

Eva Derksen
03/01/2024
GWSS 484 A

Bodybuilding: the Construction of Bodies

The sport of bodybuilding emerged in Victorian England and proliferated throughout the Western world in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Its canonization was sanctioned by a shifting American socio-political climate which was searching for ways to define and enforce social hierarchies of gender, race, class, and ability. For most of the 20th century, the sport of bodybuilding was functionally exclusive to a male-bodied population, and the inclusion of women in the sport later in the 20th century only reinforced the male exclusivity of the sport, rejecting any opportunity for subversion of the gender binary. Moreover, the sport operates in distinctly racialized, classicized, and ableist ways, favoring a model of power that is contingent on middle-class whiteness, maleness, and physical ability. A brief study of the history of bodybuilding will provide a basic understanding of its imperialist and euro-centric roots, which will support analysis of two bodybuilding docu-drama films—*Pumping Iron* and *Pumping Iron II: The Women*—from the later 20th century. These two films illustrate how the sport operates dichotomously, which is especially salient in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, which flagrantly belies its own attempt to enter a gender-inclusive discourse. There is an intriguing opportunity in the sport of bodybuilding to transgress boundaries of race, gender, and ability through bodily cultivation; however, as an institution, the sport instead continually reproduces and reimposes the ideal of the hegemonically masculine man, closing the door on inclusivity.

Much of the popular discourse surrounding the semiotics of the body and the obsession with the powerful male figure can be traced to Greek Antiquity. Bodybuilding discourse is saturated with references to Greek art, Gods and Goddesses, and imagery that celebrates the

virility of the ancient Grecian man. Kenneth R. Dutton, in his book *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development*, examines the origins of this symbolic body in Greek culture. In his chapter titled “The Emerging Bodies,” Dutton explains how the Greeks canonized the invention of “the ideally *human* body” in art, which was the primary modality of culture-building at that time.¹ Depictions of this idealized form in art drew inspiration from the Grecian athlete, who embodied heroism in action and form.² Heroes become athletes, and athletes become heroes, attaining a godlike status through the embodiment of a perfected human body.³ Here begins Western culture’s obsession with man’s ability to reach and even surpass his mortal limits and the centrality of physical, actionable achievements as the primary means of fulfilling one’s true potential.⁴ The female body is ostensibly excluded from this heroism and divine power narrative. Women are entirely left out of Dutton’s discussion of symbolic bodies in Greek art, and the symbol of the female body is only mentioned once, in reference to an ancient symbol of female fertility—*The Venus of Willendorf*, who is noted for her “large breasts, buttocks, and abdomen.” This iconic relic dates back to 30,000-20,000 B.C., where it is already apparent that the male and female bodies are semiotically opposed.⁵ The female body is relegated to the status of sex symbol—what little symbolic power this body holds is evidently derived from its ability to reproduce—and the male body holds the position of physical and practical power. The male body is associated with hardness and strength, while the female body is identified by its softness and sexual function. This semiotic opposition of the male and female body will continue to inform body discourse throughout the following centuries and is inextricably etched into the sport of bodybuilding itself.

¹ Kenneth R. Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development*. (New York: Continuum, 1995), 22.

² Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*. 26.

³ Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*. 26.

⁴ Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*. 28.

⁵ Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*. 23.

Another important moment in Western history and body semiotics is the institutionalization of the Christian church in the 5th century A.D. Though convoluted, the history of the body in the Christian Church ultimately reinscribes it with the same dichotomous language of natural power that began in antiquity and will continue to inform Western ideals of the body moving forward. What is outlined by Dutton is the distinct focus on individuality within Western Christianity.⁶ The body is seen as a vessel which is a means to achieve “individual destiny” through individual actions.⁷ In this individualist, “activist” tradition of Christianity, the perfected male body is symbolic of proximity to the divine as achieved through external, physical actions and self-imposed asceticism.⁸ It is the individual's responsibility to manage their body so that they can maintain morality and potentially elevate their status.

Ancient ideas about the inherent nature of men and women are preserved and reinforced in this individualist practice of self-ascendance. Unsurprisingly, the male body is the primary focus of this narrative of “individual destiny.” Women, as the weaker, more feeble sex were thought to be incapable of such stringent self-control—in fact, the woman represents a threat to this destiny in that her body is a source of temptation capable of provoking sexual deviance on the part of the man. Gender, class, and race hierarchies flourish within the Christian church, with power resting in the hands of the male-bodied elite white men. Morality centers on physical differences and control over one’s body and sexuality, and gender-inscribed dichotomies that link gender, sex, and morality are cemented into the body in a distinctly gendered way.

The sport of bodybuilding appeared for the first time in the Western world during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1901, the first major bodybuilding competition—organized by

⁶ Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*, 55.

⁷ Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*, 54.

⁸ Dutton, *The Perfectible Body*, 63.

the “father of modern bodybuilding”⁹ Eugen Sandow—was held at the Royal Albert Hall in London. That same year, the natural history branch of the British Museum made a statue out of Sandow’s body as a part of an exhibition displaying the “perfect type” of human body across every race, and Sandow personified the “perfect type of European man.”¹⁰ A circus strong-man with an interest in reproducing the “perfect” human bodies canonized in ancient Greek sculpture, Sandow was looked to as the symbol of physical perfection and Aryan masculinity, not only for his incredible strength but for his uncanny resemblance to ancient Greek statues of heroic and physically exceptional men. Sandow’s biography is also prototypical of a certain “weaking to strongman” trajectory—coined by Sebastian Conrad in his essay titled *Globalizing the Beautiful Body*—that repeatedly manifests in figures of hegemonic masculinity.¹¹ According to Conrad, Sandow claimed he was “exceedingly delicate” as a child, but his time as a strongman in the circus molded his body into its exemplary masculine form.¹² Sandow’s body was seen as a work of art—he toured as a model for artists during his time as a vaudeville performer and later exhibited his body throughout Europe and the United States—posing in imitation of classical Greek statues, performing feats of strength, and wrestling with lions.¹³

Sandow was also instrumental in outlining a racialized identity for the male bodybuilder. He operated within an imperialist framework, which aimed his efforts at preaching a specific flavor of masculinity to a white audience.¹⁴ It was his “great scheme of preaching the value of physical culture to the whole of the English-speaking race.”¹⁵ Sandow was, in many ways, a

⁹ Sebastian Conrad, “Globalizing the Beautiful Body: Eugen Sandow, Bodybuilding, and the Ideal of Muscular Manliness at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of World History* 32, no. 1 (2021): doi:10.1353/jwh.2021.0005.

¹⁰ Conrad, “Globalizing”

¹¹ Conrad, “Globalizing”

¹² Conrad, “Globalizing”

¹³ Conrad, “Globalizing”

¹⁴ Conrad, “Globalizing”

¹⁵ Conrad, “Globalizing”

prophet—a harbinger of the gospel of body culture.¹⁶ In this sense, the sport of bodybuilding became a religion in its own right—a religion which, like Christianity, favors a hierarchical structure wherein personal physical actions can bring each man closer to God—or the symbol of the masculine man. By participating in the action of building his body, a man can play God—physically forming himself into an idealized version of man. This religion of bodybuilding is befitting only to those who participate and functionally exclusive to the white male. It is a way to physically exemplify and embody a natural and exclusive white male superiority. Sandow invented the religion of bodybuilding and facilitated a foundation of white and masculine supremacy within this religion. Sandow’s popularity is key in understanding how this body culture movement is distinctly gendered and racialized and operates in response to fears of otherness and a need to re-assert the supremacy of the Anglo-European and Anglo-American race. Sandow substantiated the perfected, omnipotent male body, which endowed him with a godlike status in the Western world. The bodybuilder’s fame was mediated by a volatile socio-political culture at the time that needed a hero like Sandow to stabilize a declining white middle-class male body-politic.

One of Sandow’s biggest proponents was the 26th president of the United States and the “ferve cultivator of bodies,” Theodore Roosevelt¹⁷. Roosevelt identified as a “political Sandow,” committing his life and presidency to the fortification of bodies—both his own and the collective national body of the United States.¹⁸ Like Sandow, Roosevelt’s childhood was a big part of his preoccupation with masculine power. Afflicted by asthma as a child, Roosevelt spent his adult life repairing his own masculine image through activities like boxing and hunting, and he extended his efforts to the body of the nation during his presidency.

¹⁶ Conrad, “Globalizing”

¹⁷ Conrad, “Globalizing”

¹⁸ Conrad, “Globalizing”

Roosevelt and Sandow both emerged as leading figures in a new movement for remasculinization that emerged in response to a disruption to the power structures that exclusively favored white men in a post-civil war, industrializing, politically and socially mutating country. The turn of the century brought significant changes to America and the rest of the Western world, and with these changes came anxieties about the stability of the nation's socio-political anatomy. Critical discourse about urbanization and industrialization revolved around fears that men and women were losing touch with their "true nature" as a result of modern city living.¹⁹ It was thought that this separation from true nature was leading to a general neglect of the physical body amongst the nation's middle class, which was leaving the American people weak and volatile.²⁰ Various reformist movements coalesced at this time, which was seeking to build "a new, virile race."²¹ The goal of bodily development was needed to intervene in the face of a threat. It was not only the new prevalence of the machine—but the women's movement, among other movements for social change at the time—that threatened the status of white men. The subjugation of women and non-white men was—to some extent—being questioned, and so by extension, was the authority of white men. The product of these societal changes was a sense of "masculinity under siege," and working out was needed "as an ideal remedy to offset a deep-seated feeling of passivity through action."²²

A growing consumer society meant that this idealized male form was marketable, profitable, and commodifiable. Furthermore, the religiosity of the sport made it exceedingly appealing as a means for grounding its believers under a singular theory and system of worship. The marketing of this body targeted a male audience—though women were encouraged to

¹⁹ Conrad, "Globalizing"

²⁰ Conrad, "Globalizing"

²¹ Conrad, "Globalizing"

²² Conrad, "Globalizing"

participate in physical activity to a much lesser extent—and bodybuilding was understood as a male profession and practice. Female strongwomen did exist within the context of the circus, but muscular women were not accepted like muscular men and instead were perceived as a threat to natural standards of beauty.²³ It is clear that the practice of cultivating a muscular body was a distinctly male practice—muscularity and strength were only considered natural when performed by a male body.

The commodification of this built male body combined with the need for a potent new leisure activity and belief system for middle-class men allowed its symbolic power to take hold quickly and sturdily—proliferating throughout the United States in what Conrad describes as a “colonization of body practices”²⁴ This new burgeoning new “body culture” became not only a leisure activity but a new, more stable identity for the “new man” of the 20th century.²⁵ Bodybuilding became a subject of American media—and magazines, newspapers, and books were filled with information teaching the nation’s white middle-class men and women how to build and manage their bodies through systematic exercise. These instructional exercise publications were catered to men and women in starkly different ways, offering a more robust and rugged routine to men and a softer, more delicate routine for women. Men’s exercise was implemented with the goal of a more inward, personal goal of individual excellence and centered growth and hardening, while the women’s exercise routines were aimed at making the female body more palatable for others—favoring a model of shrinkage and cultivating softness.

One magazine circulating in New York in the late 19th and early 20th century—*The New York Observer and Chronicle*—featured weekly bodybuilding articles by the reverend S.B. Dunn in a section titled “Pillar and Lilly.” The magazine, affiliated with the Presbyterian church,

²³ Conrad, “Globalizing”

²⁴ Conrad, “Globalizing”

²⁵ Conrad, “Globalizing”

catered to a white and middle-class male audience. In an article titled “Essentials of Body-Building,” Rev. Dunn references the Grecian athlete and names exercise as an essential practice in order to “eliminate the soft and effeminate and to cultivate hardness and endurance.”²⁶ The article stresses the importance of exercise that is ascetic in practice and aims to develop the body— another issue of this publication associates bodybuilding with “religious fidelity” and glorification of the body. The author insists that “complete control of the will..under the influence of high ideals and ennobling thoughts...give[s]...majesty to the presence.”²⁷ Another article champions an athletic body as “the prime desideration” of success.²⁸ This language reveals this new Puritan body culture. This specific type of body cultivation aims not only to cleanse the male body of softness but also to do so in an explicitly repressive and ascetic manner that will lead to personal success. It is a sentiment steeped in puritanical ideals about bodily management that is religious in nature and a way to signal a certain commitment to control—something conceptually exclusive to the white man.

In contrast, a physical health publication by Professor Anthony Baker in 1904 entitled *Physical Culture* teaches “simple exercises for young women” with the goal of a “good carriage” and a “good figure,” which can bring attention to a woman, “no matter if she is not blessed with the most regular features in the world.”²⁹ Professor Baker explains, “every girl should work to obtain...a good figure [and] bodily poise.”³⁰ The exercises offered to women in this publication include “swinging the leg” in order to “reduce the hips” and “the charge and bend,” which is “for

²⁶ S. B. Dunn, “Pillar and Lily; Or, Strength and Beauty--VIII.: Essentials Of Bodybuilding,” *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*, Aug 13, 1908.

²⁷ Dunn, “Essentials.”

²⁸ S.B. Dunn, “Pillar and Lily--VII.: The Athletic Quality,” *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*, Jul 09, 1908, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/pillar-lily-vii/docview/136664908/se-2> (accessed February 28, 2024)

²⁹ Anthony Barker, “Physical Culture,” *Health (1900-1913)*, 09, 1904, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/physical-culture/docview/90881154/se-2> (accessed February 28, 2024).

³⁰ Barker, “Physical Culture.”

suppleness.”³¹ While both men and women are encouraged to engage in physical activity, there is a clear delineation between the types of bodily management in which men and women should interest themselves. The woman’s exercise routine aims to obtain suppleness and poise—and to reduce her figure—an inversion of the man’s bodybuilding routine, which aims to harden and add bulk to the physique. The man is taught to take up more space—to build his presence as a means to gain personal success, while the woman is instructed to shrink herself—ostensibly to become more appealing to the public. However, both male and female bodies are taught to control themselves—they are learning their roles in the world and how to best occupy those roles.

The sport of bodybuilding continued to develop throughout the 20th century, becoming truly canonized in American sport. The first mens physique contest was conducted in New York City in 1903. The winner—Al Treloar—was called “the most perfectly developed man in the world.”³² In the proceeding years, the competition was held a few more times, with Charles Atlas winning in 1921 and 1922.³³ The first Mr. America competition was held in 1939, peaking in popularity in the late 1950’s and 1960’s.³⁴ At the same time, rivals Oscar Heidenstam (Britain) and Joe and Ben Weider (Canadian) founded the Mr Universe and Mr Olympia Competitions, and the latter was—and still is—considered to be the more prestigious of the two³⁵ Competition legitimizes bodybuilding as an institution, and makes the sport and its bodies infinitely more profitable and consumable. The first Mr Olympia competition was held on September 18, 1965, in New York City at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.³⁶ The winner of the Mr Olympia competition receives—to this day—a miniature bronze figure of Eugen Sandow. The 1977 film;

³¹ Barker, “Physical Culture.”

³² “Bodybuilding,” Britannica, Last modified September 28, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/sports/bodybuilding>

³³ “Bodybuilding,” Britannica.

³⁴ “Bodybuilding,” Britannica.

³⁵ “Bodybuilding,” Britannica.

³⁶ Austin Letorney, “A Complete List of Mr Olympia Winners Throughout the Years,” Generation Iron, November 6, 2023, <https://generationiron.com/mr-olympia-winners/>

Pumping Iron, documented the 1975 Mr Olympia and Mr Universe competitions. In 1980, the sport was opened up to women, and the first Ms Olympia competition was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.³⁷ In 1985 *Pumping Iron II: The Women* came out, sparking major debates about the merits of women's bodybuilding. The institutionalization of the sport of bodybuilding in the later 20th century—and both of the *Pumping Iron* films—are particularly salient in observing the gendered and racialized way that the sport operates. The sport of bodybuilding not only concretely commodifies the body but necessitates a definition of “right” and “wrong” bodies. This cartesian view of a body's status rests upon its proximity to the symbol of white masculinity, and markers such as gender, race, and ability must be both defined and bounded. Bodybuilding in itself is a segregated practice, as the entire sport is contingent upon clear demarcation of physical difference; most visibly, gender, which is inextricable from intersectional identities, further complicates this task of defining a body's correctness—its proximity to its “natural” state.³⁸ The inclusion of women in the sport of bodybuilding in the later 20th century does not give way to a defeat of gender boundaries but instead only further reinforces the idea that the sport is synergistic with a specific flavor of masculinity and imperialistic bodily management. An analysis of both of the *Pumping Iron* films reveals how issues of gender, race, class, and ability stemming from a historical model of body nationalism continue to inform the development of the sport in the later 20th century.

Pumping Iron is a 1977 bodybuilding docu-drama directed by George Butler and Robert Fiore. The film is inspired by the 1974 book—also titled *Pumping Iron*—by photographer George

³⁷ Roger Lockridge, “Queens of the Stage – Every Ms Olympia Winner,” Barbend, August 1, 2023, <https://barbend.com/ms-olympia-winners/>

³⁸ Chris Holmlund, “Visible Difference and Flex Appeal: The Body, Sex, Sexuality, and Race in the *Pumping Iron* Films,” in *Building Bodies*, ed. Pamela More (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 89.

Butler and writer Charles Gaines. *Pumping Iron* follows the 1975 Mr. Olympia and Mr. Universe competitions, with a focus on the competition for the title of Mr. Olympia between six-time winner Arnold Schwarzenegger and underdog Lou Ferrigno. Small supporting roles include; Mike Katz, Ken Waller, Franco Columbo, and others. The film is catered, unsurprisingly, to a white male audience, and the primary goal of the film is to motivate its viewers to aspire to a similar level of potent masculinity. Dialogue in the film is monopolized by men, and women make appearances only as supporting characters—wife, mother, or sex object—they are positioned as no more than props. In its portrayal of bodies, and the way that they are looked at and judged, the film identifies the body as the main site of discerning, performing, and imposing gender roles on oneself and others and highlights an expectation for specific ways in which these bodies must be cultivated, used, and maintained.

A prevalent theme in *Pumping Iron* is the all-familiar “weakling to strongman” trajectory. Several bodybuilders in the film cite a childhood affliction as the impetus for their bodybuilding career. Lou Ferrigno’s story is especially salient in observing the way that this phenomenon operates. Hard of hearing and skinny as a child, Lou overcomes his challenges by becoming the “largest bodybuilder ever.”³⁹ Lou’s significant hearing loss is only mentioned once throughout the film—as a key motivator in his bodily edification story—as if his deafness was eliminated in his pursuit of muscle. It is never mentioned that Lou had been wearing hearing aids since the age of 4—his deafness was, in fact, still a part of him.⁴⁰ It is presented as a deficiency that can and should be amended and then ignored. The implication is that his deafness and his muscularity could not have existed at the same time. This story is not new. Theodore Roosevelt

³⁹ *Pumping Iron*, directed by George Butler and Robert Fiore, (Cinagate, 1977) 00:33:21 https://youtu.be/6lCCk6rgn84?si=B48_Wf-V5rVn6uZ6

⁴⁰ WKMG News, “Lou Ferrigno tells News 6 how cochlear implants changed his life,” November 14, 2022. Youtube Video, 5 min, 37 sec, <https://youtu.be/7eAH5ppnbvI?si=TZqqB0nT09wuJRzF>

reformed his “asthmatic child” identity through hunting and boxing, Mike Katz’s successes as a football player and bodybuilder were born out of bullying he experienced as a Jewish child in the American school system, Arnold Schwarzenegger got big because he was a timid child afraid of his dad, and Sandow unsurprisingly also cited childhood frailty as the catalyst for his bodybuilding career.^{41 42} There is no shortage of stories like these in the bodybuilding world. Disability, weakness, cultural or ethnic difference, and femininity can all be understood as a “queering” of the body in relation to the standard. The perceived impairment renders the body unmasculine, un-American, undesirable—different. The action of physically strengthening the body is like a cleansing behavior, which minimizes or eliminates the threat of difference. For women bodybuilders, however, it seems that the act of bodybuilding itself is a threat to the feminine physique.

The 1985 film *Pumping Iron II: The Women*—the “feminized” companion to its predecessor, *Pumping Iron*—follows several woman bodybuilders as they prepare for the 1983 Caesar’s World Cup female bodybuilding competition. The film is ostensibly meant to challenge the idea that women are less capable of achieving the same level of muscularity as men but instead inadvertently affirms the idea that the sport cannot be performed by women in the same way it is by men. This central argument rests on the idea that there is, in fact, some obvious physical marker of “femininity,” with boundaries that cannot and should not be transgressed. The film is replete with symbolism that betrays the idea of female empowerment through bodybuilding by continually reasserting and recentering female sexuality as the woman’s ultimate goal, and evidently of the woman bodybuilder. In fact, this expectation of female

⁴¹ Jonathan Goldberg, “Recalling Totalities: The Mirrored Stages of Arnold Schwarzenegger,” in *Building Bodies*, ed. Pamela More (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 217.

⁴² Conrad, “Globalizing”

seduction is clearly voiced several times in the film, with one judge of the competition stating, “we don’t want to turn them off, we want to turn them on.”⁴³ “Them” is presumably the heterosexual men who are evidently the intended audience of the competition. This statement alone reveals much about the gendering of the sport of bodybuilding. For one, it assumes that straight men are the targeted viewers of a women’s bodybuilding competition and the sole audience that must be catered to. Secondly, it assumes that a woman’s primary goal is to “turn on” straight men. In this scenario, it would not make sense that a woman would want to compete in a bodybuilding competition for the same reasons as a man—to become strong, to become big, to challenge herself physically. This statement effectively defines women’s bodybuilding as an entirely different sport than men’s, which is evidenced in how the film portrays the competition as more of a pageant than a sports competition. The women are made to don tiny swimsuits, put on makeup, and prepare sultry dance routines in lieu of the simple posing routines of the men’s competition. It is clear in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* film that women’s bodybuilding is unquestionably dissimilar to men’s bodybuilding and should not be performed or judged as the men’s competition is. Furthermore, it is the act of building their bodies that poses a problem, threatening the established bounds of visible femininity.

The primary controversy of the film is the presence of female bodybuilder Bev Francis and the threat that her perceptibly “unfeminine” body poses to the sport of bodybuilding. The main goal of the judges and competitors is to define and enforce a “aesthetic femininity,” which would disqualify Francis and others who look like her from women’s bodybuilding competitions.⁴⁴ A competitor insists, “a woman is a woman,” and “I hope [the judges] stick with

⁴³ *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, directed by George Butler, (Cinecom, 1985) 00:35:41
<https://youtu.be/RnNxywXICcg?si=gfTScYPgYwhOd0Kl>

⁴⁴ *The Women*, 00:35:14.

a feminine look,” adding, “when you lose [the feminine look], what’s the point of being a woman...”⁴⁵ She insinuates that womanhood is entirely a function of physical form; and can be identified and potentially betrayed. Later on, a debate breaks out amongst judges in regards to “a definite meaning of the word femininity” and “what you have to look for.”⁴⁶ One judge identifies the problem of defining aesthetic goals on the basis of constructed gender ideals, saying, “I object being told that there is a point beyond which women can go with this sport” and continuing, “it’s as though the U.S. ski federation told women skiers that they could only ski so fast.”⁴⁷ This further illustrates the specific way that bodybuilding relates to gender and also exists outside the typical bounds of “sport.” As a sport that is entirely focused on the judgment of the appearance of bodies, there is an unprecedented need to define how the body should look and perform. It is a sport of looking and judging. The need to define a distinctly masculine and feminine somatic form rejects any nuance regarding the ways that gender is socially constructed and relies on ancient and unsubstantiated gender dichotomies.⁴⁸ The implication is that masculinity and femininity are natural and evident and thus in need of being observed, defined, and enforced.⁴⁹ Based on these dichotomous assumptions about masculinity and femininity, bodies like Francis’, which exist outside of the imagined confines of bodily correctness, are not only wrong but are a threat to the stability of accepted “natural” ideals of the body.

Within the sport of bodybuilding, it is not only masculinity, but whiteness that is presupposed. The question of racial difference is perhaps not as obvious in the *Pumping Iron* films, but is present nonetheless. In both of the *Pumping Iron* films, the issue of race is entirely ignored. In *Pumping Iron*, the issue of race seems to be of little importance to the filmmakers or

⁴⁵ *The Women*, 00:33:07-00:33:28

⁴⁶ *The Women*, 00:34:48

⁴⁷ *The Women*, 00:35:20-00:35:36

⁴⁸ Anne Bolin, “Flex Appeal, Food, and Fat,” in *Building Bodies*, ed. Pamela More (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 186.

⁴⁹ Bolin, “Flex Appeal,” 186.

the men in the film, despite its being held in apartheid South Africa. It appears as if there is no need to acknowledge race because it is so obvious in a comparison of physical differences.⁵⁰ In *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, the issue of race is again entirely overlooked by filmmakers, but it is nonetheless an obvious factor in judging women's bodies. The portrayal of Carla Dunlap, the only black competitor in the film, reveals a lot about the way that race is understood in the context of bodybuilding. Despite the fact that she is more muscular than any of the other girls (except Francis) and her strong and outspoken opinion regarding the issue of female muscularity, it seems that Dunlap never poses a threat to the competition in the way that Francis does. The film is focused entirely on Dunlap's obvious sensuousness and femininity rather than her muscularity. The issue of female sexuality is not examined in Dunlap in the way that it is with other women in the film. Sequences show Dunlap practicing synchronized swimming, putting on makeup, and practicing a graceful dance routine, and the omission of the ubiquitous "boyfriend" character, which is apparently needed to affirm the sexuality of the other women, signals that there is no question of sexuality in her case.⁵¹ Her posing routine echoes racialized sentiments about black female bodies and exoticism as she poses seductively to Grace Jones' "Feel Up," complete with jungle noises and a palpable air of mystery.⁵² This particular combination of blackness, exoticism, femininity, and sexuality seems natural—as media representations of blackness and femininity are, as explained by Gloria Joseph, "shrouded in sexual suggestiveness [and] loaded in particularly racist ways."⁵³ Dunlap goes on to win the competition, ostensibly due to her perfectly natural performance of female sexuality and race as expected by the competition judges. Highlighted here is the way that perceptions and limitations of race and gender inform

⁵⁰ Holmlund, "Visible Difference," 96.

⁵¹ Holmlund, "Visible Difference," 94.

⁵² Holmlund, "Visible Difference," 97.

⁵³ Joseph, 1985, as cited in Holmlund "Visible Difference," 97.

and are influenced by socially imposed expectations that manifest themselves similarly in institutions like government and sports.

Throughout its history, bodybuilding essentially functioned as a tool that taught men to strive for violence and physical domination, women to perform their prescribed role as sex symbols, and for both genders to stay within the bounds of their prescribed roles. Within this structure, there is no room for gender transgression, despite opportunities that arise in the ability to sculpt one's body. Instead, bodybuilding acts as an extension of nationalistic ideals of control, which plays out in the ascetic management of a body that understands and performs its prescribed role under a falsely liberatory form of self-government. As a sport and practice that is defined by physical markers of role performance, these markers of difference must be identified and regulated. This practice teaches self-subjection and self-subordination, affirming externally defined markers of difference both from within and without. Attempts to undermine this dichotomous structure within the sport only further reinforced its gendered, racialized, classicized, and ableist roots, affirming its divisive function in the 20th-century United States.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barker, Anthony. "Physical Culture." *Health (1900-1913)*, 09, 1904.

<https://www.proquest.com/magazines/physical-culture/docview/90881154/se-2> (accessed February 28, 2024).

Britannica. "Bodybuilding." Last updated September 28, 2023.

<https://www.britannica.com/sports/bodybuilding>

Butler, George and Fiore, Robert. *Pumping Iron*. Cinagate, 1977. 1h.26 min.

https://youtu.be/6lCCk6rgn84?si=B48_Wf-V5rVn6uZ6

Buter, George. *Pumping Iron II: The Women*. Cinecom, 1985. 1h.47 min.

<https://youtu.be/RnNxywXlCcg?si=gfTScYPgYwhOd0Kl>

Conrad, Sebastian. "Globalizing the Beautiful Body: Eugen Sandow, Bodybuilding, and the Ideal of Muscular Manliness at the Turn of the Twentieth Century." *Journal of World History* 32, no. 1 (2021): 95–125. doi:10.1353/jwh.2021.0005.

Dunn, S. B. "Pillar and Lily--VII.: The Athletic Quality." *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*, Jul 09, 1908.

<https://www.proquest.com/magazines/pillar-lily-vii/docview/136664908/se-2> (accessed February 28, 2024).

Dunn, S. B. "Pillar and Lily; Or, Strength and Beauty--VIII.: Essentials of Body-building." *New York Observer and Chronicle (1833-1912)*, Aug 13, 1908.

<https://www.proquest.com/magazines/pillar-lily-strength-beauty-viii/docview/136663896/se-2>
(accessed February 28, 2024).

Dutton, Kenneth R. *The Perfectible Body : The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development*.
New York: Continuum, 1995.

Letorney, Austin. "A Complete List of Mr Olympia Winners Throughout the Years." *Generation Iron*. November 6, 2023. <https://generationiron.com/mr-olympia-winners/>

Lockridge, Roger. "Queens of the Stage – Every Ms Olympia Winner." *Barbend*. August 1, 2023. <https://barbend.com/ms-olympia-winners/>

Moore, Pamela L. *Building Bodies*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

WKMG News. "Lou Ferrigno tells News 6 how cochlear implants changed his life." November 14, 2022. Youtube Video, 5 min, 37 sec.

<https://youtu.be/7eAH5ppnbvI?si=TZqqB0nT09wuJRzF>