**BODYBUILDING AND MENTAL RESILIENCE**

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**Introduction:**

The current pandemic hit the world suddenly with a vortex of pain, suffering, and all kinds of distress that have burdened humanity on a macro and micro level. Looking at it from a macro quantitative perspective, the effects are subjected to statistical analyses and numbers such as number of deaths, number of infected, % decrease in annual revenue, % of jobs lost. However, such data and perspective don’t dive into the complexity of emotions on those impact, rather the data just presents an overlying emotion such as “anger”, “sadness” or “happiness”. The complexity therefore lies in the quantitative data that illustrates the experience of those affected in complex emotions and character, data that is life changing. A great analogy I would propose is that to look at this paper’s data as a coconut, the deeper I dive into interviewing the participant, the more I uncover the shell of a coconut to feel a taste of its rich nutrients, in this case the nutrients are the emotions, experiences, and lessons that we take from the paper that further our development as individuals, because that’s what progression is all about. Its about learning from your own and other’s experiences so that we don’t fall into the same trap yet again.

The paper will specifically address the impact of bodybuilders/athletes on their personal life. The paper seeks to uncover the challenges faced by those individuals due to the closures of exercise facilities, the lack of social life, economic instability, and the halt of various competitions which they have prepared for extraneously months before the pandemic hit.

The phenomenon in question is the use of *“bodybuilding as a coping mechanism”.* Part of being a sentient is the will to survive and thrive under all circumstances. It is genetically embedded in our DNA to pass own our genes with all our power. If there is a will there is always a way I was taught. Bodybuilding mimics real life development not only from a physical aspect, but from an emotional and mental aspect to all athletes who engage in the sport. It is the meaning of the lived experience. In bodybuilding one must seek discomfort in order to grow, to progress, to develop into a better person. Generally, people walk into the sport with aim to physically change themselves however as they go down the road, they find themselves more mentally and psychologically challenged. It is that psychological challenge that catalyzes the growth in one’s journey. It is the mental power that is the steering wheel of the body, thus dictating your direction.

The fundamental question of the paper is how we shape our society, at the same time how the society is shaping us. Consequently, the experiences of each respective respondent give an insight to alternate issue that are not normally discussed. These episodes then form a common theme, where the respondents face a similar obstacle or similar solutions.

**Methods:**

1)VT, the respondent, is a 23-year-old Tamil-Canadian girl who had dealt with bullying when she was younger and been suppressed by a patriarchal community who did not support her dreams to become a bodybuilder. I reached out to her because we had a conversation about how wanting to be ourselves and follow our passions comes at the "cost of getting shamed by people from our community". She was thrilled to be part of this as she believes that there "should be a better discourse about how bullying has a long-term impact on someone's mental health as well as a discourse which would emphasize more on breaking societal norms." There are many more young women who like our respondent want to follow their dreams and passions but are unable to due to old-fashioned societal pressures or people intimidation. The interview took place in Riverdale park Toronto to set an outgoing environment for the respondent as well as minimizing the chances of transmission of covid-19, thus being outdoors seemed most appropriate.

2) RT is a 21-year-old Egyptian male living in Canada. He is in his fourth year of studies, completing a Business Management degree at York University. He lives with his parents and 16-year-old brother. His biggest passion is bodybuilding, but he also takes interest in photography and videography. I have met RT in gym where we both shared a machine and ended up conversating about bodybuilding only to find out that we share more in common. I conducted the interview at my house where he is a welcomed frequent visitor.

3) MA is a 22-year-old male who is from Iraq but was born in Canada. He is studying Life sciences at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus with a double major in Psychology and Neuroscience and is currently in his fourth year of studies. He has spent his entire life living in Toronto, completing his entire education from grade school through university in the city as well. He has aspirations of one day becoming a doctor, although his field of the medical specification is still not set. His goal in life is to make sure he can pay his family back in whatever capacity he can for everything they have done for him and to start and take care of a family of his own.

4) SE is a 23-year-old male from Egypt who immigrated to Canada in search of a better life and more opportunities. He did his undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto and graduated with a high distinction. He is now pursuing a master’s in laboratory medicine at the University of Toronto in hopes to further his goal of getting into medical school and becoming a world well renowned surgeon. We were training partners back in his undergraduate days and developed a passion for the sport of bodybuilding congruently as time went on. I interviewed him in the valley where we frequently enjoy long walks as a form of cardiovascular exercise.

**Episodes:**

**1)The Interview with V.T.**

***Episode 1: FOOD DISORDER***

V.T, the respondent, is a 23-year-old Tamil-Canadian girl who had dealt with bullying when she was younger and been suppressed by a patriarchal community who did not support her dreams to become a bodybuilder. I reached out to her because we had a conversation about how wanting to be ourselves and follow our passions comes at the "cost of getting shamed by people from our community". She was thrilled to be part of this as she believes that there "should be a better discourse about how bullying has a long-term impact on someone's mental health as well as a discourse which would emphasize more on breaking societal norms." There are many more young women who like our respondent want to follow their dreams and passions but are unable to due to old-fashioned societal pressures or people intimidation. The interview took place in Riverdale park Toronto to set an outgoing environment for the respondent as well as minimizing the chances of transmission of covid-19, thus being outdoors seemed most appropriate.

It all started with a limited-edition Pokémon card. When I was a thirteen-year-old, I furiously refused to surrender up a special Pokémon card called “Blatosie” to one of my friends, everyone in my friend group began to ostracize and belittle my actions. Growing up, I had never felt ugly because of my weight. I was well aware of the fact that I was on the heavier side of the scale because at boutiques I wouldn't fit into medium-sized clothing. That didn't stop me from truly being joyous and content because I had two "working-strong and loving immigrant parents, who always made me feel beautiful." However, since a small group of teenagers did not get what they wanted, they made an agenda which included criticizing my body image and others who shared similar features as my own. From the colour of my skin to my size, my middle school peers did not leave any room for me to have any confidence in my appearance, rather they left me in a state of constant doubt about myself and my own presentation to the world. From taunting and bullying, to saying things like "is the colour of your skin called mud cause you look dirty" to outright calling me a "fatty." The bullies would also ask their peers to not engage in conversation with me or be my friend referring to me as 'clingy' or 'fixated'. For the entirety of my middle school years, I had next to no friends. "No one to sit with. No one to share my thoughts with. No one to eat with or call a confidante."

This led to a series of events where I not only developed starvation and bulimic tendencies, but also a toxic relationship with my own mindset. My disorder began with restricting food intake, "I would not eat all day and after dinner some days I would just put a finger down my throat and throw up”. I knew what I was doing was unacceptable behaviour and inappropriate. I recall about a summer night where I "gulp a whole tub of ice cream" and then concerned about the calories, again put a finger down my throat and threw up all night. "I cried all night thinking about how easy it for others to be encouraged and appreciated for who they are and why I couldn't be as loved." The long-term effects of bulimia were still unknown. Yet again the depressive mood swings, self-hate and the "binge-purge" cycle, but I couldn't control it. I couldn't stop Myself from this vicious cycle even though I knew that it is wrong and even though I knew I needed help to better understand and accept a healthy relationship with My body and food. There were times I "couldn't even look at the mirror." "I remember this one day where before school I wanted to wear earrings and went in front of the mirror and looked at myself. At that moment, I just felt in all honesty – ugly. I thought how it would even matter if I wore earrings?" And I didn't.

Although an unhealthy method to lose weight, my eating disorder was effective and by the time I was sixteen, I started receiving societal approval from my peers. That's the thing about weight loss, the very thing that we fear is what is gave me the approval I was starving for. People appreciate your weight loss and compliment the hard-work and state how people look “better”, which in other words indicate that they weren't enough when they were heavier. Even after having friends finally at later stages of high school, I was constantly in self-doubt. I was horrified because I didn't want to seem as being "Clingy," as that is what the middle schoolers referred to me as. "I wouldn't respond to WhatsApp group messages. I would type it and then delete it. If a friend wouldn't answer my phone calls, I felt that they probably don't want to be my friend anymore." This constant battle of validation and approval from myself and others carried on for a while until I went to university.

When university rolled around, I was so engulfed in my career that I had forgotten for a while about my weight or the toxic self-discourse. I made friends easily and focused on myself getting better academically as academia became the top priority, especially to a woman making it in the western society coming from immigrant parents. Towards the end of my university, I realized that I had not noticed my own steady weight gain. As I realized I had gone back to square one, my eating disorder and depressive anxiety came back. This time around knowing how to get rid of the weight, I reverted to my unhealthy tendencies. Even though I was starving myself, I was not able to lose weight and I began to lose hope that she could ever fit the societal standards of what being pretty meant. I ran miles and ate once a day. I was stressed and one day at the gym someone mentioned that I should lift weights. At first hesitant, but with the help of a trainer, I started to lift weights. Not to lose weight, but just wanted to try it out "And I lost about 40 pounds in my first year alone,". I gradually shifted my toxic conscious and eating disorder to a healthier lifestyle where I had started appreciating my body. It was easier said than done, I had believed every single stereotype about lifting until then. Lifting weights and focusing on being a female bodybuilder was not just a method for me to feel better and overcome my depressive mindset but also had become my new dream. However, little did I know that it would come at the cost of belonging to a patriarchal society.

After graduating from university, I wanted to pursue bodybuilding as a profession. I had just discovered my new passion in life towards lifting and a world of body-positive benefit. When we had a conversation about it at home, I was dismissed. Not understanding my own struggle over the years with my body image issue and unhealthy methods of losing excess weight to be socially accepted, my family and even members of my Tamil community did not appreciate me being passionate about being a bodybuilder. “It’s the things for the guys! You are a girl. Who will marry you if you looked so bulk?” were some of the things that were said to me. Everyone pushed me towards making plans to further complete my studies and no one was willing to encourage me to pursue my ambition to be a bodybuilder. I knew that it would be a struggle to survive in a community where a girl does something out of the norm and this time around, I believed to not have the “same level of fight,” in me and thus I had to conform to what the society expected out of me – yet again.

I then kept my dream of being a bodybuilder aside although I would still hit the gym to lift weights for hours every day. I wanted to have a new change in my life and move away from all the things I had to struggle with my entire life – move away from constantly trying to 'fit in.' I decided to do her master's degree this time around, but I wanted to be as far away from everyone and everything I was taught. I only pursued a master's degree because "that's what the society wants of me so I could be more eligible to get a good boy to get married to me." Shattered still, I had decided to go to England to do my masters and get a fresh start to life and get a better perspective of how to master a healthy self-discourse. "I knew that at least with doing a master’s degree I will not be put in the loop of getting a suitable boy to get married to and get some more time to understand myself and get over everything that I dealt with.”

**Follow up question:**

Even though your family did not support your ambition to enter the bodybuilding world, did you have a support system that did?

Yes, after I went to university I might a group of friends who were very understating towards my love of the sport and how it intrinsically kept me going in aspects other than the gym such as academia, social gatherings and self-discipline. It’s like I have found a family within that friend group.

By putting bodybuilding aside, do you feel like you gave up?

On the contrary, by putting it aside I was just emphasizing that it wasn’t in the front seat, but it was still in the car. In order to be an accomplished bodybuilder/ fitness athlete I also need to have my education in check so I can expand on my network and knowledge. And sometimes you have to take a step back so you can take 2 steps forward.

- End of Episode 1 -

**Interpretation:**

This first episode V.T provided encompasses a variety of emotional, mental and physical struggle. She starts off in a flash back of remembrance to her early childhood, where she was subjected to constant taunting and demoralization by her classmates. She was often highlighted as an outcast due to her physical features and body structures, this resulted in her development of several eating disorder tendencies such as bulimia, forcing herself to throw up the previously consumed food in worries that it might add to her weight gain. In addition, she had purposely withdrawn from eating all day at the aim of reducing her weight to feel wanted and praised by those around her. This hunger for validation affected her daily life as she barely even voiced her opinions on any matter, which stems from the thinking that she is not enough or that her opinion is not worth sharing. Further, social pressure was not of any help, as women of her appearance rarely received any gratification. Bodybuilding then paved the way for her to validate herself without the need of other’s acceptance, even though coming from a Tamil community that didn’t not glorify such as sport, let alone for a woman, she still kept her passion in practice.

These struggles convey deep rooted scars in V.T, an example of which is her remembrance of the Pokémon incident from early childhood, this indicates the severity of the event as the limbic system must have been flooded with emotion and any event that we experience a high emotional resolution in, we tend to never forget. On a personal note, I have been friends with V.T for about three years since the start of my undergrad. Throughout our friendship, I categorized her as a very extrinsic woman that is lively in every situation she encounters, it was extremely difficult to wipe a smile of her face. Therefore, while conducting the interview, I felt like I was talking to a V.T from an alternate dimension, she didn’t have that smile, she didn’t have those dilated pupils, she seems very stressed and constricted by her memories. Her body language spoke louder than she spoke, her body was all crunched up, eyes watery and palms sweating to the extent that it can be visible to the naked eye. As she spoke, I could tell that her experiences were merely forgotten, rather it was subsumed by distractions such as school which was evident when she stated “ I was so engulfed in my career that I had forgotten for a while about my weight or the toxic self-discourse”. It then made me aware that she used bodybuilding as a coping mechanism to revert away from these negative thoughts that constantly haunt her. But the question is, is the problem solved? It seems that bodybuilding offered her an escape rather than a solution, which mimics the contemporary drug use in north America where people use drugs to escape their reality, so bodybuilding was that narcotic in this episode.

There is also an internal conflict between self-fulfilment and the validation of her family. She is hesitant to conquer her dream as her dream is not appraised by her family which makes her question if her bodybuilding aspirations are of importance to her future.

***Episode 2: The MOVE and Covid-19***

VT, the respondent, is a 23-year-old Tamil-Canadian girl who had dealt with bullying when she was younger and been suppressed by a patriarchal community who did not support her dreams to become a bodybuilder. I reached out to her because we had a conversation about how wanting to be ourselves and follow our passions comes at the "cost of getting shamed by people from our community". She was thrilled to be part of this as she believes that there "should be a better discourse about how bullying has a long-term impact on someone's mental health as well as a discourse which would emphasize more on breaking societal norms." There are many more young women who like our respondent want to follow their dreams and passions but are unable to due to old-fashioned societal pressures or people intimidation. The interview took place in Riverdale park Toronto to set an outgoing environment for the respondent as well as minimizing the chances of transmission of covid-19, thus being outdoors seemed most appropriate

In January 2020, my master's program started at Warwick University. I was all ready to embrace and accept whatever this new phase of my life had to offer me in England. I was willing to learn and understand what I truly needed help with and how to value myself – my mental and physical health with a higher emphasis. Little did I know how aloof the place was and far away from crowded places. I found a small apartment close enough campus with no roommates or flatmates. At first, it was everything I wanted. I would wake up at dawn, go out for a run and then have breakfast when I would get back home and start my day right. "I haven't had breakfast in years. I didn't know how amazing breakfast food is. I didn't know how great this feels to own your mornings and elevate your life."

I would then hit the gym in the evenings right after I would finish all my classes to lift weights. Although I felt out of place at the gym at first, I set my mind towards lifting right and went with it. What kept me motivated during this time was the fact that "knowing I am a strong woman and my goals were all wellness-related." I had taken a vow to myself to do whatever it takes to stay consistent with weightlifting and focusing on getting better. I had been feeling incredible as I knew that this time around, I was in "control" of everything.

Just as I started owning my life and getting it in track to normalcy were, we all hit with the covid-19 situation. “It was so sudden. I didn’t even understand the intensity of it. I was in class when the news broke down and we were told that classes will be off for a little while.” And just like that, the lockdown took place a month into school and I was locked in her cubic space called home.

It was all fine at first. My morning routine remained the same and I would attend classes virtually just like everyone else. Slowly the rain kept pouring hard and my days kept getting darker. Not having to be able to meet anyone and the loss of a support system made falling back on unhealthy and toxic habits unavoidable. When I was alone during her middle school age, I still at least had a loving family who accepted and adored me the way I am. However, with no one to rely upon during this relapse, it hit me more vigorously. Within a month, I had my bulimia symptoms reappearing along with no motivation to continue my days in a positive outlook. "I would stay in bed as much as possible, I had no one to speak to and my mind would not stop overthinking about all the terrible things that I did to myself and others did to me." I, unfortunately, started gaining more weight as I wouldn't even move an inch and to make myself feel better, I would eat whatever was available. The quarantine and lockdown situation got all of those negative memories back. I wouldn't even leave my bed at all some days, crying and trying to beam back my motivation to fight this. The months April to June I was battling with my inner demons; knowing well enough that the 'binge-purge' cycle was only going to worsen my situation.

  It wasn’t until a rainy Wednesday afternoon where I felt some inspiration hit me. “Browsing through Netflix, I noticed the Bollywood hit film, Dangal was trending. I remembered my friends had told me about this movie a few years ago but I never got around to watching it. They said it was an excellent enactment of the struggles of Indian women wanting to pursue something out of the norm." Dangal is based on the real-life stories of the Phogat sisters, the first Indian Olympic wrestlers. It showcased their journey from a small village to winning Gold for India. “ I have never related to any movie in my life before because as a brown girl who just wanted to lift weights and take care of herself, this movie spoke to me in-depth," It wasn't just about taking care of myself but also about how this movie broke through the gendered stereotype and overcoming the patriarchal ideologies.

I then decided to do one good thing towards better mental and physical health every day. I loaded my gym bag with all my university books to make it heavier and made that as a form of weights to start working out. I also started eating more and keeping it all at this time. "I told myself, one lunge at a time. Just one more lunge!" and the next few months that's how I got through it. I also used part of my Indian attire- a dupatta, stitched an elastic band around it and made it work as a resistance band to work on particular parts of the body. I slowly started to lose weight again, although not my initial goal, I felt better about it. This worked out until the gym opened up in September.

“It felt like I was hiding away during a zombie apocalypse and finally I could step out without being eaten away.” The gyms felt weird to me. Working out with a mask on and lifting weighting weights was extremely difficult. Proper protocols weren’t in place. But all I could think about is how grateful it is to be back at the one place where I feels accepted and empowered, where I feels like I truly and genuinely belong. It didn't matter to me whether I wasn’t able to lift as much weight as before as my muscles had been lost over the course of the lockdown. I knew I would get around it sooner than later. All I could think is how I was on the road to a better journey.

I still struggle with my mental health and have some bad days. Although my bulimic tendencies have ended, I am working on myself every day to feel accomplished in my goals one day. The unprecedented situations made me realize that resilience is so critical to have, to be able to bounce back from the darkest of places is something many people fail to do. What we can blame is the stigma and lack of conversation about mental health, especially in South Asian communities. It makes a huge difference to see someone you can relate to that has had or is currently experiencing similar difficulties as yourself. Now I hope to be a voice of advocacy for South Asian women all around the globe to bring to light the importance of taking care of one's mental health as much as physical. As Louis Hay said, "you have been criticizing yourself for years and it hasn't worked, try approving of yourself and see what happens.”

- End of Episode 2 -

**Interpretation:**

In this episode, VT experiences a disruption in her lifestyle that she worked so hard to attain. Her bulimic tendences had come back to haunt her due to the introduction of covid-19 that eclipsed all her hope and ambition. The episode shed light on the importance of having a support group or a supporting social circle, her loneliness played a significant role in her demise. This illustrates a great distinction about being alone and being lonely. Being alone, just emphasizes self-concentration and more personal time, on the other hand being lonely is a social disease I would say that results from the lack of social interaction when social interaction is needed, Just analogous to the lack of food when food is needed. In addition to the social isolation, she was restricted to in training as the facilities shut down, so she was unable to be on level terms with her physical demands. This resulted in a mental setback. However, after the deciphering the event, it was evident that her food disorder was merely covered by the gym, academics, and family, therefore once those elements of the episode were restricted, she was subjected to facing her food disorder by herself. It was clear that she had given up from the start by her weight gain, she goes through an intrinsic battle that tests her psychologically. Intrinsic battles are the battles that sculpt character, the intrinsic battles rely on self-competency and resilience. You either defeat or be defeated. There it was the movie “Dengal” that catalyzed the upbringings of her resilience against the psychological parasites that were sucking the life out of her soul. From the episode, I could also notice that her attitude changed about her bodybuilding goals in the sense that she realized that her motivation to break down the stigma against south Asian women and stereotypical thinking that limits their opportunities is beyond an individualistic goals, and that she has to be a great representative for all south Asian women in order to inspire other to follow on her footsteps.

**2) The Interview with RT:**

***Episode 1: Bodybuilding during a Pandemic***

RT is a 21-year-old Egyptian male living in Canada. He is in his fourth year of studies, completing a Business Management degree at York University. He lives with his parents and 16-year-old brother. His biggest passion is bodybuilding, but he also takes interest in photography and videography. I have met RT in gym where we both shared a machine and ended up conversating about bodybuilding only to find out that we share more in common. I conducted the interview at my house where he is a welcomed frequent visitor.

Being active has always been an important aspect of my life. To me, being active is not a hobby that I do on the side; it is a lifestyle that I live by. In my childhood, I kept fit by playing sports such as soccer, basketball, and rugby. As I entered my teenage years, I started to gain interest in the body-building world. I was fascinated by the years of consistent hard work, dedication, and commitment that people in this sport have put in. At 14 years old, I made a promise to myself that I will put in everything I can in order to make it far in this field. With the help of a personal trainer, I followed a strict regime which included an eating, sleeping, and exercising schedule. Since then, body-building has been a dominating factor in my life. Since I started body-building and until March of this year, I have always been consistent with my strict routine, no matter how busy and hectic my life got. I always prioritized and made time for my meals, workout sessions, and sleep. When the COVID-19 lockdown happened, it was the first time that there was nothing I could do to change the circumstances. I felt lost, hopeless, and defeated for a short while. However, I decided to make the best with what I have because no matter how difficult the circumstances get, a true bodybuilder does not surrender. Instead, he comes back stronger. In order to continue bodybuilding, I started off by purchasing a few dumbbells and free weights to use at home. I tried to implement the same routine that I had before COVID but with some modifications due to the lack of proper equipment and machines. An important note to keep in mind is that fitness equipment is very expensive, so I attempted to build the machines that I could not afford. For example, I built a make-shift squat rack out of wood and used car tires and sacks of sand as weights. I also reached out to my friends who are also into bodybuilding in order to motivate and keep each other in check, as it was a difficult time for everyone in this field. Additionally, I signed many petitions and joined protests (while maintaining physical distancing) that advocated for gyms to remain open as analyses have shown that no COVID cases arouse or spread in gyms. Despite the great amount of effort that I put into maintaining my fitness levels, it was unfortunately still deteriorating. I was feeling significantly weaker each day and the thought of being able to lift the weights I could lift before COVID seemed impossible. Also, because I have always had consistent progress towards getting bigger and stronger since I got into body-building, I had projected goals that I was working towards. If it wasn’t for this setback, achieving and even surpassing these goals would have been possible, but unfortunately, I was nowhere near them. Instead, I was moving in the opposite direction despite putting in what felt like the most work I have ever put into my lifts. Additionally, the constant opening and closing of the gyms was very mentally draining. When the gyms opened for the first time, I was extremely excited and full of hope. I create a rigorous workout and meal plan in hopes of getting back on track and making up for the losses I have made. Indeed, I was consistent in going to the gym every single day and putting in all of my effort into the workouts. Unfortunately, after slowly regaining some of my strength back, the gyms were shut down once again. This felt like a huge slap to the face and I felt more discouraged than I did the first time around. Essentially, it felt like all my hard work for those few weeks were going to waste. For the past eight years, since I first started bodybuilding, the gym has become an outlet for me to relieve my stress. It was the only place where I could stop thinking about the hassles of my life and just focus on the present moment. In those two hours of every day, I pushed my body to its limits and watched it endure heavier and heavier weights. When I walked out of the gym, I felt like I can conquer anything life throws my way. So in a way, I saw working out as a metaphor for the hardships in my life: No matter how heavy the hardships may be, I can face them and get through them. Thus, the positive benefits of bodybuilding did not end once I left the gym, they benefited every other aspect of my life. Simply, bodybuilding was what kept me sane and grounded. When this was taken away, my mental health was in shambles. Not only was I physically becoming weaker, but mentally and emotionally as well. I felt extremely unmotivated and lazy, perhaps for the first time in years. Going to the gym at a specific time every day created structure to my days. It set my day straight and made me more productive on every other task. Now that this was gone, my days felt messy and I lacked the energy and motivation to get things done. I was also very agitated and got easily frustrated at little things. It was like all my stress was bottling up and I wasn’t able to release it as I was used to, so it manifested itself in different situations. After months of trying everything in my hands to maintain the strength, muscle mass, and stamina that I originally had, I finally accepted the fact that with everything that is happening in the world, it is okay to slow down the pace of my body-building journey until things get better. Essentially, I realized that this pandemic has created problems and obstacles for almost everyone in the world, not just myself. And many of those problems are much bigger and more serious than my own. I opened my eyes to the fact that while the problem that I have will be overcome once the gyms open up once again, some people will not be able to overcome the problems that this pandemic has caused them, such as the loss of a loved one. I also constantly reminded myself that this is an obstacle that everyone in the body-building world is currently facing, so it has put a stall on everyone’s progress. Finally, I came to terms with the fact that although I may not be physically progressing as I had hoped, I am still doing my best to maintain most of my strength. All in all, this experience was an eye-opener as it taught me something I never fully fathomed before, which is that I will not always have control over the circumstances. I learned that it is okay to sometimes take a step back when needed to, rather than constantly being in a rush. I believe that this will benefit me in many situations of my life that are related to bodybuilding.

- End of Episode 1 -

**Reflection:**

I chose to speak about this experience because it truly is a challenge that I never thought I would face. Since I started bodybuilding, some of the hardest challenges were things that I had control over. For example: making time for the workout session, prioritizing working out over other things such as going on, staying motivated, and putting in all my effort. These are all challenges that I have control over, ie., the issue results due to my failure to do something. Conversely, gym closure due to COVID-19 is something that I have absolutely no control over, so it was a new challenge for me. It took me a while to be able to mentally and emotionally come to terms with the fact that I simply had to accept the circumstances rather than beating myself up over it. Thus, this experience taught me that I will not always be in control and that is okay. Essentially, I learned that there is a limit to how much I can do. This is a lesson that is going to help me in many different situations in my life as I usually have a tendency to like being in control at all times.

**Interpretation:**

After speaking with RT, I understand what it is like to have a true passion. Through his tone and body language, it was very clear that he was extremely devastated by the situation. Even nine months after the closure of gyms, you can still feel and see the disappointment and sadness in his voice and face. Bodybuilding is not only a hobby of his, but it is a huge part of his identity. So since he has not been able to practice it due to gym closures, he feels as though there is a void in his life. This has taken a huge toll not only on his physical health but more so on his emotional and mental health. Unfortunately, if you knew RT before gym closures, you would easily notice the tremendous difference in his ambiance. He was very low in energy, which was shocking as this is unusual to him. Despite all of this, RT’s resilience still shone through. It was clear as day that he was negatively affected by the situation; however, it was just as clear that he was trying his best to remain positive. The quick actions he took upon gym closures such as building and buying equipment and modifying his workout routine to be home-based simply demonstrate his strong persistence and determination to continue his sport no matter what. This was inspiring to hear about because it showed that when a person cares enough about something, they will truly go to far extents in order to achieve it regardless of how difficult it may be, and no matter how many times they fail. This is very admirable about him.RT’s actions screamed “Resilience”, which is such an important characteristic to have in life, but unfortunately, it is not acquired by everyone. This made me wonder, “What does it take for someone to be resilient?”. Upon some thought, I came to the conclusion that in order to be resilient, one needs to be passionate. A person needs to have strong feelings about something or care deeply about it in order to be resilient- to recover quickly from difficult situations. I believe that RT demonstrated resilience at two different times. First, he demonstrated resilience upon gym closures by finding alternative methods to continue pursuing his passion. However, he explained that despite doing that, he was still not making progress in the way that he had hoped. Instead, he was losing his progress. Despite this, he continued to put in all of his effort in order to maintain just a percentage of his strength and muscle mass. This was the second time that RT was resilient because he kept going and did not give up. As a result of his resilience, when the gyms open up once again and RT is able to train properly, he will be much better off than if he had not looked for alternatives to working out, or if he had quit training altogether after not making progress. Simply put, his resilience will pay off and he will be proud of himself. Another thing that stood out to me is that he mentioned looking at the situation from less of an egocentric viewpoint and realizing that this pandemic is creating much bigger problems than gym closures. To me, this realization demonstrates growth as he realized a fault in his way of thinking and changed it.

***Episode 2: COVID-19 Contraction***

RT is a 21-year-old Egyptian male living in Canada. He is in his fourth year of studies, completing a Business Management degree at York University. He lives with his parents and 16-year-old brother. His biggest passion is bodybuilding, but he also takes interest in photography and videography. I have met RT in gym where we both shared a machine and ended up conversating about bodybuilding only to find out that we share more in common. I conducted the interview at my house where he is a welcomed frequent visitor.

On September 10th, I woke up feeling a bit run down, but I blamed it on not having been getting enough sleep lately. Halfway through the day, I started to feel head pressure, chills, and extreme fatigue so I took a nap, something that I never usually do. I woke up to a high fever of 38.7 °C and uncontrollable shivers. By this point, I realized the high possibility of a COVID contraction, so I started to take precautions and social distance from my family members who live in my household. This was very difficult as I was too sick to care for myself, but I did not want to risk getting my family sick. I took some over-the-counter medications and hoped that my symptoms would improve by the next day. To my surprise, my condition was horribly worse the next day. The head pressure, fever, and chills had persisted, but on top of that, I had a very dry cough, nausea, and extreme shortness of breath. I called a local clinic and explained my symptoms to them, which in itself was a challenge as I was gasping for breath after every few words. They informed me that due to an overload of patients in the city, they were only seeing patients on the basis of the severity of their conditions and that my condition was not as severe as others. They simply recommended that I rest in bed and completely avoid any extraneous activities and that I continue to take over-the-counter medication to control my fever, chills, and nausea. They said that I might be able to be admitted to a hospital if my condition gets worse OR if I am willing to pay a hefty fee. Being an unemployed university student, going with the latter option was not possible for me, so I had to wait it out at home and see how things go. By the next day, the symptoms I had had gone down, but new ones came up. I had lost my sense of smell and taste, was tasting weird chemicals in food and water, and had a lingering pain all over my body, as if I had just gotten out of a bad fight. After about a week, the pain had gone away, but unfortunately, the rest of the symptoms persisted. As you can imagine, for someone whose life revolves around being physically active, this sickness took a huge toll on my body-building journey. For the first time in years, I had to completely stop working out. In fact, even if I was allowed to work out by my doctor, I physically wouldn’t have been able to do it because of my horrible symptoms. To start with, I was unable to get out of bed for most days due to extreme fatigue and weakness. When I eventually forced myself to get out of bed, the simplest of tasks would wind me. Walking to the bathroom felt like a strenuous activity. I was gasping for air with each step I took. It felt more difficult than any body-building session I had ever done in my life. On top of this, I had completely lost my appetite, so I was unable to follow the diet regime that I have been following since I started bodybuilding. I had to force myself to eat when I didn’t feel like it, but not being able to taste or smell my food only discouraged me even more. On most days, I would only be able to have one meal and drink, in comparison to the five meals that I am used to eating daily. Needless to say, I lost a huge amount of strength, stamina, and muscle mass in the two weeks that I was ill. In that time period, alone, I lost about 30 pounds of muscle, on top of what I had already lost due to gym closures before my COVID contraction. This experience undoubtedly had a huge negative impact on my mental health. Since March when the lockdown first started, I have been feeling extreme loneliness due to the lack of social interactions. I believe this was the case with almost everyone, but sometimes these feelings were so intense and unbearable. I reminisced on all the times I had fun experiences and made memories with my friends. These feelings were nothing in comparison to how I felt while suffering from COVID. This is because, by the time I had COVID, which was in September, restrictions were starting to ease as schools and universities were partially opening up. It was also five months since COVID lockdowns started, so many people, including most of my friends, were fed up with being quarantined, so they were going out and meeting each other. Seeing them meet each other while I was unable to join definitely made me feel lonely and upset for missing out, but it also made me mad and frustrated. I was frustrated because people were acting irresponsibly, not taking the situation seriously, and not realizing how horrible COVID actually is. It is truly the most emotionally, physically, and mentally painful experience I have ever lived through, so I did not want others to deal with it because of irresponsible people. Let's not forget that not only was I isolated from the public, but I was also isolated from my own immediate family for two weeks. This only made things ten times more difficult because I have a close attachment to my family, especially after spending every single day with them for five months straight. My parents are also old in age and suffer from chronic health issues, so the fear of passing COVID to them gave me great anxiety for a while. Another important thing to keep in mind is that I don’t know who I directly got the virus from. This made tracking down everyone I have been in contact with for the past few weeks before my illness a huge challenge. I felt huge guilt by the thought that I might have spread this horrible sickness to another person. After recovering from the illness, I became more conscious of the rules that are set in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. I avoided leaving my house unnecessarily and being around big groups of people because I did not want anyone to suffer through the same thing I did. Additionally, I now understand the need for gyms to be closed to curb the number of COVID-19 cases and plan on working out at home until then. Now, almost two months after suffering from COVID, there are still symptoms that have not completely gone away. The most impactful ones are the loss of my sense of taste and smell. Firstly, this symptom continues to have a huge effect on my emotional and mental state because I’m unable to experience life to its full extent. You do not think about the significant impact that tasting your favorite foods, enjoying the taste of coffee, or smelling your favorite perfume would have on your mental state. Although these experiences seem small and trivial, you truly do not realize their effect on our living experience until they are gone. I have also gotten back into working out but moderately as I understand that my body needs a while to recover before putting a heavy strain on it. Despite being one of the most challenging situations I have ever lived through, it has taught me valuable lessons that I will remember forever. Most importantly, it has taught me to be grateful for everything in my life, even the littlest day-to-day things that I take for granted, such as breathing, smelling, tasting; let alone exercising strenuously and lifting heavy weights.

- End of Episode 2 -

**Reflection:**

This experience is unlike anything I have ever experienced in my life. Being diagnosed with such a horrible virus that is causing a global pandemic felt surreal. I only realized the seriousness of this virus and of the restrictions that are put in place by the government to control its spread once I lived through it firsthand. This incident made me have a new level of appreciation for everything in my life no matter how small. Watching my health deteriorate made me wish I had been more grateful for it. I realized that it’s often so easy to take for granted things that we never think we would lose such as our basic senses or being able to breathe easily. Most importantly, this experience taught me to be resilient no matter how difficult the circumstances may be. Despite being physically, mentally, and emotionally fatigued during my illness, I tried my best to remain positive and not feel hopeless. Even after recovering, the persisting symptoms can often be discouraging and upsetting, but I make sure to look at the bright side which is that I recovered from such a threatening virus.

**Interpretation:**

Contracting COVID-19 is currently a fear that everyone across the globe shares. After speaking with a person who has had firsthand experience with the virus, I can confirm that it deserves to be feared. Despite having recovered from it, he still sounded and looked as if he had just caught a bad flu. For many people, being ill with COVID-19 might be the most challenging experience that they will ever have to deal with. According to RT, this was definitely the case with him. When asked a follow-up question about the most taxing aspect of the illness, RT’s answer was unexpected. He explained that other than the physical and emotional drain associated with the illness, the most challenging part for him was his anxiety due to the uncertainty of the situation. He explained that he was restless almost all day because he felt like he did not know what would be coming next. While he was experiencing a bunch of different symptoms each day, he was hearing about different symptoms that he didn’t have on the news and reading about scary stories online. This created great anxiety for him because unlike a usual flu, where we can predict the events from sickness to recovery, he had no idea what was going to happen next, as each case takes a different turn than the other. Additionally, RT felt a huge burden as he was anxious about the fact that he could have spread the virus to other people because he did not want anyone to experience what he was going through. This was something he mentioned more than once, so it was obvious that even after recovering, he still worries that he might have caused a spread. Additionally, there was a general theme of loneliness and alienation in RT’s episode partially because he felt that during his illness, none of his friends and family truly understood how difficult his experience is. My interpretation of this is that although he was physically and emotionally dealing with the toughest time of his life, due to his innate resilience he did not overtly show his struggle. Perhaps because he still tried to stay active by working out and not letting the virus entirely limit him, he portrayed more strength and positivity than he was actually feeling. Another manifestation of his resilience is that despite not having an appetite and not being able to smell or taste, he forced himself to eat his meals so that he doesn’t completely stray away from his bodybuilding goals. On top of this, he also showed resilience by looking at the positive side of this experience and taking it as a reminder to be grateful for his health. Furthermore, the fact that he took it upon himself to educate people about the firsthand experience of COVID-19 in order to raise awareness and prevent its spread is another manifestation of his resilience. Once again, he did not allow this situation to be nothing more than a “bad experience”, instead, he turned it around and made something positive out of it. RT’s experience is truly inspiring as it serves as a reminder that although it may be easy to lose hope when things get tough or when it seems like your efforts are going to waste, it is important to be resilient in order to get to the light at the end of the dark tunnel.

**3)The Interview with M.A:**

***Episode 1: holding on***

MA is a 22-year-old male who is from Iraq but was born in Canada. He is studying Life sciences at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus with a double major in Psychology and Neuroscience and is currently in his fourth year of studies. He has spent his entire life living in Toronto, completing his entire education from grade school through university in the city as well. He has aspirations of one day becoming a doctor, although his field of the medical specification is still not set. His goal in life is to make sure he can pay his family back in whatever capacity he can for everything they have done for him and to start and take care of a family of his own.

I started going to the gym in 2014. I used it as an outlet to relieve stress from my school, work, family and the relationships I had. At first, I started off slowly, maybe going 3 times a week for light sessions, but as time went on and I felt more comfortable in the gym, I would be working out 5-6 times a week. The longer I spent in the gym, the more I got to know people there, and those people introduced me to the world of body building. At first, I didn’t understand what it was, I just thought of it as a bunch of oiled up men and women flexing their muscles on a stage. But as I learned more about it, and realized there is a lot more to it than that, I became invested in it and thereby decided that he wanted to pursue bodybuilding, not to compete, but rather to have myself looking and feeling the best way I can.

When the pandemic hit, I travelled home to the middle east as schools were now closed, and I hadn’t been back in over 4 years. Gyms were still open, to a certain extent, so I was able to continue working out during the pandemic. I was keeping my routine and working out consistently, when suddenly, about a month after I arrived, there was a surge of infections over the course of the next month. There were thousands daily getting sick, and hundreds dying. It got to the point where leaving your front door was dangerous.

I was definitely scared, but not as much for myself. Rather, I was more afraid for the people around me getting infected. It’s pretty clear by now that this virus hits people with pre-existing conditions the hardest, and I am a healthy young man, so I am not at as much of risk.

Obviously at this point, gyms had to close down, but I still had a gym set at home that I was using. I would try to keep my routine as stable as possible during this time.

It was definitely not easy, as strictly staying at home is counterproductive towards bodybuilding and working out in general. In order to reach you fullest potential, you must go out and train your mind as much as your body. Staying at home put a damper on that. With that being said, I still did my best to make do with what I had.

Now this all continued until I heard that one of my close friends had been infected with covid. This guy was a friend of mine from childhood, who always would work out with me and hearing him getting sick hit me hard. My friend had asthma, putting him at serious risk. He went to the hospital; however, we could not visit him due to the covid guidelines. We were all worried sick about him, not knowing whether or not he would recover.

At this point, the gym was the last thing on my mind, and even when I did try to work out, I could not fully focus on what I was doing. I started gaining weight and reverting to smoking and drugs to numb the pain. This all came to a head when on May 4th, my friend passed away.

Everyone was in grief; we just lost a true childhood friend. He was truly a good man, and he was gone now. Due to covid restrictions, we couldn’t hold a proper funeral, and we couldn’t even bury him ourselves, as the hospital has a separate area for burial of those who passed due to covid. It was a very tough time for all of us, someone whom we loved was taken away far too soon. I tried to do whatever I could to distract myself from the pain.

At first, I didn’t speak to anyone for over a week, just locked myself in my room and smoked up all day long. Afterwards, I slowly started going out again, but it was difficult knowing my closest friend wasn’t out there. I wasn’t the most pleasant person to be around. I was not trying to face reality and thereby I repressed any thoughts about him from my mind.

Then I finally remembered something important. When I had problems earlier in my life with breakups and any kind of heartbreak, the healthiest outlet for the pain for me was to go to the gym. The gym has always helped me through all hardships, so why should I abandon it now. So, I started going again, since at this point, gyms had reopened. It wasn’t easy, after such a long layoff, but I still tried my best. Slowly but surely, I started feeling healthier and stronger, and did no longer feel the need to repress my thoughts. I had finally come to face the reality of the situation, that my friend indeed did pass away. Holding it back would only end up harming me in the long run, so this was a major turning point for me.

When looking on how this ordeal affected my bodybuilding career, in some ways it helped my body building aspirations, and in other ways it hurt it. One way it helped it was through the pain of loss, one becomes a stronger person overall. Every successful bodybuilder in the world has experienced some form of loss. Be it injury, losing a loved one, financial poverty, or other forms of pain, they all have experienced some of these to a certain extent. Successful bodybuilders use this pain as motivation to become stronger. One way this experience hurt me was through not going to the gym for about 2 months. Naturally, if you don’t go to the gym, you will lose muscle mass, and that definitely applied for me. Although, this isn’t much of a loss, and more of a delay, so in the long run it had little effect on me.

- End of Episode 1 -

**Reflection**

There are countless thoughts in my mind to process over what I was feeling throughout this experience. I lost a close friend, so grief and depression were always at the front of my mind. These feelings can destroy someone’s life if they do not take control of them, and I feel that over time, I was able to find a healthy outlet for those feelings in the gym and made sure they did not take control over me. Knowing that even though I was faced with this hardship, I still was able to come out on top, I feel that no matter what obstacles I face, I can succeed. In episode 2, I go more into detail on an obstacle I face in the near future and how I am able to overcome it. All in all, I know that this experience changed me into a better man.

**Interpretation:**

This episode has been an eye-opening experience for me on the intersectionality and importance of mental and physical health. Often, in our communities, being mentally, psychologically, and emotionally healthy have not been given importance as physical health as they were considered taboo subjects for the longest. However, conversations around mental health and social health have started to be addressed between people and I think COVID-19 pushed these conversations to be a priority because, under the COVID umbrella, folks were not able to engage socially or find the kind of support they need to get through their day. I want to specifically mention the significance of gyms as social spaces where individuals with common interests (bodybuilding, being active, etc.) meet and build communities. For example, MA mentions that “I got to know people there, and those people introduced me to the world of bodybuilding” and this serves to reinforce the idea of gyms as social spaces. Furthermore, MA is a responsible individual as he expresses sentiments of concern for the people around him if he catches COVID-19. He states, “I was more afraid for the people around me getting infected”. Additionally, he showcases personality traits of being dedicated and committed to being active and joining the bodybuilding community from the amount of time he allocates to go to the gym. He mentions “I started slowly; maybe going 3 times a week” and “working out 5-6 times a week”. Thus, it is clear to see that MA possesses characteristics that put him in an advantageous situation to be able to turn his passion for bodybuilding into a reality and also be able to mix well with the community of bodybuilders and socialize with them.

However, we see his characteristics of being responsible, committed, and consistent be challenged upon the personal tragic incident of losing his close friend due to COVID-19. He shows us that even a physically healthy individual is prone to be affected mentally which leads to a non-healthy lifestyle if the person does not find the will and determination to do something about it. MA emphasizes the deterioration of his body due to mental/psychological health challenges when he says “Even when I did try to work out, I could not fully focus on what I was doing”, “I started gaining weight and reverting to smoking and drugs to numb the pain” and “everyone was in grief”. These statements indicate the lack of a support system around MA to push him to have conversations about the death of his friend and accept the reality and move forward with it. Additionally, it depicts how isolating oneself and depending on drugs to ease the pain never results in something productive for an individual. Finally, it is refreshing to see that glimpse of hope and the act of positive thinking even in such a difficult situation when MA reflects that bodybuilding and the active lifestyle are his methods of maintaining sanity and the only way to relieve stress and sadness. He states a very interesting statement “use the pain as motivation to become stronger” which in turn indicates that regardless of the many challenges and obstacles one faces in their life, they have to face it, accept the reality and work on becoming better and stronger. Overall, the main interpretation that I conclude from this episode is that a healthy body is not possible without a healthy mind and a healthy mindset. This is because without stability and peace of mind, it is very difficult to focus on goals and prioritize oneself and here comes the importance of the surrounding community and the individuals to support that person in need, listen actively to their concerns and offer pieces of advice and positive sentences to uplift that person and make them feel that others truly care about them. However, it is also important to note that under the COVID-19 climate, a lot of individuals’ social health has been affected in tragic ways that folks are isolated and not reaching out to others to check up on them and the power of will that we find in MA is not something very common in the society.

Therefore, it is important to continue to push for conversations around mental health and the different resources in the community for individuals to be able to access them.

***Episode 2: construction site***

MA is a 22-year-old male who is from Iraq but was born in Canada. He is studying Life sciences at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus with a double major in Psychology and Neuroscience and is currently in his fourth year of studies. He has spent his entire life living in Toronto, completing his entire education from grade school through university in the city as well. He has aspirations of one day becoming a doctor, although his field of the medical specification is still not set. His goal in life is to make sure he can pay his family back in whatever capacity he can for everything they have done for him and to start and take care of a family of his own.

After spending my entire summer in the Middle East, I decided it was time to return to Toronto for school. The last time I was in Toronto, everything had just gone on lockdown, there was no more toilet paper, and everyone was scared of going out the front door. It’s safe to say that things were definitely different when I returned in September. Although the cases of covid infections were about 6 times higher than when I left, there seemed to be no lockdown, people didn’t really care as much about going out, and most importantly, there was toilet paper again! The whole situation was a bit of a head-scratcher, but nevertheless, once I finished my 14-day quarantine after coming to Toronto, I started hitting the gym immediately… for about two weeks, when gyms closed down for the second time.

It sucked. When gyms closed down the first time, I had access to a home gym in the middle east, whereas here in Toronto, I had no such thing. Seeing that we were looking at several months without gyms here, I decided it was best to build my own home gym here in Toronto. I knew that was going to be a daunting and expensive task, but seeing as there was no alternative, I had no choice.

I started off by buying dumbbells from online stores. These were a type of dumbbell that could adjust for weight up to 90 pounds, so I wouldn’t have the need for several dumbbells of different weights. Next, I had some extra wood laying around the garage that I used for a previous project, and I used it to make a makeshift bench. For a few days, I used only these two to work out, but soon it became apparent that I would need much more to have a functional gym. I planned on doing this all in my garage since doing it in my room would get me kicked out of my house before I finish my first workout. My list of items included a full squat rack, a proper bench, a 45 lb barbell, and one set for each of the weights (5 lb, 10 lb, 25 lb, 35 lb and 45 lb). I had a 500$ budget to make all this happen, and I wanted to get it done as soon as possible, so I immediately started searching.

One obstacle I didn’t anticipate, although in hindsight makes sense, was the lack of availability of gym equipment online and in stores. It seems that everyone who can’t go to the gym also got the same idea as me to build a home gym. Or so I thought. When I looked on Kijiji, and Facebook marketplace, all the people who bought weights online were now selling them at 3x the price they got it. It was really sad that people take advantage of others during a time of turmoil, however, we live in a capitalistic society and those kinds of people are the ones who come ahead.

Anyway, I could not afford the prices for the materials that I needed, but I was not ready to give up just yet. After much searching, I was put in touch with a friend of a friend who manufactures gym equipment. He said that not only could he supply me with every piece of equipment I needed, but he would give me a discounted rate on top of it. What a great guy.

About a week later, I got all the equipment in and started setting up my gym. As I was setting it up, I felt something was missing, but I couldn’t quite think of what it was. I finally finished setting up and it was a beautiful sight. It was almost exactly like what I had back home overseas. Still, there was something off, and I didn’t realize what it was till midway through my first workout, I dropped a weight on the concrete floor, and it snapped in half. Oh shit. The thing I was missing was rubber flooring (and now a 45 lb plate).

So, I called up my guy again and told him my predicament. Apparently, the most expensive piece of equipment was the flooring itself, costing me around 300$. After all that, I finally had my gym set up, for real this time, and it was time to put it to use.

Honestly, the feeling was amazing. The gym I had back in the middle east was set up by my uncle, so this was the first time I did such a thing all on my own. Just having a problem, then figuring out a solution for it by yourself feels good, but when it’s at this magnitude, then the feeling is 10x better. The gym wasn’t the best setup, and it was not a replacement for the actual gym, but it could hold me up for a few months. But just the feeling that whenever I see the gym, I know that it was made through my hard work is an exhilarating sensation.

- End of Episode 2 –

**Reflection**

This whole experience was another lesson in my life, as I learned how to approach a problem and solve it for myself. This trait is key to bodybuilding, as there will always be new obstacles that emerge and impede your path to become the best person you can. Sometimes those obstacles will be injuries and you must find a way to work around them. Sometimes you will plateau in your workouts and must create an entirely new routine to stimulate your muscle growth. Whatever the case may be, these obstacles must be dealt with if you ever hope to become a true bodybuilder. Through this experience, I know that through this challenge being presented to me, I was able to come out on top, meaning no matter what is ahead of me, I know I can still succeed.

**Interpretation:**

This episode is very interesting as it showcases the different types of people and how they act in difficult challenging situations such as in the COVID-19 climate. MA notices two types of individuals, the ones who are trying to take advantage of the situation to get richer and benefit either monetarily or socially and on the other hand, some folks are trying to help others by offering them what they need. This is a very interesting episode to see that there are good and evil in every situation we encounter and that there are positive and negative things to everything, even for COVID-19. For example, MA mentions the negative side when he says, “all the people who bought weights online were now selling them at 3x the price they got it”. This reinforces the idea that in challenging situations, some folks would prioritize money and financial gain over helping others and what their morality tells them. It is very interesting to see that even though the entire world got affected by COVID-19, some people got affected to different extents than others based on different elements such as their income/ethnicity/neighbourhood they lived in/the types of jobs they had and whether they could afford some privileges such as owning a car or not. On the other hand, it is important to note that how within a couple of months, the entire psychology of people changed from initially being frightened with COVID-19 and not wanting to leave their homes while the infection rates were not that drastically high compared to the second wave where people do not care as much and still carry their daily activities like they please to, even though the infection rate is way higher and there are a lot of hospitalized individuals. This reflects the intriguing psychology of people who are either fed up with the situation and do not care or are not completely aware of the facts as they do not trust the official government sources or in the worst situations, do not even believe that the virus is real. MA mentions this carelessness of the people in Toronto when he returned in September when he states, “people did not care as much”. However, it is also refreshing to witness that there are folks who are willing to help others and go beyond and above what they need to do. For instance, MA mentions this when he states “He said that not only could he supply me with every piece of equipment I needed, but he would give me a discounted rate on top of it. What a great guy”. Additionally, it is imperative to mention that during challenges and obstacles, individuals adapt differently by acquiring new skills and enhancing others. In the example of MA and his home-made gym, we can see elements of newly acquired skills and the amount of pride and happiness it brings him to have built his gym in his garage. He mentions” this was the first time I did such a thing all on my own. Just having a problem, then figuring out a solution for it by yourself feels good, but when it’s at this magnitude, then the feeling is 10x better”. This showcases that he is an independent individual who was able to complete this task on his own as well as that he has the autonomy of using his home-made gym whenever he wishes to do it in the case of another lockdown or even during regular days post-COVID. Furthermore, it is clear that he has applied his skills of having built a gym in the Middle East and replicated the process when he moved back to Toronto and thus, he was able to use those transferable skills of building and knowing how to use building tools for his advantage. Overall, in any challenging situation in life, there can be two scenarios, we either look at the positive or negative sides of it. The negative side will keep us overthinking about the situation with no tangible results while the positive side will offer us the opportunity to work towards a solution.

**4)The Interview with S.E.**

***Episode 1: Hold up wait a minute, you thought we were finished ?***

SE is a 23-year-old male from Egypt who immigrated to Canada in search of a better life and more opportunities. He did his undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto and graduated with a high distinction. He is now pursuing a master’s in laboratory medicine at the University of Toronto in hopes to further his goal of getting into medical school and becoming a world well renowned surgeon. We were training partners back in his undergraduate days and developed a passion for the sport of bodybuilding congruently as time went on. I interviewed him in the valley where we frequently enjoy long walks as a form of cardiovascular exercise.

The COVID 19 pandemic took the world by surprise and quickly life as we knew it changed. It seems like just yesterday when school closed down, malls shut, and everyone was forced to stay home. Even more surprising was how quickly things changed, almost with no warning at all. People lost jobs, lost ability to see family, lost family through death, and also lose the ability to go to the gym. When gyms and fitness facilities closed down, there were many thoughts that came to my mind. The simplest being to just sit home and relax for a while. However, it was increasingly seeming like this would be a long term issue that the world would have to adapt to and there was real possibility of gyms being closed down for a while. The other option was to buy insanely overpriced gym equipment but not everyone has the luxury of buying whatever they want when they want it- there are bills that need to be paid, and especially at a time like we were in- there was limited funds and still lots of bills to pay. Thus, it seemed like the options were narrow and not in my favour. With a little bit of creative thinking, there was inspiration to embark on ad adventure/project. However, this project would require adaptability, learning new skills, and most of all perseverance and dedication. My friends and I decided to build a home gym from simple wooden logs and pulleys from Canadian tire. Daily walks to the Highland Creek Valley often resulted in us carrying logs back on our back. It was a brutal experience and not for the weak, but it was something that had to be done. Of course, there were many times when the question arose “Is this worth it? Or is this feasible? Or more importantly will this even work?” But I have learned to always find solutions to problems and not to complain about the existence of problems. Thus, with weeks of daily hard work, failures, and learning from those failures- a primitive but effective backyard gym was finally ready for use. However, as always, and as expected, there were hiccups which essentially resulted in the destruction of our beautiful backyard gym. As if the situation was not hard enough, it was just made even worse- there was no real gym and now no backyard gym. So, what does one do?

At that point you would guess we just went back, home, right?

Well, that was what we wanted to do. And with so much of our hard work going to waste, it was so tempting to just call quits. But hard situations are what determine what you are made of. Within a few hours, a backup solution had been formulated and not only was another gym gonna be built from scratch, but it would be an even better one- one that could actually sustain our hard work and challenge us. The situation became even harder as time went by with the early closure of stores such as Home Depot and Canadian tire. To gather supplies while it was still accessible, there were 6AM trips to home depot to gather lumbar and other supplies. Take in I didn’t even wake up at 6AM before any of this, and with the hardened situation and everything with the future being so unclear, those 6AM trips were something that was not even seen as an issue. That gym had to be built. It was COVID versus us and COVID would not win this battle. This was a slightly more complicated gym to build because it was designed to sustain heavy weights and mimic a real life gym-or aspects of it- as closely as possible. To some extent, that goal was reached. Although here was continuous mockery or doubt of the efficacy of the gym, what mattered more was the support and admiration that was received at the same time. People were astonished at what had been built despite the circumstances. Usually people who have a home gym buy some equipment, bars, and plates and call it a day. The equipment for this gym was lumbar made from start to finish, the weight plates were constructed from concrete-something that is relatively unheard of- and the bars were designed from steel bars-something definitely unheard of. It was a challenge and it was messy, but the proof was in the pudding- it worked, and that alone was a huge success.

After two months of completing this project and keeping our training in check, we started to attract media attention from all sorts of place. We had the school paper write about us as well as many bodybuilding icons praising our achievement and stating that this is what bodybuilding is all about, the fight in the fighter. This positive feedback was a privilege for us to be idolized by others and mirrored by friends of ours. We were motivated and uplifting by the community around us such that we started a social media platform educating those who want to work out during the pandemic on how to go about doing what we did. We then realised that our project was more than just for us, it delivered a sense of hope, a sense of resilience that was as infectious as covid-19, so we were trying to uplift the community as best as we could, right!

The mental and physical challenges associated with this project only made us stronger. We were able to overcome, to the best of our abilities, a very difficult and never seen before situation.

- End of Episode 1 -

**REFLECTION:**

I think this is one of the most memorable times in my life, at some point I was actually enjoying the struggle just like I enjoy beating myself up in the gym day and day out. It was really an out of the box experience. I think the determination was the highlight of the event, we really didn’t want to give up, we still had goals to go after and we had to find a way around covid-19.

**Interpretation:**

This episode showcases the concept of resilience and how this individual has many options to choose from during a challenge or an obstacle that can either result in a positive or a negative outcome. Furthermore, it also depicts the power of will and determination that this individual must exhibit to continue their daily routine and bodybuilding activities regardless of the many challenges that COVID-19 brought. This indicates personality characteristics of adaptability and initiate-taking as well as resilience and flexibility. These personality characteristics and features are showcased through the sentences that the individual expresses. For instance, we can see initiative-taking in these sentences “there was inspiration to embark on ad adventure/project”, “But I have learned to always find solutions to problems” and “a backup solution had been formulated”. On the other hand, we can see elements of adaptability to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected every single person on this planet and left irreversible damage to a lot of folks. Luckily, SE, the individual in this episode did not suffer of major losses during the pandemic and has decided to take this challenge and make something useful out of it by being adaptive and not giving in to the hardships created by the pandemic. For instance, adaptability is shown in these statements that SE mentions “it was increasingly seeming like this would be a long term issue that the world would have to adapt to and there was real possibility of gyms being closed down for a while” and “weeks of daily hard work, failures, and learning from those failures- a primitive but effective backyard gym was finally ready for use”. As much as these statements indicate adaptability and the will to take on the challenge of building a full-on functioning gym using wood material and put in manual physical labour, it also exhibits being realistic and assessing the situation fully before making a move. This is clear when we see SE assessing the realities of COVID-19 that it is going to be a long-term challenge as well as hat gyms might be closed for a long while. This definitely turned out to be true because everyone had to accept that our reality has changed, and we could no longer continue with our “normal” lives. Last but not least we could see the feature of flexibility in SE statements such as “To gather supplies while it was still accessible, there were 6AM trips to home depot to gather lumbar and other supplies” and “those 6AM trips were something that was not even seen as an issue. That gym had to be built”. It is also important to note how some people mocked the whole initiative of building a gym from scratch and mocked SE and the friend group for starting it. This shows how some people are not supportive and do not encourage others at all during difficult times ye are the first ones to celebrate or applaud an individual when they see the final result. This reminds me of hypocrite toxic so called friends who have shown their true colours during the pandemic whether they actually reached out, supported their friends or sat there and watched the challenge their friends are going through without offering help. As much as the COVID-19 pandemic has been hard on everyone’s social, physical and mental health, one can not but appreciate that the true colours of some “friends” were made clear and their toxic friendship that they offered. Therefore, it is important to find the positive side of every challenge and hold on to that because even a worldwide pandemic has its benefits and positive sides such as exposing true intentions and unearthing real values of people. Most importantly, it offered a lot of people lessons in resiliency and adaptability because during each challenge or obstacle an individual faces, there are multiple options to choose from and not all of them result in negative outcomes. One must always remain hopeful and grateful for going through different experiences and life lessons.

***Episode 2: Egypt vs Canada***

SE is a 23-year-old male from Egypt who immigrated to Canada in search of a better life and more opportunities. He did his undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto and graduated with a high distinction. He is now pursuing a master’s in laboratory medicine at the University of Toronto in hopes to further his goal of getting into medical school and becoming a world well renowned surgeon. We were training partners back in his undergraduate days and developed a passion for the sport of bodybuilding congruently as time went on. I interviewed him in the valley where we frequently enjoy long walks as a form of cardiovascular exercise.

Change requires adaptability. But change usually comes in a gradual form, allowing the recipient some time to make the necessary changes to adapt. But what does one do when the change is spontaneous and effective immediate? This was one of the biggest impacts by COVID19 I think. The fact that everything happened so quickly and didn’t give us enough time to prepare. I was in some ways fortunate enough to see how two different countries handled change and specific aspects of the COVID19 pandemic. A few months ago, I travelled back to Egypt to see some family and it gave me the opportunity to contrast between the mental state of people working out in Egypt and in Canada. To give you some brief info first, when gyms reopened in Canada-or at least the one I went to- there were serious limitations and restrictions set in place. These included booking gym sessions in advance, maximum of one-hour training sessions, and wearing masks while training. Obviously, this was quite the change from what we are used to, but it wasn’t that big of a deal to me. The main thing I noticed was how big of a deal everyone was making this to be. Most people were annoyed with such little time to train and having to book. Contrasting this to Egypt, there were also some restrictions in certain gyms (franchise gyms such as the equivalent of Goodlife). However, the public perception to these changes was much different. There was no complaining or frustration, or at least nearly not as much as in Canada. To some extent there was even stricter adherence to the guidelines of wearing masks while training. And most strikingly, there was still a sense of high morale under the circumstances. While everyone was focused on getting their workout in with high efficiency, there was still comradery amongst the gym members. If someone needed help with going for a personal record weight, there was always someone willing to spot them. If someone needed some motivation, there was always someone standing in the distance cheering them on. Essentially, under the cruelest of situations, people still found a way to be happy.

Well, you look at these “anti-mask” protests and all that and you see that many people were frustrated that their rights were taken away- the right to go out and party, to gym whenever you want, to go to restaurants- and to some extent, those are the biggest troubles they have had in their life. Contrast this to a country that has been consistently fighting to live and has been in serious conflict for almost the last 10 years, those people are able to withstand much more because they have seen worse. I asked a few people at that gym in Egypt about what they thought of the gym restrictions in Canada and what they would have felt if they were there. Most of them replied with something along the lines of “What restrictions? You call 1-hour gym session a restriction? During the revolution we were restricted in how much bread we can buy. That’s restrictions”. They were just happy they could still gym to release some stress, and not even stress due to COVID, but more so work-related stress or family related stress. I guess if I were to summarize this all up in one sentence, regarding the main difference in how people that went to gyms in Canada and Egypt were, it would be that- in Egypt, they felt a privilege that they still were able to go and made the best use of it. Ultimately, I think this is just a consequence of the different lives and challenges that different people from different demographics go to.

I felt more comfortable in Egypt during this triumph because I was also there during the Egyptian revolution. The perception of going to war or battle such as the “the war with the invisible enemy that the world is going through is rather collective. People in Egypt “a developing country” battled the virus as a whole, as one system, as in if one Egyptian gets infected, we are all infected. This comradery not only provided a great fight against the virus, it provided support, motivation, and warmth between one another. My people were so resilient, so powerful from all that they have seen, that their hearts were made of steel. On the other hand, in Canada, the battle was very individualistic, rarely anyone cared for one another. I felt alone. But once again bodybuilding was the anchor of my sanity. I progressed to keep on training when I came back to Canada because I had a competition on November the 17th called King Kong classic which I have been training for months before the pandemic hit. It was really a struggle to keep the discipline to stay training extensively throughout the pandemic but just like I previously stated, the Egyptian mentality was a driving force in keeping me going. I would also admit that my motivation was not always there but what the champions and the most resilient have is discipline. I had that discipline with my studies I just needed to convert to my bodybuilding passion. However, the second wave hit Toronto and the gyms closed down. I was so close to giving up until I dug deep into my social network in hopes of finding any way, I could find a gym. The search became harder and harder because other regions weren’t even allowing anyone from my region to sign up, and just when all hope was lost I was contacted by one of my friends who informed about a gym that was commercially closed but the owner was letting a selective group of train behind closed doors. After an emotionally draining search, this was the only choice I had.

I have arrived to find that this gym was a dungeon, lights were off, not music, nothing! just a couple of guys in there sharing some blood sweat and tears. This was an exclusive opportunity only a few people were allowed to be there. We all had the code to open the door, and we were all instructed to keep it closed at all times, with the addition of keeping an eye out for any authorities. At first, barely anyone talked to each other, each person kind of did their own thing and went on with their day but as the days went on, we started connecting and bonding with each other as if we knew each other for years, it felt like I was back in Egypt. I felt the comradery amongst these few individuals. That played a huge part in the intensity of my training as my gym peers toke my challenge as their own and did the best, they could to aid me in having a good placement in the competition

Competition day came, I was nervous and excited at the same time. This was my first competition and I went through a whole pandemic in between my preparation, part of me was not prepared and didn’t adhere to the idea of winning. Personally, at this point winning didn’t matter, I just wanted to go the distance. After an eventful day, I ended up placing second in my line up which I was very satisfied with considering the circumstances. The real award was not the medal, it was the journey that I had to take.

I started by talking about adaptability and preparation for it and I conclude by making the connection: lockdown was a completely new phenomenon to Canadians in this era, Egyptians went through this a few years ago only instead of there being printout signs to enforce the rules, there were military tanks on the streets. They were more mentally prepared for this and as a result they were better able to handle this current situation. If anything is to be learned or hoped form this episode, it is that hopefully the current restrictions amongst the whole world that are in place will make people better adaptable to future unforeseen circumstances.

- End of Episode 2 -

**Reflection:**

The episode was eye opening to me and that’s why I decided to share it. As an Egyptian growing up in poverty and struggle, it is without a doubt to be thankful that I live in Canada where life is much simpler. However, the Egyptian mentality will never be beaten, these people have shown me time and time again that their strength is not economic nor monetary, but it is cultural and emotional. That’s why even as a Canadian immigrant, I will always be Egyptian at heart.

**Interpretation:**

This episode is very insightful as it brings different elements into conversation with each other such as privilege, ideology, resistance, and perspective. Furthermore, it also showcases the differences between two nations and two populations on how they have perceived the challenges introduced by COVID-19 and their ideologies. Additionally, it also depicts how previous challenges and experiences prepare one group of people for a new challenge by making them adapt and be resilient. For instance, according to SE, Egyptian were not complaining as much as the Canadians were during the pandemic and during restricted timing in the gym. For example, SE mentions; “ I asked a few people at that gym in Egypt about what they thought of the gym restrictions in Canada and what they would have felt if they were there. Most of them replied with something along the lines of “What restrictions? You call 1-hour gym session a restriction?”. This indicates how one thing can be viewed completely differently by two populations based on the experiences they had, so for the Canadians who have mostly experienced a privileged lifestyle of no wars or physically being afraid for someone’s life, a 1-hour restriction is seen as a way to control them and take away some of their privilege of fully doing what they want to do. However, for the Egyptians who have experienced days of hardship of no food during war, this was not seen as a restriction but seen as a way to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Some people might even think that having the means to go to the gym even during a global pandemic is seen as a privilege within its own self as it implies that the individuals going there have the time and money. Therefore, it is imperative to note that privilege and the level of treatment expected from a government towards its citizens definitely determined what was acceptable versus not under the COVID-19 umbrella. This reflects ideologies regarding governance, politics and societal freedom in these two countries, implying that the population in Canada is used to having freedom at the core of their daily activities and no coercive push for anything to the extent that there has been plenty of anti-masker protests happening in Toronto yet no protests of these natures happened in Egypt. Additionally, SE mentions how resistance is developed because of previous experiences and perspectives are shaped based on his resistance. For instance, SE mentions about their bodybuilding competition that they took part in and how the motivation to continue training and putting in effort was their resilience and the power of will. SE states “This was my first competition, and I went through a whole pandemic in between my preparation, part of me was not prepared and didn’t adhere to the idea of winning”. I really like how the aim or goal of SE was not winning per se, but the process and effort put into this long journey of training for a year and preparing oneself. This also shows maturity by SE and being realistic to all the different challenges that they gone through this year. Another point that is also super important to mention is the fact that there are individuals in the society who are so pure-hearted and ready to offer help at any instance. This is clear when SE mentions the gym owner who just offers the space to some individuals who are in dire need or require it to train for their competitions just like in SE’s situation. It is refreshing to see that there is a section of the population whose priorities are to help people and not to make money off every move they make. Overall, this episode offers great lessons of resiliency and good deeds by mentioning that when these two are combined, individual resiliency and good deeds offered by another member of the society, great things can happen such as the continuation of training and bodybuilding of SE for their competition as well as to find a social space in that gym with the other folks who had access to it, and therefore having the opportunity to build a community of people with similar experiences and interests while also sharing similar characteristics of being resilient and willing to take up any challenge that comes their way.

**Theory:**

The eight episodes provided to me by the four respondents were lucrative in nature and provided insightful experiences that others and I can learn from. The amalgamation of the episodes all reflects a common theme, a coherent theory I propose. It was **intrinsic resilience.**  Each individual was intrinsically in a battle with the external world in which the problems that are occurring in the outside world were not only causing the respondent to tackle these problems, rather the problems subjected them to internal problems that were uncovered by the reality. Resilience encapsulates the idea of facing life’s challenges and recover, and in doing so you can enhance your life. Being resilient means facing stressors not avoiding them, to be resilient directs you to learn from your mistakes not avoid making them, and to be resilient means you rebound from failure. People manage stress better than others and we can look to them and learn how to become more resilient. Now I would like to highlight in perspective the role of bodybuilding in promoting resilience in and out of the sport as it pertains to the episodes presented. In bodybuilding, one must be at a bio-mechanical disadvantage in order to grow which means that the athlete must seek discomfort to knock on the doors of progress. Therefore, bodybuilding has molded these individuals into becoming more resilient being rewiring their mindset to welcome challenges and to accept the failure/mistakes are an essential part of the journey. Evidently, this can be demonstrated in SH’s episode where he has found a way to compete even though the pandemic, the restrictions, and social isolation where stacked against him impeding his goals. I would argue that his bodybuilding lifestyle provided him with extra mental shields to battle the circumstances covid-19 offered. VT- “I gradually shifted my toxic conscious and eating disorder to a healthier lifestyle where I had started appreciating my body. It was easier said than done, I had believed every single stereotype about lifting until then. Lifting weights and focusing on being a female bodybuilder was not just a method for me to feel better and overcome my depressive mindset but also had become my new dream” this statement illustrates a shift from fighting a food disorder to finding a home in bodybuilding. Before bodybuilding she had been a slave to her bulimic tendences and a victim to bullying and body shamming. However, after she embodied the elements of bodybuilding which entail discipline and perseverance, she became more resilient when approached by her food disorder tendences and battelled them off and on to their abolishment. Further, in VT’s second episode she states that “The quarantine and lockdown situation got all of those negative memories back. I wouldn't even leave my bed at all some days, crying and trying to beam back my motivation to fight this” which illustrates that bodybuilding and training were a critical anchor to her mental health and resilience, therefore there was a correlation between bodybuilding and resilience in the sense as that when bodybuilding was excluded from her life, she reverted back to the negative tendences, hence bodybuilding was coping mechanism that she used in order to fuel her resilience.

RT- “I felt lost, hopeless, and defeated for a short while. However, I decided to make the best with what I have because no matter how difficult the circumstances get, a true bodybuilder does not surrender”. This statement from RT speaks volumes as his voice presents him as a bodybuilder for a quite a while. By just that statement “a true bodybuilder does not surrender” I can postulate the kind of mentality that he has, a mentality engraved with resilience that came about through the struggles of the bodybuilding lifestyle. RT- “It was the only place where I could stop thinking about the hassles of my life and just focus on the present moment. In those two hours of every day, I pushed my body to its limits and watched it endure heavier and heavier weights” RT’s statement explains the importance of bodybuilding to him, that it was a supplement to his health which supports the phenomena that bodybuilding is often used as a coping mechanism.

MA- “In order to reach you fullest potential, you must go out and train your mind as much as your body. Staying at home put a damper on that. With that being said, I still did my best to make do with what I had”. Once again there is a reoccurring theme of resilience within bodybuilding, and as he has stated “you must go out and train your mind as much as your body” shows inclination to resist defeat that reflects spiritual resilience which is the ability to maintain a positive spirit even in the face of adversity. Even though the gyms have closed, MA changed the narrative and built his own gym, taking negativity and turning it into a positive outcome to keep the bodybuilding spirit alive.

SE who has been bodybuilding for some time displayed immense amount of resilience. It is evident from the way speaks that he has cultivated the phenomena of resilience. He explained that his resilience was largely attributed to the Egyptian people who have gone through so much that they had no choice but to be resilient in order to survive. Now I would like to propose an analogy that I think pertains to resilience, stressors in life are just like a heavy weighted squat, it will bring you down and test you the most at your lost but you have to be strong enough to get back up, and if you got a spotter (social support) they won’t let that weight defeat you. This was the theory I was trying to convey, the fact that the practice of bodybuilding results in an increase in intrinsic resilience.

**Literature:**

**Paper 1**: *Bacchi, Stephen. Et al. (2016). Resilience and psychological distress in psychology and medical students, Academic psychiatry.* DOI 10.1007/s40596-016-0488-0

This journal article explores the levels of resilience and psychological distress in both medical students and psychology students. The authors used a quantitative method of studying the subject by administering a voluntary anonymous online survey which measures the levels of stress and resilience based on a score. The timing of the survey’s administration could be influential on the data that is recovered, the survey was conducted a month prior to exams which would innately indicate a higher level of distress. The results found that higher levels of resilience were associated with lower levels of psychological distress. In addition, students have proposed intervention strategies to decrease psychological distress, many of which were monetary solution but when asked an open-ended question, students called for changes to the academic structures as well as more social sporting activities to help the students experience some leisure time aside from the academic warfare.

Relating to my theory and findings, the paper’s result does seem to cross over in the fact that resilience is elevated when psychological stress is decreased. As presented in VT’s episode, when she was under immense psychological stress she gave up to her bulimic tendencies and wasn’t resilient enough to fight back until, slowly her psychological distress decreased due to adaptation of the situation and inspiration from the movie which resulted in her resilience meter to increase. Moreover, in the paper the students mention “social sporting activities” as way to relive some psychological stress. This is consistent with the phenomena that bodybuilding is used as a coping mechanism, the premise of the paper does intersect with the phenomena I proposed by which bodybuilding will increase resilience by decreasing psychological distress.

**Paper 2:** *Rutter, M. (1993). Resilience: Some conceptual considerations.*Journal of Adolescent Health, 14*(8), 626–631.*[*https://doi.org/10.1016/1054-139X(93)90196-V*](https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/1054-139X(93)90196-V)

Resilience is contemporary in our modern society and is around us. Biological studies on resilience to diseases or physical hazards show that resilience does not derive from avoidance of risks but from controlled exposure (Rutter, M. 1993). Community Resilience is evident through the news platforms, it occurs when a particular community is affected by a shared disaster which then requires its people to collaborate into solving the issue in place. However, evidence from behavior genetics suggests that in many circumstances, nonshared environmental influences tend to have a greater effect than shared ones (Rutter, M. 1993). Therefore, as a qualitative study the paper seeks individualistic data that have a stronger cause and effect validity though not neglecting the effect of the surrounding environmental factors such as social relationships. The paper then demonstrates similar findings on the insight of community resilience as we have seen in respondent SE second episode where he details the contrast between how two different communities that have to collaborate in battling coivd-19. This offers a form of collective resilience which is dependent on a given social context. However, the data presented is individualistic in nature which promotes its cause and effect validity according to the paper. Talking about individualism, bodybuilding promotes intrinsic resilience stated in the theory section, it is an individualistic sport overall but does have its collectivism due to its practice being in a shared environment. Therefore, I can make the premise that bodybuilding has a greater effect on resilience than most activities because for one to excel or win in bodybuilding he himself has to go through all the pain and suffering (building up resilience) in order to go the distance at end.

**Paper 3)** PeConga, E. K., Gauthier, G. M., Holloway, A., Walker, R. S. W., Rosencrans, P. L., Zoellner, L. A., & Bedard-Gilligan, M. (2020). Resilience is spreading: Mental health within the COVID-19 pandemic. Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12(S1), S47-S48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000874>

This paper explores the current covid-19 pandemic through its negative implications on the mental health of respondents, and how covid-19 will result in a long term resilience being the most common outcome. The paper discusses 4 myths about resilience, two of which are important to the subject at hand. Myth2, “resilient people do not have bad days or weeks”. The authors debunk the myth and explain that resilience is characterised by active problem solving ,engaging in adaptive behaviors while struggling and while experiencing intense anxiety, or grief. This is consistent with the theory of intrinsic resilience as two of the respondents (MA and SE) took problem solving into their own hands. They both used their bodybuilding knowledge and passion into manifesting forms of training equipment and regime to further their goals as well as establish that sense of achievement. “resilience means continuing to show up and move forward, even when we’re at our lowest” (PeConga, E. K. et al. 2020), a statement that speaks volume and is well established in all episodes. Myth 3: resilience is something you either have or you do not have. The authors debunk this myth be explaining that resilience is constructed and shaped by dynamic behavioral, cognitive, and environmental processes suggesting that it is learned not acquired (PeConga, E. K. et al. 2020). In addition, individuals and communites can influence one another to cultivate resilience. These findings are consistent with the respondent’s episodes. We saw that in SE second episode where he described the resilience of the Egyptian people to be much greater than the Canadian people, which in turn provided him with more social support and comfort that proved that their resilience was infectious to others. On the other hand, in VT’s episode we see her building up her resilience as she goes through the journey of finding bodybuilding, which became a catalyst in constructing a resilient mindset. Therefore, in the episode’s progression, there are indicators and trails of resilient manifestation such as the RT’s experience with covid-19 where he was not only battling the virus physically but mentally too.

Paper 4) Mustafa Sarkar & David Fletcher (2014) Psychological resilience in sport performers: a review of stressors and protective factors, Journal of Sports Sciences, 32:15, 1419-1434, DOI: [10.1080/02640414.2014.901551](https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2014.901551)

This paper sheds light on psychological resilience in sports athletes to maximize their performance. It is hoped that synthesising what is known in these areas will help researchers gain a deeper profundity of resilience in sport, and also provide a rigorous and robust foundation for the development of a sport-specific measure of resilience (Sarkar, Mustafa. Et al. 2014). The authors narrow it down to five main families of psychological factors (positive personality, motivation, confidence, focus, perceived social support) that aid athletes in overcoming the effects of stressors.

Positive personality is defined by having qualities that influence resilience associated behaviour such as optimism, hope and pro activity. Motivation is defined as having energy, direction, and persistence that adheres one to a particular goal or task. Confidence is the degree of certainty one possesses about their ability to be successful in achieving a certain task. Focus refers to the ability of one to devote metal effort and concentration to a given situation. Perceived social support is described to be access to social support. Now that I have defined the 5 main families according to the text, I would like to visually illustrate their effects from figure 1 in the paper

Diagram

Description automatically generated

Figure 1. A grounded theory of psychological resilience and optimal sport performance (reproduced with permission from Fletcher & Sarkar, [2012](https://shapeamerica.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02640414.2014.901551)).

In relation to my findings. I would examine all 5 families contextually on my respondents. VT experiences stressors such as bullying for her plus size figure, as result her confidence decreased, her motivation was hindered, her focus was altered, she did not have any perceived social support, and her positive personality (optimism) was fading away. But if we look at respondent SE, when faced with stressors he was confident in his abilities to compete regardless of the obstacles (episode 2), motivated and focused to build his own gym (episode 1), he acquired a whole load of social support through media and friends. Thus, the effect of stressors on an individual’s varies on their level of resilience. Now I would like to make the distinction that SE has been bodybuilding for a while now, leading to his consumption of the bodybuilding principles that supplemented his resilience, while VT was just newly included in the mix however we do see the progression of the 5 families in her journey as in episode 2, she was focused, confident, motivated, to keep going after having a fall back to her bulimic tendencies. This is where we see that bodybuilding played a great factor in building such intrinsic resilience anchored by the proposed 5 families.

**EPILOGUE:]**

This project has been an eye opening not only to me but to my fellow respondents as well. Bodybuilding has been a long passion since the devastating ACL injury I endured when I was 15 that shattered my hopes and dreams of becoming a professional football player. Bodybuilding offered me a path not to a career, rather to constructive lifestyle that offered me traits such as discipline, motivation, confidence, self-actualization, determination and the greatest of all resilience. Through bodybuilding, I manifested a mindset that promotes discomfort, a mindset that understands the beauty in pain and the growth in struggle. Speaking to my respondents made me realize that I wasn’t the only one that found a home in bodybuilding, which was quite nurturing as we could bond over similar circumstances and understand in a way the thought processes of each other’s actions. I learned the difference of handling stressors through my respondent’s explanation of their episodes. In addition, I learned that as much as bodybuilding is empowering, it stems from a mixture of one’s insecurities such that it turns from a leisure activity to a form of physical psychotherapy. Therefore, I was really Enlighted when understanding that bodybuilding can be used as a coping mechanism for some, and as a leisure activity for others. I would like to point out that being a bodybuilder, doesn’t necessarily than one must be making a living out of it or professional in that manner, it merely becomes a part of the individual. Personally, I have always said the biggest or fittest person in the gym is not the one with the most appealing physique, it is the one with biggest heart. By that I mean the person most passionate and most devoted. Moreover, after the respondents shared an episode with me, I shared one back out of solidarity because I believe the project should not only change me but change those who are changing me as well. I described to them several of my experiences, they were shocked but mostly admired how resilient I was to be still standing Infront of them today. I spoke to them about a criminal case that was falsely presented to me which flipped my life right around and drove me to depression, that was something respondent VT could relate to because she too had depressive symptoms when she was bullied. Therefore, me describing my experience battling my inner demons was insightful to her as her episode was to me. I provided her with an explanation of how bodybuilding taught me how to be patient and that it taught me to control my stressors. These people weren’t just an assignment to me, they weren’t just respondents I would take their information and make use of it for myself. They are contributing individuals in our society and friends of mine that I felt obligated to add to their lives as they do add in mine. Overall, there was a lot of learned principles in making the project, a qualitative project always has a higher ecological validity, so I do know that my finding are applied and are in the lived world. Now I end with a piece of advice to whoever is reading, try to understand where people’s actions are coming not blame them for their action. I feel like people are asking the wrong questions, so the question to ask is not “what’s wrong with you” its “ what happened to you”, and in that question lies all the answers about the person you thought you knew.

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