An Autoethnography of Bodybuilding Visual Culture, Aesthetic Experience, and Performed Masculinity

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Abstract
This autoethnographic study examines the social history of bodybuilding along with personal testimonies of those with experience in weight training and bodybuilding to raise awareness of aesthetic experiences found within the culture of physique. The author explores aesthetic experiences in both the formal and performative sense as frames for reflecting on his adolescent pursuits as an amateur bodybuilder in order to deconstruct the visual archetypes of bodybuilding and their impact on his formative notions of maleness.

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Sharif Bey is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at Syracuse University. He earned his Ph.D. in Art Education from The Pennsylvania State University. As a doctoral student, Bey was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to conduct research on post-socialist art education reforms as a scholar and artist in residence at The Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, Slovakia. Bey’s writing offers revisions of personal and institutional art education histories through archival research, interviews, narrative inquiry, and ethnographic studies. Bey has published articles in publications such as Studies in Art Education, The Journal of Curriculum & Pedagogy, The Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education, and The Journal of Power in Education. Dr. Bey is editor of The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education for years 2013-2015 and serves on the editorial boards of The Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education, Studies in Art Education, and Visual Arts Research. Bey is an internationally exhibiting studio artist. He has been an artist-in-residence at the McColl Center for Visual Art in Charlotte, Hunter College in New York City, the Vermont Studio Center, and at the John Michael Kohler Art Center/ Kohler Plumbing Company. For correspondence, Sharif Bey can be reached at shbey@syr.edu.
Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Autoethnography is a self-reflective form of writing used across various disciplines such as communication studies, performance studies, education, English literature, anthropology, social work, sociology, history, psychology, religious studies. Hofstede: Masculinity / Femininity. This dimension focuses on how extent to which a society stress achievement or nurture. Masculinity is seen to be the trait which emphasizes ambition, acquisition of wealth, and differentiated gender roles. “Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” “Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” From Hofstede (2001), Culture’s Consequences, 2nd ed. p 297. Thus, autoethnography allows researchers to draw on their own experiences to understand a particular phenomenon or culture. As mentioned before my own autoethnography was the first instrument I used in order to understand my participants' personal narratives about their emotions and motivation to learn a foreign language. Telling my personal story made me reflect on my language learning history and empathise with my students' emotional experiences and reactions. Thus, analytic autoethnography is directed towards objective writing and analysis of a particular group, whereas evocative autoethnography aims toward researchers' introspection on a particular topic to allow readers to make a connection with the researchers' feelings and experiences.