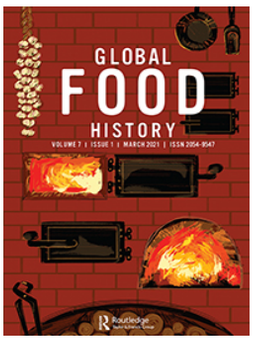

Global Food History

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfgf20

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To cite this article: Ryan Murtha, Conor Heffernan & Thomas Hunt (2021) Definition Diets and Deteriorating Masculinity? Bodybuilding Diets in Mid-Century America, Global Food History, 7:1, 71-91, DOI: 10.1080/20549547.2020.1868106

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2020.1868106

Published online: 08 Jan 2021.

GLOBAL FOOD HISTORY
2021, VOL. 7, NO. 1, 71–91
https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2020.1868106

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Definition Diets and Deteriorating Masculinity? Bodybuilding Diets in Mid-Century America

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ABSTRACT

In the late 1960s Steve Davis, a young strength athlete turned bodybuilder, prepared for an upcoming photoshoot by consuming nothing but meat and water. Far from unique, Davis represented a new line of bodybuilders who engaged in extreme dietary behaviors to achieve a lean and muscular look. Three decades prior to Davis' photoshoot, Dave Willoughby, an influential weightlifter and fitness writer, promoted a diet defined by its wholesome foods eaten in moderation. Comparing the contrasts between Davis and Willoughby's approaches, the following article sheds light on the still relatively unexplored area of bodybuilding diets in twentieth century America. Studying the shift in bodybuilding from health to purely aesthetic concerns, this article argues that food for the 1970s bodybuilder became a means self-fashioning. This change was driven by a conflux of competitive, chemical and societal factors. The article thus addresses the nexus between food, sport and gender in the United States

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 12 November 2019
Accepted 21 December 2020

KEYWORDS
Diet; American history; bodybuilding; gender; sport history

"What, if anything, can one do to make these addlebrained 'Mr.' aspirants see that they are overdoing it?"[1] So asked Dave Willoughby, in a letter from the 1970s, bemoaning the changing esthetics that had come to dominate the sport of bodybuilding. Throughout the preceding decades, body fat percentages plummeted among elite male bodybuilders, creating a new kind of body defined by large amounts of muscle with little body fat. Prior to the early 1960s, bodybuilders resembled the bodies exemplified by ancient Greek statuary. By the end of the 1960s matters had changed almost irrevocably. Willoughby claimed that "they [bodybuilders] are not content with that, but must get rid of every ounce of subcutaneous fat until their veins are standing out as though they would burst."[2] Changes in diets and training practices had produced an entirely new esthetic, one distasteful to older coaches like Willoughby. Controlling food intake has long been of importance in the fitness industry. Studying the shift in bodybuilding from health to purely esthetic concerns, this article argues that food for the 1970s bodybuilder became a means self-fashioning. Bodybuilders who ascribed to this new bodily ideal positioned themselves as determined, masculine, and strong.[3] This change was driven by a conflux of competitive, chemical, and societal factors. Adherence to the esthetic ideal reviled by

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

Willoughby required both control over food and its denial. If bodybuilding often acts as a forum for hyper-realized masculinities, food played a pivotal role in this process.

Tanfer Emin Tunc's study of *The Drinking Man's Diet* (1964), highlights the diet's relationship to a perceived "softening of American masculinity."[4] Framed in this way, Tunc explains that "the diet called for a rebirth of American patriarchal masculinity and male-bonding in the midst of social crisis."[5] For Tunc, the diet was not a neutral form of consumption but rather a form of self-fashioning for American men. The diet's foods became linked to elevated sites of masculinity as evidenced by the body. Tunc's work substantiates that of Jeffery Sobal, who claims that "by attributing gender to particular foods, eating masculine or feminine foods becomes semiotic."[6] Acts of preparing and consuming food became loaded with meaning. Building on such research, this article extends the study of food and gender as embodied by American men with an examination of bodybuilding diets in 1930s and 1960s America.[7]

In other contexts, food historians have explored the very real relationship between food and masculinity. Jessamyn Neuhaus's *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America*, for example, ties in Cold War concerns about a "softening" of American masculinity with how men prepared and consumed their food.[8] Carol Adams's seminal research has traced the long association of meat and masculinity. Across time and space, meat has been associated with a male hunter archetype.[9] Likewise Katharina Vester traces the tensions between masculinity and femininity of food and cooking in the United States. Cooking, dieting, and even vegetable eating have oftentimes been seen as "feminine" behaviors.[10] The bodybuilding diets documented here attempted to subvert these ideals, appropriating them as masculine and admirable in the pursuit of muscular bodies.

Beginning with a discussion of American diets as found in the early fitness industry, the article continues by highlighting David Willoughby's bodybuilding diets of the 1930s and 1940s. This article argues that Willoughby's promotion of wholesome foods and Greco-Roman bodies was reflective of the general fitness industry in America at that time and interwar concerns about Americans' overall health and vitality. Willoughby's diets of the 1930s are next contrasted with a series of weight loss diets from the 1960s. Promoted by two of the most influential bodybuilding coaches of the age, Vince Gironda and Rheo H. Blair, such diets were defined by their extremeness. This shift from Willoughby to Gironda and Blair spoke of changes in the sport itself, which were driven by increased competitiveness, the influence of anabolic steroids, and the need to change one's body in extreme ways. The article thus contributes to a growing literature on the relationship between food and embodied genders.

Bodybuilding, Food and American Life: An Overview

Writing in 2012, Jeffrey Pilcher argues that "food matters, not only as a proper subject of study in its own right, but also as a captivating medium for conveying critical messages about capitalism, the environment, and social inequality."[11] In the case of physical culture and bodybuilding, the same is true. Despite the growing body of literature on the history of food and physical culture, much work remains to be done on the interaction between the two. Previous works on vegetarianism, such as Adam D. Shprintzen's study of American groups in the nineteenth century, has gone some way to filling this

gap, but there remains a lack of information on the kinds of foods and diets used to achieve unbounding health or forge a time-specific individual or group identity.[12] Fad diets can, as exhibited by Peter Sterns, offer an insight into the broader cultural and political climate of the age.[13] The bodies such diets produce amplify these messages. In Great Britain, for example, vegetarianism was linked to growing British radicalism and gender crises.[14] One's diet helped embody societal beliefs and masculinity, in the case of athletes like the 1908 Olympic gold medalist Eustace Miles.

As a pursuit, bodybuilding is inherently connected to food. Writing in the mid-1970s, Vince Gironda, a highly regarded coach among elite bodybuilders, claimed that bodybuilding was primarily about one's diet rather than time spent in the gymnasium.[15] The specified body types idealized by bodybuilders and physical culturists are reflective of strict forms of diet and culinary observation. It is for this reason that Susan Bordo writes that the bodybuilder's relationship with food borders on the obsessive.[16] More specifically, Bordo highlights the recurring discourses of "will, purity, and perfection" found in fitness discourses surrounding food and especially those imbued in bodybuilding diets.[17] This is not a new or isolated affair. Alan Klein's ethnographic study *Little Big Men* discusses the dual nature of eating for those concerned with their bodies across several decades in bodybuilding.[18] For dedicated exercisers, food was both a means of celebration and a source of anxiety. A surplus was needed to build the muscular body, but an excess of body fat was abhorred and necessitated urgent action. Such thinking represents an extreme form of the fat aversion echoed in George Vigarello's cultural interrogation of body fat.[19] Food, for the bodybuilder, was, and is, simultaneously a means of self-fashioning and a means of denial or punishment.

Certainly, the early fitness promoters of the late nineteenth century found primarily in Great Britain and North America were aware of food's importance to their health. George Hackenschmidt, a famous wrestler and weightlifter, wrote extensively on the need to eat nuts, fruits, and vegetables in their raw and uncooked state.[20] So too did Eustace Miles, a tennis player, physical culturist, and vegetarian athlete who eschewed meat in favor of nuts and "proteid" supplements.[21] Where Great Britain represented the hub of bodybuilding in the early twentieth century, a series of political and economic changes, not least the Great War (1914–1918), ensured that the United States became a hub for fitness entrepreneurs from the 1920s onwards.[22] It is for this reason that far more physical culture texts exist in the American context from the 1920s. Heather Addison has linked America's growing concern with physical culture in the 1920s to the overall strength of American culture and industry during this period.[23] Importantly, Addison cites the relationship between 1920s American physical culture and growing American concerns surrounding its geopolitical importance and a perceived gender crisis for men.

It was also during this time that extreme weight loss diets first gained nationwide attention among female physical culturists pursuing a desired svelte look, commonly referred to as the "reducing craze."[24] Not as coherent as later diets, the "reducing" craze was defined by the large array of approaches taken to lose weight. For some women, reducing meant calorie counting or starving. For others, it necessitated additional products, supplements, or single food eating plans.[25] Where Hollywood and pulp physical culture magazines were the initial means through which individuals measured their bodies and obtained information, the 1930s saw an intensification in mail order exercise courses, especially among male physical culturists. Such mail order courses gave

individuals a weekly or monthly opportunity to review and reflect upon their dietary practices.

Offered almost exclusively by and produced for men, mail order courses gave simple and systematic advice on diet and exercise to be followed on a week by week basis. Entrepreneurs like Charles Atlas, who ran one of the most influential mail order courses, regularly told his "students" of the wonders of milk in curing diseases and obtaining muscle.[26] Atlas's nutritional dictates, which were in time reiterated by Willoughby, focused on foods said to be in their "natural state." Thus, Atlas's mail order courses criticized man-made foods like apple pie, which Atlas claimed was a common lunch when coupled with coffee for the working man. Instead he advised the consumption of green, leafy salads, vegetables, lean meats, and, of course, milk.[27] Atlas upheld canned foods, alcohol, and cigarettes as symbols of modernity's ills. Such foods were prepackaged, designed to be eaten or consumed in a hurry, and provided little nutritional substance.[28] Clearly inspired by Horace Fletcher's chew therapy from the late nineteenth century, whereby diners would over chew their foods, Atlas stressed slow and nutritious eating. Such was his adherence to this model that Atlas encouraged "chewing" one's milk to extract the full benefits.[29] This was done at a time when bodybuilding and fitness cultures were not yet competitive. Although Atlas won two separate male beauty contests in the early 1920s, the practice of bodybuilding had not yet been born.[30] This meant that discourses from entrepreneurs and coaches focused more on one's vitality than esthetic appearance.

Atlas's mail order workout courses, and those of his fellow physical culture entrepreneurs like Tony Sansone, Earle Liederman, Lionel Strongfort, and Bernarr MacFadden, exhibited an intense focus on food and the kinds of bodies produced using dietary systems. For Bernarr MacFadden, whose physical culture business ventures began in the late nineteenth century, food held an almost mythical place for physical culturists. Accordingly, MacFadden regularly claimed through his *Physical Culture* magazines that his diets could cure illnesses, improve one's eyesight, and arrest hair loss.[31] An ill-nourished body was seen to embody the "ills" of modernity as understood by speed, poorly manufactured products, and appealing advertising. The healthy, and muscular body, built with nutritious foods, embodied a newer ideal which rejected the allure of modernity in favor of "natural" approaches. In extreme cases, an absence of food, in the form of fasting, was advocated by MacFadden for his clients. Atlas, whose introduction to the entrepreneurial side of physical culture came from MacFadden, largely echoed these sentiments with the proviso that few could match MacFadden's acerbic writings on unsavory diets. MacFadden and Atlas both linked poor dietary habits to American society more generally. For MacFadden, the power of orthodox medicine, the pharmaceutical industry, and industrialized foods were responsible for innumerable societal and health problems.[32] Food, in this framework, represented a defense against these scourges of modernity. MacFadden's and Atlas's calls for dietary constraint and the importance of "pure" foods were reminiscent of broader cultural anxieties regarding America's modernization.

Atlas and MacFadden, influential though they were, were not the only early physical culturists to discuss the importance of food. Other physical culturists in the 1930s and 1940s, like Tony Sansone and Lionel Strongfort, focused on food as the necessary building blocks for a muscular body.[33] Sansone, in particular, proved a strong advocate

of natural foods as evidenced by his muscle building diets built using milk, eggs and organ meats.[34] This emphasis on a natural diet largely distinguished them from Atlas or MacFadden who, although acknowledging the importance of food in building strength or muscle, focused more on the importance of food for overall health and vitality. Even at an early juncture, physical culture and bodybuilding was becoming divided along dietary lines. Ultimately, individuals began to focus far more on food as necessary for strength rather than food as medicine. By the time Willougby began writing on diets in the late 1930s, Americans had come to expect, and follow, dietary advice from influential fitness coaches.

David Willougby and "Soft Bodies"

In 1939, America's first official bodybuilding competition was held, the Mr. America contest. The creation of regular bodybuilding competitions changed the manner in which food and the body were perceived.[35] Whereas previous informal competitions had existed prior to this point, the creation of Mr. America competitions, with annual events and standardized rules, meant that the male body began to be viewed in different ways. Annual contests meant that strict criteria emerged for the male physique, albeit with the proviso that the focus remained on overall health. Whereas Atlas and MacFadden studied the body with terms like vitality or health, those interested in the Mr. America contest cared more for muscularity, symmetry and definition.[36] Seen to represent an American confidence in perfectible forms of masculinity, the show's contestants became increasingly regimented in their training and dietary practices. Soon diets became geared toward competition and building a muscular physique. This shift was found in the diets and courses promoted by David Willoughby, one of America's most popular physical culturists of the 1930s and 1940s. Willoughby's diets were geared entirely toward this new generation of bodybuilders who wanted to compete in Mr. America contests or, at the very least, emulate its competitors. In targeting these exercisers, Willoughby not only spoke of new bodybuilding ideals but also the society in which they were situated. Significantly, the format of the Mr. America contest was not based solely on one's physical appearance. Contestants were, for several decades, judged on their strength, physical appearance, and even their personality. Such criteria ensured that judges looked for a "holistic" winner – one who exhibited muscularity but also athletic strength. The winner, it must be stressed, was often the best developed white male. Prior work on physical culture has explained the overt racism found in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fitness industry.[37] Ideal muscular bodies were presented, by default, as white. This pattern continued with the Mr. America contest which, although welcoming African-American bodybuilders from the late 1940s, did not have an African-American winner until the late 1960s, despite calls by competitors from the late 1950s onward that the competition was racially discriminating against deserving competitors.[38]

David Willoughby's understanding of the relationship between food and the body is useful as a foil for what would come later. A contemporary of Bernarr MacFadden, Willoughby wrote at a time when bodybuilding, as a pursuit, was largely concerned with individual health and wellbeing. A drive for muscularity existed, but there were few competitions. His prescriptions were different then, from those in the 1960s and 1970s, which promoted far stricter diets in pursuit of competitive victory. Born in New Orleans

in 1901, Willoughby spent most of his life in Southern California. He began lifting weights as a teenager, beginning in 1918 as part of his rehabilitation from an illness. In 1921, he found a mentor in Al Treloar of the Los Angeles Athletic Club. Though Willoughby came of age too early to compete in bodybuilding competitions like the Mr. America contest, he won a number of Amateur Athletic Union weightlifting championships in the 1920s and was reputed for his strength as much as his figure. By the time of his death, he was labeled "perhaps the world's greatest weightlifting historian of our time.[39] Champion bodybuilder and weightlifting John Grimek similarly praised Willoughby's writings on muscle building as "a masterpiece."[40] Willoughby also helped form some of the earliest weight lifting organizations, he and was instrumental in the push to standardize strength sports.[41] His own fitness system may not have been as popular with the general public as those published by competitors Charles Atlas or Earle Liederman, but Willoughby – operating in the same social milieu – had cachet among dedicated exercisers in America.

When Willoughby wrote in the 1920s and 1930s, weight lifting and bodybuilding organizations and competitions only existed in their most protozoic forms. With no institutional guidance, standards for what the ideal body looked like, specifically within a given subculture, were based largely on the opinions of influential individuals like Willoughby. As Allan Mazur argues, standardization of beauty only came with the rise of mass media.[42] Admitting some American male figures superseded the bodies of antiquity, Willoughby still celebrated those ancient Greek athletes preserved in marble, labeling them "anthropomorphic perfection."[43] During an era in which technology was for the first time becoming an unavoidable intrusion on everyday life, Willoughby looked to classical physiques from Ancient Greece, which he saw as timeless.[44] This was a common opinion among weight trainers in the United States. Earlier physique competitions hosted by Eugen Sandow, Bernarr MacFadden, and *National Police Gazette* publisher Richard K. Fox in the early 1900s all privileged Greco-Roman understandings of health. For those in the 1930s, such competitions marked the ideal forms of judging the male body. Stemming from this, it was ancient sculptures like Discobolus (a Greek discus thrower) or Laocoön (a Trojan priest fighting snakes) that Willoughby believed offered the best combination of looks and function, and so he both pursued such an appearance for himself, and encouraged others to do the same.

Willoughby's success at the time likely came from the fact that the lifestyle he proposed counteracted what historian Susan Currell calls "the widespread belief that the country was not just economically depressed but also 'diseased' in some way" in the early 1930s.[45] Currell writes that "hopes for the future strength of the nation were often linked to hopes for stronger and more robust mental and physical responses to the challenges of the era."[46] Critical in this was the Economic Depression of 1929, which shook traditional conceptions of white American masculinity across the next decade. Joseph Armengol found a return to sport and physical exercise after 1929 among men seeking to build their physiques and hence embody their masculinity.[47] Willoughby's promotion and promise of Greco-Roman bodies blended nicely with these anxieties. At a time when eugenic ideals of male and female bodies permeated parts of American society, the notion of the perfectible body grew in importance. For these reasons Willoughby's championing of the classically muscular body met with a ready audience of aspiring bodybuilders in America.

Additionally, Willoughby found success by offering his readers a degree of control over their lives at a time when it seemed everything was out of control.[48] Downturns in the economy meant that five thousand banks closed in the early 1930s, while billions of dollars were lost in savings. Attempting to preserve some liquidity in the face of frequent runs on the remaining banks, bankers called in housing loans, sparking a wave of home foreclosures across the country. Business investment evaporated, and unemployment skyrocketed. Veterans of World War I marched on Washington to demand early redemption of deferred service payments, only to be forcefully driven away by members of the very Army in which they had served. In rural America the Dust Bowl compounded problems. Social services were cut in many states while public commentators scoffed at the softening of American men and the greed of Wall Street investors.

Willoughby offered a lifeline, a way to exercise control over one's own body, and, in turn, one's future. His celebration of fuller bodies doubled as a call for a return to prosperity, especially at a time when the average American body was perceived to be smaller and weaker than it had been the previous generation.[49] Willoughby declared that the "optimal or ideal man has an amount of fat equal to 11.25% of his body weight," and about twice that for women.[50] He based this assumption from the measurements of the aforementioned Greek statuary, which he calculated had a similar body fat percentage. Such a physique was embodied for Willoughby in the first winner of the Mr. America competition in 1939, Roland Essmaker, pictured below.

Willoughby's calculations suggested to him that "a similar, if not identical, standard for the ideal masculine physique has prevailed for some 2000 years."[51] Willoughby's preference for some level of fat was not just based on esthetic preferences; he advocated for its health benefits as well. Moderate amounts of fat would insulate the body from both the cold and from blunt impacts; it would store energy; and in women, it would promote menstruation. Willoughby's thoughts on fat evidenced his larger belief, namely that appearance could not overshadow function. This ideal fit well with the Mr. America's praise for "holistic" bodies. Willoughby wrote that a well-developed, fuller physique had many benefits, from a firmer body to "good digestion, a cleared brain, sound sleep, and buoyant spirits."[52] He even suggested it may have economic benefits, "when often a man is sized up and given employment, or advanced from his present, just on the strength of his appearance."[53] Like many of his colleagues discussed above, Willoughby had his own mail-order fitness system, and he used it to spread his message of functional fitness. He promised his acolytes "big muscles a fine, athletic figure," a fuller one than future generations of bodybuilders would prefer.[54]

Critically one could not achieve this Greek ideal through lifting alone. Rather, "health, strength and bodily shapeliness are the result, not of any one thing, but of a COMBINATION or circle of beneficial influences."[55] Chief among these factors was nutrition. Bodybuilding, Willoughby believed, "is 50% nutrition and 50% exercise and the two of them must go hand in hand if worthwhile results in health and bodily development are to be obtained and retained."[56] Willoughby suggested his colleagues did not appreciate the importance of the relationship between physical fitness and proper nutrition, writing that "specialists in exercise are inclined to disregard the influences of food on health and longevity. On the other hand, experts in nutrition are equally liable to overlook the necessity of exercise as an invigorator of the organic functions."[57]

While physical culturists before Willoughby similarly claimed that "no amount of exercise, however excellent, will enable one to improve physically if the diet is lacking in the substances essential to health," Willoughby spoke to a United States still attempting to recover from the Great Depression.[58] Where Elizabeth Applegate and Louis Grivetti found that people across millennia have altered their diets to achieve a desired outcome, the supposed scientific promises of diets grew in the twentieth century. Applegate and Grivetti explain that it was not until this time that individuals began to understand the scientific underpinnings of their eating. "Most evidence for relationships between diet and supplements and improved performance . . . stems from the early twentieth-century, with the advent of research on understanding muscle work, fuel use during exercise, and the specific roles of protein, fat and carbohydrate."[59] Thus, when Willoughby was writing in the 1930s and 1940s, research into the composition and roles of food was only beginning. Yet he provided his readers with sophisticated dietary guidelines to meet whatever their needs were. For those attempting to lose weight, Willoughby prescribed a high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet, limiting them to no more than 40 grams of the latter daily.

For those looking to gain weight and add muscle, Willoughby said they should eat up to six meals a day, evenly spaced. Additionally, he commanded, "Eat slowly. Chew your food thoroughly. Do not eat when hot, tired or excited. Do not hurry or be overactive soon after eating …. Never allow yourself to go hungry; always maintain that full, satisfied feeling." Preserved or processed foods of all kinds were to be avoided, and water was to be drunk at room temperature. After meals, Willoughby suggested that readers lie down with their feet elevated, which "allows the blood to stay around the digesting organs."[60]

The diet Willoughby described for his clients placed great emphasis on the type of protein they were consuming. Beef and lamb chops were most desirable, he said, but pork was harder to digest, and so should be limited, except as bacon. Duck, veal, goose, sausage, and tongues of all kinds were likewise frowned upon. Fish could be consumed once a week, but salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, and shellfish were to be avoided. Beans and other legumes were also rejected. Willoughby described these as "incomplete proteins," saying they would sustain life but not support growth.[61] Milk was key – raw if one could get it, as pasteurization removed desirable vitamins. And goat's milk, he added, was always superior to cow's milk. Eggs were also an important part of obtaining necessary protein, and he said to consume two or three daily, ideally poached or drank in uncooked liquid form. Vegetables should be eaten raw, and sugar substituted with honey, molasses, or carob. Additionally, readers were warned to avoid spices and condiments of all kinds lest they agitate the digestive system by introducing too much flavor. This meant no salt or pepper, nor ketchup or mustard.

One example provided by Willoughby of a good day of eating for those attempting to gain muscle is as follows: breakfast at 8:00am consisting of a glass of fruit juice, a bowl of potatoes, either two eggs and four strips of bacon or a medium steak, two slices of toast with butter, a glass of whole milk, and a vitamin tablet. Two hours later, one would eat a sandwich on whole wheat bread, along with another glass of whole milk. At noon, lunch would consist of a steak, hamburger, roast beef, or other plain meat, accompanied by a large baked potato, two slices of bread and butter, a large leafy vegetable salad, a large

serving of fruit, a small slice of plain cake, a third glass of whole milk (this time with added protein powder), and a second vitamin tablet.[62]

As a mid-afternoon snack, a second sandwich and fourth glass of whole milk would suffice, leaving room for dinner at 6:00pm. This consisted of a cup of soup, a medium serving of plain meat, a large succulent vegetable, two slices of bread and butter, pudding, a fifth glass of whole milk and a third vitamin tablet. Before bed, the day would end with a third sandwich and sixth glass of whole milk.[63]

Thus, Willoughby promoted a diet focused on "pure" wholesome foods, a diet which eschewed modern processed foods and would, in turn, build a seemingly timeless body based on Greco-Roman sculpture. At a time when modern industry was being blamed for the economic downturn, when contemporary conceptions of masculinity were in crisis and a lack of individual control was palpable, Willoughby's diet promised purity, stability, and economic prosperity. Moreover, it promised the holistic kinds of bodies that were desirable in bodybuilding sport at this time. His was not a diet driven to extremes but one searching for order in an increasingly chaotic America. Willoughby's timeless masculine body was seen as pivotal toward gaining employment and control. Food was a necessary step.

Vince Gironda, Rheo H. Blair, and Extreme Dieting in 1960s America

Where Willoughby's diets promised stability, order, and reason, later bodybuilding diets were defined by their extremity. Much of this shift can be attributed to competitive and chemical changes in the sport. Equally important, however, were changes in American society. As American society stabilized, at least economically, new cultural crises surrounding masculinity promoted a body more defined by Spartan than Athenian bodies. Illustrative of this transition was bodybuilding coach Vince Gironda. Born in New York in 1917, Gironda rose to prominence as a bodybuilder and trainer in mid-century America. Known for his direct manner, which regularly launched him into conflicts with other bodybuilders, Gironda was one of the most highly sought-after bodybuilding trainers of his age. His trainees included championship winning bodybuilders, athletes, film stars, and members of the general public. Nicknamed the "Iron Guru" in later years, Gironda's three-decade training career was defined by his intimate knowledge of the body and nutrition.[64] Established in California from 1948, Gironda became enmeshed in the California lifestyle recently discussed by Mark Dyreson.[65] When Gironda opened his gym at 11262 Ventura Boulevard, Los Angeles had become a popular location for surfers, bodybuilders, gymnasts and artists. Venice Beach's importance was evident in the pre-war period, but its popularity rose rapidly following the Second World War.[66] Writing on the rise of lifestyle sports in Venice Beach, Tolga Ozyurtcu cites the alternative lifestyles and bohemian images of innumerable Venice Beach regulars during this time.[67] Situated in his small but well-equipped gymnasium, Gironda was separated both ideologically and geographically from much of the outside culture. Later members of Gironda's gym often reminisced about its spartan esthetic which included no music, no loud noises, and a steadfast obedience to Gironda's dictates.[68]

When Gironda first opened his gym, American culture and society was largely defined by economic growth, military strength, and conspicuous consumption. Despite new political disturbances, domestically and internationally, Martin Halliwell has cited an

overall optimism and patriotism permeating American discourse at this time.[69] Broadly speaking, gender roles remained relatively static as the image of the male breadwinner and head of the household still held considerable sway.[70] Turning to bodybuilding, it is no coincidence that the preeminent competition of the 1950s was the Mr. America contest.

Owing to the multifaceted nature of the competition, early Mr. America competitors, although muscular, tended to carry the soft form of muscularity promoted by Willoughby during the 1930s and 1940s – as evidenced in the Roland Essmaker image shown above in Figure 1. Dietary advice from these decades, as found in popular magazines like *Strength and Health*, promoted diets high in natural, unadulterated foods, with lean meats, eggs, dairy and vegetables holding a particular importance.[71] Physiques excessively low in body fat were actually discouraged from bodybuilding competitions at this time – a point Vince Gironda experienced in 1951 when he finished third in a competition for being excessively lean (Figure 2).

That excessive levels of leanness were undesirable meant that dietary advice tended toward the simplistic. One of the most influential fitness entrepreneurs of this time, Bob Hoffman of York Barbell, informed his readers that in order to lose fat prior to a competition, they needed to eat less food and exercise more. To build more muscle or to bulk up, trainees were advised to eat an excess of food.[72] By the time Gironda retired from bodybuilding to focus on his coaching in the late 1950s, bodybuilding and American culture had changed irrevocably. The optimism surrounding the American style of living, defined by conspicuous consumption in the 1950s, gave way to new forms of rebellion and skepticism. As Robert Cottrell highlights, a growing divide emerged between traditional and unorthodox lifestyles.[73] America's growing military engagements, explicit or implicit, in a Cold War age brought fears of conflict and physical degeneration. In 1957 the USSR launched Sputnik into orbit, and in doing so, provided a visceral indication of the Soviet Union's military and scientific power. Growing Cold War tensions spilled over into personal fitness. As part of a holistic attempt to reassert American supremacy over the Soviet Union, President Eisenhower and later President Kennedy supported a President's Council on physical fitness aimed at improving children's fitness. In 1962, Kennedy famously told the crowd in Rice Stadium that America would reach the moon before the decade's end. This herculean effort would not be undertaken because it was easy but rather "because it is hard."[74]

The positive American image cultivated in the Mr. America competitions faced complaints of being outdated to modern interests. Many competitors resented the judges' seemingly archaic interest in one's athleticism and personality rather than taking a strict interest in their physiques.[75] Capitalizing on bodybuilders' growing apathy toward the Mr. America competition, a series of new promoters began running alternative competitions. Unlike the Mr. America contest, competitors were judged solely on their physical form, and bodies with lower body fat became a means of distinguishing themselves from their softer rivals.

The growth of such shows coincided with the influx of anabolic steroids into the United States. Anabolic steroid use emerged with weightlifting and spread through additional American sports, including bodybuilding. Through the crude use of anabolic steroids like Dianabol, bodybuilders in the late 1950s and early 1960s began presenting with far greater musculature than ever before.[76] The competitive changes found in the

Figure 1. Roland Essmaker, c. 1939. Courtesy of the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center of Physical Culture and Sports.

sport were supported by new chemical innovations. Where Vince Gironda was penalized in 1951 for his excessive leanness and muscularity, those competing at the decade's end desperately sought to achieve the kind of body displayed by Gironda (see Figure 2). Gironda, himself, was an outspoken critic of anabolic steroids, often claiming that raw, natural foods could provide similar muscle building effects.[77] That many of his most successful clients were later said to have taken steroids problematizes the extent of Gironda's claims.[78] The influx of anabolic steroids meant that competitors could engage in far more extreme dietary practices than their natural counterparts. It was in this extremity that Gironda and others, like Rheo H. Blair, flourished. As bodybuilders pushed the physiological limits of their frames, prizes went to those competitors who could display a body simultaneously lean and muscular.

Scholars have previously noted a hardening of American attitudes during the 1960s and a push toward the extreme, and these trends were similarly embodied by star bodybuilders during this time.[79] In 1965, the Canadian bodybuilding entrepreneurs Joe and Ben Weider established the Mr. Olympia contest, which quickly became the sport's defining event. That the competition's first victor, Larry Scott, was a client of Gironda's was no mistake.[80] Scott had, by his own admission, faithfully followed Gironda's dictates when it came to diet and exercise. Scott was followed by countless others. As

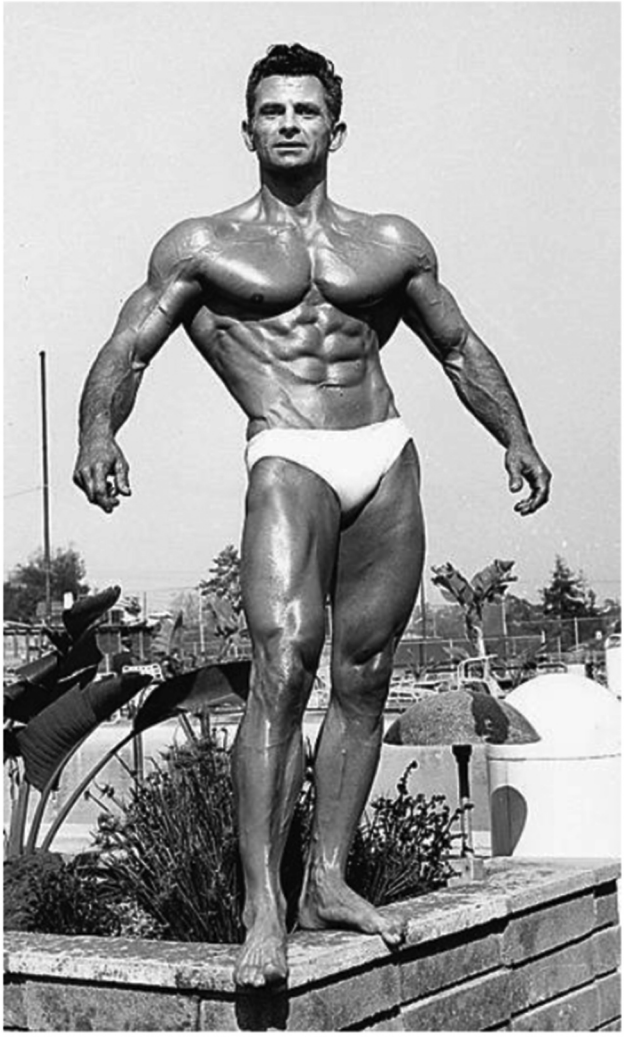

Figure 2. Vince Gironda during his bodybuilding career. Courtesy of the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center of Physical Culture and Sports.

bodybuilding's popularity rose in the aftermath of the first Mr. Olympia show, Gironda's fame grew. Clients across America came to train in his gym and many more wrote asking for his expert advice. Seeking to appease his fans' demands, Gironda released a series of nutrition and training books during this period.[81]

The discourses surrounding Gironda's diet plans spoke of a new extremity in American bodybuilding and indeed, American life. Where Willoughby encouraged smooth, muscular physiques with a healthy amount of body fat, Gironda instead promoted short term and intense periods of dieting designed to produce an unsustainable body image. Tanfer Emin Tunc's study of the *Drinking Man's Diet* during the 1960s depicts the diet as homosocial tool that allowed men to recuperate their lost masculinity through food.[82] Gironda's diets reinforced tenets of a lost American masculinity in

privileging grit, self-sacrifice, and discipline. In this way, his diets echoed an older turn-of-the-century masculinity underpinned by a sense of discipline, ruggedness, and purpose famously associated with Theodore Roosevelt.[83] This was certainly true of Gironda's most famous bodybuilding diet, used first with his clients and subsequently published for the general public: his "maximum definition diet." Seeking to address the "considerable mystery and misconception" concerning his weight loss diet, Gironda's subsequent public book presented his meal plan as a temporary, difficult, and effective means of achieving the new kind of muscularity and leanness desirable in bodybuilding.[84]

In terms of composition, the diet was relatively straightforward. Eat three meals a day composed solely of eggs and meat. No vegetables were allowed, no dairy, and certainly no carbohydrate foods. Indulging in such "forbidden foods" would, according to Gironda, lead to a "smoothing out" of the body, by which he meant an excess of bodyfat. Every three days, a small carbohydrate meal was permitted to ensure compliance with a rigid and strict eating plan. Gironda's support for red meat over all else was reminiscent of interwar claims in the United States that men's strength was derived sustained and built through meat. Such claims were not exactly new, but enjoyed renewed interest in the 1940s and 1950s.[85] Critical to success in the meat and eggs diet was a supplement plan which included over 30 tablets to be taken each meal.[86] Such pills were said to address every possible nutritional need from B12 in the form of liver tablets to sufficient fiber in the form of wheat germ oil. Randy Roach, one of the few individuals to study Gironda's diets, cites its simultaneous difficulty to maintain and popularity among the general public.[87]

Gironda's bodybuilding diets of the 1960s and 1970s reflected, albeit subtly, the growing importance of anabolic steroids in bodybuilding. First emerging in the late 1950s, steroids were quickly used by many American weightlifters and bodybuilders to build muscle, increase strength, and improve recovery. Although initially many doubted the efficacy of such drugs, with at least one 1960s bodybuilder claiming steroids made him weaker, the benefits were well known by Gironda's time.[88] That chemical interventions resulted in drastic increases in strength and muscularity changed the claims made around bodybuilding diets. Whereas the diets discussed by Willoughby were linked to muscularity and overall health, those promoted by Gironda and others now focused on "steroid like" effects from eating.[89] Joe Weider, an influential bodybuilding entrepreneur, regularly encountered the ire of the Food and Drug Administration for claiming that his protein supplements could build ten to twenty pounds of muscle in a short period of time.[90] Gironda told followers that unpasteurized cream was the most anabolic food group, that desiccated liver would drastically improve one's energy, that brewer's yeast would cleanse the body and, that high protein diets would build muscle.[91] Gironda's diets were also influenced by the "mega dosing" movement of the age whereby individuals took high-dose vitamin supplements in a bid to achieve remarkable health results.[92]

Where Gironda held a relatively open view to nutrition – he promoted both vegetarian and meat-based diets – he remained steadfast in the belief that carbohydrates were problematic for bodybuilders. Akin to Charles Atlas, Gironda's depiction of carbohydrate foods like bread, pastas, and rice positioned them as inherently unhealthy, devoid of nutrients and bastardized by food manufacturing.[93]

That Gironda demonized carbohydrates was not particularly unique. This was the case for the *The Drinking Man's Diet* in the early 1960s and the raison d'être of the

Atkins Diet, published by Dr. Robert Atkins in the early 1970s.[94] What distinguished Gironda's diet was his rhetoric. Both Robert Cameron and Robert Atkins linked an excess of carbohydrate consumption to excess body fat; however, Gironda linked an average consumption of carbohydrates to "smoothing out" and a failure to maintain discipline or order in one's life.[95] Gironda, whose unabashed promotion of the muscular physique was routinely made clear, linked the muscular physique to strong, disciplined masculinities. This meant that Gironda's clients needed to live ascetic lives prior to competition or, at the very least, prior to reaching their weight loss goal. Furthermore, Gironda's voluminous supplement regimens served to transform the individual into a sort of lifeless machine, fueled primarily by scientifically derived fuels. The body, and by extension, the man whom Gironda wished to create was built through hardship and asceticism. If Leslie Heywood was correct in depicting bodybuilding as an exaggerated form of masculinity and femininity in the embodied identities attached to muscular male and female physiques, the bodies sculpted according to Gironda's dictates strove to imbue these bodies with a heightened masculinity formed through the diet.[96]

Gironda was not the only respected bodybuilding trainer known for his ascetic program. Equally, if not more restrictive, was Irving Johnson's "meat and water" diet. Later renaming himself Rheo H. Blair (following advice from his astrologist), Johnson's diet was likewise presented as a short-term, but highly effective means of preparing individuals for competition or to lose weight.[97] Where Gironda was known primarily as a bodybuilder and trainer, Blair's fame stemmed from his protein and nutritional supplements which, during the 1960s, were seen by many as the most effective on the market. Turning to Blair's diet, which mimicked Gironda's, individuals were told to consume nothing more than meat and water for three to seven days prior to a bodybuilding competition.[98] Unlike Gironda's diet, whose efficacy is often highlighted without reference to personal testimonies, two bodybuilders recorded their experiences with Blair's diet.

Seeking to enter bodybuilding after a successful career as a powerlifter, Steve Davis, a young American strength athlete, underwent one of the most dramatic, and well-publicized transformations of the 1960s. Initially weighing over two hundred and eighty pounds, Davis, under the tutelage of Blair and Gironda, dieted down to just under two hundred pounds. Dramatically, this was done in less than a year for his first competition. Although Gironda oversaw Davis's transformation, the duo made the decision to trail Blair's much more restrictive, and arguably more dangerous, diet prior to competition.[99] Three days before a contest or a photo shoot, Davis consumed nothing but meat and water. The logic behind this decision was that the restriction of carbohydrates and fat would enable Davis to appear lean, while still retaining his musculature. It is no surprise that Davis himself found this regimen particularly grueling. Speaking about his experiences several years later, Davis claimed that

> I continued this type of program for a period up to twelve days. And this is the sad part of the story. I became so physically exhausted, so high strung, so onerous and drawn that after Rheo had taken the pictures I was about ready to collapse.[100]

Davis's ascetic diet resulted in the desired results and quickly became another popular form of bodybuilding diet. Its difficulty added to its appeal. Sam Fussell has

documented the manner in which male bodybuilders in the 1960s and 1970s prided themselves on their ability to endure pain, to maintain discipline, and to produce exaggerated male bodies.[101] Bodybuilding in the 1960s became a means of reinforcing, oftentimes through severe methods, traditional forms of masculinity based on discipline and self-sacrifice. The praise lavished on Davis by the bodybuilding community for his transformation ensured a place for the meat-and-water diet among bodybuilders.

Dan Lurie, a bodybuilder and contest promoter, later recalled Lou Ferrigno's diligence and compliance in following Blair's diet during the 1970s. Once more the diet was presented as unproblematic despite its difficulty.[102] Only when Ferrigno failed to win his competition was the diet placed under some form of scrutiny. At a time when the American zeitgeist was becoming increasingly concerned with soft or flabby bodies, bodybuilders took this objection to its extreme. Vegetables, carbohydrates and fats were all denied. This was not done to improve one's health but rather one's appearance. That a male bodybuilder could undertake this severe dietary regimen was seen within the bodybuilding community as a sign of his heightened masculinity. The male bodybuilder was presented, as Richard Dyer later argued, as a sort of Nietzschean *ubermensch*, whose capacity for self-sacrifice and discipline elevated him above the average citizen.[103] Food was an integral part of this self-fashioning.

Conclusion

Bodybuilding and health diets are, in many instances, driven by their extreme measures. In the case of Vince Gironda or Rheo H. Blair, a desirable body, and the masculine identities it was perceived to embody, necessitated a great deal of discipline, starvation, and dedication. This move or push to extremity did not occur in a vacuum but stemmed from growing socio-cultural changes in American life more generally. At a time when American citizens, in the midst of the Cold War, were being encouraged to work harder and endure hardship, it is perhaps unsurprising that sports like bodybuilding would reflect these changes. The body and its bearing, as noted by Sandra Gilman, often acts as a tableau for broader cultural anxieties.[104] Previously male American exercisers were encouraged to build their bodies, to display a certain level of body fat, and to model themselves on Greco-Roman statues. Thus, in the 1930s and early 1940s, David Willoughby promoted diets based on wholesome foods, eaten regularly and the avoidance of processed foods.

Willoughby, Gironda, and Blair all linked their diets to American masculinity. All three felt that certain attributes could be embodied through their eating plans, and all three operated in a time when gender roles for men had become increasingly destabilized. Despite these similarities, they differed greatly in their dietary advice and their conceptions of the ideal male physique. Studies on the history of sport nutrition have yet to fully unpack the broader implications of diets directed at athletes and bodybuilders. Seeking to address this gap in the literature, this article suggests that cultural anxieties surrounding American masculinity and American global hegemony encouraged new ways of eating for American bodybuilders. In this way, exercisers following Willoughby, Gironda, or Blair's diets deliberately chose their foods in a bid to change not only their physiques but their identities and futures. Food became the key tool of this transformation.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Dr. Jan Todd and Cindy Slater for their contributions to the present work. This article would not have been possible without Dr. Todd's tireless collection efforts or Ms. Slater's support in finding key materials.

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Notes

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2. Ibid.
3. As competitive female bodybuilding did not emerge until the late 1970s, this article focuses specifically on male bodybuilding. Todd and Harguess, "Doris Barrilleaux and Women's Bodybuilding."
4. Tunc, "The 'Mad Men' of Nutrition," 190.
5. Ibid.
6. Sobal, "Men, Meat, and Marriage," 137.
7. Tunc, "The Mad Men of Nutrition"; Pace, "Feast of Burden," 1–19; Sobal, "Men, Meat, and Marriage,"135–58.
8. Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 216–20.
9. Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat*, 12–45.
10. Vester, *A Taste of Power*.
11. Pilcher, "Introduction," xvii-xxviii.
12. Shprintzen, "Looks Like Meat," 113–28.
13. Stearns, *Fat History*.

14. Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians.*
15. Sushinsky. *Eating the Vince Gironda Way*.
16. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight.*
17. Ibid., 151.
18. Klein, *Little Big Men.*
19. Vigarello. *The Metamorphoses of Fat*, 1–25.
20. Hackenschmidt. *The Way to Live*, 35–50.
21. Miles, *Better Food for Boys*, 12–34.
22. Dyreson. "The Emergence of Consumer Culture," 261–81.
23. Addison, *Hollywood and the Rise of Physical Culture*, 45–78.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Atlas, *Everlasting Health and Strength*, 12–34.
28. Ibid.
29. Atlas, *Dynamic Tension Lesson One*, 5.
30. Fair, *Mr. America*, 1–22.
31. MacFadden. *The Encyclopedia of Health and Physical Culture.*
32. Hunt, *Body Love.*
33. Massey, *American Adonis.*
34. Ibid., 12–34.
35. Fair, Mr. America, 1–12
36. Ibid.
37. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 1–12.
38. Fair, *Mr. America*, 171–180.
39. SCPC, Box 1, Folder 026, Jim Weber to Ray Rogers, July 19, 1982.
40. Grimek, "As I Remember Dave Willoughby," 6.
41. Fair, "George Jowett and American Weightlifting," 4–13.
42. Mazur. "U.S. Trends in Feminine Beauty," 284.
43. Willoughby, "The Human Figure Ideal and Real," 21.
44. Cooney. *Balancing Act.*
45. Currell. "Introduction," 3.
46. Ibid.
47. Armengol, "Gendering the Great Depression," 59–68.
48. Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s.*
49. Coffey, "The American Adonis," 185–202.
50. Willoughby, "How Much Bodyfat is Normal?"
51. Ibid. That Willoughby celebrated a muscular white physique as timeless was common for the time. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that Black, African American, and Latino bodies began to be celebrated within the sport.
52. Willoughby, "Have Athletic Records Reached a Standstill?"
53. Ibid.
54. Willoughby, "The Master Method of Health."
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Applegate and Grivetti, "Search for the Competitive Edge," 869S- 873S.
60. Willoughby, "The Master Method".
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Dyreson, "The Californization of Olympian Love," 36–61.
65. Ibid.

66. Whiting, *Pop LA: Art and the City in the 1960s.*
67. Ozyurtcu, "Living the Dream," 20–35.
68. Kennedy, *Hardcore Bodybuilding*, 118.
69. Halliwell. *American Culture in the 1950s.*
70. Ibid.
71. Hall, and Fair, "The Pioneers of Protein," 23–34.
72. Hoffman, *The High Protein Way.*
73. Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock' n' Roll.*
74. Bowers and Hunt, "The President's Council," 1496–1511.
75. Fair, *Mr. America*, 153–57.
76. Ibid.
77. Conant, *ConVINCEd*, 1–44.
78. Roach, *Muscle, Smoke and Mirrors*, 447–70.
79. Schlesinger Jr, *The Politics of Hope.*
80. Liokaftos, "Professional Bodybuilding," 318–39.
81. Gironda and Kennedy, *Unleashing the Wild Physique.*
82. Tunc, "The 'Mad Men' of Nutrition."
83. Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics," 1509–33.
84. Gironda, *Definition: New Revised.*
85. Buscemi, *From Body Fuel*, 58; Neuhaus, *Manly Meals*, 216–20; Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat*, 12–45.
86. Gironda, Definition: New Revised.
87. Roach, *Muscle, smoke, and mirrors*, 45.
88. Ibid., 332.
89. Gironda, "Eggs & Steroids."
90. Roach, *Muscle, Smoke, and Mirrors*, 132–45.
91. *Gironda Master Series Course*, 12–16.
92. Ibid., 33–45.
93. Ibid., 88–110.
94. Knight, "An Alliance with Mother Nature," 102–22.
95. Ibid.
96. Heywood, *Bodymakers.*
97. Hall and Fair, "The Pioneers of Protein."
98. Lurie and Robson, *Heart of Steel*, 147; Roach, *Muscle, Smoke, and Mirrors*, 416; Davis and Weis, *Raw Muscularity*, 64–68.
99. Davis and Weis, *Raw Muscularity*, 64–68.
100. Ibid.
101. Fussell, *Muscle*, 12–34.
102. Lurie and Robson. *Heart of Steel*, 147.
103. Dyer, *White*, 146–170.
104. Gilman, "Stand Up Straight," 57–83.

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