

The Spornosexual: Representation, Sports, and Masculinity

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## Abstract

### The Spornosexual: Representation, Sports, and Masculinity

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Society continuously changes the parameters of what constitutes the ideal male form and thus the preferred notion of masculinity. The definition of masculinity itself is simultaneously a place in gender relations, practices through which men and women express their position in said gender relations, and the effects those practices have on culture, bodily experiences, and personality. The prevailing image of hegemonic masculinity disseminated by the contemporary visual culture is one of athleticism, virility, and dominance. Coined the ‘spornosexual’ by journalist Mark Simpson, the term refers to a second-generation metrosexual: a man who previously aimed to be admired for his well-groomed appearance and fashion sense now seeks adoration for a muscular body often modeled after athletes from others while simultaneously self-fetishizing said body. Taking a formalist, semiotic, and social constructivist approach to my research, I demonstrate that the spornosexual persona is the latest iteration of a recurring male archetype meant to reaffirm the dominance of white heterosexual men at times when their position is threatened. I posit that contemporary popular culture has re-appropriated past iterations of masculinity, archetypes if you will, that have proven to be successful in the reaffirmation of male heterosexual dominance. Visual representations range from Eugen Sandow (1867-1925), Bob Mizer’s 1950’s Beefcake, to fashion advertisement campaigns by Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, D. Hedral, Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani, and Dirk Bikkembergs.

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## Introduction

Society continuously changes the parameters of what constitutes the ideal male form and thus the preferred notion of masculinity. As Mark H. Moss argues: “Ideas of what constitute the cultural offerings of masculinity or the physical parameters of maleness are those that often evolve on a continuum.”<sup>1</sup> Although historically, one type is held as the preferred form of masculinity at a time, many scholars including R. W. Connell, Frank C. Mort, Tim Edwards, and Mark H. Moss, among others, agree that multiple forms of masculinity can and do exist simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> The contemporary iteration of ideal, hegemonic masculinity, the spornosexual as coined by journalist Mark Simpson, is meant to convey notions of virility and dominance. What makes the spornosexual so visually appealing? The figure is a hypersexualized form of masculinity inspired by the sports and porn industries that demonstrates an obsession with exposing the musculature of his own body. Modelling his body after those of professional athletes, he aspires to sculpt his body into an object worthy of adoration. A character obsessed with his physique who enjoys being admired and desired by men and women, he is also particularly concerned with establishing himself as a devout heterosexual. I propose that the spornosexual is not, in fact, a new figure but rather has clear historical precedence. Newly defined by Simpson, the spornosexual has largely been ignored by scholars to date. As a result, the term cannot be used in

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<sup>1</sup> Mark H. Moss, *The Media and the Models of Masculinity* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity* (London New York: Routledge, 2006).

Mark H. Moss, *The Media and the Models of Masculinity* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011).

Frank C. Mort, “Boy’s Own? Masculinity, Style and Popular Culture,” in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, edited by R. Chapman and J. Rutherford, 193-224. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988).



association with any examples of historical precedence. What are some of these historical precedents and what social, political, health, and economical events contributed to the archetypes' popularity in each era? With its roots in eugenics, this form of hegemonic masculinity can be found in modern history with nineteenth-century strongmen like Eugen Sandow and the 1950s beefcake. Sandow epitomises the bodybuilder aesthetic that is a cornerstone of the contemporary spornosexual. This aesthetic would next rise in popularity during the post-war era with the character of the beefcake, hence my inclusion of this figure in my discussion. The homosexual was also established as a complete character type during the same time period as Sandow's professional career which is significant considering the roles homoeroticism and homosociality play in my thesis. Why do men continuously return to this archetype? Taking a social constructionist and semiotic approach to my research, I hope to explain why Western society finds the heroic archetype so visually appealing and thus continuously returns to it as a source of comfort. Fashion houses have capitalised on his growing popularity by employing professional athletes that have the physique desired by spornosexuals in their campaigns. In their advertisements, the semi-naked male body is transformed into an object of consumer culture. The "over sexualization of sports personalities within advertising," as Christopher Breward describes, is a cornerstone of contemporary fashion underwear advertising.<sup>3</sup> While historically, men's underwear was seen as solely utilitarian and thus often marketed for their performance when playing sports, this has since changed beginning in the 1970s when fashion designers entered the market and began touting their products' fashionable appearances.<sup>4</sup> Visual representations of the spornosexual will be taken from fashion advertisements by fashion

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<sup>3</sup> Ligaya Salazar, eds. *Fashion v. Sport* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 100.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Jobling, *Man Appeal: Advertising, Modernism and Men's Wear* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2005), 121, 125.

designers Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani, D. Hedral, and Dirk Bikkembergs which feature professional athletes Tom Hintnaus, Karl Frederik Ljungberg, Rafael Nadal, Italy's national football team, Terrell Owens, Thom Evans, and Andrea Vasa, respectively, as their models. While women feature as spokespersons for such brands in advertising campaigns, they cannot be described as spornosexuals as the term refers exclusively to men and so are not the subject of this thesis. In the same vein, images prevalent on social media platforms like Instagram are purposefully excluded here to emphasize the unattainability and unrealistic standards set by the spornosexual. Fashion advertisements for underwear and swimwear, where the spornosexual features prominently, are heavily edited. As a result, images of the male body featured in advertisements cannot reflect those found in everyday life. Here, focus is on the intersection between fashion, marketing, and sports, and as such I do not delve into the world of social media.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Definitions of Masculinity**

The field of men's studies is relatively new with many scholars pointing to the rise of second-wave feminism as the catalyst for its inception.<sup>6</sup> The notion of masculinity has traditionally been perceived as a seemingly unmarked and self-evident category and thus not worthy of scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> Historian and philosopher Elisabeth Badinter has found that models of masculinity have not changed much over the past few centuries. According to Badinter, the modern man

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<sup>5</sup> Photographs posted on social media could be classified as imitations of those disseminated first by mainstream media and the analysis of original ground-breaking imagery is of more value to my topic.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, (2006), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert L. Sussman, *Masculine Identities: The History and Meanings of Manliness* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 1.

must adhere to four “imperatives”: 1) a man “must” be a man and not a “sissy”; 2) always be competitive and willing to demonstrate their superiority publicly; 3) be detached and impassive; and 4) be willing to take risks even under the threat of danger or violence.<sup>8</sup> The rise of feminism and its focus on gender problematized the way society classifies masculinity. Masculinity is often described simply as the opposite of femininity with the latter consistently associated with weakness.<sup>9</sup> Masculinity is thus associated with notions of strength. Scholars in the mid-twentieth century expanded on this concept of binaries with the introduction of the sex role theory, claiming that to be a man or a woman is the culmination of “a general set of expectations” associated with one’s sex, hence the name sex role theory.<sup>10</sup> Such expectations, which are acquired through social learning, are in turn internalised and outwardly expressed as masculinity and femininity.<sup>11</sup> The notion that sex roles and thus masculinity are internalised means that there is room for social change. However, sex role theory is not without its limitations. It has been accused of placing too much emphasis on people’s social behaviour (their occupations, age, and political status for example) while devaluing the effects of social inequality and power (economic class, race, etc.).<sup>12</sup> Instead of pigeon-holing masculinity as the result of a binary, it would be more accurate to state that there can be many different types of masculinity. After all, not all men are masculine just like not all women are feminine. R. W. Connell encounters this

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<sup>8</sup> Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 4.

<sup>9</sup> “[Alfred Adler’s argument started from the familiar polarity between masculinity and femininity, but immediately emphasized the feminist point that one side of the polarity is devalued in culture and associated with weakness.” (Connell, 16).

<sup>10</sup> Connell, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Connell, 26.

issue when attempting to establish a single, unifying, and all-encompassing definition of “masculinity” stating that the term has an underlying connection to notions of gender.<sup>13</sup>

Connell’s most comprehensive definition of masculinity is as follows:

Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioural average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. ‘Masculinity’, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of those practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.<sup>14</sup>

Connell acknowledges that there are many facets to masculinity and includes them all in the definition. Accordingly, masculinity is not just a product of one’s appearance or mannerisms. Instead, it is an amalgamation of gender relations, the activities and practices men and women use to express their place in said relations, and the effects those practices have on people’s personality, culture, and lived experience, all of which affect the way society perceives one’s appearance and behaviour.

While multiple forms of masculinity can exist simultaneously, one form tends to develop into the one most widely expressed. Derived from the work of Antonio Gramsci on class relations, the term hegemony “refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life.”<sup>15</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is, therefore, the dominant, preferred, idealized form of masculinity at any given time. Traditionally, academia and popular culture have ensured that any discourse regarding hegemonic masculinity remains completely

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<sup>13</sup> Connell, 3-6.

<sup>14</sup> Connell, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Connell, 77.

and compulsorily heterosexual in nature.<sup>16</sup> Any discussion of the spornosexual by the public is set to reaffirm the dominance of heterosexual men. As many scholars will attest, one's masculinity must constantly, almost ritualistically, be defended and preserved, if not it will, as Gilbert Herdt and Robert Stoller put it, "fade away."<sup>17</sup> The muscularity of the spornosexual in general is a commonly used trope for defining masculinity in Western culture.<sup>18</sup> While the acknowledgement and recognition of diverse types of male bodies have increased in recent years, men still feel pressure to conform to hegemonic norms. After all, it is not uncommon for a person's sense of worth and value to be tied to their physical appearance. As a result, no matter how unrealistic hegemonic attributes may be, men continue to internalise and use them to judge themselves as well as other men.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Social Constructionist Methodological Approach**

Despite Connell's definition of masculinity encompassing more than just a person's physical appearance or behaviour, the term remains inextricably linked to the male body. This is especially true in casual conversations where masculinity is often seen as a natural progression from men's bodies, being something inherent to it or expressing a physical trait of said body.<sup>20</sup> Such a limited view is problematic. After all, not all male bodies are in fact masculine nor does

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<sup>16</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and Raewyn Connell, eds. *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 271.

<sup>17</sup> Franco La Cecla, "Rough Manners: How Men are Made." in *Material Man: Masculinity, Sexuality, Style*, ed. Giannino Malossi, (New York: Abrams, 2000), 40.

<sup>18</sup> "Wienke (1998) discussed the centrality of muscularity in defining hegemonic masculinity in American popular culture." (Kimmel et.al, 275)

<sup>19</sup> Kimmel et.al., 373.

<sup>20</sup> Connell, 45.

the male gender have exclusive rights to the descriptor.<sup>21</sup> There are two opposing scholarly approaches, comparable to the nature vs. nurture debate, used to discuss the male body and masculinity. The first combines dominant ideology with biology.<sup>22</sup> Theorists that utilise this approach believe that the body is a machine that creates gender difference through the production of hormones, genetic programming, and the act of reproduction.<sup>23</sup> The second approach, social constructivism (used primarily in the humanities and social sciences) identifies the body as a *tabula rasa*. Rather than believing that anything may be inherent to the male body, this second approach claims that the body is a blank and neutral surface onto which social symbolism, meaning societal norms, needs, and desires, is written.<sup>24</sup> In the complete opposite, social constructionism is the belief that the body is a canvas filled by social determinism.<sup>25</sup> This means that social, cultural, and psychological processes all have an effect on the creation of gender.<sup>26</sup> If that is true then that suggests gender is constantly adapting to society's ever-changing value systems. When speaking about men in terms of their sex, the definition of manliness remains limited to the realm of biology. It is when notions of gender come into play that social expectations and outside influences have any effect.<sup>27</sup> In an attempt to reconcile the two

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<sup>21</sup> Edwards, (2006), 123.

<sup>22</sup> Connell, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Connell, 50.

<sup>26</sup> Kimmel et.al, 370.

<sup>27</sup> Connell, 45.

approaches, Connell has proposed that both biology and social influence have an effect on the production of gender identities and difference.<sup>28</sup>

This approach to masculinity has its roots in the psychological works of Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler.<sup>29</sup> Their theories in psychoanalysis “demonstrated that adult character was not predetermined by the body but was constructed, through emotional attachments to others, in a turbulent process of growth.”<sup>30</sup> This is a point of convergence between psychoanalysis and social constructivism as both claim that socialization with other men as well as societal expectations would affect a man’s character, and thus his level of masculinity, throughout his development.

The belief that masculinity is a product of social constructivism, which is the approach taken in my thesis, leads to the work of Judith Butler on gender performativity. Butler’s notion of gender performativity sounds eerily similar to that of social constructivism. She states that “[t]he view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike during a performance in a film or play, there is no separation between the person and the persona.<sup>32</sup> One could say that gender performativity is the internalisation of social expectations while social constructivism is the acknowledgement of this relationship between the external world and a person’s internal psyche. As Herbert L. Sussman freely admits, a man’s

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<sup>28</sup> Connell, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Kimmel et.al, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Reference to Connell’s (1994) discussion on Freud and Adler by Kimmel et.al.

<sup>31</sup> Sussman, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Edwards, (2006), 87.

entire sense of self is created through his association with other men.<sup>33</sup> The term homosocial has historically been used to describe instances where people of the same sex develop social bonds.<sup>34</sup> Eve K. Sedgwick argues that homosexual desires are not present in homosocial relationships but that homophobia often links the two together.<sup>35</sup> Instead, homosocial relationships, which have “obligatory heterosexuality” built into the structure, are more likely to be used to foster and promote what she calls the interests of men. Educational, recreational, and religious institutions are established to provide opportunities for homosocial behaviour allowing men to perpetuate and maintain socially acceptable behaviour and ideologies. Men are encouraged, and in fact pressured, to perform their masculinity through their participation in organized sports, their careers, and their sexual conquests.<sup>36</sup> Participation in sports, usually a homosocial activity, reinforces normative gender relations such as the exclusion and/or domination of women as well as a sense of competition and hierarchy among men.<sup>37</sup> What causes some confusion is that in performing acts that demonstrate masculinity, the line between real and ‘unreal’ or artificial masculinity is blurred. One can no longer tell the difference between “acting or *doing* masculine and *being* masculine.”<sup>38</sup> Homosocial activities provide opportunities for men to repeatedly

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<sup>33</sup> Sussman, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Eve K. Sedgwick, Introduction to *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, by Eve K. Sedgwick, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Sedgwick, (1985), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards, (2006), 92.

<sup>37</sup> Connell, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Edwards, (2006), 99.



perform their masculinity until they cannot tell the difference between a performance and a genuine expression of masculinity.

### **Homoeroticism**

In many ways, while a cornerstone of the spornosexual is his heterosexuality, he owes much to both the representation of homosexual men and the homoerotic imagery prevalent in all his iterations. Images meant to evoke or portray homosexual desire, much remains unsaid in the analysis of homoerotic imagery. The homoerotic connotations of the spornosexual bring to mind Michael Hatt's analysis of Thomas Eakins's *The Swimming Hole* (1885). In his article "The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins' *The Swimming Hole* as a Homoerotic Image," Hatt navigates through the homoerotic undertones of the painting. The male bodies presented in the work are on display for the scrutiny and the pleasure of the male gaze.<sup>39</sup> According to Hatt, for a male nude to be validated all traces of eroticism must be refuted or concealed. Such efforts to conceal these kinds of desires only serve to reproduce and valorise them.<sup>40</sup> Homoeroticism is the tool used to separate and create a clear boundary between the homosexual and the homosocial.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, to create a boundary calls attention to it and the close connection between the two sides. As a result, "the homoerotic cannot be named, not least because of the

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Hatt, "The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins' *The Swimming Hole* as a Homoerotic Image," *Journal of Philosophy and Visual Arts* (1993): 11.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines homoerotic as, "pertaining to or characterised by a tendency for erotic emotions to be centred on a person of the same sex." (Hatt, 12)

<sup>40</sup> Hatt, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Hatt, 13.

way it opens up the field of desire and makes the social/sexual division untenable.”<sup>42</sup> Hatt goes on to identify four major approaches to the containment and mitigation of desire: writing self-consciously within a discipline that can give a legitimate reason for the male-on-male gaze other than that of desire; claiming the gaze is being perpetrated by a female; claiming a purely aesthetic response by reducing the body to a mere representation; lastly, employing hierarchies that would categorise the body as an ‘other’ and thus legitimize the gaze as a tool of power. These approaches can be taken equally by scholars, writers, and the public in due course when they encounter a contentious image of this kind. The homoeroticism in the images of spornosexuals presented in this essay employs the first method: it mitigates any desire a man may feel for the male model/athlete’s body by framing it within the realms of sport, fashion, and advertising. Consumers can then safely distance themselves from any claim of homosexual desires by claiming they either desire the product (the underwear), are fans of the sport the athlete is famous for, or admire his athletic abilities, not the man’s physical appearance.

If masculinity is indeed socially constructed then there can be multiple types and expressions of masculinity at any given time, or what Frank Mort describes as “plurality.”<sup>43</sup> Society’s views on what constitutes the ideal form of masculinity change and evolve over time.<sup>44</sup> Archetypes depicted in and disseminated by the mass media and popular culture help define masculinity and provide ideals for men to look up to.<sup>45</sup> The bar for what type of body men are

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Frank C. Mort, “Crisis Points: Masculinities in History and Social Theory,” *Gender and History* 6, no. 1 (1994): 125.

<sup>44</sup> Moss, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Moss, 2.

ideally supposed to possess is set unrealistically high by models, athletes, and celebrities and yet they continue to strive for it. “It is fundamental to recognize as well, that masculine identity often latches on to established and proven male archetypes in some form or another.”<sup>46</sup> The conception and reconception of familiar male archetypes demonstrate their longevity and are a source of comfort at specific conjunctures.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, it is not unreasonable to think that the latest archetype presented as the ideal within popular culture, the spornosexual, has a past. Each iteration of the archetype may have tweaked its look but its characteristics remain carefully constructed and curated every time.

### **Sports and Fashion**

The relationship between organized sports and high fashion is relatively new. First occurring during the 1990 World Cup, the host country of Italy found itself to be the new emblem of style, fashion, and spectacle at the end of the event.<sup>48</sup> Notably, Giorgio Armani provided a press package featuring the country’s athletes dressed in his suits.<sup>49</sup> This novel symbiotic relationship was remarked upon by the attending press and helped cement Italy’s identity as the most stylish country for men’s fashion. British garment companies took inspiration from the 1990 event, following its example by dressing athletes in their designs. Storm, a British model agency based in London, began signing professional soccer players in 1995.<sup>50</sup> The rise in popularity of men’s

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<sup>46</sup> Moss, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Moss, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Stella Bruzzi, “The Italian Job: Football, Fashion and that Sarong,” in *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations, and Analysis*, edited by Pamela C. Gibson and Stella Bruzzi, (London New York: Routledge, 2000), 286.

<sup>49</sup> Bruzzi, 287.

<sup>50</sup> Bruzzi, 288.

health and lifestyle magazines happened as models and actors began emulating their athlete counterparts in the media. Magazines like these represent and mobilize cultural shifts in masculinity.<sup>51</sup> The Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) found that such magazines disseminated in the United Kingdom have seen an increase in readership from under 100,000 copies of four titles in 1990 to at least a dozen titles selling 500,000 copies each by the early 2000s.<sup>52</sup> New magazine titles include *FHM (For Him Magazine)* (Spring/Summer 1985) and *Men's Health* (1986).<sup>53</sup> Tim Edwards has noticed, however, that while these magazines may be geared toward men and may be constructed around so-called 'men's interests', they are rarely about men themselves – save male celebrities.<sup>54</sup> Instead, they act as tools of inspiration providing aspirational models of health, beauty, and masculinity. It is also important to keep in mind the men that own and control said media outlets that perpetuate images of hegemonic masculinity. The majority of the global media industry is owned by privileged, able-bodied, and white middle-aged men.<sup>55</sup> While they are not the male bodies on display they do control which image of masculinity is consumed by the masses. One feature of the spornosexual that remains unremarked by Simpson's definition is the archetype's skin colour. However, this characteristic cannot be ignored. The vast majority of men featured in these advertisements are caucasian

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<sup>51</sup> Bethan Benwell, *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, (2006): 32.

<sup>53</sup> Dates taken from: <http://www.ericmusgrave.co.uk/index.php/archive/blog/the-launch-issue-of-for-him-magazine/> and <https://www.menshealth.com/trending-news/a19538781/first-mens-health-cover/>.

Mark Moss reports that *Men's Health* alone has seen an increase in circulation from 250,000 copies sold per month during the early 1990s to 1.5 million by the end of the decade. (Moss, 22)

<sup>54</sup> Edwards, (2006): 33.

<sup>55</sup> Kimmel et.al., 278.

which Richard Dyer argues is itself a race. As Dyer explains, “[a] person is deemed visibly white because of a quite complicated interaction of elements, of which flesh tones within the pink to beige range are only one: the shape of nose, eyes and lips, the colour and set of hair, even body shape may all be mobilised to determine someone’s ‘colour’.”<sup>56</sup> Where such categorization is typically seen as a sign of privilege and colonial power, Dyer writes that the act of seeing whites as a race removes them from a position of power and authority.<sup>57</sup> If white people are just people, this affords them a certain amount of privilege thus allowing them to create “the dominant images of the world” just as the men who control the global media industry control which images are disseminated to the public.<sup>58</sup> The visibility of white men facilitated by these publications is, according to Satya Mohanty, another crucial step in asserting their “ability to command respect and fear in the subject race.”<sup>59</sup> The spornosexual, an example of white masculinity, is constantly asserting and maintaining his dominance. His entire appearance is cultivated to impart an air of control and power.

### **The Spornosexual**

Coined by British journalist Mark Simpson in 2014, the spornosexual is a man who longs to be admired for his muscular, often semi-nude if not nude displayed body. Simpson describes the type as having “painstakingly pumped and chiselled bodies, muscle-enhancing tattoos, piercings, adorable beards and plunging necklines” to the point that “[t]heir own bodies ... have become

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (London New York: Routledge, 1997), 42.

<sup>57</sup> Dyer, (1997), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Dyer, (1997), 9, 44.

<sup>59</sup> Satya Mohanty (1991: 315) quoted by Dyer, (1997), 44.

the ultimate accessories, fashioning them at the gym into a hot commodity...”<sup>60</sup> Yet, a perfect body is not enough for the spornosexual. Simpson claims that “[t]o get our attention these days the sporting male body has to promise us nothing less than an immaculately groomed, waxed and pumped gang-bang in the showers.”<sup>61</sup> The spornosexual, unlike its predecessor the metrosexual, wants to be desired for his body and not for his fashion sense. This framework corroborates with that of the homoerotic as previously discussed. Simpson describes the metrosexual as a young man with money to burn, living in a metropolitan city so as to be near clubs, gyms, fashionable stores, and hairdressers.<sup>62</sup> The metrosexual is so conscious of his image, so vain, that Simpson has claimed that no sexual partner could supercede the relationship he has with his own reflection.<sup>63</sup> There is a certain level of narcissism showcased by spornosexuals. A narcissist is a person that is self-absorbed to the point of that he excludes everyone that surrounds him.<sup>64</sup> A narcissist is preoccupied with stemming any traces of ageing through rigorous control and self-

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<sup>60</sup> Mark Simpson, “The Metrosexual is Dead. Long Live the ‘Spornosexual’,” *The Telegraph*, June 10, 2014 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/fashion-and-style/10881682/The-metrosexual-is-dead.-Long-live-the-spornosexual.html>).

<sup>61</sup> Mark Simpson, “Sporno,” in *Metrosexy: A 21st Century Self-Love Story*, (self-pub., CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013): 60.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Simpson, “Meet the Metrosexual.” *The Salon*, July 22, 2002.  
<http://www.salon.com/2002/07/22/metrosexual/>.

<sup>63</sup> In 1996, Mark Simpson wrote, “Metrosexual man might prefer women, he might prefer men, but when all’s said and done nothing comes between him and his reflection.” (Edwards, (2006), 37).

<sup>64</sup> Alan M. Klein, *Little Big Men: Bodybuilding Subculture and Gender Construction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 205.

mastery.<sup>65</sup> Simpson theorises that the narcissism exhibited by both the metrosexual and the spornosexual has developed as a sort of survival tactic due to women's increased independence.<sup>66</sup> As women entered the workforce *en force* in the 1980s they became less reliant on men for financial stability. As a result, Simpson hypothesises that men felt increased pressure to tend to their physical appearances so as to make themselves more attractive partners. After all, "the more independent, wealthy, self-centered and powerful women become, the more they are likely to want attractive, well-groomed, well-dressed men around them."<sup>67</sup> This change in social norms is the cause of what many scholars have identified as a crisis in masculinity.<sup>68</sup> Beauty is historically a quality women were meant to embody.<sup>69</sup> To possess women who held such beauty was something men were taught they must do.<sup>70</sup> This dance between men and women was believed to be both completely natural and necessary for evolution.<sup>71</sup> Naomi Wolf disagrees with this assessment and instead provides the notion of 'The Beauty Myth' as an alternative. Beauty, she contends, is simply a currency system used to maintain male dominance and like any other system is determined by politics and other institution or practices of power.<sup>72</sup> The metrosexual and the spornosexual have both subverted the so-called 'Beauty Myth' using the same value

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<sup>65</sup> Klein, 206.

<sup>66</sup> Simpson, (2002).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Klein, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Naomi Wolf, "Chapter 1: The Beauty Myth." In *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, INC., 1991), 12.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Wolf, 12-3.

system. The value of a human being continues to be determined by their beauty. The only difference is that now both women and men feel pressured to embody beauty.

The spornosexual has little use for many of the amenities (stores, clubs, hairdressers, etc.) considered crucial by his predecessor – save the gym of course. Derived from the words “sport” and “porn,” the term denotes both the interests of the identity type and a source of inspiration; spornosexuals are both interested in watching and participating in sports activities while turning their bodies into semi-pornographic images of desire. Many young men discover early on that sports provide opportunities to enjoy both the company of other men and the spectacle of their bodies in a socially acceptable fashion.<sup>73</sup> Sports not only help men cultivate the desired physique it gives the public licence to admire their bodies, which is exactly what spornosexuals want.<sup>74</sup> They also draw inspiration from the bodies of professional athletes when sculpting their own. Simpson took the second-half of the name, “porn,” from the tone taken by many images featuring spornosexuals. Pornography transformed into a global industry worth over \$US97 billion with the rise of the internet during the 1990s.<sup>75</sup> The internet made pornographic images and videos easily accessible to the masses. The pervasiveness of such media has allowed men

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<sup>73</sup> Mark Simpson, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 73.

<sup>74</sup> Sports also form a cornerstone of lad culture, a subculture that gain prevalence in Britain, the same place the spornosexual was coined, during the 1990s. Participants in lad culture are typically young men who enjoy watching sports, particularly ‘football’, and behave in a brash manner. For more information see Carolyn Jackson’s *Lads and Ladettes in School: Gender and a Fear of Failure* (2006), *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines* (2003) by Bethan Benwell ed., and Frank C. Mort’s *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth Century Britain* (1996).

<sup>75</sup> Patrick Keilty, “Desire by Design: Pornography as Technology Industry.” *Porn Studies* (July 2018): n.p. accessed July 10, 2018. DOI: 10.1080/23268743.2018.1483208.



and women to consume porn from a young and impressionable age thus shaping the way they treat these objectifying representation of men and masculinity. Most photographs taken by and of spornosexuals are likely to feature men partially if not fully naked. Viewers are meant to admire and desire the men posing in these photographs. As a means of enticing the viewer, and thus increase the chances their images will be shared and disseminated widely online, on screen, and in print, many of these photographs are erotically charged – some could even be described as borderline pornographic. Simpson remarks that the metrosexual tried his best to remain coy with his sexual imagery, slyly taking inspiration from gay soft porn.<sup>76</sup> The spornosexual has no such qualms and so finds his inspiration from gay hardcore porn.<sup>77</sup> However, it remains a possibility, which teases the viewer, because spornographic images are not in fact pornography.<sup>78</sup> Scholars have also described muscles as being phallic. A phallus cannot simply be defined as a penis – the term also encompasses the amount of reverence one treats it with.<sup>79</sup> One must treat the organ with a certain amount of “majesty,” as Susan Bordo claims, for it to be considered a phallus.<sup>80</sup> In addition to being proof of physical activity and a sign of achievement, muscles are by definition hard.<sup>81</sup> Unlike women who are typically described as being soft and round, the value ascribed to muscles comes from their hard lines and angular shapes.<sup>82</sup> Muscles are also used as an

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<sup>76</sup> Simpson, (2013): 60.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), 101.

<sup>80</sup> Bordo, 87, 101.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Dyer, “Don’t Look Now.” *Screen* 23, no. 3 (1982): 71.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

expression of power and prowess. According to feminist author Margaret Walters, the phallic quality of men's muscles does not come from their hardness' supposed direct metaphor for an erect penis, as one might think, but for their abstract representation of paternal power. Richard Dyer goes so far as to say that the celebration of muscular bodies is also a celebration of Western society's affluence considering the amount of time needed, and thus available, to develop a body "for its own sake."<sup>83</sup> Only a man with copious amounts of free time, or those whose employment is predicated on a muscular body such as bodybuilders, models, actors, and athletes, would be able to put so much time and effort into something that had no specific use or benefit. The body of a spornosexual is a fantasy presented as a characteristic some men are inherently born with. In reality, it requires a lot of work and effort to cultivate and maintain that look equivalent to a second job.

In their never-ending quest for the perfect body, some men have found success by entering the world of bodybuilding. A sport predicated on the display of their bodies, bodybuilders essentially create a body they desire while simultaneously escaping one that he loathes.<sup>84</sup> In a space with so many bodies on display, bodybuilders transform themselves into their own objects of desire to combat any possibility of their developing a desire for another man's body.<sup>85</sup> In his book *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity*, Mark Simpson postulates this is the reason why all gyms catering to the community are filled to the brim with mirrors not to mention the importance placed on posing during bodybuilding competitions.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Dyer, (1982): 68.

<sup>84</sup> Simpson, (1994), 30.

<sup>85</sup> Simpson, (1994), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Simpson goes on to state that bodybuilders are encouraged to channel any homoerotic charge attributed to the sport into narcissism, narcissism which ironically is often seen as a precursor to homosexuality.<sup>87</sup>

Images of spornosexuals can be disseminated using a variety of media, most notably those categorised as social media platforms. The most popular social media outlet used among spornosexuals is without a doubt Instagram. As part of gym culture, spornosexuals are encouraged not only to exercise as often as they can to attain and maintain the desired physique but also to document their journey. As such, many men take photographs of themselves, and of their fellow spornosexual friends, working out in the gym and posing half-naked in front of the mirror to show off the results. These photographs are then uploaded through various social media platforms for the public to admire. Gyms provides an excuse for men to gaze at other men without the fear of reprisal. The gym, and sports in general, acts as a filter for all images of spornosexuals thus mitigating any homoerotic undertones. Sports spectatorship used to be the only socially acceptable vehicle for men to look at each other's bodies – they were able to do so at a safe enough distance so as to avoid any accusations of homosexual desire or intent.<sup>88</sup> Oliver Winchester claims that this is possible because the sporting body is rendered asexual, pure, and god-like in its embodiment of ideal beauty.<sup>89</sup> Simpson argues that the spornosexual does not care if he was admired by women or other men – he wants to turn everyone on.<sup>90</sup> All that matters to him is that he is admired.

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<sup>87</sup> Simpson, (1994), 32.

<sup>88</sup> Salazar, 103.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Simpson, (2013), 61.

The images of men depicted in men's health and lifestyle magazines invite the reader to view the male body as an "object of consumer desire" something that has previously been considered taboo.<sup>91</sup> "Cut close-up focus on bum, torso, crutch and thighs follows standard techniques of the sexual display of women in advertising over the last forty years. But now the target is men."<sup>92</sup> Historian of masculinity Frank C. Mort asserts that it is the display of the body through a product and not solely the body itself that makes such images erotic.<sup>93</sup> Specifically, he describes a scene in which a man wearing belted, button-fly jeans that have fallen to his thighs gets into a bath.<sup>94</sup> He argues that in such cases, what makes the image erotic is not necessarily the flesh beneath the jeans but rather the teasing nature of the clothing obscuring the body. In addition to an image's setting, position, and the model's manner of dress, one must also take the male model's facial expression into consideration. While a female model averting her eyes may be used to suggest an air of modesty the same cannot be said for men.<sup>95</sup> A male model looking off to the side is meant to suggest an interest in something or someone the viewer cannot see while a male model gazing upwards is often used to project an air of spirituality or intellect.<sup>96</sup> To be looked at is still considered a passive and thus feminine pose. The display of underwear also occupies this liminal space between protecting and revealing the phallic power of men as described by Freud.<sup>97</sup> To combat any notion of passivity, images of men often depict them in the

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<sup>91</sup> Mort, (1988), 194.

<sup>92</sup> Mort, (1988), 201.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Dyer, (1982): 63.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Jobling, 128-9.

midst of completing an action or activity.<sup>98</sup> Posing with other men as if participating in bonding activities, such as sports, or with a female companion serve to assert their heterosexuality.<sup>99</sup> Even when the male model is seemingly lounging his muscles are taut as if to emphasize the fact that he is ready to jump into action if so required.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, this straining or striving upwards is a common trope used to describe male sexuality in Western cultures.<sup>101</sup> Such imagery owes much to the mainstream media's more recent acceptance of homosexual culture. From hooking fingers into beltloops and wasitbands, flexing one's arms over your head, to twisting hips in order to emphasize abdominal muscles, many of the poses and gestures used in mainstream advertising are based on those used in homosexual communities to demonstrate sexual desire.<sup>102</sup> One could argue that the spornosexual was partially modelled after the muscular homosexual male persona of the 1970s Gay Clone.<sup>103</sup> The Gay Clones adapted the archetype after the Gay Liberation movement when homosexual men began seeing themselves as masculine instead of inherently effeminate.<sup>104</sup> They expressed this shift by emphasizing their masculintiy blatantly. Lynne Luciano posits that this masculinization of gay culture was an effect

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<sup>98</sup> Dyer, (1982): 66-67.

<sup>99</sup> Kimmel et.al., 283.

<sup>100</sup> Dyer, (1982): 67.

<sup>101</sup> Dyer, (1982): 63.

<sup>102</sup> Jobling, 129.

<sup>103</sup> Moss, 39. The hyper-masculine homosexual persona, known as "the Gay Clone", was popular during the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s as effeminate homosexuals were rejected by large parts of the gay community. The clone was characterised by his plaid shirt, leather jacket, and button-fly jeans. (Edwards, (2006): 70, 75)

<sup>104</sup> Shaun Cole, "'Macho Man': Clones and the Development of a Masculine Stereotype," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 2 (2000): 125-6.

of the Stonewall riots.<sup>105</sup> The continual harassment of homosexuals by the New York police department culminated in the riots of 1969.<sup>106</sup> Lasting five days, the riots became part of a larger social movement along with the civil rights and feminist movements.<sup>107</sup> After the riots, gay men were emboldened to look for companionship overtly. Their physical appearance, from their musculature to the way they dressed, was meant to communicate both their sexual availability and personal preferences.<sup>108</sup> Clones took inspiration from what Shaun Cole describes as “traditional images of rugged masculinity.”<sup>109</sup> They dressed in form-fitting Levi jeans that emphasised their behind and revealed the contour of their genitals, tight T-shirts, plaid shirts, hooded sweatshirts, bomber jackets, and lace-up work boots.<sup>110</sup> Clones also became known for a particular style of grooming showing a preference for short hair and full moustaches.<sup>111</sup> Every clothing item and grooming choice was chosen carefully for the express purpose of enhancing sex appeal.

In his seminal article, “Meet the Metrosexual” (2002), Simpson himself states that the Gay Clone provided a prototype for the metrosexual.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the spornosexual has also been

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<sup>105</sup> Luciano, 153.

<sup>106</sup> *Britannica Academic*, s.v. “Stonewall Riots,” accessed May 13, 2018, <https://0-academic-eb-com.mercury.concordia.ca/levels/collegiate/article/Stonewall-riots/473397>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Cole, (2000): 133.

<sup>109</sup> Cole, (2000): 128.

<sup>110</sup> Cole, (2000): 128, 130.

<sup>111</sup> Cole, (2000): 128.

<sup>112</sup> Simpson, (2002).

described as a reaction and rejection of the effeminate homosexual.<sup>113</sup> Men are meant to gaze at these images of men and find them appealing enough to buy the products being sold. However, there is a fine line men are expected to straddle; they cannot find the models/athletes too appealing because then they could be labelled homosexuals for which they would be publically shamed. The increase of homoerotic imagery in the mainstream media seems to run parallel to the rise of homophobia; they are trapped in a never-ending cycle of self-reinforcement where the increase of one seems to strengthen the other.<sup>114</sup> The past few years have seen the increased acceptance of homosexuality by mainstream Western society. As a result, we would like to think that homophobia is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, due in no small part to homophobia and the effects of the homosocial, spornosexuals continuously exclaiming that they are ‘not gay’, as if being so was something shameful, disprove that assertion. Men are also confronted with an ideal that though unrealistic for the majority of the population to realise, they are meant to strive for. Guy Garcia touches on this phenomena in regards to Calvin Klein’s adaptation of the spornosexual but his writing is applicable to all the fashion campaigns included in my thesis. When recalling the development of Klein’s new advertising practice, Garcia describes its reception as follows:

When Calvin Klein figured out in the eighties that eroticized images of muscular men would sell underwear to men and women, straight and gay, he not only let the macho gay aesthetic out of the closet and into the shopping mall, he opened the door to the not-so-brave new world of straight male neurosis. As it became acceptable for near-naked male bodies to be ogled in ads and in the media, most men only felt a creeping sense of self-consciousness and inadequacy. While images of men had changed, masculine codes of behavior and sexuality had not. Masculinity had been repackaged but not fundamentally

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<sup>113</sup> Moss, 40.

<sup>114</sup> Sussman, 137.

altered: guys were still expected to act like men, but now they had to look like Olympic gods, too.<sup>115</sup>

Society pressures men to conform not only physically, in the sense that pressure is put on men to look a certain way, but also in terms of their sexual orientation. The spornosexual and its predecessor the metrosexual, with David Beckham as its iconic manifestation, are both identity types that are known to staunchly and loudly proclaim their heterosexuality and many have gone to great lengths to prove their heterosexuality. Boasting about their conquests and showing off female sexual partners are just two ways this can be done in their day-to-day lives. David Beckham is known to travel extensively with his wife and children, making sure to be photographed by their side as often as possible. Fashion designers have been known to take a similar approach in their advertisements whether they be in print or commercial form. A perfect example is D. Hedral's 2013 campaign featuring Scottish rugby player Thom Evans [Figure 1]. An advertisement for the D. Hedral's swimwear collection, Evans poses in a cove of some kind, sitting on a rock formation with his legs dangling in the clear blue water while a woman sits behind and slightly to the right of him with half her body hidden by his torso. The model, Paolla Rahmeier, wraps her body around Evans as much as she can without obscuring herself entirely. D. Hedral only sells clothing items for men so she cannot be there to model their wares. Rather, the entire reason for her presence in the campaign is to demonstrate Evans's appeal to women and assert his heterosexuality. Women who feature in advertising featuring groups of men are often the sole female in the image. In those cases, the woman is included in order to defuse any hint of intimacy between men, diluting the homoeroticism present in the image in order to reassure and reaffirm a heterosexual point of view.<sup>116</sup> Instead of a purely homosocial setting the

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<sup>115</sup> Moss, 134.

<sup>116</sup> Shaun Cole, *The Story of Men's Underwear* (New York: Parkstone International, 2010), 226.



viewer may infer that she is the object of desire present, not another man. The woman acts as the object of desire for both the men present in the image and the viewer.

The relationship between the homosexual and the heterosexual has been an area of interest throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims that Western culture as a whole is structured by the homosexual/heterosexual binary.<sup>117</sup> This binary can be traced back to the nineteenth century when the homosexual came into being.<sup>118</sup> According to Michel Foucault, “[t]he nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology.”<sup>119</sup> The sexual policing of the Victorian era transferred from acts of sodomy to a full-fledged character type; from a temporary act of misconduct to a permanent state of being.<sup>120</sup> New institutionalised ways of thinking encompassing medical, legal, literary, and psychological fields helped cement the definition of the homo/heterosexual binary.<sup>121</sup> Surprisingly, out of the many features that can be used to differentiate and categorise people, gender and sexual orientation became and have remained the defining factors in many people’s minds.<sup>122</sup> Though not every divisive characteristic is implicitly stated out loud, Sedgwick believes that silences can be just as powerful a strategy for shaping

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<sup>117</sup> Eve K. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (California: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>118</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Sedgwick, (2008), 2.

<sup>122</sup> Sedgwick, (2008), 8.

discourse.<sup>123</sup> She calls the silence “closetedness.”<sup>124</sup> Everything that remains unsaid creates moments of ambiguity that contemporary advertisements and historical figures like Sandow take advantage of.

### Eugenics and Eugen Sandow

The origins of the spornosexual can be found in the roots of eugenics which was practised by Western countries in one form or another between 1740 and 1945 when it gained notoriety for its connection with the Holocaust.<sup>125</sup> Defined as “the manipulation of the processes of evolutionary selection, in order to improve a particular genetic stock or [of a] population,”<sup>126</sup> eugenics was perpetuated through the ever-increasing level of importance placed on notions of fitness, health, hygiene, racial purity, and general wholesomeness of one’s heredity.<sup>127</sup> The manipulation of genetic material was used, often by state-run organizations, to “encourage people with desirable traits to have children and by encouraging people with undesirable traits not to procreate.”<sup>128</sup> Sybil Gotto from the United Kingdom, for example, founded the Eugenics Education Society

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<sup>123</sup> Sedgwick, (2008), 3.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Fae Brauer, “Introduction: Making Eugenic Bodies Delectable: Art, ‘Biopower’ and ‘Scientia Sexualis’,” in *Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delecti*, edited by Fae Brauer and Anthea Callen, (Aldershot, England Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 9.

<sup>126</sup> "Eugenics." In *A Dictionary of Sociology*, edited by Scott, John.: Oxford University Press, 2014. <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com/mercury.concordia.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199683581.001.0001/acref-9780199683581-e-759>.

<sup>127</sup> Brauer, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Calum MacKellar and Christopher Bechtel, eds., *The Ethics of the New Eugenics* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 1.

(EES) in the early twentieth century in an effort to reduce the high birth rate of the lowest socio-economic class.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, eugenics was embraced in the United States by religious leaders and the government under the guise of communal health with forced sterilization programs and a “statute [that] excluded from immigration to the United States ‘all idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded persons, epileptics, [and] insane persons.’”<sup>130</sup> While health and fitness were growing concerns among Europeans through the nineteenth century, the prevailing image of masculinity until the last quarter of the century was that of a “thin physique, pale complexion, and languid air.”<sup>131</sup> While there is no evidence that the spornosexual is interested in the manipulation of genetic material, both parties hold up the same body aesthetic as the ideal male form. As more Europeans and North Americans left their farms for an urban life and office work, they began searching for activities that would improve their health and their physical appearances.<sup>132</sup> Christian religious institutions took advantage of this trend by establishing Young Men’s Christian Associations in their communities which served to introduce Muscular Christianity, a practice weaving spirituality and physical health together.<sup>133</sup> Muscular Christianity is the belief that the best Christians were ones who are both morally and physically strong.<sup>134</sup> The practice was of particular interest in Victorian England and mid-century United

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<sup>129</sup> McKellar and Bechtel, 25.

<sup>130</sup> McKellar and Bechtel, 28.

<sup>131</sup> David L. Chapman, *Sandow the Magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the Beginnings of Bodybuilding* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Martin Radermacher, *Devotional Fitness: An Analysis of Contemporary Christian Dieting and Fitness Programs*. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Science and Business Media Springer Nature, 2017), 63.

<sup>134</sup> Chapman, 3.

States where protestant and evangelical organizations integrated programs of this nature into their preaching.<sup>135</sup> This coincided with an increased emphasis on modest clothing with men's undergarments coming in two lengths: the shorter version worn under breeches and "smallclothes" and the longer version worn under pantaloons and trousers.<sup>136</sup>

Capitalising on this changing climate was strongman Eugen Sandow (1867-1925) who was born Friedrich Wilhelm Müller in Prussia. Remaining in Prussia until 1885, Sandow initially trained in acrobatics.<sup>137</sup> It was only after meeting Louis Attila, who would later serve as his teacher and mentor, that Sandow began his journey towards becoming a strongman. Attila was a strongman who ran a school of physical culture in Brussels.<sup>138</sup> Under his tutelage, Sandow was encouraged to use heavy weights in order to increase his mass and acquire the muscular body he became famous for.<sup>139</sup>

Although he started his career touring with a troupe in the 1880s, he gained celebrity status after travelling to the United States in 1893. Beginning in New York City, Sandow's performances were driven by displays of physical strength.<sup>140</sup> First, he would perform acrobatic routines using 56-pound dumbbells followed by lifting an oversized barbell into the air, later

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<sup>135</sup> *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* by Clifford Putney and Donald E. Hall's *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* are two books that chronical the history of Muscular Christianity.

<sup>136</sup> Cole, (2010), 31, 50.

<sup>137</sup> Chapman, 6.

<sup>138</sup> Chapman, 8.

<sup>139</sup> Chapman, 9.

<sup>140</sup> Chapman, 50.

revealing how two grown men could be found sitting in each bell.<sup>141</sup> In the finale, three trained horses were driven across the stage while the strongman remained in the “Tomb of Hercules” pose.<sup>142</sup> Later that same year, Sandow performed at the World’s Columbian Exposition of Chicago.<sup>143</sup> It was during the exposition that Sandow debuted a new type of performance in which he would conduct a series of poses in the style of “living statues”, modelled after famous ancient Greek and Roman sculptures.<sup>144</sup> During his tenure with Attila, Sandow is known to have posed for many artists and sculptors between the years 1887 and 1889 which may have served as inspiration for his classical poses.<sup>145</sup> His performances progressively became less about showcasing feats of strength and more about the aesthetics of the muscular body. By 1893, after enthraling the audience, Sandow’s manager/promoter Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. would walk in front of the floodlights and invite any woman daring enough to come backstage and feel the strongman’s muscles for \$300.<sup>146</sup> It would seem Ziegfeld took pleasure in adding to his client’s rumoured reputation as a ladies man. His antics perpetuated Sandow’s image as a man desirable for his strength and beauty in the eyes of women. Not surprisingly, Sandow’s first tour of North America was a resounding success.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Maurizia Boscagli, “The Zoo, the Jungle, and the Afterhours: Mass Superman,” in *Eye on the Flesh: Fashions of Masculinity in the Early Twentieth Century*, by Maurizia Boscagli, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 106.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Chapman, 11.

<sup>146</sup> Chapman, 60.

Available at all of Sandow's performances were what were commonly called cabinet photographs. Many showcased the performer imitating the poses of iconic statues from the classical *The Dying Gaul* and *Diskobolos (Discus Thrower)* to Auguste Rodin's famous *The Thinker* [Figures 2-4].<sup>147</sup> Captured by photographer Napoleon Sarony, who was best known for his portraits of Oscar Wilde, these photographs were available for purchase both at the cigar stands in the theatres and by mail order.<sup>148</sup> Sarony, in fact, most likely sold a great number of these photographs to middlemen at wholesale prices who would then resell them in theatres, hotels, or by mail.<sup>149</sup> Sandow was also photographed by Los Angeles photographer George Steckel in 1894 clad only in an artificial fig leaf.<sup>150</sup> All these photographs serve to immortalise Sandow as both the strongest and most beautiful man on earth.<sup>151</sup> A prime example of excess, from his muscles to his props, Maurizia Boscagli describes Sandow's body as an encoded combination of "Nietzschean vitalism, an overt eroticism subdued by bourgeois respectability, the eugenicist call to health and hygiene, and even the high culture discourse of classicism."<sup>152</sup> Similar photographs were also featured in books published by the strongman that were meant to serve as both inspiration and a guide for men who desired to emulate his body. One such photograph with Sandow posed as the *Farnese Hercules* was published in *Sandow on Physical*

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<sup>147</sup> Boscagli, 106.

<sup>148</sup> Charles Musser, "'A Personality So Marked': Eugen Sandow and Visual Culture," in *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film 1880-1910*, edited by Nancy Mathews and Charles Musser, (Manchester, Vt: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Williams College Museum of Art, 2005), 106.

<sup>149</sup> Chapman, 72.

<sup>150</sup> Chapman, 89.

<sup>151</sup> Musser, 106.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

*Training* [Figure 5]. The book was meant to act as both an instruction manual and source of inspiration for men looking to achieve the author's muscular body. Copying the original, Sandow leans to his left with his left arm draped completely over a tall, relatively narrow, post of some sort and his right bent at the elbow behind his back. The left leg is also placed in front of the other in a "T"-shape position. Both subjects' heads are tilted downward with their eyes gazing at the ground as if in contemplation. The differences between Sandow's photograph and the original sculpture are minor. While the original is completely nude and is leaning against a tree trunk, Sandow wears only a fig leaf and leans against a pole covered in animal skin. The hide refers back to ancient Greek mythology when gods and heroes slayed beasts to prove themselves worthy of worship. By including the hide in the photograph Sandow connects himself to heroic narratives and demonstrates his raw animal masculinity.

Sandow was known for admiring ancient Greek sculptures.<sup>153</sup> Once he arrived in England in November 1899, Sandow opened a School of Physical Culture, his second school, not dissimilar to that of Attila, located under the North Tower of the Crystal Palace.<sup>154</sup> In his teachings, Sandow emphasized the intellectual side of physical culture claiming that the one would need to be mentally fit in order to tackle the physical aspect of his regime.<sup>155</sup> His entire goal was to "undo the evil which civilisation had been responsible for, in making man regard his

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<sup>153</sup> Eugen Sandow wanted to sculpt his body to emulate the sculptures of ancient Greek gods and athletes.

<sup>154</sup> Kate Nichols, "'[M]anly Beauty and Muscular Strength': Sculpture, Sport and the Nation at the Crystal Palace, 1854-1918." In *After 1851: The Material and Visual Cultures of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham*, edited by Kate Nichols and Sarah Victoria Turner, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 104.

<sup>155</sup> Nichols, 105.

body lightly.”<sup>156</sup> Growing up Sandow would have been aware of the toll war takes on the body. Before leaving his native Prussia he would have witnessed to two wars: The Seven Weeks’ War (1866), or the Austro-Prussian War, and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).<sup>157</sup> While Sandow never joined the army himself he was not completely ignorant of the injuries his countrymen sustained. The British concern with men’s and women’s bodies similarly was instigated by war after many military recruits were rejected during the Boer War (1899-1902).<sup>158</sup> As a result, the state of people’s bodies became a matter of national interest. In an effort to reshape his students’ bodies, Sandow took inspiration from the nude classical Greek sculptures that were displayed within the Crystal Palace. When the Palace first opened in 1851, the Fine Arts Courts had assembled a number of plaster casts of sculptures owned by museums across Western Europe.<sup>159</sup> While these sculptures caused some controversy at the time for their nudity they were ultimately accepted for “the perceived aesthetic, moral and social benefits that Victorian people might accrue from looking at Greek sculpture.”<sup>160</sup> Sandow himself was a great proponent of these

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<sup>156</sup> Eugen Sandow, quoted by Kate Nichols. (Nichols, 105.)

<sup>157</sup> *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Franco-German War," accessed February 9, 2018, <http://0-academic.eb.com.mercury.concordia.ca/levels/collegiate/article/Franco-German-War/35149>.

*Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Seven Weeks’ War," accessed February 9, 2018, <http://0-academic.eb.com.mercury.concordia.ca/levels/collegiate/article/Seven-Weeks-War/66943>.

<sup>158</sup> Nichols, 104.

<sup>159</sup> Nichols, 99.

<sup>160</sup> Nichols, 100.



sculptures and insisted that his students visit the exhibition and familiarise themselves with what he believed to be the superior Greek body type.<sup>161</sup>

Such sculptures demonstrated the importance that Ancient Greece placed on a man's musculature in artistic renderings of what is meant to be the perfect body. While the pseudo-science of sexology was not a term used until the late nineteenth century with the advent of the homosexual, many of the characteristics used to describe that character type were taken from ancient Greek sources.<sup>162</sup> In fact, Ancient Greeks operated with a one-sex model rather than the two-sex binary model Western society has grown accustomed to.<sup>163</sup> A one-sex model sees men and women as belonging to the same category; women just lack male organs.<sup>164</sup> While the ancient Greeks had no moral objections to sexual relationships between men as the Christians would develop in later years, such relationships were subject to strict regulations.<sup>165</sup> It is hard to

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<sup>161</sup> Nichols, 106. Unlike Sandow who drew inspiration from Ancient Greek sculptures, members of the Aesthetic movement like Oscar Wilde held up the figure of Saint Sebastian as their bastion of masculinity. They even went so far as to claim him as the patron saint of embodied homoeroticism. The antithesis of the spornosexual, Saint Sebastian is a symbol of "erotic submission and abandon." He is represented as a youthful well-form boy often posed like a traditional reclining figure. Saint Sebastian remains a queer saintly figure – adopted by the 1970s Clones discussed later in this essay. (See: John Potvin, "Mystically Perverse: Towards a Queer Semiology of Breton Male Bodies," *Genders* 41 (Spring 2005): 15-16.)

<sup>162</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 3, 18.

<sup>163</sup> Sussman, 6.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ancient Greeks and Judeo-Christians have distinct views on gender and sexuality. Said views also depend on the era in question as their beliefs and practices changed over time. For more information, see David M. Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (1989) and Louis Crompton's *Homosexuality and Civilization* (2003).

determine exactly when this attitude was first adopted by ancient Greek society but Kenneth James Dover claims that the practice was widespread by early-sixth century B.C.<sup>166</sup> First, the Greeks were adamant about the importance of moderation, which they referred to as *enkrateia*.<sup>167</sup> Diogenes advocated for exercise as a way to maintain a strong body and mind and thus the ability to maintain such self-control.<sup>168</sup> Perhaps that is why the representation of ideal masculinity in Greek sculptures is that of a man in excellent shape. Second, to ensure that no free man held power over another in a same-sex relationship, such sexual activities were restricted to one between a youth (*eronemos*) and a fully-grown man (*erastes*) who acted as a mentor figure.<sup>169</sup> Finally, exchanges of money were strictly prohibited in same-sex relationships.<sup>170</sup> The homoerotic nature present in many images of spornosexuals would, therefore, be completely acceptable by the ancient Greeks.

While the sexual thread present throughout Sadow's career cannot be disputed, homoeroticism played a large role in framing his images into socially acceptable fare. His performances were attended by both women and men and it is impossible to know if his photographs were consumed by one sex more than the other given the number of intermediaries involved in their dissemination. What we do know is that Sadow's own sexuality was a topic of interest throughout his North American tour. Newspapers took great delight in touting his

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<sup>166</sup> Kenneth James Dover, "Problems, Sources and Methods." in *Greek Homosexuality*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>167</sup> Foucault, (1990), 56, 65.

<sup>168</sup> Foucault, (1990), 73, 79.

<sup>169</sup> Foucault, (1990), 196, 215.

<sup>170</sup> Sussman, 46.

reputation as a womanizer and yet he could never escape speculation over his true sexual preferences.<sup>171</sup> Travelling with Sandow beginning in 1893 was Dutch pianist and composer Martinus Sieveking who he had known since his time in Belgium and Holland.<sup>172</sup> Sandow and Sieveking lived together in Europe and New York though Sandow always insisted that the two men were only friends.<sup>173</sup> Sandow's insistence did little to change the public's mind as many doubted his word. He finally quelled rumours in 1894 when he married Banche Brookes, the daughter of a photographer that had previously photographed him in Manchester.<sup>174</sup> Following their wedding on 8 August, Brookes accompanied her husband on his second North-American tour.<sup>175</sup> Keeping his wife beside him ostensibly proved his undeniable heterosexuality.

Sandow would later retreat from the public eye during the late 1890s. His retirement was likely due to the shifting political and social climate following Oscar Wilde's infamous trial at which point the homoerotic aspect of his performances would fall under more scrutiny.<sup>176</sup> Wilde was arrested and convicted under the Labouchere Amendment (1885) in 1895 for acts of sodomy.<sup>177</sup> It was believed that his lifestyle of vice and excess was not only contagious but also corrupted young men into a life of prostitution.<sup>178</sup> During his trial, Wilde was questioned about

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<sup>171</sup> Chapman, 51.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Chapman, 71, 91.

<sup>175</sup> Chapman, 91-2.

<sup>176</sup> Musser, 109.

<sup>177</sup> John Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort: Queer Aesthetics, Material Culture and the Modern Interior in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 113.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

his 'love of luxury', his lodging's decoration, his domestic habits, his relationship with friend Alfred Waterhouse Somerset Taylor, the activities he may have witnessed at Taylor's apartment as well as his choices in interior decorating.<sup>179</sup> The prosecution was particularly disturbed by the heavy drapes that covered the windows thus hiding the interior from the public realm and the incense and perfumes used in Taylor's apartment.<sup>180</sup> He was suspected of deviancy based on his living arrangements, his manner of dress, his participation in the Aesthetic movement, and social activities and was ultimately convicted.<sup>181</sup> The nineteenth century also saw the policing of the homosexual as a whole and constant personage, as Michel Foucault called it, instead of acts of sodomy which were seen as temporary acts of misconduct.<sup>182</sup> David M. Halpern names C. G. Chaddock as the man who invented of the homosexual in 1892.<sup>183</sup> Rumours of Sandow's homosexuality could no longer be ignored and the strongman persona went into hibernation until the mid-twentieth century.

### **The 1950's Beefcake**

The *strongman* archetype would rise in popularity again in the mid-twentieth century under the title of "beefcake." Beginning slowly in the 1920s and 1930s with the popularization of bodybuilding, the trend reached its peak between 1955 and 1965.<sup>184</sup> The first wave in popularity

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<sup>179</sup> Potvin, (2014), 113-4, 118.

<sup>180</sup> Potvin, (2014), 114.

<sup>181</sup> Musser, 109.

<sup>182</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43.

<sup>183</sup> David M. Halperin, "One Hundred Years of Homosexuality," review of *Die Griechische Knabenliebe*, by Harald Patzer, *Diacritics* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 34.

<sup>184</sup> Gilad Padva, "Foucauldian Muscles: Celebrating the Male Body in Thorn Fitzgerald's 'Beefcake'," *Film Criticism* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2005/2006): 47. Thomas Waugh, "Chapter Three: Strength and Stealth," in *Hard to*

occurred during the Great Depression when strong healthy bodies would have been a symbol of economic and social stability – a symbol of hope to those who wished for better living conditions. The second wave was at its height in popularity in the years following World War II when the world would still be recovering from the horrific event. The Second World War had been the most devastating wars in history. The number of men returning home with injuries was immense which increased the desirability of aesthetically perfect bodies. Such a reaction could be interpreted as nostalgia for the pre-war era or an expression of hope for future generations.<sup>185</sup>

The term beefcake is used to describe the publication of images of “young, muscular, and smooth-skinned” men in physique magazines.<sup>186</sup> These magazines, which featured men like Charles Atlas, are an extension of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications like those by Sandow. Once again the media played a role in the dissemination of images of masculinity. The circulated images underwent a significant shift, however, from one period to the next. In the beginning, namely the 1920s, emphasis in the images was placed on the male model’s physical strength.<sup>187</sup> By the 1950s, the focus had shifted towards the aestheticization of the body with a renewed interest in this body’s shape not seen since Sandow.<sup>188</sup> Many of these images were known to be consumed by homosexuals though they were marketed to all men as

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*Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall*, 176-283. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 176.

<sup>185</sup> British artist Richard Hamilton also channel such sentiments in his inclusion of a beefcake in the collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956).

<sup>186</sup> Padva, 50.

<sup>187</sup> Waugh, 207.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

exemplary models of physical and mental health.<sup>189</sup> Thomas Waugh explains it best when he writes that “[t]he entire operation was predicated on bodybuilding as a channel – and at the same time a camouflage – for the sexualized male body.”<sup>190</sup> Magazines such as *Strength and Health* and *Physique Pictorial*, as well as others, were circulated throughout the United States by mail and through newsstands.<sup>191</sup> The images featured in these magazines were considered quite shocking. This is not surprising when one considers that mainstream advertisements for men’s underwear published during this decade were either illustrated or only hinted at the presence of a body without ever actually showing it.<sup>192</sup> Either the advertisement featured fully-clothed men, only hinting at their undergarments through text, or undergarments were photographed flat over some illustrations.<sup>193</sup> They attempted to normalize the nudity featured within their pages by covering at least one of three areas of interest: sport, art, and “nature.”<sup>194</sup> Bodybuilding exercise instructions and advertisements of various bodybuilding paraphernalia falls under the first field of interest: sport.<sup>195</sup> *Freikörperkultur* (FKK), a German movement from the nineteenth century,

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<sup>189</sup> Padva, 47-8.

<sup>190</sup> Waugh, 176.

<sup>191</sup> Waugh, 216.

<sup>192</sup> Pier Dominguez, “Why the New Calvin Klein Underwear Ads are Bulging with Meaning.” *Buzzfeed News*, published March 3, 2017. [https://www.buzzfeed.com/pdominguez/why-the-new-calvin-klein-underwear-ads-are-bulging-with-mean?utm\\_term=.ccxP4nDrk#.uxJrJYXNv](https://www.buzzfeed.com/pdominguez/why-the-new-calvin-klein-underwear-ads-are-bulging-with-mean?utm_term=.ccxP4nDrk#.uxJrJYXNv).

Cole, (2010), 199.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Waugh, 219.

<sup>195</sup> Waugh, 222.

inspired the beefcakes' response to "nature" through naturist aspirations.<sup>196</sup> It asserted that the nude body was healthy, beautiful, and in harmony with nature.<sup>197</sup> Whether mid-century beefcake magazines were successful in their efforts to quell the homoerotic undertones of the beefcake is debatable as that remains a large part of their legacy.

Photographer Bob Mizer (1922-1992) made a name for himself photographing beefcakes, through his own magazine *Physical Pictorial*.<sup>198</sup> He took countless beefcake photographs but, for the purposes of this essay, I will concentrate on just one as they were all were shot under similar circumstances [Figure 6]. In the photograph, the unknowns male model reclines back on a dark green grassy expanse. He is completely nude, his body shiny as if oiled up, save for a small triangle of red fabric cover up the bare minimum of his genitals. As the model leans back, his weight supported primarily by his left arm which is stretched behind him, he twists his pelvis towards the viewer as if inviting their gaze. His pose is quite passive and one viewers are more likely to see used by female models. The model's passivity is further compounded once the viewer's eyes reach his head, which is thrown back as he focuses his gaze over his left shoulder. There is no eye contact whatsoever with the viewer. In many ways, his pose is reminiscent of common female tropes in art history.<sup>199</sup> He is coy, inviting the viewer to gaze at him as a fetishized object. The viewer is not confronted by his eyes and in no way made to feel ashamed or uncomfortable for looking at him as his passivity has effeminized him. Instead, the model's

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<sup>196</sup> Waugh, 225.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Waugh, 211, 216.

<sup>199</sup> For example: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Venus and Cupid* (1625-30), German von Bohn, *The Death of Cleopatra* (1841), Jean Frederic Bazille, *Reclining Nude* (1864), and Reginald Arthur, *The Death of Cleopatra* (1896).

entire purpose is to be looked at. This is very unlike the spornosexual who is more likely to be posed frontally which symbolizes power and heroism. While the spornosexual's body may be exposed to the viewer in its entirety his facial expression, especially in the eyes, convey feelings of dominance over the viewer. However, the viewer is not meant to feel any shame as the spornosexual wants to be gazed at and admired. Homoeroticism frames the image by setting its subject in places like the gym, giving the image a health and fitness, or in an advertisement which redirects the viewer's desire to a product. There is, however, some historical precedence for the model's pose. There are ancient Greek and Roman sculptures that feature men reclining, however, I think one would be hard-pressed to describe those characters as heroic, at least not at that moment.<sup>200</sup> One is more likely to see a god lounging in revelry than one caught a moment before leaping into action. This passivity of Mizer's model is in direct contrast to characteristics associated with the spornosexual.

Other examples of beefcake photography showcase the character in a light more in tune with the spornosexual. Alan B. Stone, a photographer based out of Montreal in the middle of the twentieth century, took a photograph of a beefcake that resembles the spornosexual archetype much more [Figure 7]. The model, again unnamed, stands frontally in front of a wooden background and flexes his arms so as to show off his muscles to their best advantage. He is nude save for a minuscule string thong hanging so low some of his pubic hair is visible. There is a slight curve to his hips as if he has cocked his hip out on one side. Finally, his head is in line with his sternum with his eyes, though hidden by shadows, gazing straight ahead. The photographer was most likely lying on the ground when he took this photograph as the shot was taken from a

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<sup>200</sup> For example: Dionysus in Pheidias, *Parthenon East Pediment* (438 B.C. – 432 B.C.)



low vantage point. As a result, the eye of the viewer is guided to gaze at the model from his legs, up his abdominal muscles, across his shoulders and arms, until finally, they reach his head. This triangular path resembles the upside-down triangular shape formed by the model's body.

Similarly to Mizer's photograph, the model invites the viewer's gaze. The difference is the model's attitude towards his spectators. Where Mizer's model is completely passive, Stone's model flexed his muscles as an act of dominance over the viewer. Like the spornosexual, the significance of the model's musculature is for its aesthetic value and not as a physical demonstration of his strength.

The two contrasting images presented here make it near impossible to categorise the beefcake as a singularly strong and masculine character. Though he is a man whose value is determined by his nude body like the spornosexual, he is not as dominant a character. The beefcake does not always have a commanding presence, he does not always dare the viewer to look at him like the spornosexual does. He is also not a paradigm of masculinity as he does not command your attention for his power, virility, drive, and dominance – characteristics that are often attributed to masculinity. In the photograph by Mizer, I would argue that the model is more feminine than masculine. From the way he has twisted his hips to the way he has thrown his head back in revelry, the entire position of his body evokes the feminine.

Bodybuilding would fall into obscurity following the decline of the beefcake. It would be resurrected by 1970s subculture with the Gay Clone but the bodybuilder aesthetic would only truly rise again to mainstream popularity with the exploits of Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 1980s.<sup>201</sup> The world of bodybuilding which is built on the pursuit of excellence, dedication,

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<sup>201</sup> Klein, 18.

talent, commitment, and self-discipline would help preserve two elements of nineteenth-century ideology: self-improvement and competitive individualism.<sup>202</sup> Contemporary spornosexuals would integrate these qualities into their lifestyle pursuits.

### **North American Contemporary Visual Representations in Fashion**

Fashion houses have recently capitalised on the archetypal trend of heroic masculinity by employing professional athletes that have the physique desired by spornosexuals in their campaigns. In their quest to survive the fickle nature of the industry, many fashion designers market their products using tried and true methods – methods that according to precedence are likely to appeal to a wide audience.<sup>203</sup> Advertising for men's underwear was not always so salacious. Before the nineteenth century, any discussion about men's underwear was done in terms of humour as all association with notions of nudity were considered to be an embarrassment.<sup>204</sup> Public opinion on male nudity changed very little over the decades as until the 1950s, and the beefcake, advertisements for men's undergarments were primarily limited to illustrations.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, instead of appealing to their customer by dangling a desirable lifestyle in front of their eyes, advertisements were more likely to focus on health benefits, comfort, and the quality of material used in their products.<sup>206</sup> Still, the advertisements were luring in customers by focusing their marketing efforts on a way of life and not a body like we

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<sup>202</sup> Garry Whannel, *Media Sports Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (London: Routledge, 2002), 190.

<sup>203</sup> Tim Edwards, "The Marketing of Masculinities," in *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society*, 56-71. (London: Cassell, 1997): 59.

<sup>204</sup> Cole, (2010), 187.

<sup>205</sup> Dominguez, (2017).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

have come to expect from contemporary images. Fashion historian and critic Richard Martin claims that this shift in marketing tactics, from health to happiness, occurred after World War II when underwear changed from a product sold through salespeople to one sold primarily through store displays.<sup>207</sup> Fashion underwear as we have come to know it emerged in the late 1960s with the popularization of smaller bikini briefs and an increase of colours available.<sup>208</sup> The 1950s and 1960s also saw the popularisation of tighter pants which led to a need for tighter and smaller underwear, hence the invention of briefs.<sup>209</sup> Fashion underwear allowed men to express their style and status by simply attaching their brand name visibly on their underwears' waistbands. Additionally, advertisements that were photographic in nature became the norm by the 1960s though there remained some exceptions.<sup>210</sup>

Calvin Klein is probably the most recognizable brand worldwide which has taken part in this trend. Their first line of fashion underwear debuted in 1982.<sup>211</sup> Almost identical to Jockey's classic brief, Klein modified his design to fit closer to a man's body.<sup>212</sup> The designer's vision for his underwear was a less practical product than those already available in the United States as they were purely utilitarian.<sup>213</sup> Instead, he intended to follow the standards set by the European

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid. Richard Martin cited by Pier Dominguez.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Cole, (2010), 90.

<sup>210</sup> Cole, (2010), 190.

<sup>211</sup> Lisa Marsh, "Chapter 4: Booming Boxers and Briefs," in *The House of Klein: Fashion, Controversy, and a Business Obsession*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Son's Inc., 2003), 48.

<sup>212</sup> Cole, (2010), 101.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

market and infuse his product with more fashion and sex appeal.<sup>214</sup> For the 1982 campaign, Klein hired noted photographer Bruce Weber, a queer filmmaker and photographer. The campaign centred around Brazilian-American Olympic pole vaulter Tom Hintnaus who Klein personally selected to act as the face of his new underwear collection [Figure 8]. Shot from a low angle, the viewer cannot avoid staring at the bulge contained inside Hintnaus's white briefs. With his body completely exposed to the viewer's gaze, his shoulders back, his hips thrust forward, and his hands resting gently on his thighs, the athlete leans back against a white rooftop chimney located on the island of Thera in Greece.<sup>215</sup> His head is also tilted back, his chin raised, and his eyes closed as if basking in the sunlight. Others have described his pose as an expression of ecstasy with the source of pleasure remaining a mystery.<sup>216</sup> No matter the cause behind this pose, it is clear Weber drew inspiration from gay pinup magazines.<sup>217</sup> When later questioned about his work by journalist Michael Gross in an article published in *Vanity Fair* (June 1986), Weber claimed that people were "starved for a way to look at men. It was something I had a sensibility about. I knew it was a way for me to start. I took something that was very, very, very easy for me to do in the sense that my feelings about men were very clear to me and I just photographed what I knew."<sup>218</sup> By making such a bold statement, the homoerotic undertones of the photograph comes to the forefront. In a collaboration, it can be difficult to determine who is responsible for every decision. Weber's statement suggests he was given creative license and thus made the

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Cole, (2010), 101.

<sup>216</sup> Dominguez, (2017).

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Quoted in Dominguez (2017).

choice to shoot such an erotically charged image. However, a statement from Klein suggests that Weber did not conceive the concept alone and that he did in fact have creative input. When asked about the advertisement Klein explained: “We did not try to appeal to gays. We try to appeal, period. If there’s an awareness in that community of health and grooming, then they’ll respond to the ads.”<sup>219</sup> Susan Bordo believes that the same is true for many if not all contemporary advertisements featuring the male body. She says that their cultural genealogy can be traced through gay male aesthetics.<sup>220</sup> Rather than suddenly realising women may appreciate looking at attractive men in advertisements marketing departments were initially more focused on getting men to gaze at other men – women were just happy beneficiaries of this.<sup>221</sup> Klein’s first foray into the world of fashion underwear was a resounding success. Bloomingdales, which initially was given the exclusive rights to sell Klein’s underwear, reported sales of four hundred dozen pairs of underwear sold within the first five days and a revenue of \$65,000 after two weeks.<sup>222</sup> The following month, twenty thousand pairs of underwear were sold by one hundred stores.<sup>223</sup>

Bruce Weber’s contribution to Klein’s burgeoning underwear line seems to have made a lasting impression as the fashion brand has continued to employ similar if not the same tactics to sell their products ever since. In the years following, Calvin Klein gained a reputation for their provocative underwear advertisements featuring professional athletes, as well as actors and fashion models, as their models. Some of their most successful campaigns feature Swedish

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<sup>219</sup> Cole, (2010), 210.

<sup>220</sup> Bordo, 179.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Cole, (2010), 102.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

soccer player Karl Frederik Ljungberg who modelled for Calvin Klein between 2003 and 2007 [Figure 9].<sup>224</sup> Shot by Steven Klein, Ljungberg poses in front of a blue wall that has some graffiti. The athlete's torso is slightly twisted away from the viewer with his left hip pointing towards the wall. This twist serves to emphasize his inguinal crease, the crease or indent located just above the hip. The crease is further emphasized by Ljungberg hooking his thumbs into the red waistband of his white boxer briefs and pulling it slightly down and away from his body. Hooking one's thumbs into one's waistband, like putting one's hands on one's hips, is a gesture of dominance.<sup>225</sup> The waistband predictably has the brand's name stitched prominently all around. His abdominal muscles are flexed so that each one is clearly defined and visible. Unlike many spornosexuals, his biceps and triceps are not as large but that makes sense once one takes the sport of soccer into consideration. With his chin down, Ljungberg stares at the viewer as if daring them to look at him. Though he is partially nude for the viewer's pleasure, there is nothing passive about his stance. He has coiled his body in such a way so as to suggest that he could leap into action at any moment.

Calvin Klein has continued to use these tactics in their underwear advertisements to this day though not all their models are or have been professional athletes. In 2013, American model Matthew Terry was employed to promote their wares. Steven Klein shot the brand's 2013 campaign in the same vein as its 2003 predecessor [Figure 10]. The image is comprised of two photographs of the model arranged side-by-side. The two could be interpreted as two stillshots

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<sup>224</sup> Adam Lee, "#TBT Vintage Calvin Klein." *Bang and Strike*, published September 24, 2014.

<http://www.bangandstrike.com/bangtalk/vintage-calvin-klein-ads/>.

<sup>225</sup> Nancy Henley, "Chapter 8: The Dance of Life: Posture, Gesture, and Body Movement." In *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 125-6.

from a video clip as the model stretches to the side. The first image, on the left, shows Terry standing frontally and upright. Though his legs are mostly excluded from the shot, he looks to be standing with them quite close together. Sitting low on his hips are a pair of white briefs with the brand's name printed in a large font onto the centre of the underwear's waistband. As in the Ljunberg campaign, the placement of the underwear and the fact that the model has flexed his muscles to the extreme emphasizes the man's hips, more specifically its "V", and draws the viewer's eye down to the model's crotch where the outline of his penis is clearly visible. His abdominal muscles are contracted to allow each ridge and curve to be clearly defined. His right arm is raised above his head and bent at the elbow so that the bicep is flexed. Raising one's arms and placing one's hands on the back of the head or neck is a sign of "relaxed aggressiveness" according to Gerald I. Nierenberg and Henry H. Calero.<sup>226</sup> This gesture, is meant to evoke feelings of superiority and dominance, especially when completed by an orator.<sup>227</sup> If a man were to take a similar stance in a boardroom setting, for example, he would exude an air of confidence, superiority, and dominance over others. The spornosexual could be found in a similar pose for its use in establishing dominance. What is most arresting, however, is Terry's facial expression. Blanketed in shadows, Terry's gaze pierces through the viewer. His stare is intense with his jaw clenched and his eyebrows drawn down in a frown. The second image of Terry shows the model at the completion of a movement; his legs are now shoulder width apart, his torso is stretched and striving upwards towards the left, and, finally, while his arm remains bent behind his head the muscles are extended further. The model is still frowning but his gaze is now pointed downward thus obscuring his eyes. As in the first image, each ridge

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<sup>226</sup> Henley, 126.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

of musculature is highlighted by a single light source. Unlike in the cases of Hintnaus and Ljungberg, the muscles cultivated by Matthew Terry have no discernable use. He is not a professional athlete that is required to maintain a specific body type in order to perform physical tasks. Instead, as a model, the only discernable reason for him to invest so much time and energy into the spornosexual body is for its aesthetic value. His sculpted physique is modelled after those most closely associated with athletes, but the result is a type of performance. This relates back to Butler's work on gender performativity and Tim Edwards' claim that there is a difference between *being* masculine and *doing* masculine. The distinction seems to fall on the model's lack of genuineness; is he truly masculine or is he simply playing a part for the camera? An athlete has a utilitarian reason for developing a muscular body but a model, or an everyday man who may come across this image, does not. Unlike the athlete, the model sculpting a muscular body reads superficial and artificial as Butler's and Edwards' claims describe. For Edwards: "performativity theory, in its attempt to demonstrate the artifice of human social interactions and identities in their entirety, argues that *all* acts, including those that are rendered entirely normative, are a form of performance or are 'performative'."<sup>228</sup> He goes on to state that Judith Butler's work has become synonymous with the invention of performativity theory.<sup>229</sup> One could claim that he is performing what the public currently believes to be the true representation of masculinity and not truly embodying it. Spornosexuals and professional athletes are not mutually exclusive – one can be one without the other. There are many men that post photographs on Instagram showcasing their muscular bodies that fall under the moniker of spornosexual yet are not employed as professional athletes. In the same vein, not all athletes are

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<sup>228</sup> Edwards, (2006), 87.

<sup>229</sup> Edwards, (2006), 89.



spornosexuals especially once one considers that there are sports played professionally that do not require an overly muscular body. Other athletes, like David Beckham, are still better described as metrosexuals. The point is that Calvin Klein established an image of masculinity to represent their fashion underwear by employing professional athletes as their spokesmodels. After the image was fully established, after they reached a point where the public would no longer question the validity of the brand's "faces", they were free to employ models instead of athletes; models, who presumably would not or could not demand as high a salary as athletes, who would perform the same tasks.

In June 1994, American designer Tommy Hilfiger followed Calvin Klein's example and released a line of briefs and boxers bearing his label's logo.<sup>230</sup> Over the years, Hilfiger has been known to use similar marketing techniques as those established by Calvin Klein. One could even go so far as to say the brand copied the latter in both their use of professional athletes as models for their underwear collections and their photographic style. Spanish tennis player Rafael Nadal's photographs from 2015 resemble those of Ljungberg from almost ten years earlier [Figure 11]. The athlete stands in the middle of the frame in front of a blown-up image of the brand's logo. With his legs opened shoulder-width apart, he looks to be posing in a stance quite similar to the contrapposto pose favoured by the ancient Greeks. The majority of his weight is placed on his back leg while the other looks to be slightly bent at the knee, though his legs are cut off at the thigh in the photograph. One arm is raised over his head, bent at the elbow like Terry in Calvin Klein's advertisement to show off his bicep muscle. His other arm hangs by his torso as Nadal hooks his thumb under the waistband of his navy blue boxer briefs. Every muscle

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<sup>230</sup> Cole, (2010), 120.

in his body is either clenched or flexed to their best advantage. This is definitely a power stance. Unlike the men featured in Calvin Klein advertisements mentioned earlier, Nadal is not frowning at the viewer. Instead, he looks to be smirking at the camera as if daring the viewer to continue gazing at him.

The viewer is meant to admire him knowing full well he is a successful and recognizable professional athlete. Yet, even those who do not follow sports would be able to admire Ljungberg's or Nadal's physiques for their aesthetic value and that is why fashion designers have incorporated spornosexuals in their marketing. These brands are hoping that men who shop for their own underwear will identify with the brand's spokesmodel for his athletic reputation as well as his looks; they will either want to be like the athlete or at the very least want to associate themselves with him. In that same vein, brands want their models to appeal to women as well. Female consumers shopping for their significant others are meant to first admire the spornosexual's body and then somehow believe that if the men in their lives wear underwear produced by this brand that they will resemble the image being sold to them. Even when the woman is not doing the shopping herself, she still holds some influence on which products are consumed. In his study on the history of men's underwear, Shaun Cole has found that "[j]ust as women bought the underwear that they wanted to see men wearing so they would frequently determine the underwear men bought themselves..."<sup>231</sup> Cole's statement claims that men would buy underwear they thought women would respond positively to, would find sexy. In that way, women had a certain level of influence on the market whether they were present at the time of purchase or not. It is as if the fashion brand has first provided a fantasy and then said that with

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<sup>231</sup> Cole, (2010), 149.

the help of their products this fantasy could be a reality. Such marketing tactics are used by both North American and European fashion designers.

### **European Contemporary Visual Representations in Fashion**

In Milan, an important centre for men's fashion, fashion house Dolce & Gabbana has taken the trend one step further working with the entire Italian national football team, instead of one athlete at a time, on multiple occasions for both the brand's clothing and underwear lines [Figure 12]. In 2010, their advertisements featured five members of the team. The athletes stand in a staggered "V" formation in what looks to be a standard locker room shower. Antonio di Natale, Federico Marchetti, Domenico Criscito, Vincenzo Iaquinta, and Claudio Marchisio all stand facing the camera clad in nothing but either boxer briefs or briefs with the word *Calcio*, the name of the collection, stitched front and centre on the waistband. *Calcio* is an Italian term with three meanings, kick, the butt of a gun, and football, which makes it a fitting title for a campaign featuring multiple members of a football team – a sport comprised of players kicking a ball.<sup>232</sup> All five stand with their legs open, feet almost shoulder-width apart. Two have their hands on their hips, two have their arms relaxed at their sides, and one leans on his teammate with one hand resting on his shoulder. There is a sense of camaraderie among the players as they pose together be it genuine or staged. More importantly, they all look ready to jump into action. The locker room has always been a controversial space in discussions about relationships between men. This is especially true in cases where men are naked together in one open space. The locker room is also a vulnerable space for men when they stand with their backs to the rest of the room as they either shower or change clothes. One could even go so far as to say that, theoretically,

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<sup>232</sup> "Calcio." *Collins Dictionary*, accessed May 19, 2018. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/italian-english/calcio>.

their backsides are left open and vulnerable to penetration when they face the wall. Thus the setting of this photographs automatically lends itself to homoeroticism. The two designers shot two more campaigns in the same spirit: one series of advertisements shot by American photographer Randall Mesdon in 2008 featuring the Italian Rugby Team and one in 2009 featuring the Italian National Swimming Team.<sup>233</sup>

Dolce & Gabbana went a step further with their homoerotic imagery by publishing a coffee table book called *Uomini* in 2011. Shot by Mariano Vivanco, who shot their campaigns in 2006 and 2010, many of the photographs included in this publication lose any and all pretences of being promotional tools for the brand's products.<sup>234</sup> In one such instance, Vivanco has model André Ziehe pose with his back to the camera completely nude in front of a crumbling plaster wall [Figure 13]. Certain curves of his body are hidden while others seem to glow due to the photographer's use of deep shadows. In fact, the right-hand side of his body is so consumed by shadows that only an outline of his physique remains visible to the viewer. The source of light, located out of frame and to the left, serves to highlight specific aspects of the model's muscular frame, namely his left thigh, half of his left butt cheek, his trim waist, the muscle located in the upper back called *Latissimus dorsi*, his raised arms, and the profile of his face. The shadows act as a layer of protection for the model standing in an otherwise vulnerable position. They hide the model's scrotum and butt crack. Without them, his posterior would have been entirely exposed thus leaving him as if vulnerable to penetration. Instead, the shadows seem as if to protect the model. His muscular body is completely aestheticised for our viewing pleasure giving the image its erotic edge. The photography straddles the border between pornography and art. The frame

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<sup>233</sup> Cole, (2010), 224.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

and soft lighting used by the photographer lend themselves towards this photograph being categorised as art, counteracting the erotic subject matter. The viewer is meant to derive pleasure from looking at this man's nude body. In a press release given by Dolce & Gabbana for *Uomini*, the book was described as a "corollary to Dolce & Gabbana Men's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, depict[ing] the male body in yet another perspective: as a model worth[y] of inspiration, a beauty ideal which transcends times, trends and cultures."<sup>235</sup> Their description of the male body, particularly the ones depicted in *Uomini*, is reminiscent of descriptions of the classical sculptures Sadow was so fond of. Both are held up as timeless models of ideal male bodies. It is as if they are trying to disassociate the publication from pornographic material by elevating the male body. The consumer demographics of this book are unknown thus rendering it impossible to determine whether the publication was popular among men. If, however, men did purchase this book it would be difficult to argue they did so for a reason other than to gaze at the bodies of other men.<sup>236</sup>

Dirk Bikkembergs, a men's fashion designer from Belgium, has been using athletes to model his underwear since the 1980s. He himself has admitted to obsessing over the search for "the perfectly proportioned body."<sup>237</sup> His book, *Dirk Bikkembergs: 25 Years of Athletes and*

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<sup>235</sup> "Uomini Press Release," *Dolce & Gabbana*, accessed February 18, 2018.

<http://www.dolcegabbana.com/dg/books/uomini/#>.

<sup>236</sup> *Uomini* is just one of countless coffee table books available featuring male nudes. Some others include: *Men of World War II: Fighting Men at Ease* (2007) by Evan Bachner, *The Dawn of the Gods* (2013) by Louis LaSalle, *Uncovered: Rare Vintage Male Nudes* (2009) by Reed Massengill, *Heavenly Bodies* (2009) by David Vance, *George Platt Lynes: The Male Nudes* (2011) published by Steven Haas, and many more.

<sup>237</sup> Dirk Bikkembergs, *Dirk Bikkembergs: 25 Years of Athletes and Fashion* (New York: Rizzoli, 2013), 23.

*Fashion*, would lead readers to believe he was the first fashion designer to employ professional athletes as models but I have found no evidence to support this claim. The publication does, however, speak to the fashion industry's interest in the male form and its objectification. While I could present examples of photographic advertisements created for Bikkembergs's designs, I would much rather concentrate on his creative use of professional athletes in performance-based marketing stunts. His print campaigns follow the same principles as Calvin Klein's and Tommy Hilfiger and so featuring an example would just be an exercise in repetition. His marketing strategies set him apart from his colleagues who tend to rely on traditional marketing mediums. In 2007, Bikkembergs launched his menswear collection at Pitti Uomo, an international menswear show in Florence, with a memorable stunt.<sup>238</sup> To showcase his underwear, the designer employed one hundred football players to act as his models.<sup>239</sup> Each one stood on a podium with a number painted on their back.<sup>240</sup> Then, every ten seconds the lights would go out during which the athletes would change their underwear from white to black and vice versa.<sup>241</sup> Two years later, the designer organised an even bigger publicity stunt where in late February of 2009, Andre Vasa, a defender on Milan's Brera football team, moved into Bikkembergs Milan flagship store.<sup>242</sup> Located in Milan's exclusive Quad area at N. 47 via Manzoni, the stunt was

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<sup>238</sup> Cole, (2010), 232.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Marie-Louise Gumuchian, "Footballers' Lives: Player Lives in Designer Store," *Reuters*, June 5, 2009.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-footballer/footballers-lives-player-lives-in-designer-store-idUSTRE5544U520090605>.

organised to market the designer's first flagship store.<sup>243</sup> Vasa lived in the store and treated it as if it were his own home. His "apartment" included ground-floor den area consisting of leather sofas and a television, a bedroom with a custom-made bed, a fully equipped gym, a small kitchen, parking, and a large bathroom cover in pages from Italy's *Gazzetta dello Sport* [Figure 14].<sup>244</sup> His space was also decorated with personal photos, books, games, hand-woven carpets, sculptures, and glass globes all to give the illusion that this space could be a real home.<sup>245</sup> Vasa also had the services of a governess at his disposal and was free to entertain guests and train for matches.<sup>246</sup> All of this was open and available to the public. Huge windows surrounded the apartment ensuring that anyone walking through the square outside had a clear view of the athlete's activities.<sup>247</sup> Shoppers were allowed, nay encouraged, to walk through Vasa's apartment space. Between the store's opening hours of 10:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. shoppers could expect to see Vasa watching television, playing video games, and even sleeping in bed.<sup>248</sup> Clothing from Bikkemberg's main line was displayed alongside Vasa's personal items allowing shoppers to feel like they were selecting clothing items directly from the footballer's closet.<sup>249</sup> Vasa himself said, "Clients go in as if it were my own wardrobe," when describing the experience.<sup>250</sup> This stunt

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

"Dirk Bikkembergs." *Collezioni Donna* 134 (September 2009): 406.

<sup>244</sup> Gumuchian and *Collezioni Donna*.

<sup>245</sup> Gumuchian and *Collezioni Donna*.

<sup>246</sup> "Dirk Bikkembergs." *Collezioni Donna* 134 (September 2009): 406.

<sup>247</sup> Gumuchian.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

suggests that Bikkembergs was responding to the public's fascination with professional athletes not just for their performances on the field but for their lifestyles as well. That same lifestyle is what fashion designers promise consumers when they use professional athletes as their models.

Bikkemberg's use of spectatorship is eerily reminiscent of a performance by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña called *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit ....* Staged multiple times between 1991 and 1992, the two artists intended to create a "satirical commentary on Western concepts of the exotic, primitive Other" as Fusco put it [Figure 15].<sup>251</sup> Conceived as a response to Christopher Columbus's perceived discovery of America, the performance has been staged in Madrid, London, Minneapolis, Washington D. C., Sydney, Chicago, and New York City.<sup>252</sup> The performance consisted of the two artists living in a golden cage for three days in a public forum dressed up as so-called undiscovered 'natives' of a fictional country.<sup>253</sup> They would each perform what Fusco described as "traditional tasks" such as sewing voodoo dolls, lifting weights, watching television, and working on a laptop.<sup>254</sup> For a small donation Fusco would dance for the audience to rap music while Gómez-Peña would share 'native' stories using a nonsensical language.<sup>255</sup> A sexual component was added in later iterations of the performance where a donation of five dollars would allow the public a glimpse of the 'native's' authentic

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<sup>251</sup> Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," in *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*, (New York City: New Press, 1995), 37.

<sup>252</sup> Fusco, 38-9.

<sup>253</sup> Fusco, 39.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.



male genitals.<sup>256</sup> When the artists had control over the marketing of their work they provided no publicity or announcement explaining that this was a performance.<sup>257</sup> As a result, it has been reported that many spectators truly believed they were humans on display like animals in a zoo. This blurring of the line between actor and spectator is suggestive of theorist and theatre activist Augusto Boal's intention to break the convention of passive spectatorship.<sup>258</sup> There is a power dynamic between spectators and actors whether they intervene in a performance or not. While spectatorship is usually seen as an action performed from a distance and in isolation it is prepositional as we are always spectators to, with, in, or of something.<sup>259</sup> When reflecting on the performance Fusco has commented that her partner seemed more uncomfortable with the experience of being objectified than she did.<sup>260</sup> She posits that her experiences as a woman may have better prepared her psychologically for the exercise.<sup>261</sup> Vasa may have had a similar reaction when staying at Bikkemberg's store as men are not typically objectified in their day-to-day lives. In both instances, the daily activities performed by men were opened to the scrutiny of the public. Vasa's performance was not critical of political or social structures but rather took advantage of them the same way reality television does. However, taking advantage of established norms and bringing attention to them can be equally as effective as critical work at prompting moments of debate and inquiry. Their lifestyles, whether they were genuine or not,

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Fusco, 40.

<sup>258</sup> Diana Taylor, "Chapter 3: Spect-Actors," in *Performance*. Translated by Abigail Levine, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 75, 80.

<sup>259</sup> Taylor, 80.

<sup>260</sup> Fusco, 57.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

are of interest in their respective performances – the aesthetics of their bodies are not even mentioned in written reports. Gómez-Peña and Vasa garnered the attention of spectators more for the entertainment caused by their actions, not their looks. This stands opposed to the importance placed on the aesthetics of the male body by the campaigns of Klein, Hilfiger, Dolce & Gabbana, and D. Hedral.

### Race

Race does not play a key role in my thesis, however, it is a topic that cannot be ignored. As readers will no doubt notice, every model or athlete mentioned so far have been Caucasian. Unfortunately, this is just a symptom of a larger problem within both the fashion and marketing industries. The overwhelming majority of people featured in advertisements are fair skinned. This is especially true when only one person is included in the images. The spornosexual feeds this racial discrimination in a way as one of its main purposes is to establish and maintain the dominance of heterosexual *white* men thus reflecting existing trends. It is an archetype all about maintaining the status quo. As a result, any efforts to evoke change, to be more inclusive, would be contradictory to the spornosexual's *raison d'être*. Racial discrimination, in addition to homophobia, is definitely a stain on the spornosexual character.

Fortunately, the inclusion of professional athletes and celebrities in fashion advertising campaigns has resulted in an increase in inclusive practices – a happy by-product of the spornosexual's rise in popularity. In advertisements featuring photographs of male models, it is rare for the public to see a man of colour standing in the foreground. The decision to have professional athletes and celebrities as the faces of fashion campaigns has provided a number of opportunities for men of colour to be featured prominently in fashion advertisements. Armani employed former footballer David James in 1996 to model Emporio Armani's underwear

collection and more recently Calvin Klein has designed an entire campaign centred around male cast members of the Oscar-winning movie *Moonlight* in Spring 2017.<sup>262</sup> That does not mean that the inclusion of black men in fashion advertisements is not without its issues. A recent article by writer and activist Charles Stephens published online by *Advocate* compares Klein's choice to print these images in black and white with Robert Mapplethorpe's artistic style from the 1980s.<sup>263</sup> Stephens argues that in both cases black men are sexually objectified by white men, a practice that is now viewed as an unfavourable part of art history.

In addition to fashion advertising campaigns, aimed at showcasing a product available for purchase, the publication of coffee table books by fashion designers featuring athletes include men of colour. Inspired by their love of the spornosexual body type, designers have published books of this nature to demonstrate their love and appreciation for the athletic body. One example of this type of publication is Giorgio Armani's two volume coffee table book *Facce da Sport* (Faces of Sport) from 2004. Demonstrating the brand's longtime interest in the aesthetics of athletic bodies, the book is composed of numerous photographs of professional athletes from around the world, male and female. Taken in black and white, some photographs are close-up shots of the athletes' faces, each displaying expressions of intense concentration and determination, while others showcase their entire body in varying states of dress. While a

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<sup>262</sup> Cole, (2010), 220. Erica Gonzales, "The Stars of 'Moonlight' Reacts to Their Calvin Klein Underwear Ads," *Harper Bazaar*, March 7, 2017. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/news/a21201/moonlight-cast-calvin-klein-ads-reaction/>.

<sup>263</sup> Charles Stephens, "Sexual Objectification of Black Men, From Mapplethorpe to Calvin Klein," *Advocate*. May 17, 2017, <https://www.advocate.com/current-issue/2017/5/17/sexual-objectification-black-men-mapplethorpe-calvin-klein>.

photograph of David James is included in this publication, I have chosen to focus on another image for the purpose of this thesis [Figure 16]. In this image, football player Terrell Owens stands perpendicularly to the camera. The photographer has captured a moment of movement as Owens strides forward clad only in a pair of black boxer briefs. His thighs are large. The right-hand side of his abs is visible along with his pelvis ridge and they along with his pectoral muscles are clenched to their advantage. His face is turned towards the camera and his right arm swings behind him clutching what looks to be a football. Along his forearm, veins are visible demonstrating the strength with which he holds the ball. Further up, each muscle is clearly defined so that the bicep, tricep, and shoulder are easily distinguishable. Neither smiling nor frowning, Owens's face is serene projecting the feeling that our spectatorship does not bother him in the slightest. The image of Terrell Owens mimics those of other spornosexuals exactly as it projects feelings of dominance and strength through the body of a man.

Even though the spornosexual archetype may not have set out to make the fashion industry more inclusive, perhaps this very development may be one of its lasting legacies. Until the popularization of the spornosexual took hold of the fashion industry, few men of different racial backgrounds were featured in advertising campaigns. Images were more likely to include caucasian men when the models were unknown to the public as they were seen as a safe marketing choice. Men of colour only entered the industry when campaigns began featuring characters from popular culture. Though modelling agencies may not have caught up yet, many advertising campaigns released in the past couple of years by world-renowned brands have predominantly featured recognizable faces. With the visibility of minorities in sport and film increasing there has never been as many well-known men for brands to choose from. In recent

years, fashion brands have taken notice of their rising popularity and have responded in kind by casting them in their campaigns.

## Conclusion

There is not one way to express one's masculinity as the definition of what it means to be masculine changes over time. The definition of masculinity encompasses physical appearance and deportment, a place in gender relations, the practices and activities men and women use to express their place in gender relations, and the effects those practices have on an individual's bodily experience, personality, and culture. Rather than something innate in all men, social constructionist believe that the body is a blank slate molded by societal norms, needs, and desires. All three have a hand in the construction of what society construes masculinity to be. Bonding among members of the same sex, otherwise known as homosocial activity, allows men to develop and maintain what they perceive is their masculinity. Educational, religious, and recreational institutions create opportunities for homosocial activities which includes participation in sports.

The West historically holds one male archetype up as the ideal at a time and that dominant form of masculinity has in recent years been the spornosexual. The spornosexual is a male persona heavily influenced by the sport and porn industries. He is a man who longs to be desired for his heavily muscular body and so is often depicted in various states of undress. The spornosexual is by no means a new character. It is just the latest iteration in a long line of hegemonic masculinities that have been socially constructed. During times of emotional upheaval, whether caused by war or social developments, the spornosexual's intended use is as a source of comfort and security. A recognisable image, it is comforting because the public knows exactly what message it is trying to convey. With its roots in eugenics, the spornosexual

character was fleshed out through the work of nineteenth-century strongmen like Eugen Sandow, 1950s beefcake photography, and finally bodybuilding subculture which rose in popularity beginning in the 1980s. In recent years, the character type has reached mainstream success and popularity which is shown through its use in global marketing efforts. The fashion industry has embraced the spornosexual and helps perpetuate the idea that he has the ideal male body by featuring professional athletes in their advertising campaigns. The homoerotic undertones of these campaigns allow viewers to distance themselves from any preconceived homosexual desires by framing the images using other disciplines like sports and fashion. It becomes acceptable to gaze at the male body appreciatively because the viewer can claim the body is utilitarian, as a muscular body is required to compete in most sports, or that they were admiring the underwear advertised and not the body itself.

Much like models employed by the fashion industry, the spornosexual is an unattainable ideal and yet many men continue to strive towards it. The film industry, which could not be covered in this essay, has also been influenced by the spornosexual. While films are less likely than advertisements to feature athletes in front of the camera on the big screen, the physical appearances of leading men definitely resemble that of the spornosexual. Television shows, however, are more likely to feature a variety of male archetypes as protagonists. It would be interesting to explore if this plurality could be attributed to the rise of social media as both are mediums that enter people's homes on a daily basis and so may feel more pressure to reflect their lived experiences.

Though he remains popular within popular culture there will come a time when the spornosexual's popularity will decrease. Some speculate that the archetype has already peaked

with feature writer Chris Elvidge posing the question, “Have we reached Peak Buff?”<sup>264</sup> The power of social media must also be taken into consideration as they have recently acted as alternatives to conventional sources of news and entertainment. Such outlets allow the public to disseminate their personal preferences in terms of male body type and it will be interesting to see how much this plurality will affect the images of men published by the mainstream media. Popular culture is still enamoured with the spornosexual which can be seen by Hollywoods seemingly never-ending supply of superhero movies but this may all eventually come to an end. After all, society’s idea of ideal masculinity is constantly changing and evolving.

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<sup>264</sup> Chris Elvidge, “Have we reached Peak Buff?” *Mr. Porter*, accessed September 10, 2017.

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## Appendix



Figure 1: Daniel Jaems, Thom Evans and Paolla Rahmeier, D. Hedral Beachwear, Spring/Summer 2013.





Figure 2: Epigonos (?), *Dying Gaul*. Roman copy of a bronze statue from Pergamon, Turkey, ca. 230-220 B.C.E. Marble, 3' ½" high. Musei Capitolini, Rome, Italy.  
From: Gardner, Helen, and Fred S. Kleiner. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective*. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014): 157.



Figure 3: Myron, *Diskobolos* (*Discus Thrower*). Roman copy of a bronze statue of ca. 450 B.C.E. Marble, 5' 1" high. Museo Nazionale Romano – Palazzo Massimo alle Terme. From: Gardner, Helen, and Fred S. Kleiner. *Gardner's Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective*. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014): 131.



Figure 4: Rodin, Auguste, *The Thinker*, model 1880, cast 1901. Bronze, 71.5 x 36.4 x 59.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, U.S.A. accessed July 16, 2018. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1005.html>.





Figure 5: Eugen Sandow in pose of “The Farnese Hercules” (front view)  
Illustration in G. Mercer Adam, *Sandow on Physical Training* (New York: J. Selwin Tait & Sons, 1894)

From: Musser, Charles. “A Personality So Marked’: Eugen Sandow and Visual Culture.” In *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film 1880-1910*, edited by Nancy Mathews and Charles Musser, 104-110. (Manchester, Vt: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Williams College Museum of Art, 2005): 106.



Figure 6: Unknown. Photo: Bob Mizer/© the artist and Courtesy of the Bob Mizer Foundation  
From: Avery, Dan. "1950s Beefcake Photographer Bob Mizer is Finally getting some  
"Devotion": Photos." *NewNowNext*, accessed October 13, 2017.  
<http://www.newnownext.com/devotion-excavating-bob-mizer-at-80wse-gallery-in-new-york/01/2014/>.



Figure 7: “Mark One” Studio (Montreal), photo by Alan B. Stone (1928-1992), c. 1960.  
From: Waugh, Thomas. *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 220.



## Calvin Klein Underwear

Figure 8: Bruce Weber, Tom Hintnaus, Calvin Klein Underwear, advertisement, 1982.



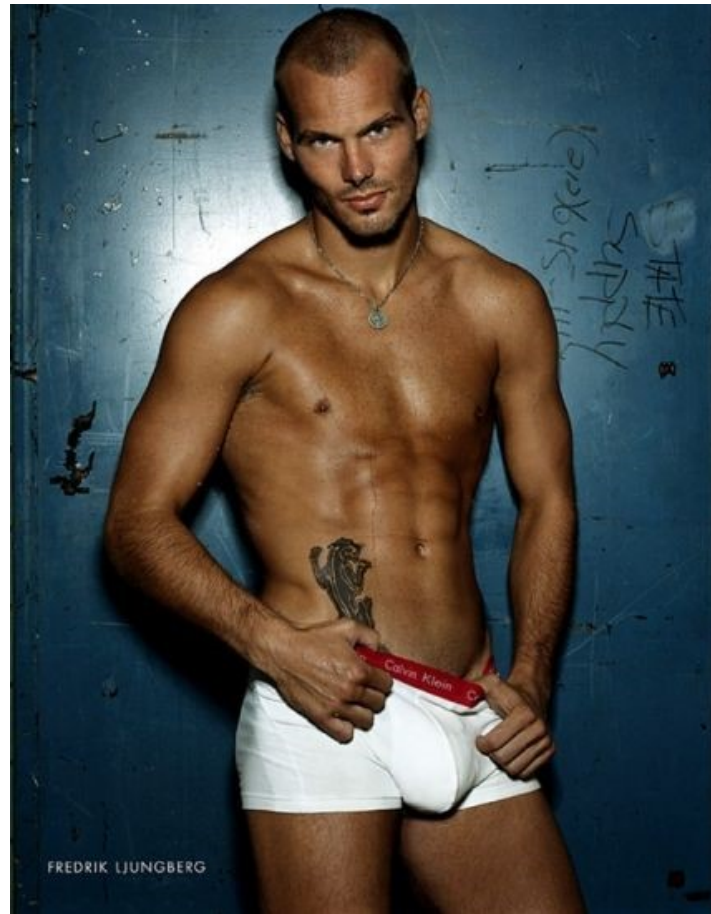


Figure 9: Steven Klein, Karl Frederik Ljungberg, Calvin Klein Pro Stretch, advertisement, Fall/Winter 2003-4.



Figure 10: Steven Klein, Matthew Terry, Calvin Klein Concept, advertisement, Spring/Summer 2013.



Figure 11: Mikael Jansson, Rafael Nadal, Tommy Hilfiger Underwear, advertisement, Fall/Winter 2015-6.



Figure 12: Mariano Vivancos, Antonio di Natale, Federico Marchetti, Domenico Criscito, Vincenzo Iaquina, Claudio Marchisio, Dolce & Gabbana Calcio Underwear, advertisement, Spring/Summer 2010.





Figure 13: Mariano Vivanco, André Ziehe, Dolce & Gabbana, Milan, June 2009.  
From: Vivanco, Mariano. *Uomini*. (New York: Rizzoli Intl Pubns, 2011) n.p.



Figure 14: Andrea Vasa in the bathroom at Dirk Bikkembergs Milan flagship store, 2009.  
From: Lamont, Tom. "Footballers' homes: put yourself in the shop window." *The Guardian*, May 3, 2009. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2009/apr/29/footballers-homes-andrea-vasa>.



Figure 15: Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis*. Photo by Robert Sanchez.  
From: Ginsberg, Elisabeth. "Case Study: The Couple in the Cage." *Beautiful Trouble*. Accessed July 12, 2018. <http://beautifultrouble.org/case/the-couple-in-the-cage/>.



Figure 16: Football player Terrell Owens photographed by Howard Schatz for the book *Athlete* (2000).

From: Armani, Giorgio. *Facce da Sport (Faces of Sport)*. (Milan: Skira, 2004): n.p.