhibit the same negative behavior they criticize their *haters* for. In other words, negative energy perceiving bodybuilders do not see that their own actions reify the negative energy frame. This community of haters is composed of two groups of negative energy perceivers: *negative energy attributers* and *negative energy generators*. But, because in my sample all negative energy perceivers perceived themselves being *hated on* (or being the targets of others' jealousy or envy) and at the *same time* all of them admitted to engaging in *hating* behavior (even though they did not recognize it as such), all negative energy perceivers belonged to both groups.

Negative Energy Attributers

Negative energy attributers are negative energy perceivers who attribute the negative energy they experience at Aesthetic Gym to haters – i.e., to perceived envious others. By seeing others as *haters* and classifying their behavior as *hate*, negative energy attributers reinforce the negative energy frame.

Perceiving haters and labeling others as such may elicit a hostile attitude in negative energy attributers. This is evidenced in Clement's comments about haters:

Everybody here is always hating bro. If you have a decent physique, you're guaranteed haters. That's just how it is here. It doesn't even matter if you actually

look better or not. It's weird bro - the little looks you get and shit. Like why are you worried about me, bro? Fucking haters, jealous bitches.

Clement's reaction to talking about haters is laced with animosity. It is his labeling of others as haters that seems to have this effect on him. Without changing his perception of other's behavior, Clement's attitude will continue to reinforce the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym.

Other negative energy attributers theorize about the *hate* they experience from others at Aesthetic Gym. The following is Kasey's opinion on the matter:

Since everybody looks so good, there's no real alpha dog, you know what I'm saying – there's not necessarily one guy that's like the main guy. So what ends up happening is you get all these guys hating on each other and vying for that crown.

Kasey's assertion that Aesthetic Gym being devoid of a "real alpha dog" leads to negative energy attributers vying for the designation at Aesthetic Gym and speaks to the competitive environment that breeds jealousy (*hate*) among negative energy attributers which inevitably contributes to the negative energy frame.

In addition to relying on the negative energy frame to be able to interpret a situation, negative energy attributers also rely on gossip to make up their minds about the existence of *hate* and *haters*. In the following narrative, Kyle talks about an instance where he became aware of some *hate* he was perceiving from an unlikely source:

Yeah dude the hate is real. Let me tell you a quick story – true story. You know Frazer, right? [Yeah.] And you know how we're pretty close always hyping each other up and shit. Well one day we went out for dinner at Dave & Buster's with a big group and after eating we headed to the arcade and kept drinking. Needless to say, we all got shitfaced and, at one point he tells me that I'm way more ripped than him and shit. You know, basically making excuses for himself. So I guess he's just as beta as everyone else here. I actually feel bad for him now. Like, how are you going to be hating on another dude?! That's such a bitch move and goes to show you anybody can be a hater.

Kyle's interpretation of Frazer's comments as *hate* is a prime example of a negative energy attributer using the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym to make sense of talk pertaining to their physique as *hate*.

Fuel

Labeling others as *haters* produces an effect whereby negative energy attributers use that perceived *hate* as fuel to invigorate their bodybuilding endeavors. In other words, negative energy attributers claim to use the *hate* as motivation to accomplish their bodybuilding goals. Perceived *hate*, then, can be instrumental in a negative energy attributer's experience while training at Aesthetic Gym. Donny's *negative energy talk* exemplifies this sentiment:

I mean it's fuel, bro! I see all these amazing bodies, guys bringing their "A" game and it's just like, wow, I need to step my game up. There's a reason why everybody here is cocky, there's a reason why the hate is real. But all of that shit is just fuel, and you use it for your own betterment, to accomplish your goals, and to prove the haters wrong.

Using others and their perceived *hate* as motivation is a common practice by negative energy perceivers at Aesthetic Gym.

Negative Energy Generators

Negative energy generators are negative energy attributers who, in addition to blaming others for the negative energy at Aesthetic Gym, *acknowledge* engaging in behavior that others perceive as *hate*, even though they themselves do not classify it as *hate* despite it being identical to the behavior they classify as *hate* in others.

Negative energy generators take pride in being a source of negative motivation for others. In their view, they are doing others a service by pushing them via negative reinforcement. Kasey explains how he carries out this quest:

"Oh yeah dude, I'm definitely a shit talker. If I see Greg over there squatting, I'll go fuck with him and call him a bitch for only doing 545. I do that shit with

everybody here. I like to think of myself as an instigator. I want to fuck with them like that so they push even harder.”

By admitting that his actions are intended to motivate others and have them second-guess themselves about their accomplishments, Kasey’s hope is that the recipient of his criticism submits himself to a looking-glass-self process whereby the individual takes Kasey’s criticism seriously and doubts how he (the recipient) may have initially framed his accomplishment. So while the intention of the commentary may not be consciously malicious on the part of a negative energy generator, it can certainly be perceived as such.

Negative energy generators also admit to intentionally withholding compliments from other bodybuilders. Clement explains:

“I don’t give props, fuck that. Even though inside me I acknowledge their accomplishments, I don’t do it. Why would I go out of my way to stroke your ego? You know? Whether it’s their physique or a lift or something – no way, never in a million years will you hear me give a guy props. That’s just not how I roll. Matter of fact, you know what I’ll actually do? If I see some dude doing something impressive I give him this look like pffft, that was nothing.”

Clement’s unwillingness to compliment others helps to reproduce the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym. Even though he admits to being impressed by other’s feats or physiques, in his view, he is not going to give them the satisfaction of them thinking that he thinks they have done something impressive. And through the lens of the negative energy frame, there is a strong possibility that Clement’s gestures will be interpreted as hate, jealousy, or envy at Aesthetic Gym.

Kyle, another negative energy generator explains his reasoning for refusing to give out compliments:

I’ll be honest bro, if I see a guy who has a better physique than me, I won’t bother giving him the attention he wants. That puts me in the awkward position of basically admitting that he’s better than me and that makes me look weak, so I’m not giving him that satisfaction.

The fear of being perceived as inferior by another prevents negative energy generators such as Kyle from being friendly. In their eyes, this would diminish their status at Aesthetic Gym. This is starkly different than the type of interactions and demeanors found at Monster Gym where positive energy perceivers are friendly and approachable to others.

CHAPTER 4

THE MOBILE ENERGY FRAME

In this chapter I introduce the *mobile energy frame* to describe the process whereby energy perceiving bodybuilders “take with them” the respective social cohesion frame they experience inside their respective gym – i.e. the positive energy frame at Monster Gym or the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym - and apply it to bodybuilding-related activities outside the immediate confines of the gym, namely to steroids use and dieting. In the following sections I discuss the mobile energy frame in both its positive and negative manifestations.

THE POSITIVE MOBILE ENERGY FRAME

I found that the positive mobile energy frame is only executed by positive energy attributers and positive energy converters, but not positive energy generators. This is because positive energy generators are bodybuilders who take credit for being the source of the positive energy that is mostly perceived at Monster Gym. Thus, positive energy generators do not give credit to the positive energy frame for their orientation towards steroids or diets. Henceforth, then, I refer to positive energy attributers and positive energy converters by the singular term *positive energy mobilizers* since they are the only two groups that utilize *the positive mobile energy frame*.

In my research I found that the positive energy frame at Monster Gym manifests in positive energy mobilizers’ bodybuilding-related activity outside the gym. This activity includes the use of steroids and diets.

Positive Energy in Steroids

In this section I discuss how the positive energy frame at Monster Gym (which advances the belief that there is no such thing as “better” in bodybuilding and thus produces a culture of

cooperation and camaraderie between bodybuilders) effects positive energy mobilizers' motivation for using steroids, their attitudes towards them, and their experiences acquiring them.

Motivation for Using Steroids

Positive energy mobilizers cite the positive energy frame at Monster Gym as instrumental in their decision to use steroids. They make this known by engaging in positive energy talk.

Augie's energy talk is exemplary of this:

I chose to hop on because it was just inspiring as hell being around guys that I admired and looked up to. Blaine and Trev were just so encouraging and chill. It was just pure motivation. Kind of like seeing your favorite superhero and saying I want to be like that. That's how I felt about these guys and they always made me feel like I was already a part of the group even before I hopped on. So when I finally said I was ready, they were like "alright baby, let's do this!"

This is how the positive energy frame at Monster Gym travels with positive energy mobilizers such as Augie and manifests in their steroids use. The positive energy is felt in the form of encouragement and support while positive energy mobilizers engage in this activity outside the gym.

Another way that the positive energy frame at Monster Gym impacts positive energy mobilizers steroid use is by motivating them to become inspiring figures and paying forward the positive energy. Prince recalls the following story that speaks to this:

I remember early on when I first joined the gym getting this really bad case of gyno. And I don't know how this random guy could tell because I thought I was being slick wearing a loose t-shirt. But he could tell. Anyways, he walks up to me during a water break and he's like – "Gyno huh? Been there. Come see me after your workout." So about an hour later I'm done and I walk up to him just like he said and he's like come on. So I follow him outside to his car and he goes to into his trunk to pull out a container of cabergoline and he just hands it to me and he says, "take half a pill twice a week for the remainder of your cycle." Then I said, "how much?" And he puts his arm on my shoulder and he says, "don't worry about it." From that point on my whole mindset about most bodybuilders being arrogant fucks changed. I saw that them being buddy buddy was real. And that's the moment when I said I want to do that for other guys too. I want to be that inspiring figure. Everything changed for me right then and there. Even the pinning. When I first

started pinning, I would always think about the guy I wanted to be bigger than at the gym and after that I was like fuck it, I'm just going to be someone these guys look up to.

Not only did experiencing that act of kindness help Prince reorient his entire perspective towards other bodybuilders, steroids, and bodybuilding in general, but it also inspired him to shift his motivation for doing steroids. In that moment, Prince's reality changed, and it was due to being exposed to an experience that he perhaps previously did not think was possible. In other words, prior to this experience, Prince's perception about gym culture, bodybuilders, and bodybuilding was quite negative, but this experience introduced him to a new frame that he was previously unaware of. The positive energy frame of Monster Gym thereafter continued to inform his subsequent steroids use.

The positive energy frame of Monster Gym may also help debunk stereotypes about steroids users and thus could motivate bodybuilders to use steroids. Such was the case for David:

I always thought that guys who used were assholes and that was something that made me hesitant to use but after being around these guys: they're friendly – and I realized that everything I ever said about them was wrong and I that's when I went for it.

After being in an environment where the majority of bodybuilders are using steroids and are also nice people, David was able to replace a previously held frame that guided his views about steroids users and replaced it with the positive energy frame of Monster Gym. This newly found perspective infused his motivation for using steroids.

Attitudes Towards Steroids

The positive energy frame at Monster Gym influences positive energy mobilizers' attitudes towards steroids in two ways: 1) the open, supportive, non-judgmental environment allows bodybuilders to indulge in steroid use without feeling guilty or feeling like they are doing

something wrong and 2) the camaraderie at Monster Gym allows steroid users to celebrate each other's steroids use which in turn generates feelings of joy in positive energy mobilizers.

Free of Judgement

The notion that Monster Gym is a judgement free zone allows positive energy mobilizers to engage in steroids use freely and openly. Furthermore, because positive energy mobilizers are open about their use of steroids, a sense of wrongdoing is non-existent. Ray explains how the positive energy frame affects his attitude towards steroids in this regard:

Just how open everybody is about it here – giving each other advice and shit. Talking about mixing this, this and that. And switching up the doses and stuff. Man, it was such breath of fresh air. Nobody is fake, they're just real. And that made me feel more comfortable doing them and not feeling like I was doing something wrong.

For Ray, the open and friendly environment of Monster Gym alleviated his preconceived attitude towards steroids. It made him feel supported and in turn he was able to go through with the steroids usage without feeling guilty. This powerful account demonstrates how instrumental a frame can be in creating or motivating attitudes without individuals being aware that they can accept or reject the frames presented to them.

James also shares these sentiments and in the following example of positive energy talk he offers an analogy of what he and others experience away from Monster Gym when they engage in the auxiliary activity of using steroids:

I just feel 100% free bro. I come in here and me and my bros talk about everything man, like what we're on, how much we're taking – all that. And it's so fuckin chill dude. Picture it like this: Imagine you're Catholic, alright? My family is Catholic, so no disrespect. And instead of having to confess to this one dude about your wrongdoings and having him make you feel guilty, you talk to the entire congregation about your deeds freely and openly and instead of them judging you, they support you. They support that this is where you're at - and that's fine. Well for us, it's kind of like the same thing. We're all doing this thing. None of us feel like we're doing anything wrong. So, we don't judge each other, and it just feels good. And if a guy decides to stop using, guess what we support him too!

James's positive energy talk reveals the supportive nature of the positive energy frame and in it he also delineates its liberating effects with regards to steroids use. This attitude, then, is a direct result of being exposed to a frame that makes positive energy mobilizers feel like they can be themselves inside and outside the gym.

"Steroids Are Just Fun"

In addition to promoting a non-judgmental attitude towards steroids, the positive energy frame at Monster Gym is also instrumental in generating feelings of joy towards steroids use because, according to positive energy mobilizers, doing them is "just fun." This sentiment is exemplified in Isaiah's positive energy talk:

Steroids are just fun man. I'll probably do them forever. You feel better, you look better, you're stronger. What's not to love. The cherry on top is when you're a part of a community like Monster Gym where there's no egos and guys don't get jealous and they talk openly about them. That's fucking cool. But seriously, there's no jealousy – you're just genuinely happy for each other and that carries over to when you're actually doing them. It's like when you're a kid and it's like Christmas Day and you can't wait to hang out with your friends to show them your presents because you know they're going to genuinely be happy for you. And then you go back home, and you stare at your new toy and it's like that much better because you know everybody else liked it too.

Since the collective orientation towards bodybuilding at Monster Gym is a positive one, it makes sense that positive energy mobilizers would utilize and apply this same frame to their use of steroids. They see this activity as something to be enjoyed. And not just enjoyed, but enjoyed with others. In their view, it does not make sense to not be happy for someone who is also happy.

Some positive energy mobilizers equate the effects of steroids to having superpowers. This framing of the effects of steroids is derived from the wider positive energy frame at Monster Gym. Ray provides a description of this framing:

What kid doesn't grow up wishing they had superpowers? This is basically that! But just like with any superpower you gotta be guided. Like Uncle Ben telling Peter that "with great power comes great responsibility." I think guys are really good about that here. They don't abuse their powers and they don't use them to feel better than others. I'd say they're role models. So when you go home and pin you know that you're doing it because it makes YOU happy not to put others down or to make you feel better than others.

It is evident, then, how the positive energy frame influences the attitude that steroids use is supposed to be fun and used for self-fulfilling and inspiring purposes. This belief is an outcome of adhering to the positive energy frame at Monster Gym and an example of how the frame is "carried" by positive energy mobilizers into the steroids arena.

Sharing Steroids Sources and Sharing Steroids Knowledge

According to positive energy mobilizers, the positive energy frame at Monster Gym is instrumental in developing a culture whereby positive energy mobilizers are happy to share steroids sources and knowledge about steroids. In this section I discuss the influence the positive energy frame has in these two areas.

Sharing Steroids Sources

There are two methods that positive energy mobilizers at Monster Gym use to acquire steroids: in-person dealers and online sources. Some positive energy mobilizers prefer to use one method over the other, while others use a combination of both. The method of acquisition is not as important as positive energy mobilizers' willingness to share their sources with others. This section illustrates the type of positive energy talk positive energy mobilizers engage in to reify the positive energy frame at Monster Gym as it relates to the topic of sharing steroids sources.

The reification of the positive energy frame at Monster Gym can be observed in the way positive energy mobilizers talk about the positive energy frame informing their decision to refer interested parties to steroids dealers. Isaiah's positive energy talk speaks to this:

I'm one of the biggest dudes here so I actually get asked a lot about sources and stuff and I have no problem pointing guys in the right direction. The dude asking appreciates it. The dealers appreciate it. Everybody's happy. We're pretty tightknit around here.

In sharing his steroids sources with others, Isaiah is activating the positive energy frame of Monster Gym. Isaiah is not concerned with keeping sources to himself because he wants everybody who wants to take steroids to be able to do so.

Similarly, Prince talks about sharing online sources:

We'll talk about it freely because we know everybody is chill about it. There's nothing to hide here bro. So yeah, we'll share our experiences with different labs and stuff. You know, this lab is good to go. This lab is trash. Shit like that.

Many positive energy mobilizers get their steroids from online sources and share their experiences with regards to them with others. In doing so, they are upholding and reaffirming the positive energy frame from Monster Gym.

Sharing Knowledge About Steroids

Not only do positive energy mobilizers share knowledge with others about steroids sources, they also share knowledge about the steroids themselves and how to use them. David describes this action:

It's a known thing around here that if you are interested in learning how to take steroids, you go to Monster Gym. Every gym across America – commercial or not – is going to have a huge population of steroids users. What makes Monster Gym different is that we're open about it and we share information with anyone that's interested. We're a family and we take care of each other here and we want to keep each other healthy so we can continue to do what we love. I've been a bodybuilder for 30 years and I was never a part of anything like this until I came here ten years ago.

In sharing knowledge and information about steroids, positive energy mobilizers demonstrate that they care about each other, thus reifying and adhering to the positive energy frame. Seeing each other like family is a direct effect of the positive energy frame.

Positive energy mobilizers also write steroid protocols for those who are interested. In fact, they see it as their duty to do so. James explains:

I write protocols all the time. The last thing I want is for guys to hurt themselves, especially first timers. So if they're set on it and I can't make them change their minds, I tell them what to use, the doses, for how long, all that.

Positive energy mobilizers' concern for others is exemplified in their reasoning for wanting to write steroids protocols for others. This type of behavior is a consequence of adhering to and reinforcing the positive energy frame at Monster Gym. The positive energy frame is successful in orienting the behavior of those who commit to it. In this case, the behavior is the sharing of knowledge related to steroids use.

Positive Energy in Diets

When it comes to dieting, there are two philosophies prevalent in the bodybuilding community: traditional approaches and intuitive eating. Traditional approaches are quantitatively based and require that bodybuilders keep track of the calories and macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates, and calories) they consume throughout the day; intuitive eating hinges on bodybuilders listening to their bodies for cues on what they need to eat in order to look a particular way. In bodybuilding, both traditional and intuitive eating diets are characterized by bulking and cutting cycles. During a bulking cycle, bodybuilders consume a caloric surplus during the "off-season" months of the fall and winter in order to accumulate lean muscle mass, while a cutting season is when bodybuilders go into a caloric deficit in the spring and summer months in order to lean out and reveal the lean muscle they put on during the bulking period.

Regardless of their dieting philosophies, positive energy mobilizers use the positive energy frame of Monster Gym to make sense of and guide their dieting experiences. This is evidenced in the positive energy talk they engage in which centers around feeling the support of

the gym while dieting and recognizing that different bodybuilders have different preferences when it comes to dieting.

Feeling the Support

Positive energy mobilizers describe feeling supported by positive energy perceivers while they are not physically present. This feeling is illustrated in Ray's positive energy talk:

The support is unbelievable, man. Seriously, I feel like the whole gym is cheering me on when I'm shoving chicken down my throat for the tenth time in five days.

Feeling supported by others while they are not physically there is another way of conveying that the positive energy frame of Monster Gym is operating while Ray engages in the complementary activity of eating.

The positive energy frame also serves as a preventive measure against getting discouraged. In other words, the positive energy frame helps to continue to motivate positive energy mobilizers in their dieting endeavors while they are away from the physical confines of Monster Gym. On this, Augie has the following to say:

Me and my guys we hold each other accountable with our diets because we want to keep that positive energy moving. That way, when we come back, we'll be properly fueled to continue to have bad ass workouts.

Via his positive energy talk, Augie recognizes that the positive energy frame of Monster Gym has the ability to impact positive energy mobilizers such as himself outside the gym in much the same way the frame affects them inside of it. Augie's commentary also sheds light on how the frame connects seemingly distinct activities and experiences across space and time.

Respecting Others' Dieting Philosophies

Another action where the positive energy frame of Monster Gym is observed is in positive energy mobilizer's energy talk pertaining to dieting philosophies that are distinct from their own. In this positive energy talk, positive energy mobilizers reveal the impact the positive

energy frame of Monster Gym has on their attitudes towards their own and others' diets. Isaiah's energy talk is illustrative of this impact:

Personally, I practice intuitive eating because for me I know my body well enough to where I know what I need to eat to look a certain way. But that doesn't mean I'm gonna knock a guy for having a strict diet and counting his macros and all that. We're all different. We understand that. So, to each their own!

Indeed, Isaiah is mindful that just because he practices a particular diet and it works well for him, it does not mean everybody has to do what he does. He knows that his way is not the "right" way or the "only" way. This attitude is emblematic of the positive energy frame at Monster Gym.

THE NEGATIVE MOBILE ENERGY FRAME

The mobile energy frame can also be of the negative variety. Aesthetic Gym with its negative energy frame that promotes a highly competitive environment where everybody is perceived as being a "hater" (a jealous or envious person who wishes for the downfall of others) spurs what I call the *mobile negative energy frame*. The mobile negative energy frame is manifested when negative energy mobilizers "take with them" the negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym and use it to motivate their engagement in the external activities of steroids use and dieting. Additionally, the mobile negative energy frame is carried out, or "spoken into existence," by negative energy talk.

Negative Energy in Steroids

The negative energy experienced by negative energy perceivers at Aesthetic Gym can "make its way" in a variety of ways to related bodybuilding activities outside the gym. One such way is in negative energy perceivers' steroids use. In this section I present how the negative energy frame manifests in negative energy perceivers' motivation for using steroids and in their attitudes towards steroids.

Motivation for Using

The mobile negative energy frame can be observed in negative energy mobilizers' motivation for using steroids. Indeed, negative energy mobilizers often cite the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym as motivating their steroids use. Negative energy mobilizers give two reasons for using steroids, both which of are informed by the negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym: *feeling pressure* and *proving the haters wrong*.

Feeling Pressure

Negative energy mobilizers mention feeling pressure from the highly competitive environment at Aesthetic Gym and its *community of haters* as one of the reasons they take steroids. In citing feeling pressure from others as a reason for using steroids, negative energy mobilizers are experiencing the negative energy frame outside of the immediate confines of Aesthetic Gym. The pressure itself may manifest in negative feelings as is the case for Collin:

Listen, when you're in an environment where everyone literally looks like they belong on the cover of a fitness magazine, you definitely feel that pressure to do something because you don't want to feel like shit. And for me the answer was steroids.

In comparing himself to others, Collin is actively participating in the negative energy frame outside the immediate confines of Aesthetic Gym. It is easy to see, then, how the negative energy frame motivates the behavior of using steroids.

Lane, another negative energy mobilizer, agrees that the pressure to use steroids is motivated by the negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym. In the following commentary he makes his assertion known:

I don't see any other reason to stab yourself willingly except for wanting to be bigger than other guys. I think about my competition and I know that they're willing to go through it, so I nut up and do what I gotta do.

Lane's motivation for doing steroids is based on his belief that others are doing them too and that their reason for doing them is to "one-up" him. This is a clear example of someone using the negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym to inform bodybuilding-related activity taking place outside of its immediate confines.

Proving the Haters Wrong

Another reason negative energy mobilizers give for using steroids is to "prove the haters wrong." *Haters* are perceived envious others who wish for the downfall of the person who is being "hated on" or enviously criticized. A defining characteristic of the negative energy frame is that the perceived negative opinions about the self from others are to be taken personally. In Clement's comments about haters motivating his use of steroids, Clement depicts the negative energy frame perfectly:

You see the little looks that guys give you – like they want you to fail or something – and it's like, "okay you fucking hater, you want to really be mad about something? Watch this." So, I went for it – I took steroids and got stupid huge. Be mad now bitch.

By focusing on proving his haters wrong, and using that as motivation for taking steroids, Clement is successfully manifesting the *negative energy frame* outside of the immediate confines of Aesthetic Gym. His animosity towards his perceived haters also reifies the negative energy frame.

Attitudes Towards Steroids

Negative energy mobilizer's attitudes towards steroids are also influenced by the negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym. Utilizing the negative energy frame, negative energy mobilizers conceive of steroids in two ways: as helping agents and as weapons.

Helping Agents

Some negative energy mobilizers see steroids as helping agents that help mitigate their insecurities which are propagated by the negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym. In this way, the negative energy frame is manifested in negative energy mobilizer's steroids use. On this, Donny has the following to say:

Nobody will tell you this because they're too insecure to admit it, but everyone at this gym cares about what other people think about them. Including me. And for me, the steroids help with that shit. They just make me feel more confident.

Seeing steroids as an agent that boosts negative energy mobilizers' confidence is common at Aesthetic Gym. In this regard, steroids are not different from other drugs that serve a similar purpose.

Weapons

Other negative energy mobilizers conceive of steroids as "weapons" that aid in the bodybuilding "battlefield." This conception of steroids is directly influenced by the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym. Kyle explains:

Bodybuilding to me is about going to battle with guys. Seriously, it's like I'm at war and steroids are my ammo. And just like with any type of armory, it's about what you have and how you use it and I feel like I always have the edge.

When negative energy mobilizers such as Kyle consume steroids they actively use the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym to guide and make sense of their behavior. In other words, seeing steroids as weapons is directly influenced by perceived competition at Aesthetic Gym.

Fear of Sharing

In an effort to maintain a competitive advantage, negative energy mobilizers are hesitant to share advice pertaining to steroids. For them, doing so would hinder them and they would be doing themselves a disservice. This unwillingness to share knowledge about steroids is a

manifestation of the negative energy frame that is predominant at Aesthetic Gym. On this, Kasey has the following to say:

First of all, you have to have some balls to just walk up to a guy and ask him about steroids. And it's happened to me and I'll give you props for that – but you ain't getting shit from me. Why would I go out of my way to help you beat me?

Kasey's sentiments regarding sharing information about steroids is illustrative of a negative energy perceiver. His unwillingness to share information is a direct consequence of submitting to the highly competitive negative energy frame that says that doing so would hinder him and give an advantage to his perceived rivals.

Negative energy mobilizers are also big on “putting in your own work.” They believe that the information is “out there” for anyone who is interested in it. And they feel like others should “pay their dues” like they did. Lane's sentiments embody this philosophy:

There's a ton of articles and blogs about [steroids] protocols. You can go check them out. That's how I learned. I did my research. I put in the work. And you expect me to hand you the goods on a silver platter just like that? That's weak.

In Lane's view, bodybuilding is an arena where bodybuilders should fend for themselves. Furthermore, his portrayal of a bodybuilder asking for help as “weak” denotes his allegiance to the competitive make-up of the negative energy frame.

Negative Energy in Dieting

Like positive energy mobilizers, negative energy mobilizers practice a variety of dieting techniques. What distinguishes negative energy mobilizers' dieting practices, however, is the energy frame they use to motivate and make sense of their diets. Negative energy mobilizers apply the negative energy frame of Aesthetic Gym which asserts that in order to be the best one has to be better than others.

In this section I present examples of the energy talk negative energy mobilizers use to reify the negative energy frame. Most of this talk centers around “the competition” being a motivating factor in the way negative energy mobilizers approach dieting. Lorenzo’s comments below are illustrative:

What drives me in staying on point with my diet is knowing that my competition is also putting in the work. You don’t think I wish I could have a burger and shake every night? But I know that the guys I’m gunning for aren’t doing that shit. And that helps me stay on point until my cheat day – but even then, I don’t go crazy.

The negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym makes its way, as it were, to negative energy mobilizers’ dieting techniques. Their satisfaction, then, always seems to be predicated on what somebody else is doing and, more precisely, making sure that they are doing it better than them. Furthermore, as seen in Lorenzo’s comments, the negative energy frame also seems to serve as an assumption-making apparatus whereby negative energy mobilizers make blanket statements, such as the one above, about others.

Negative energy mobilizers understand the role their diets play in creating their desired physiques. Acquiring this physique, however, is hardly the end-goal. Kasey explains:

There’s always these dudes that we’ve made it kind of a competition – I don’t know them personally – but, there’s these dudes that use the bottom of their shirts to wipe the sweat off their faces knowing damn well they could use their towel. But no, instead they use the bottom of their shirts because it gives them an excuse to show off their abs. And that pisses me off, so that makes me not wanna fuck up on my diet so my abs stay pristine and I can do the same thing to them.

In addition to acquiring his desired physique, Kasey’s motivation for being strict with his diet is to one-up his perceived competition. It is quite clear, then, that the negative energy frame can be “lifted” from the immediate confines of Aesthetic Gym and be activated in activities that take place outside of the gym such as dieting.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Society is an organism and social cohesion is a frame. Society is an organism composed of different individual frames. Each frame looks at the organism of society in a distinct way. In this dissertation I have conceptualized social cohesion as a frame. Togetherness exists in the eye of the beholder. When many share the same notion of togetherness, then togetherness exists for that group. Togetherness can thus exist in different modalities. In my research with bodybuilders at two gyms, I discovered two variations of the *social cohesion frame*: the *positive energy frame* and the *negative energy frame*.

AESTHETIC GYM AND THE NEGATIVE ENERGY FRAME

For bodybuilders at Aesthetic Gym, the *frame of social cohesion* takes the form of the *negative energy frame* which conceives of social cohesion as something that exists outside of bodybuilders in a *community of haters* (i.e. perceived envious others who are perceived as wishing for the downfall of the negative energy perceiver) that negative energy perceivers do not see themselves being a part of even though they themselves engage in the same negative behavior they criticize haters for.

The negative energy frame manifests through different pathways or *currents*. These include the *non-talk current*, the *lone-wolf mentality current*, the *careless confidence current*, and the *fear of being criticized current*.

The *non-talk current* promotes Aesthetic Gym as a place where small talk and socializing are frowned upon. Non-talk reinforces the idea that the gym is a place where serious work is to take place because bodybuilding is a serious endeavor. Non-talk also emerges as a result of the competitive environment that is fostered at Aesthetic Gym.

The *lone-wolf mentality current* promotes Aesthetic Gym as a place where bodybuilders work out alone without the need of company and bodybuilding as an individualistic endeavor. The lone-wolf mentality promotes a “me against the world” attitude which further isolates negative energy perceivers and invigorates the negative energy frame.

The *careless confidence current* can be observed in negative energy perceivers’ arrogant behavior which includes walking with their noses in the air, not responding when spoken to. and, in general, “putting out” an unfriendly demeanor. This demeanor speaks to a culture of competitiveness that ultimately brews negativity and reinforces the negative energy frame.

The *fear of being criticized current* manifests when negative energy perceivers take offense at “criticism” they perceive being aimed towards them. From their perspective, any type of advice given to them is a “shot” at their physique because the critic is a *hater*. In order to avoid criticism, negative energy perceivers keep to themselves, thus contributing to the regeneration of the negative energy frame.

While each energy current is instrumental in reifying the negative energy frame at Aesthetic Gym, the currents would not exist without the actions and attitudes of individual actors. In the case of Monster gym, each energy current is carried out by a community of *negative energy attributers* and *negative energy generators*. Negative energy attributers are negative energy perceivers who attribute the negative energy at Aesthetic Gym to others, while *negative energy generators* are negative energy perceivers who attribute the negativity they experience at Aesthetic gym to others (thus, they are also negative energy attributers) *and* admit to engaging in behavior that they themselves classify as *hate* in others, but when it comes to themselves, are hesitant to label as such.

MONSTER GYM AND THE POSITIVE ENERGY FRAME

For bodybuilders at Monster Gym, the *frame of social cohesion* takes the form of the *positive energy frame* which conceives of social cohesion as the collective harmony that occurs when individuals adhere to nonjudgmental, supportive, and celebratory interaction principles.

The positive energy frame manifests through different pathways or *currents*. These include the *verbal greetings current*, the *encouraging compliments current*, the *helpful tips current*, and the “*spotting*” *current*.

The *verbal greetings current* is observed at Monster Gym when positive energy perceivers go out of their way to greet each other every time they see each other and others at Monster Gym. Positive energy perceivers see everybody who walks in through the doors of Monster Gym as family and they treat them as such because they are genuinely excited to see their family members every single time. Stopping to say hello, dapping each other up (a type of handshake/hug), and making small talk is not just a norm, but a genuine gesture of appreciation.

The *encouraging compliments current* manifests when positive energy perceivers exclaim and give each other congratulatory words of encouragement and praise. Positive energy perceivers root for each other and for others. They also compliment each other’s physiques and lifting feats. These words work to reify the positive energy frame at Monster Gym.

The *helpful tips current* can be seen in action when positive energy perceivers share bodybuilding information with each other and with others. The information and help that is circulated around Monster Gym is well-received and appreciated on the part of positive energy perceivers and reinforces the positive energy frame at Monster Gym.

The “*spotting*” *current*, is observed when positive energy perceivers assist each other with their lifts. As with the encouraging compliments current, positive energy perceivers understand that the “spotting” current is about genuinely helping each other and wanting to see

each other succeed. The “spotting” current, then, is instrumental in reifying the positive energy frame at Monster Gym.

The currents are carried out by individual actors at Monster Gym. These *positive energy perceivers* can be divided into subgroups. In my research I found three subtypes of *positive energy perceivers* that make up what I call a *community of winners*. The three subtypes of *positive energy perceivers* are *positive energy attributers*, *positive energy generators*, and *positive energy converters*. This *community of winners* is essential in reifying the *positive energy frame* at Monster Gym.

Positive energy attributers give credit to the positive energy frame at Monster Gym for the positive environment that is characteristic of the gym. In other words, positive energy attributers attribute the joy they experience while working out at Monster Gym to the actions of the community there.

Positive energy generators see themselves as contributing to the positive energy frame of Monster Gym. In other words, they bring the positive energy because, as they see it, something comes out of nothing. And that “something” they bring to the table, is the positive energy frame.

Positive energy converters are positive energy perceivers who are going through rough patch in life, but bask in the positive energy frame while at Monster Gym. In other words, no matter what else is going in their lives outside the gym, they can always count on the positive energy frame at Monster Gym to uplift them.

THE MOBILE ENERGY FRAME

Additionally, I introduced the *mobile energy frame* to describe the process whereby bodybuilders “take with them” the respective *social cohesion frame* they experience inside

Monster Gym (*the positive energy frame*) or Aesthetic Gym (*the negative energy frame*) and apply it in bodybuilding-related activities outside the immediate confines of the gym.

At Monster Gym, positive energy attributers and positive energy generators experienced the positive mobile energy frame, while at Aesthetic Gym negative energy attributers experienced the negative mobile energy frame.

The mobile energy frame sheds light on how social cohesion can be conceived of as a frame since co-presence is not necessary to feel connected to others.

IMPLICATIONS

“What is it that is going on here?” is the question Goffman contends frames help answer. Indeed, frames help guide individuals on how to make sense of a given moment. But isn’t it true that when we pause and deconstruct every socially constructed component of the moment, the answer to the question Goffman so eloquently poses is either “nothing,” “everything,” or “whatever I choose?”

Without teaching individuals that they are the perceivers of a situation, it is easy to see how they could adopt frames that do not make them happy. By acknowledging and teaching the existence of both the positive and negative energy frames, individuals in our society would be better prepared to identify the situations that make them happy or unhappy. By understanding that they have a choice in selecting the frame they choose to decorate a situation with, they would be better equipped to either change the situation or change the frame.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In the future, I would like to explore the positive and negative energy frames in other contexts such as homes (families), prisons, k-12 and college classes, and sports.

REFERENCES

- Adler, Patricia A. and Peter Adler. 1987. *Membership Roles in Field Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Anderson, Elijah. 2004. "The Cosmopolitan Canopy." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 595:14-31.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1958. *Naven*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Biernacki, Patrick and Dan Waldorf. 1981. "Snowball Sampling." *Sociological Methods and Research*, 10(2):141-163.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bottoni, Gianmaria. 2018. "A Multilevel Measurement Model of Cohesion." *Social Indicators Research*, 136(3):835-857.
- Burgess, Robert G. [1894] 1990. *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*. Routledge, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Chong, Dennis and James N. Druckman. 2007. "Framing Theory." *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10:103-126.
- Denzin, Norman K. and Charles M. Keller. 1981. "Frame Analysis Reconsidered." *Contemporary Sociology*, 10:52-60.
- Durkheim, Emile. [1893] 1997. *The Division of Labour in Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. [1897] 1951. *Suicide*, translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. New York: Free Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. [1906] 1974. "The Determination of Moral Facts." In *Sociology and Philosophy*. New York: Free Press.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Second Edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Entman, Robert M. 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." *Journal of Communication*, 57(1):163-173.

- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hymes, Dell. 1974. *Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Iyengar, Shanto. 1987. "Television News and Citizens' Explanations of National Affairs." *The American Political Science Association*, 81(3): 815-831.
- James, William. 1890. *The Principles of Psychology*, vols. 1 & 2. Holt/Dover.
- Johnson, C. Lincoln and Weigert, Andrew J. 1980. "Frames in Confession: The Social Construction of Sexual Sin." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 19(4): 368-381.
- Kahneman, Daniel and Amos Tversky. 1979. "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk." *Econometrica*, 47(2):263-292.
- Kennedy, Mark Thomas and Peer Christian Fiss. 2009. "Institutionalization, Framing, and Diffusion: The Logic of TQM Adoption and Implementation Decisions Among U.S. Hospitals." *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5):897-918.
- McQuail, Denis. 2005. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, Fifth Edition. London, UK: Sage.
- Scheufele, Dietram A. 1999. "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects." *Journal of Communication*, 49:103-122.
- Schutz, Alfred. 1945. "On Multiple Realities." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 5(4): 533-576.
- Snow, David. 1979. "A Dramaturgical Analysis of Movement Accommodation: Building Idiosyncrasy Credit as a Movement Mobilization Strategy." *Symbolic Interaction*, 2(3):23-44.
- Snow, David, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review*, 51(4):464-81.
- Snow, David and Robert Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research*, 1:197-217.
- Snow, David and Robert Benford. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Snow, David A. and Pamela E. Oliver. 1994. "Social Movements and Collective Behavior: Social Psychological Considerations and Dimensions." In *Sociological Perspectives on Social Psychology* edited by Karen Cook, Gary Fine, and James House. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Snow, David. 2001. "Extending and Broadening Blumer's Conceptualization of Symbolic Interactionism." *Symbolic Interaction*, 24:367-77.

Snow, David A. 2004. "Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields". In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* edited by David A. Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Snow, David A. and Leon Anderson. 1993. *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Snow, David A. and Catherine Corrigan-Brown. 2005. "Falling on Deaf Ears: Confronting the Prospect of Non-Resonant Frames". In *Rhyming Hope and History: Activists, Academics, and Social Movement Scholarship* edited by David Croteau, William Hoynes, and Charlotte Ryan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Snow, David A., Rens Vliegenhart, and Catherine Corrigan-Brown. 2007. "Framing the French 'Riots': A Comparative Study of Frame Variation." *Social Forces*, 86(2):385-415.

Snow, David A., Robert D. Benford, Holly J. McCammon, Lyndi Hewitt, and Scott Fitzgerald. 2014. "The Emergence, Development, and Future of the Framing Perspective: 25+ Years Since 'Frame Alignment.'" *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 19:489-512.

Snow, David A., Louis A. Zurcher, and Gideon Sjoberg. 1982. "Interviewing by Comment: An Adjunct to the Direct Question." *Qualitative Sociology*, 5(4):285-311.

Snow, David A., Rens Vliegenhart, and Pauline Katelaars. 2019. "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements: Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Social Movements, Second Edition (New and Expanded)* edited by David A. Snow, Sarah Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon. Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell.

Snow, David A. and Roberta G. Lessor. 2010. "Framing Hazards in the Health Arena: The Cases of Obesity, Work-Related Illnesses, and Human Egg Donation." In *Social Movements and the Transformation of U.S. Health Care* edited by Jane C. Banaszak-Holl, Sanra R. Levitsky, and Mayer N. Zaid. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tversky Amos and Daniel Kahneman. 1981. "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice" *Science*, 211:453-58.