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“The Most Muscular Woman I Have Ever Seen”: Bev Francis

Performance of Gender in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The question of what constitutes femininity has been widely debated, not only in gender studies, but also in the broader social world. A venue for this debate is the 1985 documentary, *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, in which gender and femininity in particular become part of the central plot of the film when Bev Francis, a woman bodybuilder more muscular than any other competitor, enters the competition. While feminist scholars have analyzed gender and sport from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives, little attention has been paid to female bodybuilding in particular. To fill this gap, this thesis will examine the ways in which Bev Francis's portrayal in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* reinforces and challenges ideas about gender, femininity, and embodiment. In *Pumping Iron II: The Women* Francis performs gender subversion, actively rebelling against gender norms while the film adheres to rigid definitions of femininity, resulting in her punishment. I seek to understand how female bodybuilding symbolizes larger cultural tensions around feminine gender performativity.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A group of women walk onto a stage, illuminated by harsh lights. The women are tanned, covered in oil, and wearing bikinis that shimmer when they move. They are unnaturally lean, muscles pronounced as they pose on stage, attempting to impress the audience and judges with their bodies. The 1985 film, *Pumping Iron II: The Women* introduced viewers to the world of female bodybuilding. The staged documentary follows Bev Francis, amateur bodybuilder and world record holding powerlifter, and her 1983 journey to compete for the first time at the Caesar's World Cup, a competition that had never happened before, and would never happen again. She faced Rachel McLish, a champion bodybuilder, and a number of other competitors. *Pumping Iron II: The Women* was a follow up to 1977's *Pumping Iron*, the film that helped to make Arnold Schwarzenegger a household name. Though Francis was an amateur competing against professional bodybuilders, she is portrayed in the film as an outsider for another reason: the sheer mass and visibility of her remarkably muscled physique. Francis was the largest woman to compete at the Caesar's World Cup, and the disparity in muscle mass between her and her competition becomes one of the central plot points of the film.

Pumping Iron II: The Women places femininity at the center of the film, and questions of what constitutes femininity and in what ways it should be displayed in bodybuilding become integral to the plot. This is evident in a scene in the film in which the judges of the competition convene to attempt to define femininity before the contest takes place. Though never named,

Francis is the clear reason for the meeting, as one judge makes note that there is one competitor that is much larger and more muscular than the others. The judges never do define femininity or make clear how the winner of the Caesar's World Cup is expected to look, but another judge remarks that he wants to see a body that is "some compromise" between feminine and masculine. In the end, it is Carla Dunlap, a woman who the film makes little effort to showcase in the way it does Francis and McLish, and one who is more muscular than McLish and less muscular than Francis, who takes first place.

In my thesis, I aim to answer the following research question: How does Bev Francis' portrayal in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* challenge and reinforce standards of femininity within women's bodybuilding? Performances of gender in bodybuilding raise questions about how women in the sport engage in gender conformity and subversion, and I argue that Francis performs gender subversion and was included in the film because of her outward appearance and the questions about femininity that she would raise. Here, I define gender subversion as the rebellion against traditional gender norms in a way that is disruptive. I argue that this is different than simply not conforming to traditional gender norms, which I believe is more passive and in line with how other competitors in the film perform gender. Francis' rebellion against gender norms is evident in that she is the center of the film, which is why I generally will not refer to her as non-conforming even though she certainly does not conform to gender norms. Further, I do not argue that Francis is gender deviant, a phrase that connotes criminalization or medicalization, unless I am referring to her in the eyes of the judges. These terms will reappear throughout this thesis, and my argument relies on the clear distinction between these words as I have defined them above.

In this introductory chapter, I first provide background on the *Pumping Iron* films and women's bodybuilding as a sport that is reliant upon gender performances. I provide an overview of literature concerning gender performances in sport and bodybuilding, explain the theoretical frameworks through which I analyze the film, and detail my methods, visual and textual analysis, which allow me to analyze the film and the ways in which it conveys Bev Francis' performances of gender.

In Chapter Two, I provide my analysis of Bev Francis' portrayal as gender subversive. The chapter begins by interrogating the ways the subjects of the film, including Francis, other competitors, and judges discuss Francis's gender subversion, showing that her performance of femininity becomes the central plot of the film. Chapter Two also showcases the way the film shows Francis and portrays her, visually, as gender subversive. Chapter Two ends with an analysis of the ways that Bev Francis is an unruly body.

Chapter Three concludes this thesis by reiterating that Francis is portrayed as gender subversive in the film. I argue that her gender subversion results in her being made a spectacle by the judges and the film, and nonnormative feminine bodies are, therefore, subject to punishment. Chapter Three also outlines limitations and recommendations for future research.

Definitions and Word Use

Women's Bodybuilding

In this section, I provide definitions of bodybuilding and describe the preparations a bodybuilder must go through before a competition in order to clarify how bodybuilding functions as a sport and provide insight into several aspects of the film. According to the International Federation of Bodybuilding & Fitness, hereafter shortened to its widely popular initialism, IFBB, bodybuilding is a process in which

Athletes train to develop all body parts and muscles to maximum size but in balance and harmony. There should be no “weak points” or underdeveloped muscles. Moreover, they should follow a special pre-competition training cycle, to decrease the bodyfat level as low as possible and remove the underskin water to show the quality of muscles: density, separation and definition. Who can display more muscle details is scoring higher at the contest. And the other matter to be assessed is general view of the physique, which should be proportionally built. It means broad shoulders and narrow waist as well as adequately long legs and shorter upper body. This definition, which can be found on the IFBB website, is broad because it is intended to address all bodybuilding divisions within the IFBB, of which there are more than 12. Each division has its own definition, criteria for judging, and history according to the IFBB. I use the IFBB definition of bodybuilding because of the federation’s extreme popularity.

The “pre-competition training cycle” that the above definition refers to is necessary to explain in greater detail in order to more fully understand the events of the film and their larger cultural significance. Bodybuilder, coach, and writer for Bodybuilding.com, Anita Ramsey describes the competition preparation cycle, beginning with instructions for new bodybuilders who are 12 months away from their competitions, but notes that many bodybuilders execute their competition preparation on slightly different timelines with some off-seasons lasting up to several years, and some pre-competition diets lasting as few as 10 weeks. Generally, she advises bodybuilders choose a contest and begin the off-season process of training and eating in hopes of gaining muscle mass 12 months before the competition. Six months before the competition, she suggests increasing cardiovascular exercise, eating high quality, protein-rich foods six days per week, and focusing on exercises that help develop muscles that are lacking in size. Ramsey recommends the competition diet begin 20 weeks before one’s contest. During this time, she

advises competitors to order their competition suit, practice posing after each workout, and learn the rules of the organization hosting the competition. Eight to six weeks from the competition, she suggests competitors register for their specific contest, pay dues, and make final decisions about presentation on competition day—down to “hairstyle, accessories, and make-up.” She indicates that it is her choice to begin the tanning process far in advance of the competition, but it is common for competitors to receive a competition-grade spray tan the day before their contest. Ramsey also discusses “peaking,” also known as “peak week,” which is the process of preparing a competitor’s body for a contest in the final week before the show. This is the stage of the bodybuilding process in which the competitor removes what the IFBB referred to as “underskin water,” by manipulating water, sodium, and carbohydrate intake, and Ramsey’s approach to this process includes taking in no water in the 24 hours leading up to her contest (Ramsey). Ramsey’s approach to this process is individual but common and is part of Bev Francis’ drastic weight loss in the film.

Gender and Race in Bodybuilding

Because word choice and language are important, it will be helpful to specify some of the language decisions that I use throughout my thesis. In this section, I clarify some of the word choices I make and follow this with a brief discussion of relevant research on women’s bodybuilding that grounds but also exceeds the scope of my specific project.

While it is commonplace for the words “woman” and “female” to be used interchangeably, I choose to use the phrase “woman bodybuilder” or “women bodybuilders” when discussing the subjects of the film and women bodybuilders as a whole. Though most, if not all, bodies discussed in this paper are female bodies, it is important to note that bodybuilding is a sport that operates on strict gender binaries as opposed to strict biological sex binaries, so the

use of the word “woman” or “women” rather than female is most accurate, as well as the convention set forth by the IFBB.

This strict gender binary is worth interrogating. For the purposes of this thesis, I interrogate this gender binary in terms of the performances of gender, but the scope of this project does not allow for justice to be done in terms of research involving transgender, intersex, or non-binary identifying bodybuilders. This area of research is vital, and I hope that future scholars will give it the attention it deserves.

Additionally, though I analyze race in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, a thorough examination of the racial politics of bodybuilding is not possible here. Carla Dunlap’s eventual victory in the competition at the end of the film involves race in complex ways that other scholars have addressed. Holmund (1989) argues that Dunlap’s inclusion in the film consistently brings race to the forefront of the film, but race is downplayed by the silence surrounding it in the film. She also asserts that Dunlap’s race is sexualized, particularly when she poses on stage at the Caesar’s World Cup to a Grace Jones song accompanied by jungle sounds. Balsamo (1996), another author who has given special attention to Dunlap’s inclusion in the film further indicates that despite Dunlap eventually winning the Caesar’s World Cup, the white players in the film-- Francis, McLish, and even Bowen-- are the focal point, showing that stories about white bodies are prioritized even when black women are the winners.

Background

The Pumping Iron Films

Pumping Iron II: The Women is a sequel to *Pumping Iron*, a film that popularized both Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno. In order to best provide background on the sequel, I summarize both films here briefly.

Pumping Iron

The original *Pumping Iron* film follows two men's bodybuilding competitions, Mr. Universe and Mr. Olympia, and several competitors. While the film spends a considerable amount of time showcasing the amateur Mr. Universe contest and its competitors, it is the film's inclusion of Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno's preparation and participation in Mr. Olympia that made the film, as well as Schwarzenegger and Ferrigno, famous. *Pumping Iron* changed the way bodybuilding was viewed in the United States, in part because George Butler, the film's director, goes to great lengths to enforce heteronormativity in that the stars of the film are seen with women, talking about women, or using women as props (Convery).

Pumping Iron II: The Women

The success of *Pumping Iron* led director George Butler to embark upon *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, a sequel that focuses on a competition made specifically for the film and its competitors. *Pumping Iron II: The Women* introduces a slew of characters, who I will highlight here in order of appearance in the film. I will then summarize the plot of the film and how other scholars have understood it.

People

Rachel McLish, a world champion professional bodybuilder is introduced wearing a feathered headdress, and posing for a photoshoot, which the viewer learns is for the cover of Muscle and Fitness magazine. McLish, a slender white woman, is then seen in the gym being asked by a man how she will compete against younger women, to which she takes offense, and says that she is eager to compete against younger women because they are less experienced than her. In this scene, she self identifies as a "really strong powder-puff" (06:16).

Lori Bowen is introduced in a short scene between McLish's photoshoot and gym scene, and she is also in the gym, working out while surrounded by men. Bowen makes clear that she is excited to compete against McLish and makes clear that she fashions herself after McLish. Bowen, also a white woman, implies that when she wins the competition, the money will allow her male partner to "quit dancing" (08:01), a statement followed by a clip of him dancing on stage, wearing a thong stuffed with U.S. dollars as women in the audience shout.

Carla Dunlap, the only person in the film to be introduced while interacting with only women, is the only Black competitor and film subject. Her introduction is largely a vessel to introduce Bev Francis, as she's seen telling the women about how she has learned that Francis will be competing against her. In telling her friends about Francis, she says, "She is the most muscular woman I have ever seen" (09:30). She then says, "She's got muscularity most men wish they had" (09:40). She assures her company that she isn't worried about competing against Francis, and that one day she might like to look like her.

Bev Francis, a white Australian powerlifter, is presented to the audience as she climbs an indoor wall in an attempt to startle her friends. The film skips straight to her participation in a powerlifting competition. The announcer at the competition refers to her as the "world's strongest woman" (12:15) and informs the audience that she will attempt to perform the deadlift, in which she will attempt to lift 510 pounds, which she does successfully. She then dons a yellow bikini and performs bodybuilding poses before the same audience.

Steve Michalik, Bev Francis' trainer is introduced next, and is a secondary character in the film to the competitors. His introduction, like Dunlap's, is mostly about Francis. He waits for her at the airport and says "I'm gonna train her like I train anybody, I don't care if she's a woman. I'll train her as hard as I train any man" (20:30). Upon seeing her, he exclaims "Look at

the size of her!” (20:51). At this time, Big Steve, known to fans of women’s bodybuilding as Steve Weinberger, who is largely an accessory in the film, is introduced. He is seen interacting with Michalik and Francis.

Plot

After the film introduces its pivotal characters, the beginning of its plot primarily consists of workout sequences, which I describe more in depth in Chapter Two, until the 30:00-minute mark. At this point in the film, the competitors and their coaches and partners arrive in Las Vegas ahead of the Caesar’s World Cup. This is followed by a judges’ meeting at which the judges attempt to define femininity. The audience then witnesses the competitors’ meeting with the judges, at which Rachel McLish’s competition suit is deemed illegal, Carla Dunlap raises questions about how femininity is defined, and indicates that everyone has a different idea of femininity. On the day of the competition, all of the competitors are seen preparing to step on stage, all tanned, shining with oil, wearing makeup, and using dumbbells and resistance bands.

Just shy of the 1:00:00-mark, the competition begins. For thirty minutes thereafter, the competitors pose on stage for comparisons and perform solo posing routines. The film jumps back and forth, then, from judges calculating scores, to competitors posing on stage. At the end of the competition, Bev Francis is awarded 8th place. Lori Bowen is awarded 4th place. Rachel McLish is awarded 3rd place. At 1:34:11, Carla Dunlap is named the winner of the Caesar’s World Cup. Those awarded 7th, 6th, 5th, and 2nd place are competitors on whom the film has not focused.

Histories of Women’s Bodybuilding

In this section, I trace the history of bodybuilding and women’s inclusion in the sport. I begin by tracing the early history of bodybuilding at its birth as part of freakshows, and women’s

participation in early bodybuilding contests. Next, I discuss the problems that arose when women were formally included in the sport, followed by the complications that came about when judges and bodybuilders alike could not agree on what constituted a successful woman bodybuilder.

When freakshows became culturally unacceptable, the freaks that they showcased did not simply disappear, and neither did the freakshows themselves, for that matter. Instead, freakshows dispersed into multiple venues, one of which became modern bodybuilding (Garland Thomson). Bodybuilding, Cecile Lindsay argues, is rooted in a spectacle of freaks, and women, in particular, must evoke hyper-femininity in order to avoid reclassification as a modern-day freak. Men's bodybuilding gained popularity in the 1950s, but as men flexed on stage, women's only way to participate was by entering the beauty contests or bikini shows that were held during the same event or an affiliated event (Bunsell).

As Title IX passed and began to reshape the United States, women's bodybuilding contests were born, with concerns regarding exactly what types of bodies women should be building following shortly thereafter (Bunsell). The first women's bodybuilding contests in the 1970's placed heavy restrictions on posing, and some poses that were integral for men's bodybuilding were not allowed in the women's contests, particularly the double bicep pose and the lateral spread. The women competitors were also forbidden from clenching their fists. Because this type of restriction caused a stir among competitors, a new women's league was founded in 1977 that more closely resembled men's bodybuilding contests, but the comparatively small bodies of the first winners still reflected the values of previous contests. In 1979, the IFBB's new and potentially more promising women's competitions fell short when winners were hand-picked based on George Snyder's personal attraction to them. As women's bodybuilding grew, a Ms. Olympia contest was formed by the organizers of the Mr. Olympia

contest (Bunsell,), the contest at which Arnold Schwarzenegger took first place more than six times in Men's Classic Bodybuilding, (Schwarzenegger), and the Olympia weekend is still regarded as the top bodybuilding contest in the world.

The first Ms. Olympia winner, Rachel McLish, received, and would continue to receive, backlash for her slender frame and lack of muscle mass when compared to the other competitors for whom the guidelines for judging were unclear. Because of this lack of clarity, judges would set and then modify rules indicating the levels of muscularity required for competitors (Bunsell, 2013). Also, periods of women's bodybuilding would exist in which women competitors were tested for performance enhancing drugs when men were not (Lindsay).

The year 2000 brought about further criteria modifications that made explicit what was already implicit in women's bodybuilding: women would now be judged on their grace on stage, their faces, and their skin tone (Bunsell).

Despite an addition of rules that meant women would be judged on more than their muscle mass and size, these two factors in placing remained unclear. Since 2000, women's bodybuilding, like men's, added divisions that would separate competitors by muscle mass, size, shape, and, in some cases, posing, performance, and attire. Now, in addition to the Women's Bodybuilding division, Physique, Figure, Fitness, and Bikini divisions exist so that women with radically different body types may all compete without being judged against one another. Generally, Women's Bodybuilding and Physique divisions most closely resemble men's contests in that competitors may gain as much muscle mass as they can, Figure and Fitness competitors showcase slightly smaller frames, and Bikini competitors have very little muscle mass compared to other divisions. Also, Fitness competitors may perform dance or fitness routines on stage as part of their competition, while all other divisions walk and pose on stage

(Bunsell).

While the incorporation of several different divisions meant to divide women's bodybuilding into categories that would resolve questions regarding muscle mass, questions of muscle mass in each division remain. In 2017, a commentator at the Ms. Bikini Olympia, who was asked to describe the Bikini division stated that the division was created for women "who want to add some muscle...but not too much muscle," just moments after the Men's Classic Bodybuilding division left the stage. She also suggested that a contemporary debate was happening within the Bikini division when she said, "A lot of people have asked and wondered, 'Is there too much muscle in Bikini?'" As she says this, Romina Basualdo is performing her posing routine, and a lower-thirds flashes across the screen for viewers to learn about the competitor on stage that indicates Basualdo was from Argentina, was five feet and three inches tall, and weighed 105 pounds.

The question of muscularity is not simply for Bikini competitors, however. In 2010, the IFBB instituted a new rule for Figure competitors that mandated that all professional Figure competitors lose 20% of the muscle mass they carried. This rule was revoked following backlash from competitors (Bunsell).

It may be intuitive to think that the simple division of the competitors in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* into discrete categories would solve issues of what constituted too much or too little muscle mass for women, but questions of muscle mass remain in women's bodybuilding today. For instance, in women's bodybuilding as a whole, Messner argues, femininity itself is ideologically contested terrain. In both *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, and in the broader world of bodybuilding, disagreements over muscularity and traditional feminine ideals play a significant

role in the sport (1988).

Literature Review

Gender and Sport

Bodybuilding, a sex segregated sport, has served as a symbol of the ways in which women have experienced difficulty entering into sport as a whole. Here, I unpack women's exclusion from sport and sex segregation in sport while arguing that women and queer people have long experienced exclusion or humiliation in sport.

In sport, women have been both invisible and spectacle, in that their exclusion rendered them completely invisible to audiences and made a spectacle when they were finally included but segregated from men. Until the 1980s, sociological methodologies for studying gender differences in sport had gone largely ignored, (Birrell) but it was clear that media representations of sport placed women in a position of passivity (Beamish).

Women and queer people, however, do have a history of humiliation or outright invisibility in sport. For example, women's specific running style alone was viewed as a basis for their exclusion for a number of years (Lenskyj). Jennifer Doyle argues that humiliation is a central mechanism for the function of sport. Additionally, in order for audiences to interpret any sport as fair, they must be sex segregated. Doyle illustrates this by examining the case of Caster Semenya, a remarkable South African runner. Doyle compares Semenya's case to the case of Simelane, a queer South African athlete who was murdered as part of the execution of a hate crime near the time that Semenya's athleticism was becoming well known and her gender was being questioned (Doyle). David Getsy asserts that the reason sports are sex segregated has to do with the homoerotic gaze. Getsy argued that all measurements of physical successes are because

of comparisons to the same sex. This reductive measurement constrains physical successes and cyclic performance of gender roles.

Further, 1985 provided a fascinating backdrop for women in sport, women's bodybuilding in particular. In "Still Killing Us Softly," Jean Kilbourne (1987) asserts that advertisements instruct consumers that women's bodies should be "very thin" is clear. Thinking back to the mid-1980s calls to mind, for many, images of Jane Fonda appearing in activewear with little to no visible muscle mass, and other popular actresses like Meryl Streep, Sally Field, Molly Ringwald, and Sissy Spacek also portraying an ideal of near extreme thinness. Even Rachel McLish, the subject of indirect criticism from Bev Francis for her lack of muscle, appears large in comparison. The feminine body ideal of the 1980s in the United States was not only extremely thin, but also white, able-bodied, middle-class, and cisgender. The context in which this ideal was produced helps us to understand the ways in which Bev Francis' embodiment and portrayal in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* foregrounds gender subversion in the context of rigid gender norms.

Theoretical Frameworks

Gender Performativity

Bodybuilders perform gender in their daily lives, but on stage, bodybuilders engage in an extreme performance of gender, which can appear naturalized. This naturalization can be interpreted using Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in which she famously argues that gender is not inherent or natural, but rather is inscribed on the body through the performance of societally expected roles (1999). Understanding *Pumping Iron II: The Women* through this framework enhances this project's contribution to understanding extreme performance of gender in the daily lives of subjects.

Examining gender performativity as it relates to bodybuilding should highlight connections between bodybuilding and drag as performances of gender on stage that consist of the presentation and judging of bodies. Butler troubles the literal gender performance of drag in her theory of performativity, asserting that drag is a performance of gender that only highlights what others do every day (Butler). Butler's understanding of drag allows us to understand bodybuilding, a sport in which competitors perform gender on stage before audiences and judges. The literal stage on which both bodybuilding and drag takes place highlights the performance. Drag performers present routines that showcase gender stereotypes, and bodybuilders' posing routines, while aiming to perform gender in more normative ways, functions similarly. Bahar Tajrobekhar argues that bodybuilders who compete in the Bikini category perform femininity and heterosexuality as a way to compensate for the ways in which bodybuilding as a sport has been viewed as masculine. The performances Tajrobekhar describes, the competitors' swaying gait and suggestive gaze, are exaggerated in similar ways in drag performances of femininity.

Surveillance

Bodybuilders self-surveil in exaggerated ways, but they don't do so differently than the rest of society. To understand the body as it relates to discipline and biopower, I have looked primarily to Foucault and scholars in Foucault studies. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault argues that modern society is one in which surveillance is used as a disciplinary tool, as opposed to spectacle, which he argued was the primary mechanism of power in the middle ages (1975). By surveillance, Foucault largely implied self-surveillance, illustrated by Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. The Panopticon is a design for a prison that consists of a circular building that houses prisoners in cells along the peripheral walls that face the center of the

building, at which stands a guard tower. Because of darkness, prisoners cannot see who, if anyone, is inside the guard tower, and cannot tell if they are being surveilled. The Panopticon functions such that prisoners will assume they are always being surveilled, and thus will learn to self-surveil at all times. Foucault argues that the Panopticon is a symbol for the way that modern institutions regulate subjects. Panopticism is useful for understanding self-surveillance of women bodybuilders and is further complicated by the nature of bodybuilding as a sport in which judges surveil the bodybuilders.

Self-surveillance in women bodybuilders illustrates the influence of biopower on the feminine sporting body. Women bodybuilders specifically self-surveil, disciplining themselves to ensure their own performance of femininity is not only socially appropriate, but appropriate within the context of the sport, an illustration of the uses of biopower that influences the feminine sporting body. Foucault laid the groundwork for arguments that Sandra Lee Bartky would later make about femininity. Bartky argues that femininity is inscribed upon women's bodies through the disciplinary power of patriarchy. She notes that while the disciplinarians of patriarchy are "everywhere" and "nowhere," in that there are no official powers set in place to admonish women for not performing socially acceptable femininity, every person has the power to do so, and she illustrates this by indicating that family, friends, and people women barely know may try to enforce dieting on fat women. Bartky asserts that to avoid punishment, women self-surveil, "just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon" (p. 479). Further building on Foucault, David Andrews connects biopower and the sporting body, arguing that Foucault's work, because of its focus on the body, is foundational for understanding the sociology of sport, and Rail and Harvey connect Foucault's work to the greater field of sociology of sport and argue that his work was foundational for sociology of sport. Biopower is another method of self-

discipline, which Pylypa argues is “the dominant system of social control in modern Western society” (21). Biopower is the way in which institutions and discourses manage populations. Biopower thus harnesses disciplinary power to individual subjects, who practice bodily habits that conform to social norms through a process of self-discipline and self-monitoring, or surveillance. Pylypa illustrates biopower’s impact using moral discourses of health, fitness, and thinness. These arguments about biopower inform women’s self-discipline in bodybuilding and begin to make a broader point about women’s daily self-discipline.

Feminist Film Theory

Because *Pumping Iron II: The Women* is not merely a text, but a film, I find it valuable to employ feminist film theory. Here, I provide an overview of the history of feminist film theory and highlight its most prominent scholar, Laura Mulvey.

Feminist film theory is understood by Karen Hollinger as existing largely in two schools, one in the United States and the other in Britain. The scholars from the United States largely took up the “images of women approach,” in which the theorists’ main concern was the way that film portrayed women (Hollinger, 8). Marjorie Rosen and Molly Haskell, two prominent theorists in this school, found that the majority of films portrayed women poorly and argued that more positive, less stereotypical images of women were necessary. In Britain, the Cinefeminism school formed in response to the United States scholars’ ideas about images of women in film. Cinefeminism’s theorists were largely interested in the ways in which film naturalized systems of women’s oppression (Hollinger).

While far from the only theorist in this British school, Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” was extremely influential and remains so today. Mulvey asserts that the

gaze of the camera onto the object of the film is male. She also asserts that the female on screen comprises two parts: the body, meant to be gazed upon, and the viewer's castration anxiety. While Mulvey's work has been met with some concerns, particularly from the psychoanalytic community, Hollinger implies that it remains one of the most impactful feminist film theory essays to date.

By drawing on insights from gender performativity, theories of surveillance, feminist phenomenology, and feminist film theory, I hope to offer an analysis of *Pumping Iron II: The Women* that examines the ways in which its depictions of gender and femininity raise broader questions about bodies and power.

Method

For the purposes of this project, I use feminist film studies, textual analysis, and visual analysis to examine and interpret the ways in which the film *Pumping Iron II: The Women* portrays Bev Francis. I analyze the ways in which Francis is cinematically represented, as well as how she is treated by others in the film, most notably, the conversations that others have about her, but also the way that the film explores her self-definition as it pertains to her femininity. In this section, I define visual and textual analysis, describe my methods of data collection, and define my goals for this project.

Using the lens of feminist film theory, particularly in the ways that Laura Mulvey sets forth in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," I critically analyze the *Pumping Iron II: The Women* as it pertains to Bev Francis' performance of femininity. My use of textual analysis relies upon the guidelines set forth by Heather McIntosh and Lisa Cuklanz. These guidelines emphasize locating and interrogating themes within the text and utilizing "thick description" as a means of data collection (McIntosh and Cuklanz, 285). My use of visual analysis is guided by

Erving Goffman's "Gender Advertisements," which provides measurable, definable characteristics of images of women in media that naturalize their subordination. I further intend to utilize textual analysis as a means to interpret the film as a whole, and more specifically, the verbal communications that happen between the people on screen, and visual analysis to understand the ways in which players in the film physically interact and appear.

McIntosh and Cuklanz's technique of thick description guides my data collection. Using time-stamps, I recorded moments of interest in the film with as much detail as possible. This recording was typed as a description of the scene as well as any necessary pieces of transcription. Upon completion of this data gathering, I categorized the data thematically.

The film attempts to define femininity in bodybuilding, and therefore focuses on the competition between bodybuilders like Francis, a newcomer who possesses significantly more muscle mass than the rest of the competitors, and Rachel McLish, a champion bodybuilder whose frame is much smaller than Francis'. The film also gives attention to two other bodybuilders, Linda Bowen and Carla Dunlap, but it is clear from the outset that these women are secondary characters, as are the competitors' partners and coaches. Due to the size and scope of this project, I focus specifically on Bev Francis rather than the other women because it is her inclusion in the competition, not Bowen, Dunlap, or even McLish's, that truly troubles the definition of femininity.

In my thesis, I analyze 1) how *Pumping Iron II: The Women* depicts gender and gender relations in bodybuilding; 2) how Francis defines femininity, 3) how others define femininity for Francis, and 4) how she embodies her own definition of femininity. The answers to these inquiries suggest that Francis' portrayal in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* simultaneously reinforces and challenges traditional notions of femininity.

Because Francis doesn't exist in a vacuum, however, it would be incomplete to examine the film's portrayal of her femininity without positioning her within the greater context of the entire film, and it is for this reason that I compare Francis' understanding of femininity to that of the other competitors while also analyzing the performance of that femininity of multiple competitors. I find it important to compare Bev Francis' performance of femininity to that of Carla Dunlap, the eventual winner of the competition, and Rachel McLish, the competitor positioned as most unlike Francis in the film. Doing so allows me to assert that McLish and Dunlap are positioned in the film as foils to Francis and allow the viewer to see the various ways in which women are punished or rewarded for their closer alignment to the expectation of feminine bodies in the 1980s and in bodybuilding.

CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS

Bev Francis's muscle, size, and strength guides *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, from the time she is verbally introduced in the film to the time the end credits roll after Big Steve's exasperated pleas for explanation of her loss. In this section, I provide analysis of Francis's portrayal in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*. This chapter begins with a section focusing on the ways in which subjects of the film discuss Francis, starting with Francis herself, then examines the discussions of other competitors and the judges of the competition. What follows is a section highlighting the disparate ways the film treats Francis and the other competitors. The final section of this chapter describes the ways that Francis is portrayed as an unruly feminine body in terms of her size, strength, and physical presentation.

Talking About Bev Francis

Bev's Own Words

In her own words, Bev Francis is different. Of course, learning about a girl who grew up interested in boy's games and was excited about gaining strength is not especially controversial today, but I argue Bev Francis describes herself in ways that would be considered particularly gender subversive in the 1980s. In this section, I find it valuable to highlight one quote in particular from Francis, the first time the audience hears her discussing her strength while they watch her prepare to execute bodybuilding style poses in front of an audience after her powerlifting meet. This quote illuminates ideas that deviated from cultural norms in the 1980s.

At 12:57, the audience has already seen and heard so much about Francis, from Carla's introduction of her entrance into the Caesar's World Cup, to Francis climbing sideways up walls

to surprise her friend, to Francis performing the 500lb deadlift. What the audience hasn't fully seen is her body, and as she prepares to show her poses to onlookers at the powerlifting meet, she says the following,

“I always felt that I was a little bit different. I used to like different things from the other little girls. I was a bit of a tomboy playing boys' games. I like playing football. I like climbing things.” Here, Francis tells the audience, via offscreen monologue, that she understands that she has always been interested in activities that subvert gender norms, participating in activities that were not expected of girls but were expected of boys. As a child, she rebelled against the norms at the time such that it made her feel as if she were different from other girls.

“I always admired strength in anything, whether it was human or animal or the weather or I loved thunderstorms and anything that's big and strong and powerful and I always wanted to be powerful, myself. I used to do things that people thought were really dumb as a little kid, like try and go without drinking water for a whole day or sort of things that I thought would toughen me up.” In this quote, Francis reveals that her lived experiences of strength prepared her for the world of bodybuilding—a sport that some consider too extreme because of the ways in which competitors become unnaturally lean—because she has already done risky acts in the name of becoming stronger.

Francis goes on to explain that she “found joy” in getting stronger, which is how she became the strongest woman in the world. Her monologue tells the audience that she understands that she is subverting gender norms, and better yet, that she always has.

As Francis poses, the quote finishes, and the music is quiet. Until the audience begins to applaud at the end of her posing routine, the tone of the scene becomes quiet and uncomfortable. The scene begins to feel like the audience is watching something awkward happen, and the few

seconds that pass between the end of Francis' quote and the in-film audience beginning to applaud feel much longer than they actually are. No uncomfortable silences are given to the other competitors in the film, because no other competitors in the film subvert gender in the ways that Francis does. While this moment is short, I assert that the audience is meant to feel uncomfortable during this silence, adding to the ways that the filmmakers craft the film around Francis and her subversion.

Competitors and Bev Francis

It would be difficult to describe this film in any other way than being centrally about Bev Francis. Indeed, she's the topic of many discussions that sometimes include her and sometimes do not. Because other competitors understand that Francis is performing gender inappropriately, they appear divided between horrified skepticism and awe when discussing Francis, whether to her face or with others. This section will discuss the ways in which other competitors talk about and to Francis in the film.

At 41:04, McLish, with friends in a gym, begins talking about a conversation she had with Francis. This conversation did not take place on camera, and through the villainization of McLish, the audience is left to wonder how much of the conversation is true. "I just asked her what bodybuilding mean to you? I mean, how do you feel onstage and what do you want to do?"

This question, of course, leads into the central point of the film. For other competitors, Francis seems woefully out of place. McLish goes on to explain what it is that she wants out of bodybuilding, and in doing so, tells the viewer what it is she believes Francis should want. In this conversation, McLish's raised eyebrows and wide eyes inform the audience of her shocked skepticism.

“Well, first, I told her that what I want, you know. I said when I'm on stage, I want every woman to just want to look like me or try to achieve what I did, which is to have a perfect body. I visualize like the caricature in comic books with a tiny little waist, perfect legs with little muscles, and they looked like Wonder Woman.”

With a goal to look like Wonder Woman, the slim but strong comic book character with a waist that got smaller every year up until 2015, McLish's confusion makes sense as Francis looks nothing like Wonder Woman. Jean Kilbourne indicated in *Still Killing Us Softly* that in the 1980s, thinness was a powerful cultural ideal, and it seems even more so for McLish.

“She thought for a while and then said she's done that. She's taking it a step beyond that impression that she had the perfect feminine muscular body and she decided to take it further. It seemed to me like she skipped that point.” Francis tells, McLish that she knows she's subverted gender norms and she's content with this.

One of the people to whom McLish is speaking, an unnamed man, seems to break the fourth wall by saying the following: “The question is whether or not society or culture, the judges, the audience, the lay person out there is ready for [a] pioneer. Like, hey, I'm really looking forward to this tremendously. I just am very, very curious. What the hell are those seven people are going to do when they're judging this contest?”

This speaker supports my argument that *Pumping Iron II* reflects the culture of not just the world of bodybuilding, but specifically the culture of the United States in the 1980s. As previously noted, the 1980s was a decade in which thinness was extremely valuable, so even Rachel McLish would be deemed too muscular by those standards, but a person with the muscularity of Bev Francis was considered especially abnormal or subversive.

McLish has a number of speaking roles in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, but her conversation about Francis, behind her back, is one of those used by the film to create a villainous role for her. On the other hand, Carla Dunlap is presented as the opposite, a character who only engages in just conflicts and prevails in the end as a result.

In Dunlap's one conversation with Francis, she enthusiastically advocates on Francis' behalf. Dunlap shows in conversations with Francis, and later in the athlete's meeting that she understands that while Francis is subverting dominant gender norms, the way judges emphasize sexual attractiveness and privilege thin bodies is unfair.

Francis asks Dunlap, during a massage, what she thinks Francis' chances of winning the competition, and Dunlap offers that she thinks judges who are men will be interested in women with more muscular bodies than their counterparts, but that women judges will either strongly favor muscular bodies or thin bodies. She then goes on to bemoan the state of bodybuilding that is interested in what she refers to as the "playboy centerfold" image, one that, in the 1980s was certainly a slim woman with very little visible muscle mass.

This conversation with Carla Dunlap is important because it shows that she is concerned with fairness and is suspicious of beauty standards of the time, though her prediction about the judges was mostly wrong considering Francis' placing in the competition.

In this section I have argued that conversations that other competitors have with Francis, in McLish's case, off camera and explained on camera, and in Dunlap's case, on camera, are rife with concerns about her gender performance. For McLish, Francis poses a threat to bodybuilding because of her open rejection of the norms that had guided the sport. Because Francis has entered the sport with the intention to, "still look like a woman" (27:15), and she reinforces this with her conversation with McLish, it is clear that Francis isn't interested in simply not conforming to

norms, but that she intends to subvert them, rebelling against the norms while attempting to shift them. Dunlap, on the other hand, seems open to this change in that she is seems, at the least, supportive of Francis, and at the most, interested in the ways that shifting the norms of women's bodybuilding could benefit her, as she did indicate in the beginning of the film that she would like to look like Francis. Despite the difference in tone, the theme of conversations that other competitors have with Francis is her gender subversion, and how that will impact the bodybuilding competition.

Judges and Bev Francis

Being that the center of *Pumping Iron II: The Women* is a bodybuilding competition, a group whose perspective is vital to understanding how others perceive Bev Francis is the group of judges of the Caesar's World Cup. With a group of body types as diverse as the competitors, the rules of the competition become unclear. Should judges look for the person who has built the most muscular and lean physique? Or should they favor slim bodies that had consistently been successful up until that point? The judges themselves attempt to answer this very question in the judges-only meeting, which I describe in the following section. After the judges only meeting, the audience's next glimpse at how the judges perceive Francis is the athlete's meeting prior to the contest. The final unit of analysis in the following section is the placing that the judges award Francis. I argue that the judges of the competition, based on their verbal discussions about Francis and their decision to award her eighth place out of eight finalists, not only see her as gender subversive, but also seek to punish her for her subversion.

IFBB Judges Only Meeting

To address the elephant in the room, Bev Francis, the judges of the competition hold a judges-only meeting. This meeting brings what is implicit in western culture in the 1980s, which

is the high value of thinness and very little visible muscularity in women's bodies and makes those desires more explicit.

At 35:06, the first judge begins the meeting by saying the following: "I hope that this evening we can clear up the definite meaning the analysis of the word femininity and what you have to look for. This is an official IFBB analysis of the meaning of that word."

This statement is an attempt to come to an agreement regarding what constitutes femininity among the judges of the contest so that they can judge each competitor by the same criteria. The last sentence indicates that the judges anticipate this to be an issue in the future, so, ideally, this meeting sets the IFBB standard for femininity. He then describes what it is he thinks is the appropriate level of femininity for this competition, "What we're looking for is something that's right down the middle. A woman that has a certain amount of aesthetic femininity, but yet has that muscle tone to show that she's an athlete."

While the judge indicates that at least some amount of visible muscularity is important, he uses the word "femininity" to define the word "femininity," which is evidence that, even though this judge turns out to be incredibly rigid, the vagueness surrounding femininity as a construct is so pervasive that it is nearly undefinable. Of course, however, the other judges know what he means. Additionally, the phrase "right down the middle," implies that the judge speaking views a feminine body with slightly visible musculature as a perfect middle ground between a feminine body with no muscle and a man's body, and based upon the final placings, believes that Carla Dunlap's body meets this standard, while Francis' body is what he views as closer to a masculine body. Along with this, he makes it clear that "aesthetic femininity" is code for sexual attractiveness (he clarifies later that sexual attractiveness of competitors is a priority),

so while it is important that the eventual winner have some muscle, she must also be sexually attractive.

One of the other judges in the room to have speaking time in the film objects to this definition. He expresses this by saying, “I object being told that there is a certain point beyond which women can't go in the sport when [we] say that they should look athletic but not too masculine. What does that mean exactly? I mean, it's as though the U.S. Ski Federation told women skiers that they could only ski so fast.”

This judge's statement is important because, while it seems unfathomable that any other sport would police women in the ways that bodybuilding does, this concept actually isn't unheard of. Jennifer Doyle recounts the story of Caster Semenya, an especially fast South African runner whose identity as woman was challenged because of her speed (2013). Women who are exceptional athletes, whether they be exceptionally muscular, as Francis was, or exceptionally fast, like Semenya, are viewed as, somehow, not women. The lead judge doubles down on his assertion, however, and says, “We want what's best for our sport and best for our girls and we don't want to turn people off, we want to turn them on.”

While this phrase can be innocently interpreted as wanting to give women's bodybuilding a good reputation, the sexual connotations are prevalent, and he illuminates even more about his definition of femininity as being sexually appealing to the male gaze. Additionally, in this definition, the feminine woman is meant to be both possessed and infantilized, which is clear by his use of the phrase “our girls.” This further exemplifies Jean Kilbourne's argument in *Still Killing Us Softly* (1987) that the infantilized woman is highly sexualized, which is evident by the judge's indication that spectators should be “turn[ed] on.”

The second judge follows by directly bringing up the cause for the meeting, Bev Francis. “This is a watershed competition in the sense that in this competition, we all know this, there's no point in talking around it, there will be a female bodybuilding competitor who has gone beyond what any other woman bodybuilder has in the sport.”

Until this point in the discussion, no one had touch on the subject of Bev Francis specifically and directly—instead they only addressed the perceived issue of femininity. Though this judge seems to show somewhat progressive views regarding gender, he still can pinpoint exactly which competitor has created the need for the judges meeting. Even this judge, despite objecting to the rules, appears to imply that it is Francis who subverts gender enough to warrant a discussion on femininity.

The lead judge, growing frustrated, evident by the tone of his voice, says, “We're here to protect the majority and protect our sport.”

This judge, having already infantilized the competitors and having already shown possession of them, doubles down by showing possession of the sport. He is interested in protecting the women competitors, “the majority,” who are smaller than Francis by favoring slim bodies. He also reinforces his concerns about the sport, anxious that muscular women will be bad for the sport, which is the inverse of the ways in which hyper-muscular men, like Schwarzenegger and Ferrigno in *Pumping Iron*, were favorable for bodybuilding.

He goes on, illuminating his opinions of what constitutes femininity even further. “If you will have the majority of the girls that absolutely say, ‘Hey, let's go for these big, grotesque muscles, go to the ultimate,’ so be it.”

Femininity, to him, and ultimately to the majority of judges, based on Francis’ placing, is the opposite of “big, grotesque muscles.” This statement pathologizes feminine muscularity and

size. This judge implies that Francis has “big, grotesque muscles” and is therefore unfeminine. His tone is of outrage and disgust, and it is this statement that clarifies the rest of the film.

Athletes' Meeting

Before any bodybuilding competition, it is typically a necessity to hold a meeting with the competitors called an athletes meeting, and though the contest in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, was created specifically for the film, it is no different in this regard. A central question of femininity at the athlete's meeting arises from Carla Dunlap. As the audience learned in her conversation with Francis earlier in the film, Dunlap feels as if the rules are unclear, and asserts the following at 43:24: “We need to define feminine as it applies to our sport [...] We've got to put some sort of perimeter around the word.”

Whether or not Dunlap implies that femininity is a social construct, she underscores that using femininity as a basis for judging is unclear at best and unfair at worst. This question had already plagued the film up until this point, and if the audience had not seen the judges meeting just a few minutes before, they might think the film was going to reveal a cut and dried understanding of femininity. Instead, of course, the audience knows that the judges never really seemed to come to a consensus, so Ben Weider, the president of the IFBB, gives the following answer: “The very first sentence in the women's rule book really covers it. Judges must do to remember that they are judging a women's contest and the competitor must still look like a woman [...] It's the winners of the competition who will set what you might call the standard of femininity.”

Weider's vague response is expected, first because the judges-only meeting came to few conclusions, and second because all bodybuilding competitions function in a way such that

competitors emulate previous winners. During the time Weider is speaking, the camera focuses on Francis, whose facial expressions are ambiguous but switch between seemingly confused and disappointed.

This athlete's meeting brings disappointment to multiple competitors and sets the tone for the contest. For the purposes of this thesis, it is troubling for Francis because it indicates that she is not what the judges are looking for, and throughout the contest, Francis makes remarks expressing concern that she is not feminine enough. Additionally, however, it is at this athlete's meeting that McLish learns that her bikini is illegal because it is made of shiny material. This is the beginning of McLish's dethroning as the queen of women's bodybuilding. Dunlap, on the other hand, is emphasizing the unclear rules. It's obvious from this conversation that Dunlap and Weider have come to an unspoken agreement that Francis' gender performance is inappropriate, but while Weider is uncomfortable with this, Dunlap seems, based on her conversation with Francis, to appreciate Francis' gender subversion.

Bev Francis Placing

While there are on-screen multiple meetings indicating that the judges indeed did not consider Bev Francis to be performing femininity appropriately, it is her placing last out of all of the finalists that solidifies that her gender performance is not welcome. Here, I describe the ways the judges discuss Francis at the competition and her subsequent placing.

During the competition, Francis is treated like a spectacle by the judges during comparisons. She is compared alongside Rachel McLish, which multiple competitors remark is unusual due to the fact that their bodies are quite possibly the two most different in the competition. The film reveals the stark difference between what is considered appropriately feminine in bodybuilding and what is considered too masculine and makes a spectacle out of

Francis. This is one way the judges and the film attempt to solidify Francis' position as deviating from gender norms.

After all of the competitors have been through comparisons and have performed solo routines, a specific quote from a judge proves that even the one woman judge who the audience interacts with views Francis as gender subversive. When being interviewed, she makes several comments that indicate she does not view Francis as performing gender appropriately, but the most important is the following, "Bev Francis does not look like a woman. She does not represent what women want to look like."

If all the judges did not consider Francis to be deviating from traditional femininity, this judge certainly does. This quote is important when considering that Ben Weider specifically references that judges of the competition are to judge competitors based on whether or not they look like women, and this judge directly says that Francis does not. This quote foreshadows Francis' placing.

After much confusion and fuss while tallying scores, placings are announced, and Francis' name is called first, placing eighth of eight finalists. Remembering that *Pumping Iron II: The Women* is at least a partially staged film, it is important to note that Francis placing below eighth would have resulted in her name not being called at all, which would have been an anticlimactic ending for viewers. Therefore, given that the judges were likely instructed to include Francis in the group of eight finalists, it is possible that they awarded her the lowest possible ranking they could have given her.

Placing Francis last of eight finalists appears to be punishment for what they perceive to be her gender deviance. After all, the judges, until this point, have referred to Francis as having "big, grotesque muscles," and claimed that she does not look like a woman. In the interest of

protecting the slimmer women who had previously been successful, the judges place Francis eighth, setting the standard for the sport that very muscular women are not welcome.

The judges of this competition have indicated to the audience in no uncertain terms that Francis is subverting gender norms. The mere fact that they call a meeting to discuss the meaning of femininity prior to the contest shows that they collectively understand her to be performing gender inappropriately, which they reinforce at this meeting, then again at the athlete's meeting, and one final time when they choose to award her eighth place. Her subversion, as I previously discussed when clarifying the words I use to shape my argument, is disruptive, particularly to the judges. To them, this is damaging for the sport of women's bodybuilding. In order to eradicate the perceived threat to the sport, they publicly punish Francis after having made a spectacle of her.

Bev Francis, the Spectacle at Which *Pumping Iron II: The Women* Gazes

As explored in the previous section, textual analysis of *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, is vital, but because of the visual nature of the film, it is integral to analyze the way the camera treats Bev Francis as a gender outlaw. Visually, the filmmakers position Francis as spectacle and the other competitors as sexual objects. Francis' gender subversion makes her unable to be framed as an object of sexual desire in the way that other competitors are. In this section, I describe the ways in which Francis is visually portrayed as spectacle based upon her strength and size, which is intensified as other competitors are portrayed as objects of sexual desire.

Group Shower Scene

At the film's 19:00 mark, after the women's first exercise scene that I describe in-depth below, the group of women who had been working out together step into the gym's shower

together. While communal showers and locker rooms are not something unheard of or even uncommon in many gyms, the camera follows the women into the shower. This group shower scene starkly contrasts the way Francis is visually portrayed in the film. Jean Kilbourne makes an important note that performing femininity requires being attractive to men, something that other competitors accomplish with this scene, while Francis is given no such screen time.

The conversation that the women have is casual, one that, taken out of context, one wouldn't imagine having taken place in a shower. One woman says the following. "With muscles, I feel feminine. I think guys have a hard time accepting that. Guys will come up to you and say some remark about your muscularity, and I think those are the guys feel really insecure, that can't handle a woman who might have a bicep."

This woman's discomfort that men treat her poorly because she has visible muscle mass is evidence of the harsh atmosphere that women who challenged gender norms in the 1980s experienced and shows that, if these slender women experienced punishment for exceeding gender norms, then Francis should surely expect the same. This scene, because it takes place early on in the film, sets the tone for the rest of the film in terms of gaze and the way the camera gazes upon women with slim bodies as opposed to the way that it treats women who possess more visible muscularity.

This scene is an aggressive example of the male gaze about which Mulvey writes, as the conversation is punctuated with shots of the women laughing together, shots of lathered stomachs, and women shampooing their hair. Classically, shower scenes in film as scenes of proximity, revelation, and exposure. Of course, it was entirely unnecessary for the camera to follow these women into the shower, and equally unnecessary for this conversation to have to take place in the shower. The conversation, however, gives the viewer an excuse to stare in awe

as one of the women says, “It should be something that is beautiful to see. It’s not gross to see your abs.”

Indeed, riding on the success of *Pumping Iron* and the fame—or infamy—the film brought to men’s bodybuilding, I assert that George Butler and the other filmmakers behind *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, sought to create a film that not only heightened the popularity of women’s bodybuilding, but also sought to create a film that was highly palatable to audiences of the 1980s. Positioning almost all of the competitors as objects of sexual desire, particularly with a scene in which multiple women shower together accompanied by generous camera angles, helps to accomplish that goal.

Workout Scenes

Because *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, is a film about bodybuilders, it is important to interrogate the film’s various exercise scenes because they demonstrate that the film gazes upon Francis as spectacle while the other competitors are gazed upon as sex objects. In this section, I argue that the way the camera portrays different exercise scenes in the film sexualizes other competitors, but shows Francis as distinctly not sexualized, which is evidence of the filmmakers’ understanding that Francis is performing gender inappropriately because they view her as not woman enough to be sexually objectified in the way that other competitors are. Francis’ workout scene in the film lasts as long as the group workout earlier in the film, and when the film focuses on Francis, it is focusing on her strength, whereas the film focuses heavily on the other women as sexual objects.

The first exercise scene in the film outside of Francis’ powerlifting competition is a group scene that highly sexualizes the women in it. These women, presumably in a different geographic location than Francis and Dunlap, are shown working out at World Gym, whose logo on the wall

appears to be an inhuman but distinctly female creature who is squatting with its feet on a globe, a barbell on its back, and wearing a bikini, an implication that this is a women's-only bodybuilding gym. Indeed, the audience only sees women exercising together in this gym.

This exercise scene lasts from 16:45 until 19:10, and much of the scene is not about the women's exercising at all. The roughly two and a half minutes begins with women applying makeup and spraying their hair, followed by the start of actual exercise footage that shows two women in striped leotards doing coordinated abdominal exercises. Rachel McLish seems to be one of the only earnest competitors, not giggling or even smiling during her workout. The camera, instead of filming her focused and serious facial expressions, films her legs, getting closer before the shot ends. The following shot focuses again on the two women in striped leotards, one squatting, the other spotting her, the camera following their hips as they complete the movement. One shot closely focuses on a woman's struggling face, a set up for a snarky comment from McLish. The following shot focuses on the two women helping each other again, a stark contrast to McLish's comment. The following shot shows a woman the audience has not yet seen but focuses on her hips and legs for three full seconds before panning up her body to show the exercise that she is doing. For two shots after this, the scene shows women helping each other, only to go right back to sexualizing another woman, and then McLish, both doing bicep curls.

This scene shows that women in the film, despite performing feats of strength, if performing gender appropriately, are to be sexualized. A scene in which the camera pans slowly up Francis' body, focusing on her legs and hips, does not exist. Francis, despite identifying herself as a woman, is not subject to sexualization in these ways because the camera does not deem her woman enough to be sexually objectified.

Francis' workout scene, on the other hand, shows a woman performing feats of strength and focuses solely on that. The first workout sequence to feature Francis shows her with her coach and then alone and lasts from 21:25 to 25:00. The special attention given to Francis creates a spectacle out of her, the camera focusing on her face as it contorts and her muscles as they contract. While the cameras slowly pan up the other women's bodies before the audience even knows what they are doing, the shots of Francis highlight her struggling with heavy weight.

The disparities in treatment that the camera gives Francis and the women at World Gym indicate that the filmmakers figure the group of slim women as women, as sexual objects, and as performing femininity correctly, while the camera treats Francis more as it treated Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Pumping Iron*, certainly not as performing femininity appropriately.

Carla Dunlap: The Exception and the Hybrid and Rachel McLish: The Villain

The film gives dimension to women's bodybuilding of the time by creating not one, but two foils for Bev Francis. The first is Rachel McLish, who represents the socially acceptable woman bodybuilder and the villain of the story, and the second is Carla Dunlap, the consistently humble and eloquent winner of the competition, and therefore, the compromise.

Rachel McLish is featured making snarky comments about other bodybuilders and is introduced in one scene with what can only be described as music that would accompany a villain. She's seen as the reigning queen who must be dethroned. Carla Dunlap, conversely, is the only competitor in the film who speaks to Bev Francis on screen, cheers her on while she poses, defends her and the question her presence raises at the athlete's meeting, and after winning, has to be called to collect her prize because she's too busy hugging the other competitors. Dunlap represents the "good girl" who is sidelined in the film, despite being the

winner, and as Anne Balsamo claims, is evidence that the white competitors in the film are the most important (1996).

Bev Francis: The Unruly Body

Bev Francis is portrayed in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* as the woman who will enter into a women's bodybuilding competition and completely unravel the very meaning of femininity. Francis is positioned in opposition to nearly every single other competitor in terms of gender; they are feminine, and she is masculine. The film presents her to the audience as a question to be answered, a problem to be solved. Francis threatens the status quo of women's bodybuilding by entering the competition as a woman who is larger than any other woman, who is stronger, and who has no problem presenting in ways that are less feminine than the other competitors. The film's entire plot revolves around whether or not Francis will do well in a bodybuilding competition in which all other competitors are much slimmer and less muscular than her and presents an unspoken slippery-slope argument, that if Francis is to do well, she would open the floodgates for women who deviate too far from traditional femininity.

Francis, before competing as a bodybuilder, was a powerlifter. Powerlifting is an objective sport in which the competitor must perform three lifts—the squat, the bench press, and the deadlift—successfully. Powerlifting has clearly defined objectives and rules and is a sport that is meant to determine one's strength. Bodybuilding is a subjective sport, and Francis' competition in bodybuilding places her in a position in which judges will assess if they think she looks like the ideal version of the feminine body.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Bev Francis challenges gender norms in various ways. In this section, I focus on Bev Francis' body and the way the film portrays that

body, and earlier in this chapter, I have evaluated the discourse surrounding femininity in the film. I argue that Bev Francis' body is deemed unruly and is punished for being such. In this chapter, I will show the ways in which Francis' body is unruly, specifically in regard to size, strength, and outward physical presentation. Francis' body is significantly larger than the other bodybuilders and is such a spectacle that her weight is even discussed. Being a powerlifter, Francis' body is also unruly in terms of its extreme strength. I also assert that Francis defies gender norms with her outward physical expression as a performance of gender. Lastly, I will then explain how this unruliness necessarily leads to gender subversion.

Unruly Size

One of the elements of the way that *Pumping Iron II: The Women* portrays Bev Francis as an unruly body is by focusing heavily on her size. Using camera angles and shots that focus on her body, the film figures Francis' large and muscular body as remarkable and abnormal. In this section, I will detail the ways in which this film depicts Bev Francis' body as so large that it has become a spectacle, and therefore gender subversive. I explore Francis' size, her preoccupation with increasing the size of her body, and the way in which she displays her size, and demonstrate that within the film, her body's abundance has caused her body to become gender nonnormative.

In *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, the viewer is not introduced to Bev Francis until Carla Dunlap tells her friends that she's just found out that Francis will, in fact, compete in the bodybuilding competition that Dunlap is entering. Before Francis even appears on screen, she is introduced as a physically large woman. Dunlap, in describing Francis, and therefore, the significance of her entrance into the competition, says, "She's this Australian powerlifter, who has got to be the most muscular woman I have ever seen. I mean, she's 180 pounds now, the last

time I saw any pictures of her, and if she comes down to a really good competitive weight, then she'll just be outrageous. She's got muscularity that most men wish they had."

The way that others describe Francis, and her overall impact on the discourse that take place in the film has been discussed more in depth in previous sections of this thesis, but Dunlap's words as a means to introduce Francis serve as a tool to set Francis up as being important to the film because of her size. It is her muscularity with which Dunlap is concerned, which implies that the audience should be as well. It important to note that the racial politics present in this film are not fully addressed in this section, but has been in earlier sections, but Francis, who is a white woman, while marked in various ways, is marked differently than Carla Dunlap, a subject of the film who I would suggest is tokenized and the film presents as never expressing any emotions, while the white women in the film freely express anger or outrage (Lorde).

The camera puts time and effort into showing the way in which Francis' body is larger than what is normal or acceptable. One of the first shots to capture this (12:25) shows Francis from behind, standing upright, arms lifted before she performs the deadlift at the powerlifting competition. The t-shirt she is wearing under her singlet can barely contain her shoulders and back, and the outline of her latissimus dorsi muscle as it bulges out of her shirt is stark against the audience before her. At the same competition, she practices her bodybuilding posing routine in front of the same audience—this time foregoing the singlet and t-shirt, wearing instead the yellow string bikini that she would eventually wear in the actual bodybuilding competition. In this scene (13:24), multiple people remove the chalk that Francis has leftover on her body and replace it with oil so that her muscles will catch the light. As she bends and flexes before the oil is put on her body, she shows the size and development of her muscles. When she begins her

routine (13:46), she bends and poses in ways that the other competitors who the film has introduced do not, attempting to show the definition of her back and chest in poses that are most commonly seen in men's bodybuilding competitions.

Francis is proud of her size, in a way that Bartky (1990) understands as a nonnormative performance of femininity. She describes her excitement to enter into the bodybuilding competition as the largest competitor, telling her family, "In the past, all the winners have been women that, to me, aren't really bodybuilders. They're thin, look more like ballet dancers or gymnasts...Now I'm going to go in, try and really get big just like a male bodybuilder would" (15:00). This desire to increase her already large size is shared by her coach, Steve Michalik, who, while training her, expresses the goal of adding an extra half-inch to her chest. Francis is shown performing chest press exercises, while the other competitors are shown primarily performing a variety of exercises, which emphasizes Francis' focus on strengthening and growing her chest muscles. This seems only to be of concern to Francis, and the judges seem to be more focused on discussing the other competitors' breasts and potential for having breast implants, so while many competitors may be focused on increasing the size of their chest, Francis alone seems only focused on increasing the amount of muscle tissue on her chest. These goals that Francis and Michalik share would be considered abnormal in Bartky's terms, who describes women's need to exercise as one tied to making the body smaller, because size or abundance is considered to be unfeminine. The goal of increasing muscularity is one that defies societal norms of femininity, and certainly, the goal increasing muscularity in an area like the chest is a further evidence of Francis' gender subversion.

When the bodybuilding competition begins, it is clear from the initial shot of all of the women together that Francis is the largest (59:42). She stands, initially, beside Rachel McLish,

the favorite to win and bodybuilding champion, and the difference in size is remarkable. Even at her leanest, Francis' arms and legs appear nearly double the size of McLish's (59:54). When Francis and McLish are asked during comparisons to do the side-chest pose, Carla Dunlap visibly laughs, and the camera quickly cuts to her to show this—an open, uproarious laugh that indicates to her that the comparison between these two, the most muscular and one of the most feminine, respectively, is literally laughable. At the same time, a different competitor remarks, “Strange comparisons,” and an offscreen competitor replies, “I’ll say.” The first competitor then says, “Total opposites” (1:01:31).

The other competitors balk at this comparison because there truly is no comparison between McLish and Francis, as these bodies are so vastly different already that there is little need to see them up close. Of course, the camera delights in this opportunity and focuses on the absurdity of the situation. Here, Francis' size is put on display and she becomes a spectacle. This comparison is for the sake of seeing exactly how large Francis truly is, and comparing her to a slight, feminine model of what has been successful in women's bodybuilding up until that point emphasizes the sheer mass of Francis' body.

Until this point in the film, there has not yet been a direct comparison of these two bodies despite how the film has placed them in opposition to each other. The film has constantly positioned McLish and Francis as the two most interesting figures, two ends of the spectrum of bodies represented in the competition and, therefore, in the film. At this moment, the audience finally gets to see these two competitors placed beside each other so that they may see the stark differences in their body composition. McLish, in this moment, is the body that most closely adheres to Bartky's understanding of what a socially acceptable feminine body is, in that she is slender, with pockets of body fat in the correct places, and she is not so muscular that she crosses

the border into nonnormative performances of femininity. Francis is literally placed in opposition to McLish in this way, incredibly muscular but at the same time, so lean that her breast tissue is imperceptible. These two bodies are not being compared because they are simply competitors in competition, they are being displayed as polar opposites.

As the comparisons continue, though it was always clear that Francis was the most muscular competitor, close up shots of the other women show that Francis is not only the largest, but also the competitor with the most muscular definition. When compared to Dunlap, who is one of the next largest women in the competition, Francis' muscular definition in her abdominals is such that one could count each of the muscles on her stomach. Dunlap, an impressively muscular and defined woman, does not even compare to Francis. Dunlap's core is lean, but the clearly defined muscles that Francis displays make Dunlap appear thin by comparison.

When it comes time for Francis to perform her individual routine (1:14:00), she performs a dance like all of the other competitors, but unlike the others who use the routine to emphasize grace and poise, the focus for Francis is on showing off her size. Her routine is similar to the other competitors, but she uses her routine to perform several poses that some of the other competitors do not, such as the pose in which she bends at the waist, facing away from the spectators, to highlight the muscles in her back and legs. This pose allows her to highlight the sheer width of her back and the size of her arms and legs. Her arms often flex with closed hands, a stance the other competitors seldom take, the others most often posing with their hands open. This manner of posing allows Francis to emphasize the size of not only the muscles in her arms, but also her trapezius muscles that connect her shoulders to her neck. As the lights go dark and only Francis' silhouette can be seen exiting the stage by ascending the stairs, she remains in a double-bicep pose, allowing the light to literally highlight the peaks of her muscles. She

continues to allow this use of light to highlight the size and shape of her body. This demonstration of size and the way in which Francis moves across the stage, stepping to the rhythm but wholly focused on showing the audience that her intention is to be the biggest woman in the competition, is unlike any of the other competitors. The routine that Francis performs is in stark contrast to Rachel McLish (1:18:30) and the way in which she performs a carefully choreographed dance routine, gyrating her hips and skipping playfully off the stage. Of course, McLish's performance comes directly after Francis'. Here, Francis is proud of the size of her body and the shape it takes despite the fact that she is transgressing norms of femininity and the fact that performances of femininity is something on which Francis is literally being judged.

Francis pays for her size and her routine. She places 8th, the lowest placing of all of the finalists in the competition. This, I argue, is because Francis' size had become unruly, embodying a dissonant or subversive femininity that defies the expectations of compliant feminine docility. I have discussed placings and the judges' opinions of Francis in previous sections, but I find it important to make clear that Francis' size and the way that she displays that size transgresses societally expected notions of femininity that Bartky discusses. For that transgression, the judges punish Francis.

Unruly Strength

Bev Francis' body is not only large and muscular but is impressively strong, and this strength is another way in which Bev Francis is positioned as an unruly body. In this section, I showcase the various ways throughout *Pumping Iron II: The Women* in which Francis' strength shows her body's unruliness as it pertains to femininity and assert that Francis' physical strength is gender subversive.

Some of Francis' competitors are introduced holding small dumbbells or being trained by a man in the gym, but Francis' very introduction in the film shows her displaying a feat of extreme physical strength, which sets the tone for the remainder of the film. Francis is first seen as a silhouette in a dimly lit hallway, climbing the walls, her hands on one wall, her feet on another (10:10). She then reaches over to the door of a room her friend is in and knocks. Her friend is surprised when she answers the door to find Francis above her. The filmmakers' decision to introduce Francis this way is a decision to convey the message that Francis is interested in using her body to perform feats of strength. According to Bartky, women's bodies are not viewed favorably if they are bodies of abundance, and Francis' abundance of strength certainly meets these criteria. Her body, as soon as it is introduced on screen, is performing an act of strength that is gender subversive.

Of course, to further emphasize the point that Francis is unusually strong, the film immediately cuts to her participation in a powerlifting competition. The woman who competes before her is as slender as some of her competitors in the bodybuilding competition and performs her lifts in front of the audience to roaring applause (11:48). Francis' name is called by the announcer and she prepares to execute her lift. It is important to note that he says that she is going to attempt to lift 510 pounds, and he refers to her as the strongest woman in the world. The audience shouts, stands, and watches in awe as Francis successfully executes the deadlift, and the previous competitor is completely forgotten. Francis' strength here is on display, and according to Bartky, the goal of women's exercise is to reduce body size, to minimize the body, not to gain strength and mass.

The type of exercise that Francis is shown doing in the film is also drastically different from that of her competitors, another display of her unusual strength. Firstly, Francis is largely

seen alone or exercising only with her trainer, while the other women in the competition are seen exercising in groups, implying that Francis is training in a class all her own. Also, while nearly all of the women in the film are seen with a variety of exercise equipment, Francis is shown exercising with more weight.

Francis' physical strength is distinctly coded as unfeminine according to the social norms the film at once references and performatively institutes. According to Bartky, women must be constantly dieting in order to achieve the bodies that society has deemed size and shape appropriate, bodies that are slim and unassuming. The ideal of thinness that Bartky describes requires many women to diet to near starvation levels, a diet which would make lifting 510 pounds or climbing an indoor wall impossible. Francis' physical strength is an indicator of abundance and a sign that she is behaving in ways that do not adhere to typical understandings of femininity.

Unruly Physical Presentation

The final way in which Francis' body displays unruliness is in her physical presentation. Other competitors present in ways that are graceful, unimposing, and even sexy. Francis' outward appearance is androgynous, and in some scenes, outwardly masculine. In this section, I argue that Bev Francis' presentation is one element of her unruly and therefore gender subversive body because of her defiance of the ways in which women are expected to present.

Francis' outward, physical presentation is unlike that of the other competitors. Rachel McLish, for example, is introduced in the film in heavy makeup, posing in ways that highlight her narrow waist (03:53). The audience learns that the photograph being taken of her would be on the cover of Muscle and Fitness magazine. Her hair, makeup, clothes, and jewelry are all carefully curated to show, in case her musculature deceived the viewer, that she was feminine.

McLish is holding dumbbells and displaying just a slightly more muscular version of what Bartky describes as the ideal feminine body, “taut, small-breasted, narrow-hipped, and of a slimness bordering on emaciation” (468). McLish’s body is portrayed in the film to show the women viewers or readers *Muscle and Fitness* magazine that the ideal feminine body is achievable, and all one needs is a pair of small, golden dumbbells. This scene shows the model feminine body, and Francis’ introductory scenes as described above—her feats of strength as she scales the indoor wall and lifts 510 pounds—are a display of the subversive feminine body.

The way that Bev Francis’ presents using her clothing is not only androgynous, but also masculine. In the bodybuilding competition itself, Francis is wearing a similar two-piece competition suit to the other competitors, so I look outside of the competition to make the comparisons about the way that Francis dresses. In many scenes, Francis is shown wearing bulky sweaters that cover her body (10:44), while other women in the film, such as Carla Dunlap, wear clothes that fit tighter or emphasize their bodies (26:30). The clothing Francis wears when she arrives in Nevada and is entertaining friends (31:08) are a white polo shirt and black pants, a similar outfit that men in the film are seen wearing, and the fit of this outfit gives her body a markedly more masculine appearance than the way that other women appear in the film. In the athlete’s meeting with the judges, the other competitors wear clothes and jewelry that appear feminine (44:38). Immediately following that meeting, Francis is shown wearing a tight t-shirt that emphasizes the muscles in her arms. In this scene, Francis is performing poses for her friends, actively making fun of some of the more feminine ways that the other women pose.

Even the choice of clothing when exercising is drastically different. Francis is shown wearing a sleeveless t-shirt and shorts (21:50) while the other women in the film exercise in what many recall being very popular women’s workout attire, high cut leotards meant less for

performance and more for appearance (17:00). The camera notes this disparity in presentation and handles it accordingly, particularly during exercise montages. The scenes of Francis exercising focus on her face in agony and her muscles moving as she completes each repetition. The camera lingers on the women in high cut leotards, however, focusing on exposed skin for unnaturally long periods of time, despite the fact that they are not performing dissimilar movements (18:06).

During these exercise montages, another method of presentation becomes glaringly obvious: the meticulously styled hair and makeup, or lack thereof. In the most notable training montage of the film (16:41), the women are seen applying hairspray, and nearly every single woman training is wearing makeup. Makeup is, of course, unhelpful and even impractical for exercise, but in the quest to adhere to traditional feminine norms, the women in the film wear it. Makeup becomes smudged and messy in the process of vigorous exercise. On the other hand, Francis appears without makeup, or without noticeable makeup throughout the entirety of the film with the exception of the competition itself. This seems to be because makeup is required or encouraged, and Francis' makeup seems to be slightly less polished than the other women's. Francis' hair is worn short for the entirety of the film and is barely touched for the competition, her hair cut reminiscent of those worn by some members of the Bee Gees, as opposed to the ways in which her competitors go to great lengths to style their hair even before going to exercise—which will be promptly undone anyway by the gratuitous group shower taken by some of the other competitors immediately following the film's first exercise montage, discussed in depth in an earlier section of this thesis. Bartky describes the styling of hair and application of makeup as one of the ways that women engage in acts of discipline. In this regard, I argue that

Francis embodies unruly gender non-conformity precisely by refusing the disciplinary codes of hegemonic femininity.

Francis' outward presentation is androgynous and sometimes masculine, a clear defiance of gender norms set forth in the social world, and a performance of gender that is unlike the other competitors. This presentation of androgyny and masculinity is evidence of Francis' gender subversion.

In the film *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, Bev Francis is portrayed as the competitor that will pose a fundamental problem for women's bodybuilding: Should women's bodybuilding function like men's bodybuilding and reward the largest and most muscularly defined bodies, or should women's bodybuilding serve the purpose of rewarding bodies that appear feminine and somewhat muscular? Up until and through the end of the film, the latter prevailed. Slim bodies were rewarded for displaying the appropriate amount of femininity while Francis' more muscular body was punished. Francis' body represented a logical fallacy in women's bodybuilding and posed the question of why women's bodybuilding is not judged by the same criteria as men's bodybuilding, and why femininity is at the core of women's bodybuilding, so much so that the judges call an entire meeting just to define femininity ahead of the competition, a meeting in which Francis' body is the elephant in the room. Because Francis' body was the cause of such a frustrating problem, I argue that the portrayal of Francis as an unruly body embodies untapped subversive energy. Her body was uncontrollable to the other competitors, to the judges, and the only way for the film to tame her body was to punish her the lowest possible placing of all of the finalists in the competition.

Bev Francis' body's unruliness means that it is necessarily gender subversive; all feminine bodies that are deemed unruly are necessarily gender subversive because, in all of the

ways that Bartky describes the ideal feminine body, the most important element is discipline. Women are supposed to discipline their bodies in a multitude of ways, not limited to dieting and exercising in the pursuit of slenderness, carefully and meticulously applying hair styles and makeup, and comporting themselves in a restricted manner. When feminine bodies are deemed unruly, they demonstrate a lack of discipline, which, in turn subverts traditional feminine gender norms, particularly in the way that Bartky defines them.

Bodies coded as feminine or belonging to women must be disciplined in ways not required of bodies coded as masculine or belonging to men. All of the ways in which I have argued Francis' body was unruly—size, strength, outward appearance—are elements valued as masculine. Men entering a bodybuilding competition are expected to be large and muscular, and those muscles should be well defined. The more men exhibit these features, the likelier they are to win a bodybuilding competition—this is evidenced in the original *Pumping Iron* film. Similarly, a man who is a former powerlifter would be expected to be strong, and it would be valuable for him to demonstrate feats of strength, acts for which he would expect and receive praise. And of course, men that present in masculine ways are likely to be rewarded. It is for this reason that I argue that a body behaving in the aforementioned ways, if coded as feminine, is unruly and simultaneously gender subversive, and gender subversion and unruliness cannot exist in this space separately for the body coded as feminine.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter of this thesis reiterates my argument that Bev Francis is subverting gender norms in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* and reflects on some of the larger theoretical questions raised by this portrayal. This chapter begins with a section that outlines some of the limitations of this research while providing recommendations for future research that may address some of these limitations or provide a more holistic analysis of this film and related topics. I conclude this chapter and this thesis by reiterating my claim that Bev Francis is portrayed as performing gender inappropriately and is punished in the film.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the size, scope, and nature of this project, it is impossible to answer every potential question that may arise, and it is irresponsible to make wide claims or assumptions about areas that the research cannot cover. For this reason, this section will note some limitations of this project and provide several recommendations for future research.

The limitations of this project include the fact that by focusing on a single film from 1985, I cannot generalize about gender performativity in women's bodybuilding beyond the scope of the film. With the data from this project, I may theorize about how gender performativity in the sport may reflect the broader social world by focusing largely on Bev Francis's gender performance in the film. My analysis cannot, however, speak to broader questions about agency and freedom in women's bodybuilding as a competitive sport, and cannot speak to general questions about gender and sport as a whole.

While I briefly compare the ways in which women's bodybuilding is portrayed in the film to today, it is necessary for me to situate the film in its historical moment and avoid assuming that the 34 years between the film's release and the writing of this thesis has consisted of a necessarily linear and progressive history.

Pumping Iron II: The Women is a film created by largely white, western filmmakers in North America, and briefly Australia, and as a white US citizen, I view and analyze this film from a white, western perspective, a limited perspective.

As these and other limitations present themselves, it is important to consider future research that may avoid some or all of these limitations or consider research that may offer a more complete view of the film or subject area. Further research could include an analysis that compares and contrasts the ways gender is portrayed in both *Pumping Iron* films, a thorough and focused analysis into the ways that Carla Dunlap's race is portrayed in the film, and an analysis of the ways in which Rachel McLish is portrayed as villainous in the film. A more thorough analysis into gender, race, and sport in the 1980s using different units of analysis would also be a valuable endeavor. Future research could also include ways in which the male gaze in the film is sexualized, and in what ways it creates heterosexuality or queerness in its subjects.

Conclusion

Bodybuilding is a sport that codifies gender norms that are already implicit throughout society as a whole. As we examine, in 2019, one of the central questions in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, and at the time, bodybuilding as a sport, it is interesting to compare the ways in which women's bodybuilding has changed. Earlier in this thesis, I described Romina Basualdo, the 105-pound Bikini competitor who posed at the 2017 Olympia Weekend and who raised questions of

too much muscle in the division. Of course, women's bodybuilding now has categories like Bikini, Figure, Physique, and Fitness alongside Bodybuilding to try to avoid issues in which bodies like Bev Francis and Rachel McLish are compared despite their vast differences. The question, however, of how much muscle is appropriate for women bodybuilders in any division is still plaguing the sport. In this thesis, I have answered the following research question: How does Bev Francis' portrayal in *Pumping Iron II: The Women* challenge or reinforce standards of femininity within women's bodybuilding? In *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, Bev Francis is presented as subverting gender norms of the time. While Francis does not reinforce standards of femininity, the filmmakers do so by way of creating a spectacle out of her, and the film and gaze focus on Francis as a way of creating a freak spectacle, just as bodybuilders owe their roots to freakshows. The way others in the film discuss her and the way she is portrayed by the camera shows that the other competitors, the judges, and the filmmakers view her as performing gender inappropriately. Her body's size, strength, and physical presentation are portrayed as unruly. A visual and textual analysis of the film highlights all of the ways that Francis subverts femininity in a film that seeks to discipline and contain femininity's range of possible meanings.

The structures within women's bodybuilding have changed and evolved since 1985, but the expectations of women competitors have remained. Expectations of women's bodies to be aesthetically pleasing to the male gaze, but not too muscular, continue to be perpetuated in women's bodybuilding as even the smallest competitors are judged more harshly for having what judges consider to be too much visible muscle mass. Women's bodies that are considered too muscular or too strong are still considered unruly bodies today, which suggests that in some ways, *Pumping Iron II: The Women* foreshadowed a history of the regulation of subversive gender performance.

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