

SPORT, BODY, AND GENDER CONSTRUCTION

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Looking at the Outside to Understand the Inside: An Analysis of 100 Years of American Muscle-Magazine Covers

A major concern in the production of popular magazines is designing a cover that will attract potential customers and yet stay true to the publisher's philosophy. Magazine covers convey many things. On the most obvious level they tell the reader what to expect inside the magazine's pages. Color and fancy fonts serve to draw the reader inward while headlines and other cover text advertise stories and play on emotions and insecurities. The most important aspects of the cover, however, are the choice of photography and other artwork and how the editor/publisher contextualizes that image. As will be shown, the selection of suitable art – and the context in which it is placed on the cover – changed dramatically in the twentieth century.

This paper analyzes the covers of four American physical culture/physique magazines: Physical Culture (1899-1940), Strength (1914-1935), Strength & Health (1932-1986), and Iron Man (1936-2001). These four magazines were chosen because: 1) they were among the most important magazines in the physical culture field during the era in which they were published; 2) they did not change titles during the lifespan of the magazine; 3) the publisher/owner of each magazine was a legitimate force in determining the editorial and photographic policies of the magazines; and 4) I have access to a complete [or almost complete] run of the magazines. My focus will be to analyze the way bodies [male and female] are portrayed on the magazine's covers. Physique magazines at the turn of the last century, for instance, almost always showed the body in full-figure. They frequently used classical elements – statuary motifs, Greek columns, and so on – to convey the notion of the ideal. During the 1990s however, the body is almost never shown in its entirety. Big chests [for both males and females] now appear to be the most

important body part, while the idea of the body as an integrated whole in which proportion and symmetry matter appears to be lost.

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Idealism or Racism? Color Consciousness and the AAU MR. America Contest, 1939-1982

This paper will show the extent to which race was a factor in the selection of Mr. America physique contest winners from this event's inception in 1939 to its demise in the early 1980s. Black activists, citing the fact that minorities with superior physiques were always relegated to second place or consoled with "most muscular man" awards, frequently charged racial discrimination, while the sport's predominantly white officials claimed that such criteria as symmetry, hygiene, athleticism, character, posing ability, and proper speech were also important in choosing a Mr. America. Hence no African-American won this prestigious title until 1970. Obviously the civil rights movement, changing societal norms, and a new set of rules stressing physical appearance had much to do with the fact that five more Blacks would win the title by 1982. The nagging question, however, remained about how much color consciousness weighed on decisions of the governing bodies of the Amateur Athletic Union throughout this period and whether idealistic views of American manhood were sacrificed in the process, particularly when the corresponding Miss America pageant in the 1970s increasingly placed more emphasis on talent and intelligence and less on physical appearance.

Only one scholar, Kenneth R. Dutton, in The Perfectible Body, The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development, has studied race within the broader context of the physical culture movement, but only partially and with scant reference to the Mr. America contest. But racial differences in physique and the way American culture reacts to diversity in appearance continues to attract much attention and debate, both within and outside the Academy. By drawing upon original sources from numerous physical culture magazines of the period, interviews, and manuscripts from the Todd-McLean Collection at the University of Texas, this study forthrightly addresses this sensitive and potentially controversial issue.
