

Nautilus Bulletin #2

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The Psychology of Bodybuilders

By this point, intelligent readers will be well aware of – and perhaps irritated by – my previous comments alluding to the psychology of bodybuilders; so I feel that a clear statement on the subject is in order. In this direction, a few case histories from my personal files may help to establish some sort of a meaningful pattern.

SUBJECT "A"

A man of about thirty when I first met him, the winner of many physique contests – but a seething mass of emotions under an apparently calm exterior. Atypical in that he was willing to work and was reasonably successful in his own business.

I had been out of direct contact with the body building field for a number of years when I first met this subject, and I was then unaware of the use of drugs by bodybuilders – but he openly admitted that he was using at least one type of drug, and told me that he was as yet undecided about the effects, if any. Ten years later he heatedly denied ever having used drugs of any kind during several conversations on the subject and roundly condemned other leading bodybuilders for being "drug freaks;" but in another conversation – apparently having forgotten his previous denials – he admitted that he had used drugs, "once."

During my first contact with this individual I broached the subject of weight-training but immediately realized that doing so was a mistake, his totally closed-minded attitude was far too obvious to overlook; so, since our relationship was not based upon physical training activities, and since I liked him as an individual, I never opened the subject with him again for a period of about ten years.

In the meantime, information that I considered of great significance had gradually come to my attention as a result of my continuing interest in the field of weight-training – and eventually, I felt that I should at least attempt to communicate some of these new developments to the individual under discussion. Which attempt was made – with, up to the moment, entirely negative results; at first he pretended interest while obviously not understanding even the basic principles involved – later he apparently started to suspect that there might at least be some financial opportunity, and he then promised full cooperation, but somehow always managed an excuse for failing to live up to any of his promises – still later, by which time the financial opportunity was obvious, he attempted, in his own words, "to jump on the bandwagon," but he still failed to live up to any of his promises – finally, in cooperation with a number of associates, he started making outright attempts to belittle the significance of the new developments, while at the same time attempting to produce and market exercise machines based on the new principles, which principles he plainly did not understand.

When reports of his actions – which contrasted sharply with his statements – first reached me, I called him and asked for an explanation; and he denied all of the reports that had been brought to my attention. Repeatedly. Finally, in an effort to get the facts, I sent a friend around for the purpose of making an investigation, and then I telephoned and demanded an explanation.

During the course of a one-hour telephone conversation, his emotions ran the gamut from calm denials of obvious fact to outraged and irrational accusations; but he still attempted to deny undeniable facts.

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None of which above-listed reactions are limited to bodybuilders, of course – but all of which (apart from this individual's attitude towards gainful employment) seem to be typical of at least a very high percentage of advanced bodybuilders. Eighty percent? Ninety percent? Ninety-five percent? I don't know, exactly – but a very, very high percentage.

SUBJECT "B"

A man of thirty-five, married to – or at least living with – a woman with a rather large number of children. While claiming a somewhat better than average educational background that qualified him for high school-level teaching positions, he sought low-paying employment in Florida in order, he said, to be able to devote most of his time and attention to body building training. In spite of his education, this subject avidly read all of the body building periodicals and admittedly believed everything he read.

Loud and pushy in situations where he felt confident, he was extremely hesitant and obviously unsure of himself in unfamiliar situations. Quick to jump to mistaken conclusions based on misunderstood hearsay, he was just as quick to change sides. Totally without regard for the rights or feelings of other people, he expected great consideration from everybody.

In the end he made the mistake of offering drugs to one of my children.

SUBJECT "C"

Approximately thirty, the picture of a man – or, at least, his picture of a man; sporty automobile, flashy clothes, unused sporting equipment of a wide variety, a wig. In short, a great assortment of possessions and attitudes, none of which were unusual or significant in themselves – but all of which, taken together, spelled "self doubt".

In common with the previously-mentioned subjects – and with a very high percentage of advanced bodybuilders – everything in his life was strictly secondary to his body building aspirations.

SUBJECT "D"

In his late twenties, the owner of a business in a field related to the primary subject of this bulletin – which in itself is apparently part of an emerging pattern, since most advanced bodybuilders seem to eventually become involved commercially in the field. A cause – or an effect? Are such people unable to conform to normal society? Are they rejected by society and thus forced to seek the company of their peers?

While almost all advanced bodybuilders are jealous of contemporaries, and critical in the extreme, they nevertheless go to great lengths to seek approval from their imagined competition. Competition for what? Just what are the prizes, where is the hoped-for reward – the approval of an extremely closed society of individuals like themselves, who are apparently constitutionally incapable of bestowing actual approval on anybody? But this subject was atypical in that he could not – or would not – conform to the accepted rules of even his own chosen society, and was thus openly rejected even by his own. Perhaps a result of the fact that – unlike most advanced bodybuilders – he had been made independent by inherited wealth?

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SUBJECT "E"

In his early twenties, an extreme example of a self-created freak – at least capable of apparently relaxed charm, an uncommon trait among bodybuilders in general: perhaps the result of having reached what he probably considers an unchallengeable pinnacle in his own limited world? Or is he really as confident as he appears on the surface? And if so, why must he make such efforts to constantly reprove himself?

This subject displays a trait that is currently very commonly encountered in body building circles – deceit; having lied about their measurements, their body weights, their strength, their training routines, and many other things almost as a matter of course, many advanced bodybuilders finally drift into a habit of habitually lying about almost everything.

SUBJECTS "F", "G", "H", etc.

Having a lot in common with the general pattern of character traits displayed by the subjects mentioned above, the typical advanced bodybuilder of the moment is certainly not the "Ideal Man" described by weight-training publications.

The only question of real importance seems to be, "... are such traits a cause, or an effect."

But the fact of these common traits is beyond question; and under the circumstances, it is only common sense to question the whole subject. There are exceptions, of course, but on the whole the character traits outlined above are extremely common – far more common than might be expected, far too common.

I can offer no solution to the problem – but I have personally learned to approach bodybuilders with great suspicion, expecting the worst.