**Psychological implications of covid-19’s Social Isolation on Bodybuilding/Fitness athletes**

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to identify the psychological demands and implications that are commonly experienced by Bodybuilding/Fitness athletes during the contemporary pandemic so that these demands and implications could be of information about the subjective suffering of people in the industry. Therefore, the study could provide pathways for interventions to be of aid in enchaining the mental health of athletes during the pandemic. Focus group interviews were conducted with 5 athletes in the fitness/bodybuilding field concentrically as they are most impacted by athletic facility closure. An inductive thematic analysis was used in distinguishing the psychological stressors experienced.

**Introduction:**

Through this research, I aim to decipher the physiological stressors imposed on bodybuilding/fitness athletes by the socially, mentally, emotionally, and physically draining pandemic that has left millions around the globe in despair. However, the study only focuses on the niche of those athletes to have a deeper understanding of their categorical struggle during this unprecedented time. Further, the study aims to contribute to the field of sports psychology by understanding how sports are used as coping mechanisms during emotional turmoil caused by the external or internal environment. Therefore, sports may be of use in some psychotherapy programs as an aide to mental health. Research examining the efficacy of sports as a mental health intervention and psychological advantageous as well as physiological would benefit from the richness in content of the study. Similarly, interventions that targets sport psychology and that on self-development and psychological demands could have a wide application. First, we must define and understand what the sport of bodybuilding encompasses since it’s an unregulated sport that is practiced more recreationally than professionally, due to various reasons such as lack of monetary compensation, genetic lottery, and the costs to live a bodybuilding lifestyle because bodybuilding is a 24-hour sport in that it is as much of a lifestyle as it is a sport.

The transactional theories of stress is a fundamental principle in the field of sports psychology, it postulates that stress is “an ongoing process that involves individuals transacting with their environment, making appraisals of the situations they find themselves in, and endeavoring to cope with any issues that might arise” (Fletcher et al., 2006, p. 329). According to Fletcher et al, the effects of stressors are mediated by how the stressors are perceived in relation to one’s own well-being. Situational Appraisal of a stressor includes evaluation of the relevance of the stressor to their goals, beliefs, values, this is coined as primary appraisals while an assessment of the coping alternatives at hand are secondary appraisals. Subsequently, the appraisals modulate the emotional, cognitive and somatic symptoms that are experienced by the athlete as result of the stressor’s effect (Martinent & Ferrand, 2015; Uphill & Jones, 2007). Following an emotional response, the athlete then determines whether their emotional state is a defining factor in their performance (tertiary appraisal) and the coping mechanisms available in regard to their (quaternary appraisal). As Berkeley’s immaterialism argues, to be is to be perceived. This philosophical piece is of great relevance to this topic and a contributes to the merging between the philosophy that psychology stems from, to our modern psychology or sports psychology in this particular case. Thus, an athlete’s perception of an emotion can both me facilitative or detrimental to their performance depending on how it is perceived and coped with.

Further, the pandemic has offered these athletes stressors of different kinds and intensities. Stressors such as the closure of the athletic facilities, the abolishment of any competition due to quarantine rules, financial restrictions stemming from the inability train clients or compete at any competitions, and lack of social support during a period of social isolation both physically and emotionally. Additionally, being unable to practice a lifestyle that is concentrically structured and scheduled from the gram of rice to the next, resulted in an identity crisis in several of those athletes. The identity crises are understood to be because bodybuilding athletes associated their muscular statue with their identity, the muscles they have built over the years are physical illustrations of the characteristics they embody, therefore as they were losing their muscles, they were congruently losing a big part of themselves. 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.

This paper does not seek to address an performance issues caused by the stressors of the pandemic, rather it is concerned with deciphering the psychological implications faced by the athletes during the pandemic.

**Methods:**

The research is conducted in a qualitative manner to ensure richness in data and higher ecological validity to accommodate the differences in data content but ensure that a coherent theme is developed from data analysis and observations made throughout the study

The research design includes face to face or virtual interviews with participants that is completely confidential therefore percipients will be addressed by the prefix of the first and last name. The interviews offer a tool to identify areas of consensus and disagreement between participants’ experiences, in addition, it offers more rich data by capitalizing on the element of human connection in that the participant does not feel like a number but rather a productive element to the study which is a motivator to the participant to contribute more and more.

**Procedure**

Following ethical approval by administering a consent form to all 10 participants, the participants where then interviewed virtually due to the limitations of the pandemic. All 10 participants were instructed to deliver their thoughts and responses on the psychological implications the COVID-19 they had to encounter and how they are coping with them through this mentally draining pandemic.

**Participants:**

1. AC Is a 23-year-old Canadian Woman from a Philippine descent. She is a recreational Bodybuilding/Power lifting athlete. She is a management student at the University of Toronto with hardworking mentality both academically and athletically. She has had various battles with her body image that essentially bodybuilding tends to oppose which makes her very invested in the sport.
2. SH, Is 25- year old Canadian man from a Sri Lankan descent. He is a recreational power lifting athlete that has thrived both mentally and physically within the sport allowing him a position in the University of Toronto’s power lifting team. He studied kinesiology at the University of Toronto, and recently graduated in the year of 2019. He applies a lot of his academic knowledge to his sport distinguishing him from others by connecting the knowledge with the exercise
3. TH, is a 24 year old Canadian man from a SrI Lankan descent. He started bodybuilding in high school as a means to achieve a level of self-confidence that he was missing. Often feeling unnoticed and invisible, he sought to change his life through bodybuilding by constructing a physique that may give him an identity among his peers. He graduated from the University of Toronto in the year of 2018 in kinesiology. He aims to further his education through enrolling in sports medicine programs.
4. AV, is a 22 year old Canadian man from a Greek descent. As student of psychology, he is a critical thinker about the mind and the body. Not only is he a well achieved student but also an accomplished athlete. AV started bodybuilding as a supplement to his passion for football, though as time went by AV’s main interests diverged to bodybuilding which he now practices as his main sport. He is currently enrolled in a psychology program at the University of Toronto and plans to graduate on the spring of 2021.
5. MR is 22-year-old Italian man studying electrochemical engineering and stable energy. I met MR in through an international student program that we both enrolled in from our home countries. We both ended up in Oromocto, a small town in New Brunswick where we attended high school together for a year. MR was a very industrious student as he always had the top grades of every class he was in, however he lacked athleticism. MR and I grew to have a mutualistic relationship where he would guide me in school, and I would introduce him to the bodybuilding world. After our graduation, MR went back to Italy to pursue his engineering degree, with a built-up passion for bodybuilding that could fill the hollow spaces in his time.
6. SN, is a 23 year old Canadian man from an Afghan decent. He is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto studying statistics and math. I had been to him introduced him by other fellow peers who thought that him and I shared the same level of passion towards bodybuilding. He was a well consistent athlete that always showed up to the gym and performed regardless of his injuries which he had many of. He plans on graduating in the year of 2022 and pursuing a career in personal training.
7. Bruno, is a 22 year old Canadian man from an African descent. He works as a male nurse at the Toronto western hospital. He is an aspiring young bodybuilder whom I met at the University Gym right before the pandemic. Even though he is satisfied with his career as a nurse, he truly enjoys the career of bodybuilding and is interested in making it a side hustle to generate more income.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.

**EPISODES**

**AC**

My relationship with food became complicated in high school. As with any teenager, I grappled with my confidence, specifically my weight. Prior to this, I had no history with diets. My knowledge surrounding “diets” was limited to caloric restriction. No knowledge about nutrients. No knowledge about exercise. Strictly calories. As the saying goes, “*ignorance is bliss*”, and so I embarked upon my first “diet”.

I lost a substantial amount of weight in 8 weeks. Little did I know, I’d gain more bad habits that outweighed the number on the scale. In conjunction with food restriction, my “exercise” was 30 minutes on an elliptical.  My workouts were “appearance” oriented rather than an outlet for stress. The prominence of the bad habits grew. It started small. These habits disguised themselves under a false facade of a “routine”. Soon, the “lose routines” became  binding rituals. Feelings of compulsion gripping at my mind. Just as quick as the binding rituals came, it disappeared along with my sense of discipline. When it came to food, I had no control.

Beneath my preoccupation with food, was the deterioration of my mental health. I scheduled my meals but never realized I was scheduling my anxiety.  I counted down the seconds until meals but always felt anxious upon finishing them. Although my meals were scheduled, the times separating them started to blur together. My “main meal” meal was followed by a flow of snacks until the next meal. These snacks would build to become full-blown binges. I never purged. The idea of shoving my fingers down my throat as punishment was off putting. I was more methodical. I *knew* what was to come with every meal. Thus, the volume of my “main meals” shrunk from a healthy portion size to 2 mandrins at lunch. I scheduled my meals further and therefore scheduled my binges further. I succeeded at breakfast and lunch. Classes preoccupied my mind and *forced* students to stick to the predetermined lunch schedule. Come dinner time, I was thrown back into the kitchen with all its food. As expected, I was ravenous. Naturally, I binged. It felt like a *never ending cycle*. What fuelled this was the voice in the back of my mind nagging me to eat more. Although my stomach was maxed at full capacity, the voice’s hunger could never be satiated.  It was pure insanity. I was grasping at the air trying to regain control but the more I did it, the more I lost it. My fear was that this was my future. I spent my nights watching youtube videos on how to *fix me.* The physical and mental exhaustion started to take over.

The weight reappeared in place of my confidence. I distracted myself with school, which only brought on a different level of stress. To view exercise as an outlet for stress was an unfamiliar idea. My introduction to weightlifting came as a requirement for being part of sports teams. Here, there was the shift of “working out for appearance” to “working out for performance”.  Here, I started to notice a shift in my mentality. If I can teach myself discipline in the gym, I can translate that into different areas of my life. I can regain control over food.

Centering my focus around performance and the gym took my mind off food. The change was gradual. The voice in the back of my mind nagging me about food started to drift. The anxiety I felt attending family gatherings and standing in the kitchen slowly subsided. My quality of sleep improved. It was a moment of mental clarity. Food became fuel. Fuel to run faster. Fuel to lift heavier. I went from being the weakest on the team, mentally and physically, to one of the fastest. To be recognized for something other than appearance was motivating. I was being recognized for my performance. In turn, I recognized food to be more than a number, it was nutrients.

People have different approaches to self-care. Some prefer shopping, the spa or even comfort food. My self-care is the gym. Within the 1-2 hours I schedule, I can focus all my energy on myself. This is the healthy way I can push myself mentally and physically. Here, the priority is me.

When the pandemic forced a lockdown, my initial frustration stemmed from the impending loss of strength. The routine shifted from weight lifting to bodyweight circuits and neighbourhood walks. This was expected and so it had to be accepted. Being stuck at home made me understand how much I relied on outside stimulus. In a non-pandemic school week, I am only home to sleep. On the off chance that I have a free schedule, I will find an excuse to be outside, whether it be on campus or at a friend’s place. It’s normal to have thoughts throughout the day. I simply forgot the volume of my own thoughts.

What was lurking behind me was the ghost of my past habits. At home, I was stuck between the walls of my mind and the accessible food. Will eating the same amount be too much for circuit training and resistance bands? If I cut back on food and start doing more cardio to get more movement in the day, will I lose more strength? Will I get fat?It was a *never ending cycle.* The fear of perceiving “food as the enemy” was a weight on my shoulders. Not the weight I would have preferred. I couldn’t see food the same way I saw it to fuel my performance. Without the gym, I was without my safety net.

Weeks into the lockdown, mental exhaustion kicks in. With 9 hours of sleep per night, my body had the energy of 5 hours of sleep. The days were sluggish and spent in front of a computer or TV with the hopes of providing a little distraction. There were brief moments when anxiety would cling to me for a week. I was fully functioning, the anxiety was at a low level. I started to lose motivation for the little movement I would get in a day. It wasn’t exciting. It was repetitive. To be fair, movement is still movement. It was more challenging than a TV. However, bodyweight circuits don’t offer the same level of stimulation as the gym.

I knew this wasn’t how I wanted to spend the year. I practiced viewing food exactly as it is, *food.* No “good food”. No “bad food”. Of course, health is a priority. Therefore, the majority of the week consists of whole foods. However, if I wanted something, I allowed it. What I soon discovered was that allowing myself to experience food, allowed me to experience my days. It’s inevitable that my performance would decline. Thus, I shifted my focus again. Rather than working out for performance, I worked out to maintain my health. As a result of this, I felt less anxious of being forced indoors. My motivation for staying active started to revive itself. Of course, nothing can replace the gym.

As with any journey, this was not without its “downs”. Instead of releasing control, I found solace in movement. It was a momentary release from reality. I escape my mind and find comfort in the physical discomfort. I find peace. It’s just me, my mind and my music.

What began as a trigger filled nightmare, ended as a blessing in disguise. The pandemic immersed me into month long reflections. The skeletons of my worst habits, that I thought were once buried, were confronted. Finally, as basic as this sounds, *I can enjoy a meal like a normal person*.

**SH**

Growing up, I have always been active and involved in physical activity. I was in my early to mid-teens when I had been inspired to get into weightlifting and bodybuilding. I watched inspirational YouTube videos on how to build muscle, eat like a bodybuilder and to admire the aesthetic physique. I was inspired by the idea of bodybuilding because it gave me confidence about my appearance, it made me feel good physically and mentally by increasing my self-esteem and it gave me something to look forward to in my daily routine. I trained at school gyms, commercial gyms, recreation centres and was recognised in the community as a “Gym rat”. When I was 18, I decided to study Kinesiology from which I then graduated from the University of Toronto. As a health and fitness advocate with years of experience and education under my belt, I dedicated my work to training teams as a coach, and I became a personal trainer. I learned the physiological and aromatical components of the body and the response to physiological stress. I applied my knowledge in rehab clinics, on field care and advocated for seniors and range of patients from complex comorbidities and chronic diseases. At this point, I was an advanced lifter who had a routine of exercising 5-6 times a week consistently and when life got busy, I would make up the extra time at the gym. I was addicted, I was motivated and was always hungry to become stronger, bigger and a better version of myself. Weightlifting became a big part of my lifestyle.  
 It was in early December when the world had discovered a new Virus, Covid-19, but I did not think much of it. As February and March came, cases were spreading worldwide, and Toronto was increasing in the number of cases. Eventually, it was declared a global pandemic and restaurants, bars, gyms and other non-essential services were coming to a close. I remember my last few days before the gyms being closed, my heart was pounding from knowing I may not be able to work out like this in a long time. When gyms started to close down, I would go search which other gyms would remain open and make an effort to work out there. With the lockdown, I felt scared, anxious, shocked, confused, angry and sad all at once because there was a huge safety concern to everyone’s health and with all fitness centres being closed. The orders were to remain home, avoid gatherings and to avoid any non-essential travel. My friends when the lockdown started would call me and check up on me in how I was managing to stay active. It was frustrating because I needed equipment and space to maintain my muscle mass and strength and I was looking for ways to manage my health.  
 The reason why I felt anxious, scared, angry, frustrated and sad was because I could not go to the gym to exercise anymore. Not only the gym, but I felt isolated by staying home and restraining from being in contact with anyone. It was depressing and a scary place to be in because the world was still discovering how the virus worked and there was no cure as of yet. The cases were rising exponentially across the globe and many people including myself had lost their jobs.   
 Exercising frequently in the gym had taught me to be consistent and work hard, not only inside the gym but outside the gym as well. I had the mindset of being disciplined, being true to myself by setting goals and accomplishing them. I knew I had to find alternatives to keep my body in shape and to maintain my strength. I had to invest money on free weights and some new equipment although I was ashamed to tell my friends and family how much I had spent, but it was an important invest for me.  
 During these uncertain and tough times, I was physically gaining weight fast that I had not expected. I was eating more due to lack of inactivity from staying indoors and eating more. I noticed I was gaining fast, and it made me feel less confident and made me feel insecurities about my body. I would be embarrassed to wear fitted shirts and I would be conscious of people looking at me if I were to go outside. Psychologically, I was constantly thinking about getting smaller and weaker even though I was not. I was worried how long it would take until the gyms would open and would constantly check the news for updates. I was also frustrated because a lot of the gym equipment was being sold out and the prices were ridiculously high when I wanted to invest in more equipment. in addition, I did not have the space to workout at home so I would go to my backyard and exercise sometimes in the cold and at night. I realized I was lucky enough to even do this because many people did not even have that. Emotionally, I was sad, worried and was hopeful that one day the gyms would open again, and this virus would come to an end globally.  
 Eventually, I learned to stop complaining about covid. I had to do something to keep myself busy, and by making the most of pandemic lifestyle. I managed to try new things during these uncertain times including gardening, spending more time with my family going on brisk walks, exploring, bike rides, and learning more about myself. I also started to cook more and found new recipes that I never had the time to try. I started to spend more time with my family and connected with them more. I began to give myself more freedom and space by watching tv shows and spent more time working on myself by researching further education and schools. When some restrictions were uplifted during the summer I had started to go on adventures and go on brisk walks in nature. I started to bike, I started to go take pictures, and help my brother in gardening. This was something I had found interesting, and it was new to me. I also realized how grateful I was because the government was providing financial aid during the uncertain time. Many people did not have that luxury or space and were being creative by posting home workout videos. I found it motivating and humbling that others were finding creative ways to stay in shape, and I had taken part in the community to post videos as well to inspire others in staying in shape from home exercises. Afterall, as a health and fitness advocate, I wanted to let others know who were in similar situations like me to find ways to stay busy and active to cope with the feelings of insecurity, anxiety, depression and isolation form covid and to change their negative thoughts and attitudes by being optimistic towards what can be done instead of what cannot.

As I got accustomed to the new lifestyle of finding new ways to exercise and be creative outside the gym. I felt good and remembered to always be humble because it was not only me going through this. My attitude had changed, and I knew there were more important things in life that I needed to worry about such as one’s health and safety. I knew it was a good idea to keep the gyms closed for the betterment and safety of others and I did take covid seriously by abiding the guidelines and rules. I felt content with my new self-care routine and took it day by day. I wanted to do my part as a citizen to maintain social distance and to avoid close contact with others, but at the same time, I knew I had to take care of my health and mental health. I could have continued to make excuses and complain about the pandemic but after taking a moment to think and reflect and learn more about myself, I realised there are other important aspects to life and mental health that were equally important. I managed to continue a plan of exercise outside the gym, knowing I can go to sleep and wake up the next day smiling.   
  
**TH- Building an empire during the pandemic**

It was moments before Toronto had declared another lockdown. Gyms, restaurants and restrictions were being closed once again and the number of cases were rising again. I still remember being in the gym the last day before it was being shut down once again. As I left the gym, I thought to myself once again of the home workouts and routines I was already accustomed to when Covid had started. I was mentally prepared this time, I knew exactly how to cope with the gyms being closed and did not let my emotions and feelings get the best of me.  
 For about 4 years now, my friend and I have started a fitness/educational company called ST6Fitness, our goal is to educate and inspire others to become the best version of themselves by exercising. We offer personal training, coaching services and educational posts. When I had visited my friends’ garage, we both thought to ourselves how the pandemic had played a huge toll in our lives in terms of taking away our social gatherings and exercise accessibility. We both had some equipment such as bands and free weights, but it was not enough to maintain. We were both anxious and paranoid if we ever felt that we were getting smaller and we would constantly look in the mirror every day to see if our bodies had been changing. When I was at my friends’ garage, I told him casually, it would be cool if we can turn this garage into our personal business gym. From that moment a spark was created.  
 With were both motivated in developing our brand and business and were inspired to transform the garage into a workout space. Our attitude towards the pandemic and the gym had to change while maintaining the covid rules. We knew the pandemic was going to last a long time and gyms were not going to reopen. At the same time people may not feel safe to work out even when gyms reopen. Our resiliency to not give up in training during the pandemic only pushed us to do more and make the most of the virus, we so decided to invest in developing a garage gym. Although It was tough, because I was not working and was collecting CERB from the government, we were purchasing equipment and selling equipment with many buy and selling opportunities. As time went by, I thought to myself, what will happen when the gyms re open? Will I continue to go to this garage gym, all this money we are investing in should be paid off for and be worth the longevity. I did not have much money, so I had to get creative. Luckily, I knew how the market was for the gym equipment and I know many people were in the same boat as me in figuring out how to get their hands on exercise equipment. I learned during the pandemic, a good business and marketing strategy would be to start a gym/equipment selling business. I had tested a trial by selling off some of my old equipment on the market. I started making profit by selling exercise equipment at higher cost price. I started buying equipment from Canadian Tire and consistency checking stocks daily, I had checked Kijiji, slowly I moved onto warehouses and wholesale and within a few months I had made enough money to reinvest into my gym. The same work ethic I had in the gym which was to consistently work hard, never give up, take it slowly and trust the process was also applicable to my work ethics outside the gym. I realized I was good at something and I was hustling. My attitude had changed, I would not only use the equipment to workout with, but I had made my own temporarily business, I found a niche from my gym experiences.  
 My buddy and I have now enough equipment into our garage gym that we would need to sustain at the gym and fitness centres. No longer we were worried about losing our strength and managing our size because we had worked so hard to gather all the equipment and start training again. This made us feel proud and accomplished. Seeing our hard work paying off by having our own gym during the pandemic was a big step because it made us realize how much more we are capable of doing and becoming.

. When covid had started I was scared, many people were dying and getting sick exponentially around the globe. I felt isolated by not being able to go to the gym and spend time with my friends outdoors. It was directly impacting my mental and emotional well-being. It was a frustrating time for many others as well who were mentally challenged by not being able to engage in social gatherings, see their loved ones and go on vacation. With the gyms being closed, I constantly would feel less secure about my body and would worry I am gaining weight so fast and losing muscle. Although, physically I did gain a lot of weight and lose strength, I knew this was a temporarily change and once I would get my hands on the space and equipment to exercise, I would come back stronger. And with our garage gym this is exactly what had happened.   
 Covid made me realize how grateful I am for my health and how important exercise and bodybuilding have become as a part of my routine and lifestyle. It has taught me to never take your health for granted and be appreciate for all the loved ones you have in your life. I had heard stories of people being sick in hospital beds and passing away without being able to see their families. Many countries were running out of PPE and hospital bed for sick patients. Fortunately, now, there are number of vaccines being rolled out and more research is done on the virus. Some areas of the region are slowly easing the lockdown, and many people have invested in their own home gym. I understand that the value and important of exercise to one’s health and emotional well-being whether it be in the form of weights training, cardio, bodyweight, the point is to just move be active and live a healthy balanced lifestyle. Being inactive and staying indoors all day can be detrimental to one’s health by feeling isolated and lonely. I am an extrovert, so I knew I had to keep myself busy and socialize with my family to keep my mental health in check. As time went by, I started to engage in up on new hobbies and outdoor activities such as gardening, cooking, go on walks, go and explore parks, enjoying nature, reading and I and had learned how to spend a lot more time to myself and self-reflect.   
 Because I had managed to find ways to socialize, stay active and busy during the pandemic, I did not go into depression, face high levels of low self-esteem, anxiety, mood disorders and stress form the pandemic. Once, I had developed my own bodybuilding routine again and found ways to exercise, I was content with myself. I cannot imagine how my life would be like If I had stopped exercising completely or had not invested in my garage gym with my friend. My hunger and passion for weight training during the pandemic only made me strive for more success. Currently, I am a Nursing student, and I am working in the hospital. I see how covid had impacted and changed people’s lives in terms of increasing isolation and creating more anxiety. It is unfortunate one cannot visit the sick and loved once’s. I really do hope people are taking care of their mental health and are able to get into their routine of things that keep them busy and happy. Covid is serious, it is to be taken seriously, one should follow the guidelines but at the same time one should also manage self-care routines. Weightlifting during the pandemic made me realise how grateful I am for my health and to set priorities, goals and to spend time in other elements to your life to maintain a sustainable healthy long lifestyle.

**MR**

I am Martin Sturdy, an Italian Master student studying in Denmark. I started my studies in Denmark in September 2019 and, after having spent my first six months in Scandinavia, the COVID-19 lockdown started in March 2020. I consider myself to be a very physically active individual and I would workout daily, mostly making use of the University’s gym facilities. The gym for me was a place to relieve the stress of my studies and to simply exercise after a long day of sitting down. Obviously, like everywhere around the world, when the lockdown started also the gym on campus closed. The typical working out routine was disrupted and I found myself having to improvise with a new workout regime. To make things worse, I did not have any equipment I could use at home to exercise: no resistance bands or free weights of any kind. Trying to order them was also out of the question, since all equipment disappeared very quickly at the beginning of the lockdown period.

I really picked up on doing some interval workouts, such as HIIT workouts at first and enjoyed doing something that was new. Differently from other countries, in Denmark it was possible to go outdoors and perform physical activity and I took full advantage of it. Also the fact that spring was approaching and subsequently summer, made the first lockdown much easier to bear. I eventually found some outdoor parks to go to and do some workouts that challenged me more than the home workouts I had been doing till then. The weather was also great, especially in a very rainy country such as Denmark.

In general during this initial period of the pandemic I did not miss the gym as much as I thought I would. Obviously training like I did was not the same as what I would do at a gym: I realized though, that it was also possible to get a good workout in alternative ways. An additional benefit to this different style of working out I developed was that I spent a lot of time outdoors: the lockdown felt less like a burden. From a psychological point of view, as I said previously, I felt well. The weather was very nice and getting warmer by the day, so I had plenty of opportunities to get outside and workout. In Denmark, during the summertime, days are also extremely long and for this reason I found it very nice to workout very early or much later at night. Some days I would also work out 3 times a day: as soon as I woke up, around midday or afternoon and in the evening. Needless to say my physical condition was very good too, possibly reaching one of the best ones I had ever achieved. This was the result of the months spent in the gym before the lockdown, a lighter diet and increased exercising during the pandemic.

Throughout the summer I continued exercising as I had done up to that point in time. Around the end of June, gyms also started to re-open for a smaller group of people at a time. I was very happy and obviously started lifting on a daily basis once again. The rest of summer was this way and also into the start of the new school year. Around November though, the contagion numbers hit new highs and everything started closing down once again and a new lockdown was established.

The situation is the same to this date and the last time I stepped in a gym was this past November. This second lockdown was much different to the first one. The biggest difference being the time of the year and the Danish weather. It has been one of the coldest winters in the country in the past few years and it was impossible to even attempt doing any outdoor activity other than simple walks, fully dressed from head to toe. The only exercise I got during these periods was walking and doing some home bodyweight exercises. Luckily I managed to find some resistance bands during the summer and I used those for my workouts during the winter. The workouts at home during this period were even worse than the ones outdoors during the first lockdown and. The bad weather also made it very non motivating to go outside at all and I felt and still feel quite drained. This also impacts my performance at school quite a bit because I am unable to relieve the stress I accumulate during the day. I hope we will get to access gyms once again soon, but I am also happy that the worst part of the year is over and am looking forward to warm beautiful days to come.

**SV**

What is fitness? What is life? How has Covid-19 affected us mentally, physically, emotionally. Well this is my story. From a 22-year-old kid that used to work out once a day for 2 hours a day to staying home 24/hrs a day, my life got flipped turned upside down as it did everyone else. A gym was my safe space where I can get away from the world and escape my troubles and just grind on my body. Walking into the gym was the best part of my day. The positive vibe and energy that did not include the snakes in this world. I felt like the gym was a space for everyone to forget bout the outside world and put their blood sweat and tears into creating their bodies a certain way to make them selves feel good and powerful.

Growing up I was a skinny tall kid. Some would say that’s the perfect body type for men but social media displays the best guy as a buff hunk of muscle. So I was an insecure kid with no serious gym goals saying I can never live up to society’s image of a man. Once entering University of Toronto Scarborough, I went from going once a month to once a week to everyday and tracking my macros. My intention of going to the gym was to look a certain way for society but overtime I needed it to help my mental health instead. Mental health is a real issue for men and it isn’t talked about because we aren’t to be viewed as weak so instead a lot of us use that to push ourselves harder in the gym. About a year ago today I weighted 210 and had the best diet. In todays world a year after covid-19 without the gyms I’ve lost 30 lbs, my sleeping schedule is messed up, I have no job, I have no life, and my diet is disgusting. I have no motivation to even walk downstairs anymore. I just sit in my room all day watching useless TV shows because theirs nothing else to do. I tried to do #pushupchallenges on Instagram. Or riding my bike or running or any type of fitness but being in that gym environment just made me feel different. Without it I just feel like a sloth.

Everyday seeing the news about how Doug Ford is closing the gyms just effects me more and more. How are they going to close something so essential to people which are the gyms for their mental health. That are following protocols and are wiping down constantly, but are opening up malls or schools it just pisses me off. I’m sure I’m not the only one that feels this way because at the same time he promotes fitness and men’s mental health but is depriving us of this necessity. It just hard and doesn’t make sense. I can’t go to other cities because its not allowed. Toronto has been in lockdown forever when other cities are open without wearing mask and rising cases. Its degrading and its hard to see that I can’t live my life and workout because of the governments terrible decision making. Everyday waking up is a challenge with online school and all this happening in the world and on top of that, I can’t go to my safe place to help mentally. I would wait every 2 weeks to see if the gyms would be open and I would get my hopes up, but then I realized gyms would never open up so I gave up on everything.

In conclusion, life has been hard during Covid-19 and closing the gyms were a tipping point of all of this. A safe place where I can escape to has been stripped away from me. This year has been tough for me mentally, physically and emotionally. There is no meaning to this life anymore as my safe space has been stripped away from.

**BM**

The covid-19 pandemic is a huge global health crisis and rapidly spreading pandemic of recent times. The government is doing everything they can to curb the spread of this virus which includes closing down small businesses. I am very into fitness and working out, and I used to work out six times a week pre-covid but since the lowdown started and the closing of gyms, I haven’t really been working out and I’ve lost all motivation. In the beginning I’d come home after a long day at work and all I want to do is workout but working out at home does not feel the same as going to a gym. I’ve also lost a lot of my physical strength due to the gyms being closed and this has ever since affected not only my physical health, but also my mental health.

It is important to note that physical activities and exercise not only help me maintain physical and psychological health but also help my body to respond to the negative consequences of several diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and respiratory diseases. In my own opinion physical inactivity due to current pandemic restrictions is a major public health issue that is a prominent risk factor for decreased life expectancy and many physical health problems. Exercise is shown to keep other physical functions (respiratory, circulatory, muscular, nervous, and skeletal systems) intact and supports other systems (endocrine, digestive, immune, or renal systems) that are important in fighting any known or unknown threat to our body which is what we need right now considering the physical activities helps to boost our immune system which in turns plays a vital role in fighting covid-19 in our body.

As an athlete, I understand the lockdown helps to stop the spread of disease, but it’s done so much damage as well because its changed my lifestyle, and has increased my anxiety and stress from not being able to go to the gym and workout, and has also affected my self-esteem.

Another important thing is, when the gyms were open and I was working out every day, I’d come home and prepare meals, I’d make healthy food like salmon, asparagus, broccoli, chicken breast etc. but since everything has change my eating pattern has drastically changed from eating healthy to unhealthy. Closure of gyms has forced me to stay home with no motivation to workout, which has changed my daily routines and hindered my fitness activities.

In conclusion, while the continuous lockdown (gym closure) poses a challenge to my fitness goals, and also not being able to see my family, the uncertainty and not being able to do anything about it just keeps affecting my psychological and physical health but I’ll try to find ways to stay fit outside of gyms, such as going for jogs, and doing home workouts. I will also try motivating myself which is really hard for me but I’ll do my best to get back in shape until the fitness centers are back open again.

**AV:**

Covid-19 had impacted almost everyone’s lives around the world in one way or another. The deadly virus has just reached its one year anniversary on becoming a pandemic and changing my live. As a student athlete, my life has revolved around sports and more specifically working on bettering myself through the gym. Working out was, and still is a huge part of my daily routine. When lockdowns began, I was worried about how I was going to keep my fitness journey alive, as I didn’t have any form of a home gym.

I spent a week not working out and felt like something was missing from my day, and my life. This not only affected me physically, but mentally as well. I would notice that I would become more fatigued than usual and I would only be working on completing school assignments so I could return to looking at my phone or watching Netflix. I noticed that I would stay up late at night looking at social media and wondering why I was so tired in the morning. Learning to train while being in a pandemic has not only challenged me, but I personally think it has made me a better man. To still want to achieve my goals with the many restrictions that has come with this pandemic has made me think of many different ways to overcome the obstacles that I have faced. Working out with the little weights I have at home and using body weight exercises has pushed me to meet my goals. In the summer of last year I was working two jobs while still trying to workout because I wanted to better myself. T

he strain of working two jobs while bearing the cautions of working in a pandemic made me feel very anxious. Thankfully, in the summer of last year my close cousin built his own home guy in his unfinished basement with all the equipment needed to fulfill our needs and reduce our stress. We have been hitting the gym regularly and have built it into our daily routine, all while attending university. If I were to stop attending my cousins home gym for workouts now I believe it would be meet with many consequences. From physically declining, and not meeting my fitness goals, to mentally declining as well. I can say that going to the gym and pushing myself everyday, has made me focus more on school as I want to earn my grades and strive for perfection. The gym has altered my life for the better in the past few years, and Covid-19 has made me push myself beyond what I have thought was capable. I can say that right now in my life I am the most physically inclined I have ever been before, and I can thank that even a pandemic that has created struggles in this journey has in turn actually helped me reach my goals and want to push harder everyday.

I have a strong love for the gym and working out because of all of the benefits that come with it. From looking better in the mirror, to helping reduce stresses of everyday life and school, lifting heavy objects has bettered my life. Covid-19 continues to restrict access to public gyms and will so for awhile, but it will never make me lose my drive to workout and better myself everyday.

**RT**

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

**SE**

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.

**MA**

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.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher (myself), producing 15 pages of single-spaced text. Features of emotions like displays of laughter, anger, sadness were also recorded to be able to understand the full picture.

The results capture 2 themes. One is the theme of resilience and the other is the theme of the power of emotions or emotionally driven consequences. All the athletes faced a battle of their own that mostly encompassed their own demons that they had to face as a consequence of the isolation. In AC’s episode, she demonstrates how bodybuilding helped her develop the character she has today. Her obsession with food was only combated through her love for bodybuilding which modulated her food intake, rather than falling into the instant gratification that food provided for her. With the pandemic occurring, this excluded the coping mechanism that bodybuilding provided for her causing her to relapse on various occasions. This is an example of how her emotions dictated her behavior. Further, others like TH and MR displayed high forms of intrinsic resilience that aids in the coherent understanding of resilience psychology. They captured the meaning behind bodybuilding and applied it when it needs to be applied. 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. 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.

**The role of emotions and mental well-being is sport**

Emotions are one of the most complex guiding systems that work as a response to the interaction of an individual and their environment, whether it be internal or external. Emotions are operated by various mechanisms of the body including psychological, physiological, biological, and mental processes that dictate ones upcoming behavior. There are positive emotions such as happiness or excitement, as well as negative emotions such as sadness, guilt, or even anger. Thus, as an athlete, I am compelled and intrigued in understanding how different emotions have an effect on the performance of athletes. Emotional experiences are highly dependent on interpretation and perception of a certain event that presents a stimulus, culture proves to be a big factor in how individuals can experience and express emotions differently towards the same situation/stimuli (Michelle N. Shiota, et al. 2010). Emotions could be understood as feedback mechanisms to ones’ mind about their external environment, if the stimulus is pleasing one would experience a positive emotion which in itself modulates the behavior of the individual to seek out that stimulus due to the dopamine surge of the pleasant experience.

Sport psychology helps in not only understanding an athletes perception of the external environment and the resultant behaviors towards it, rather it also plays a factor in helping produce complex therapeutic treatments that aid an athletes’ performance from a psychological standpoint. These treatments are researched and applied by sports psychologists from various institutions. The literature offers immense insights of emotional regulation in athletes brought about by both the external and internal environment. Further, the literature illustrates that interactions between emotions and the environment can be both a forward and a backwards reaction, in the sense that an emotion may elicit poor performance to an athlete, as well as an athlete’s poor performance may elicit a negative emotion. A paper discussing the pacing strategies of athletes for optimum performance explores the conscious and unconscious moderators of energy expenditure with regards to the duration of the physical activity, they propose that the brain acquires knowledge on the distances, environmental stressors and metabolic conditions to set an optimum pacing strategy and avoid any catastrophic physiological failure (Baron B, et al. 2011). Therefore, it is postulated that there are unconscious calculations driving emotional arousal and the most metabolically efficient pacing strategy that could be maintained till the finish line (Baron B, et al. 2011). In support, another paper focused on one specific emotion which is anger and its arousing capabilities in athletes. Anger is a predominate emotion in the sporting world which stems from an internal frustration towards the external environment when met with intangible stressors. Anger is often promoted in sports as a medium to release instinctive aggression of human beings, although the empirical evidence does not seem to support that (John P. Brunelle, et al. 1999). The paper then sets out to CONTROL the level of competitive anger with two cognitive behavioral techniques that decrease the experience and expression of anger in sports. This was achieved through enrolling male soccer players into two sperate groups which were the role-playing group and anger awareness groups. The findings supported that the role-playing intervention proved to have a greater effect on anger reduction within participant behavior. The study further explains the need to reduce anger in young athletes followed by the consequences of its expression. By reducing both covert and overt happenings of anger, role-playing is suggested to be the best intervention due to its application of the competitive sporting experience.

**Discussion:**

The confinement of these athletes due to the pandemic’s restrictions resulted in various emotional mental, physical, and psychological turmoil. It has led to a decrease in self-based goals as time went on under lockdown restrictions (Lochbaum et al., 2020). However, some athletes were driven by their intrinsic resilience that stemmed from the sport of bodybuilding to help them cope and find ways to oppose the mental stressors. The study should provide insights to social psychologists in understanding the effects self-isolation not only physically but mentally have on athletes, which would then enhance their research and productivity in creating interventions to help athletes cope with the psychological demands subsequently leading to greater outcomes related to both wellbeing and performance. Additionally, the study shows how the physicality of body ultimately creates a different type of construct in which the athletes attribute their muscles or appearance as a part of their character. As a result of the lockdowns, these participants started losing all their muscle mass as well as any physical progress followed be a steady decline in physical and mental health. While many would refute to see the importance of such implications, it takes a broader mind to look at it from a different perspective, because these participants and individuals suffering from the same pain are not just losing their muscle mass, in fact the muscle mass in this notion Is only a symbolic tool to illustrate that they are losing themselves. By the muscle mass being attributed to character and I didn’t, the participant must think I am losing muscle ergo I am losing myself, and in that loss of self comes the greatest life stressors that impact performance in any sort of activity.

**Conclusion**

This pandemic has shed light on the importance of social interaction as well as recreational activities to the mental health of individuals whether athletes or not. Bodybuilding/fitness athletes have developed intrinsic resilience that offered to be a supplement against their opposing external stressors. Emotions have played a great role in the modulation of these athletes’ behavior in and out of sport, and those emotion were further disturbed by the impacts of the pandemic causing a whirlwind of uncertainty in the minds of athletes on their identity and questioning whether it is possible to bounce back. Psychological interventions could help athletes overcome such obstacles and increase their understanding of the struggle to make meaning out of it. Additionally, sports psychologist should have a greater understanding about how isolation could impact the performance of any athlete, especially in individualistic sports like tennis or golf where no teammates are available throughout the process.

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