



Is Bodybuilding a Sport?

Adrian Kind^{1,2} and Eric R. Helms^{3,4}

¹ Berlin School of Mind and Brain, Faculty of Philosophy, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

² Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, Otto von Guericke University of Magdeburg, Magdeburg, Germany

³ Sports Performance Research Institute New Zealand, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

⁴ Florida Atlantic University, Department of Exercise Science and Health Promotion, Muscle Physiology Laboratory, Boca Raton, FL, United States

Please cite as: Kind, A, & Helms E.R. (2023). In *Bodybuilding a Sport?* *SportRxiv*. Doi: ...

ABSTRACT

Since its beginnings, modern bodybuilding has been accompanied by the background issue of whether it should be considered a sport. A problem culminating in its provisional acceptance as a sport by the International Olympic Committee, retracted later. The uncertainty of whether bodybuilding is a sport or not seems to linger. Addressing this issue, Aranyosi (2018) provided an account to determine the status of bodybuilding as a sport that arrives at the negative answer: bodybuilding is not a sport but rather a form of artistic presentation. In this paper, we disagree with Aranyosi. We argue that by the standards he presents in his first argument, bodybuilding should be considered a sport. Further, we argue that his alternative approach on how to evaluate a discipline as more sport- or art-like on a spectrum, is not a valid basis to make such a judgment regarding bodybuilding. Further, even if his spectrum was modified to enable such a judgment, again it would result in bodybuilding being evaluated as a sport. Therefore, we conclude that everyone who accepts Aranyosi's (or any less restrictive) requirements to decide whether bodybuilding is a sport, has to consider bodybuilding as sport or refrain from making claims about its status.

All authors have read and approved this version of the manuscript. This article was last modified on **March 6th, 2023**.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bodybuilding competitions are events in which a panel of judges score entrants' physiques based on pre-established, division-specific (men's bodybuilding, women's bodybuilding, figure, bikini, men's physique, classic bodybuilding etc.) criteria, against their fellow competitors. Since their emergence, modern bodybuilding competitions have been linked to sports and aesthetics. Historically bodybuilding emerged from the vaudeville-style strongman performances during the physical culture movement of the late 1800's that sometimes included physique displays (Heffernen 2022). One of the first recorded bodybuilding competitions in England in 1898 was attached to a weightlifting meet (Chapman 1994), a format that would continue for decades even for major events on other continents, like the Mr. America (Fair 2015). Thus, physique competitions have been linked to strength sport since their inception. However, bodybuilding has also been closely associated with art. Indeed, Eugen Sandow, a strongman and savvy businessman who rose to fame due to his muscular physique, hosted the 'Great Competition' of 1901, the first pure, large-scale bodybuilding competition. Eugen, the so-called 'father of modern bodybuilding' based scoring on who was the 'best built man', defined as who appeared most athletic and healthy, but also based on aesthetic, artistic views of the body (Chapman 1994). In order to ensure these judging criteria, contestants were scored by Eugen as well as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, physician and author of the Sherlock Holmes novels, and Charles Lawes, amateur athlete and sculptor (Fair 2015).

In the mid to late 1900's, there were efforts to develop bodybuilding into a less 'pageant-like' discipline and make it independent from other sports. These efforts included removing aspects from scoring, such as moral character, the appearance of health, and community involvement and putting more focus on muscularity, and proportionality (Fair 2015). However, there was also a focus on separating competitive bodybuilding from competitive weightlifting (Fair 1999). These efforts, at least in part, resulted in bodybuilding's recognition by the American Athletic Union through 1999 (Fair 2015), and by the International Olympic Committee, albeit temporarily, in 1998 (Liokaftos 2017). Further, bodybuilding was represented at each of the World Games, from 1981 to 2009, after which it was removed for doping violations (Woycke, 2016). Therefore, in its modern form, bodybuilding's place is one that straddles art and sport, with some recognition as a sport, but still infused with aspects reminiscent of aesthetics-driven presentations.

The uncertain status of bodybuilding as a sport cannot be resolved empirically. It requires a normative stance on what makes something a sport, in addition to the empirical assessment of whether bodybuilding meets these criteria. Therefore, the question of whether bodybuilding is a sport falls into the domain of the philosophy of sport.

The first serious attempt to address this question philosophically was by Aranyosi (2018). Aranyosi argues bodybuilding is not a sport. His strategy, discussed in section 2, is to propose a list of necessary conditions for something to be a sport. He then argues bodybuilding does not meet these criteria and therefore, is not a sport. Moreover, he proposes an additional argument based on an art-like to sport-like spectrum for physical activities, placing bodybuilding far to the

art-like side, comparing it to certain kinds of dance performances which, like bodybuilding (by his argument), are not sport.

As we elaborate on in Section 3, we beg to differ: we argue that bodybuilding, according to the standards in Aranyosi's first argument, should be considered a sport. Further, we argue the spectrum proposed in his second argument fails to provide a valid basis to draw a meaningful conclusion regarding the question of whether bodybuilding is a sport or not, at least that is preferable over any intuitive answer to this question. Finally, in Section 4, we conclude that even if one takes Aranyosi's approach (or one more inclusive) for granted to determine what qualifies as sport, bodybuilding would indeed qualify.

2. WHY BODYBUILDING IS SUPPOSEDLY NOT A SPORT

Aranyosi (2018) provides two arguments for why bodybuilding should not be considered a sport. We call them the Categorical Argument and the Spectrum Argument. The strategy of the Categorical Argument is to provide a list of necessary conditions for something to be a physical sport and then to show Bodybuilding does not meet these necessary conditions. Consequently, bodybuilding would not be a sport. On the other hand, the strategy of the Spectrum Argument is to claim there is a spectrum between two types of physical activity based on the skill criterion. Sport on one end, art-like performances on the other based on whether they are emblematic of embodied or expressive skill, respectively. Then it is argued that given the above-provided criteria, that are now used as typical features, bodybuilding is more on the end of art-like

performance and, therefore, should be considered more art-like than sport-like. In the following subsections, we detail these arguments.

2.1 THE CATEGORICAL ARGUMENT

In his Categorical Argument, Aranyosi (2018, 402) proposes four necessary criteria for something to be a sport. Specifically, he focuses on what he considers physical sports, that are characterised by the execution of exceptional physical feats, rather than exceptional mental feats (he does not address activities that may be candidates as non-physical sports, such as chess or e-sports). Further, he does not attempt a full-fledged definition (necessary and sufficient conditions) for something to be a sport, siding with philosophers of sport who - while willing to assume important features of sports - remain skeptical towards a full definition, such as Mc Bride (1975) and Morgan (1977).

1. **Physical Skill:** It is a necessary feature of all physical sports that the goal is to achieve relative excellence in some skillful activity, to become better in a non-trivial task.
2. **Activity:** Moreover, skills relevant to physical sports are necessarily active rather than passive. (i.e., it seems to imply some sort of motion or force resistance.)
3. **Judgment by Skill:** Skill in this context involves overcoming some challenge, entailing that there are levels of manifesting the skill, according to which those performers of the skill will be judged and awarded.
4. **Ranking:** Sports (at least on the professional level) involve competition, either directly or by rankings (world rank lists, etc.)

Assuming these necessary conditions, Aranyosi claims Bodybuilding does not meet the Physical Skill criterion (1). Further, he argues even if it would meet this criterion, it would fail the Activity criterion (2) and the Judgment by Skill criterion (3). Why does he think so?

The reason why bodybuilding is not a physical skill, as claimed by Aranyosi, is that performance in Bodybuilding is not determined by a skillful activity, but rather only the features of muscularity:

'[w]hat is judged in a competition is the general appearance of your body as far as your skeletal muscle system is concerned. This complex is thought to emerge from three component qualities of your muscular system: mass, proportion, definition, and vascularity. (...) What is ultimately evaluated in the competition is not an activity or skillful excellence (...)' (Aranyosi 2018, 403).

The reason why bodybuilding, even if one considered it a skill, is not a sport is because it is also not active:

'(...) contrary to what the continuous form of the verb might suggest, being good at posing means being able to end up in a good pose, (...). A Pose is a static event, a static appearance of one's body not an activity' (Aranyosi 2018, 404).

Finally, Aranyosi argues even if posing were a skill and was active, it is not directly or specifically evaluated by the judges, thereby bodybuilding fails the Judgment by Skill criterion:

'There is also activity, the argument goes, during competition, namely flexing your muscles and posing. The problem is, again, that, although how well you flex is correlated with how well built you appear to the eyes of the jury, it is not part of the complex quality itself of looking well built. The jury does not grade your flexing abilities per se, but the visual result of the flexing events' (Aranyosi 2018, 404).

2.2 THE SPECTRUM ARGUMENT

Aranyosi's (2018) second argument against bodybuilding being a sport, is what we call the spectrum argument. His spectrum is defined by the distinction in the type of skill, whereby more sport-like activities and more art-like performances are differentiated by the type of skill on display. 'Embodied skills' he considers more sport-like and 'expressive skills' more art-like. Embodied skills 'involve the body as lived entity, and hence induce in both the performer and the audience a kind of active engagement', while expressive skills 'present the body as a body, and hence the motion, at least on the part of the audience, is not lived but admired from a purely spectatorial view' (Aranyosi 2018, 409).

But what is a 'lived body'? The distinction between the 'lived body' and the merely presented body used by Aranyosi stems from Merleau-Ponty (1945) and his distinction between the lived body and the body as object. As summed up by Gallagher(1986), this distinction comes down to the idea that

'the body as it is lived and the body as it appears in objective observation are one and the same body. The lived body is the physiological body. The distinction between lived and objective is a perceptual distinction. The objective body is a perceived body; it is the objectification of a body that is also lived. The distinction is explained by Merleau-Ponty in the following way: "the objective body is not the true version of the phenomenal body, that is, the true version of the body that we live; it is indeed no more than the latter's impoverished image." [Merleau-Ponty 1945, 109] [...]From this viewpoint the lived body could be defined as "a certain power of action within the framework of the anatomical apparatus' [ibid]. (Gallagher 1986, 140).

Unpacking and dejargonising this distinction, it seems that in the spectrum argument the two types of physical skills are assumed to come in two different forms. On one hand, embodied-skills bring attention to the feat executed by the body. But on the other hand,

expressive skills bring attention to the body or its movement as an object of interest itself, to be admired.

In light of this distinction, Aranyosi (2018) proposes we think of physical competitive disciplines of various forms on a spectrum of being more sport- or more art-like, depending on the degree to which the skill exercised in it is embodied or expressive. Aranyosi uses music performances to illustrate:

'Take, for instance, virtuoso instrument playing, like piano. One and the same performance can be enjoyed as a showcase of high technical skill, manifested through the finger motions, and as expressive excellence manifested through the aural effects of those motions. In other words, the sport-like aspect is bodily in nature, whereas the art-like aspect is auditory' (409).

His prime example to illustrate further is dance, specifically comparing Ballet with Lindy Hop:

'classical ballet is closer to the (...) [expressive skill] extreme of this spectrum, as it is the artistic expression through bodily motion that it is usually appreciated for, while, say, Lindy Hop dance is closer to the sporty, (...) [embodied skill] side of the spectrum' (409).

Therefore, Aranyosi claims that

'Bodybuilding could, then, also be thought along these lines, placed on this spectrum, and, if I am right, it would clearly occupy a place much closer to the art-like side of performance' (409).

So that again bodybuilding, rather than being near the sport-like end of the spectrum, would be closer to the art-like end.

3. WHY BODYBUILDING IS A SPORT

To argue against Aranyosi's Categorical and Spectrum argument we pursue the following strategies. Regarding the Categorical Argument (3.1), for the sake of argument, we accept

the presented necessary conditions for something being a sport as valid and argue against the claim that bodybuilding does not meet the Physical Skill criterion, the Activity criterion, and the Judgment by Skill criterion. For our response to the Spectrum Argument (3.2), we argue the spectrum between art-like physical activity 'expressive skill', as well as the sport-like 'embodied skill' is poorly justified. It fails for two reasons. First, the spectrum loses credibility as a tool to judge the sport- or art-likeness of physical disciplines because it would place some sports, e.g. Olympic gymnastics, as being arguably more art- than sport-like, undermining its meaningfulness and therefore, its usefulness for controversial evaluations like the case of bodybuilding. Second, it fails to provide sufficient justification for why its evaluations should be preferred over usual intuitions of what is art or sport, further undermining its plausibility.

3.1 AGAINST THE CATEGORICAL ARGUMENT

According to Aranyosi's categorical argument, bodybuilding is not a sport because it fails to meet three of four necessary criteria (all but the Ranking criterion). In what follows we address each of the supposedly failed criteria showing that indeed, bodybuilding meets each of them.

3.1.1 THE PHYSICAL SKILL CRITERION

The Physical Skill criterion states it is a necessary feature of sports that participants strive to achieve relative excellence in some skillful activity. Bodybuilding supposedly does not meet this criterion because only the 'component qualities of your muscular system: mass,

proportion, definition, and vascularity' (Aranyosi, 2018, 403) are central in a bodybuilding competition. In Aranyosi's presentation, there is no skill that makes a significant contribution.

Our counterargument is that posing is not a trivial task, it is a physical, skillful activity executed by bodybuilders on stage that is integral to bodybuilding. Famously, in the 1977 movie documentary *Pumping Iron* (Butler and Fiore 1977), competitive bodybuilders Arnold Schwarzenegger and Franco Columbo attended ballet classes to improve their posing. However, the skillful elements of bodybuilding posing have earlier historical roots. Notably, Alfred Montague Woollaston AKA 'Monte Saldo' (1879 - 23 February, 1949) was an early bodybuilder, weightlifter, and organiser (USAWA, 2018). Monte Saldo was recognized by a commission to write the first book on posing (Webster, 1992). His book *How to Pose* (Saldo, 1914) provides detailed advice on posing for pictures, early physique competitions, and discusses body positioning and 'muscle control' (contracting specific muscles, but not others, to various degrees to highlight aspects of the physique), illustrating the complexity of posing. The skill of posing remains evident in modern bodybuilding as experienced competitors, coaches, and officials regularly put on paid, live posing workshops, do in-person or remote posing coaching, and sell courses on posing (see e.g. <https://ifbbpro.com.pl/en/posing-seminar/> or <https://wnbfcanda.ca/pages/workshops>). As mentioned by Bob Bell, President of the World Natural Bodybuilding Federation (WNBF), Judge and retired professional Bodybuilder, in personal communication (E-mail, February 14th 2023),

'It takes years to learn how to pose properly and fully flex all muscle groups to their maximum potential, let alone maintain the most symmetrical physique, to withstand shaking, all while displaying the most aesthetic physique while posing. For athletes who do not spend enough time and effort practicing their posing and having their posing execution evaluated they may find themselves out edged by the competition in the most crucial minutes that an athlete may have been preparing for all year.'

To conclude, posing has historically always been viewed as a skilled activity, and today it is regularly practiced by competitors, taught by their coaches for a monetary value, and influences placings. As a comparison to gymnastics, more challenging moves which novice gymnasts simply cannot perform have a higher baseline score than less challenging moves (FIDE, 2022). Thus, only an elite gymnast can perform these moves at all; however, in a competition between elite gymnasts, the winner is determined by how well these moves are executed. Likewise, while a young, first-time physique competitor cannot beat a seasoned professional, no matter how well they pose due to their clearly inferior physique, in a close competition between professionals, placings are influenced by how well the competitors display their physiques.

3.1.2 ACTIVITY CRITERION

The Activity criterion says skills relevant to physical sports are necessarily active rather than passive. (i.e., implying some sort of motion or force resistance). Bodybuilding supposedly does not meet this criterion because the only relevant thing bodybuilders do in competition is pose, and posing is supposedly not something active but passive. 'A Pose is a static event, a static appearance of one's body not an activity' (Aranyosi 2018, 404), as Aranyosi puts it.

This argument is the most easily refuted, given how commonplace 'static' events are in sport, and that these events, like posing, are clearly active, not passive.

While dynamic muscle actions which include a concentric, eccentric, and isometric phase are the most common form of resistance-training and muscle action in sport, isometric-only actions where - despite the muscle producing force - the muscle-tendon unit remains at a constant length, are by no means passive, regularly occur in sport, and are used in training (Dietz and Peterson 2012). During such training, athletes can exert force (with varying degrees of effort from light to maximal) against an immovable object or training apparatus, or against forces produced by their own body. Specifically, an agonist muscle can contract against the force produced by its antagonist (such as the biceps and triceps), resulting in a fixed joint angle with no visible change in muscle length (hence, isometric). Indeed, isometric muscle actions (the type of contraction that occurs during posing) are not passive and can result in physiological and performance adaptations such as muscle growth, improvements in tendon structure and function, and increases in neuromuscular activation, rate of force development, and maximal force output (Oranchuk et al. 2019). In sport there are many examples of 'static' active events such as the iron cross in gymnastics, waterskiing, the competitive strongman event the Hercules hold, a scrum in rugby, transitions between movement in climbing, acts of balance in gymnastics, and others. Arguably, the element in these examples which makes them 'Active' per the criterion despite appearing static, is that the athlete is challenged while trying to hold a static position. In each example, the athlete's

ability to hold the position well, or how long they can hold it impacts their competitive performance.

Therefore, for Aranyosi's argument to hold that posing is passive, the claim must be that it is not challenging for bodybuilders to hold poses, or that if they fail to hold the poses well or long enough, there are no competitive consequences. However, this is not the case. In close competitions, some posing rounds can last nearly an hour, and all of the mandatory poses in each division require isometric contractions of many of the muscles of the body, simultaneously. Bodybuilders sweat on stage due to exertion, and in long rounds fail to maintain poses well, or sometimes at all, and are seen putting their hands on their knees and taking a moment to catch their breath. Further, lapses in posing are often noticed by judges and can impact judging, especially in close competitions. Appealing again to our personal communication with Bob Bell (E-mail February 14th 2023), he emphasized that

'posing is an intense, active, and skilled part of our sport and "can be" the most important aspect of "natural" bodybuilding outcomes. (...) Depending on how good or bad an athlete's posing is and the quality of the physiques that are in the class, I've seen shows that have and have not been decided solely on perfect posing.'

In sum, Aranyosi's assumption that posing is passive is not justifiable.

3.1.3 JUDGMENT BY SKILL CRITERION

The Judgment by Skill criterion says that skill in the context of sports involves overcoming some challenge entailing that there are levels of manifesting the skill and accordingly, performers of the skill are judged and awarded. Bodybuilding supposedly does not meet this criterion because judges do not grade your posing abilities. Flexing your muscles in a posing

presentation Aranyosi claims, is 'correlated with how well built you appear to the eyes of the jury, it is not part of the complex quality itself of looking well built'. So it is not the flexing itself that is judged on stage but only 'the visual result of the flexing events' (Aranyosi 2018, 404). This claim is clearly refuted per the division-specific rules of major bodybuilding organisations. At best, one could conclude certain divisions in bodybuilding are more or less sport-like based on the Judgment by Skill criterion, but not the entirety of competitive bodybuilding.

Specifically, certain divisions under the umbrella sport of competitive bodybuilding, such as men's bodybuilding (IFBB 2021a), women's physique (IFBB 2021b), and classic physique (IFBB 2021c), require competitors to perform a solo posing routine to music. These routines are judged rounds in the International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation (IFBB) which impact placings, with judges directed to 'look for a smooth, artistic, and well-choreographed routine' and are 'reminded that, during this round, they are judging the routine and the physique' (IFBB 2021a, 12; 2021b, 12; 2021c, 12). In other federations, such as the WNBF, these routines are instead used to break ties and can move a competitor up or down a single placing (WNBF 2021b). These specific divisions have arguably more objective judging criteria based purely on competitors' muscularity and proportionality compared to more 'pageant like' divisions that include subjective judging elements of poise, grace, and beauty. For example, the bikini (IFBB 2023), men's physique (IFBB 2021c), and women's figure divisions (WNBF 2021b) place comparatively less emphasis on muscularity than the bodybuilding division, and more

emphasis on presentation (Alwan 2019). In these divisions in the IFBB, the judged criteria includes 'the athlete's ability to present herself with confidence, poise and grace' (IFBB 2023, 9), or the judges look for 'the contestant with the best stage presence and poise, who can successfully convey his personality to the audience and the athlete's ability to present himself onstage with confidence' (IFBB 2021d, 8-9). In the WNBF, presentations can break ties, where 'judges will assess competitors' ability to seamlessly execute quarter turns, present confidence and poise, and change places with other competitors' (WNBF 2020a, 2). Instead of individual posing routines, these divisions have individual stage walks, where the competitor walks in a specific pattern across the stage, performing predetermined poses in which movement quality can be the predominant judged criterion: 'The judges will be assessing each competitor on how well they display their physique in move. Competitors shall be assessed on whether or not they carry themselves in a graceful manner while walking to and along the stage. The pace, the elegance of moves, gestures, 'showmanship', personality, charisma, stage presence and charm, as well as a natural rhythm should play a part in the final placing of each competitor' (IFBB 2023, 14).

Finally, although these divisions have waned in popularity, men's (IFBB 2021c) and women's fitness (IFBB 2019) divisions are explicitly judged not only on the appearance of competitors' physiques, but on their 'fitness routines' in separate rounds. In the IFBB, much like in the aforementioned divisions, fitness competitors are compared in mandatory poses on stage in the 'assessing round'. However, in the fitness routine round judges score 'the routine with

a view towards tempo, strength, flexibility, style, personality, athletic coordination and overall performance. Judges will also look for competitors who perform strength and flexibility moves, as well as gymnastic moves. The routine may include aerobics, dance, gymnastics or other demonstrations of athletic talent' (IFBB 2019, 7; IFBB 2021c, 7). Further, 'The judges are reminded that, during this round, they are judging ONLY the fitness routine and NOT the physique' (IFBB 2019, 7; IFBB 2021c, 7).

From the herein discussed aspects of judging, it appears Aranyosi's claim that there is no judgment by skill in bodybuilding is not in line with actual judging practice, and therefore wrong.

3.2 AGAINST THE SPECTRUM ARGUMENT

According to Aranyosi's Spectrum Argument, Bodybuilding is less sport-like and more art-like. This is because even if there was skill involved in bodybuilding - which Aranyosi denies for the categorical argument but seems willing to grant in the spectrum argument - the skill primarily serves presentational purposes. Hence, bodybuilding is placed closer to the art-like side of the spectrum than the sport-like end. To reiterate, according to Aranyosi, the art- and sport-like sides of this spectrum are divided by whether one's body is used more to *achieve* something in competition (Sport-Like) - via an embodied skill which brings attention to the physical feat executed - or to bring attention to the body or its artistic movement and *present* it via expressive skill (Art-Like). We, however, think the spectrum argument has several problems, making it unfit to support the judgment that bodybuilding is more art than sport.

To accept this vague spectrum which places physical disciplines somewhere between sports and art - notably without providing intervals on the scale or methods to operationalise how to place candidates - we propose this spectrum must either align with society's collective intuition and practices of what is and isn't a sport or, if it judges a discipline commonly considered as sport to not be sport (or vice versa), the judgment should be sufficiently well supported to convince a reader to revise their intuitive view. By fulfilling at least one of these two criteria, the spectrum would be plausible enough for it to be applied to controversial disciplines such as bodybuilding. However, if the spectrum cannot fulfill one of these criteria, we argue the spectrum should be rejected.

We propose two pathways by which Aranyosi's spectrum could be deemed sufficiently credible. First, the spectrum could gain credibility by passing a 'sanity test'; i.e., if it reliably made predictions in line with what, for all general purposes, is considered sport or art. If it does, we can say that the spectrum itself classifies physical disciplines adequately in most cases, and is, by inference to the best explanation, assumed to be a sufficiently sensitive litmus test of judging something to be sport or not. If the spectrum could reliably classify physical activities in this way, we could then accept when it provides a revision to what might be controversially considered a sport (or not). Thus, the question is whether Aranyosi provides such support. Notably, Aranyosi justifies the distinction between more art- and more sport-like disciplines based on two types of different skills present at the two ends of

the spectrum. Aranyosi demonstrates the distinction through an inductive generalisation: certain disciplines seem intuitively more sport-like (Lindy Hop) because they arguably contain more embodied skill, while disciplines he considers more art-like (Ballet) are arguably more about presentation. However, when this approach classifies physical disciplines widely acknowledged as sports as being art-like rather than sport-like, it is problematic. Specifically, if different counterexamples (rather than Ballet and Lindy Hop) were judged differently than how they would be intuitively placed, this misclassification calls the overall reliability of the spectrum as a tool to evaluate physical disciplines into question. One might object that it is questionable whether one needs to place disciplines usually assumed to be sport closer to the sport-like or art-like end of the spectrum at all. Why is it important that sports are closer to the sport-like end? The question itself foreshadows its answer: if a sport is not more sport-like than an artistic performance, the spectrum becomes meaningless in evaluating what is or isn't sport.

To show that the spectrum places disciplines widely accepted as sports closer to the art-like end of the spectrum, we propose the example of Olympic Gymnastics, part of the summer Olympic games since 1896. The form of gymnastics initially represented in the Olympics is called 'Artistic Gymnastics' indicating it contains stylistic and competitive elements of performance. Interestingly, the term 'artistic' was introduced to delineate the discipline as sport, rather than the more mechanical, exercise-like style used in physical education and military training. Artistic gymnasts can compete in six events: the floor exercise, pommel

horse, rings, vault, parallel bars, and horizontal bar. Perhaps more pertinent, in 1984 rhythmic gymnastics became a women's Olympic sport. In it, athletes compete in the ribbon, hoop, ball, or clubs event. Specifically, in rhythmic gymnastics, competitors are scored for both artistic and technical aspects of their routines, as well as stylistic elements of their presentation (Cervin et al. 2017).

Given the artistic elements of both forms of gymnastics, which align with Aranyosi's description of expressive skill, it seems both established Olympic sports would sit closer to the art-like side of the spectrum than the majority of other established sports. Moreover, regarding their placement on the spectrum as a whole, they are likely closer to the art-like end, at least as far as we can reason given the vague nature of the spectrum. Further, given that rhythmic gymnastics has more emphasis on artistic presentation and creativity than artistic gymnastics, it must be even closer to the art-like side of the spectrum than artistic gymnastics. Yet, both are established sports. These counterexamples demonstrate how the spectrum can fail to intuitively classify sports as being more sport-like, thus lacking the necessary face validity for it to be applied to controversial cases (such as bodybuilding).

The second option, rather than a 'sanity test', is subtly different: it would be to accept Aranyosi's spectrum as a deductive argument, stipulating that embodied skills are associated with sport and presentational skills with art-like presentations. Therefore, any physical discipline could be judged by determining whether it contains primarily expressive or embodied skills. Unfortunately, this is also problematic as the premise that certain skills are

associated with sports or art is not self-explanatory. Thus, a reason to accept this association must be provided, but all Aranyosi provides are notions from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology (which we previously outlined). Though these phenomenological concepts may have merit, mapping them on to a distinction between sports and art-like performances appears to be an *ad hoc* solution in service to Aranyosi's position. Given these issues, we have no reason to credit the spectrum (in its present form) the power to resolve conflicting intuitions people may have about what is and is not sport.

In sum, the spectrum fails as a deductive argument due to a shaky basis for the association between expressive and embodied skills with art and sport, respectively, and also arguably fails an intuitive sanity test. Therefore, we propose the present concept of the spectrum should be rejected as a sufficiently valid tool to settle whether bodybuilding is a sport.

A proponent of the spectrum argument who - despite its problems - intends to save it, might propose to introduce a threshold on the spectrum. Notably, a threshold is not Aranyosi's idea, but we wish to anticipate this potential approach. Interestingly, to circumvent the above problems by introducing a threshold so the spectrum could pass a sanity test, it would then transform from an analysis by degree (i.e., more or less sport- or art-like), to a categorical prediction of whether something is a sport or an art-like performance. This threshold does not have to sit in the middle of the spectrum. We may, for example, put it right behind the most artistic physical activity that is widely regarded as sport. Using the example we chose, one may put the cutoff right behind rhythmic gymnastics, making all physical disciplines that

are more art-like than it art, and all disciplines similarly or less art-like than it, sport. Introducing a threshold to the spectrum seemingly upholds its ability to accurately categorise and thus, our argument against using the spectrum becomes obsolete. Unfortunately, however, this strategy has its own problems.

The problem with introducing a threshold to save the spectrum, is the price it pays for this credibility. By introducing a threshold to make it pass the sanity test, it subsequently reverses Aranyosi's evaluation of bodybuilding as an art-like performance. This problem occurs because putting the threshold for what is sufficiently sport-like to be a sport on the spectrum such that it includes gymnastics, will also include bodybuilding. Consider again the examples of artistic and rhythmic gymnastics, specifically, rhythmic gymnastics. If the threshold for what is sufficiently sport-like is in line with the degree of embodied skill in rhythmic gymnastics, this would make the spectrum more valid, as it now passes our aforementioned 'sanity test', but arguably also includes bodybuilding as they contain similar amounts of expressive and embodied skill.

In gymnastics what your body *does* is the primary determinant of performance (or at least it is intended to be), while in bodybuilding the primary determinant of performance is what your body *looks like*. In both cases, however, the skills involved seem similarly presentational (and therefore expressive). In rhythmic gymnastics athletes receive a technical score (judgment of an embodied skill), but they also receive an execution score (judgment of an expressive skill). The execution score is evaluated independently from the athleticism of the

routine based on the artistic, presentational components of the routine, such as the composition, use of space, body movements and poses, and coordination between music and movement. Similarly, displaying a muscular, symmetrical, and lean physique can be an engaging artistic spectacle (an expressive skill), which is scored. Likewise, as we argued, how a bodybuilder poses is actually an embodied skill, which is also scored. Bodybuilding, therefore, based on its combination of embodied and expressive skill should be on the more sport-like side of the spectrum if we are willing to use other paradigmatic examples of disciplines widely accepted as sports, such as rhythmic gymnastics, as a threshold for this evaluation.

In conclusion, the initial spectrum as presented by Aranyosi is a flawed argument against bodybuilding being a sport. It fails to gain *prima facie* validity from the reliable assessment of sports, as shown by our example of Olympic gymnastics, and is not sufficiently supported by independent arguments to substitute the lack of this support. Further, even if we set up a spectrum in a similar yet valid manner by creating a threshold for classification, the only options remaining are to accept bodybuilding as a sport due to an arguably similar placing on the spectrum as Olympic gymnastics, or to reject both gymnastics (or at least rhythmic gymnastics) and bodybuilding as sports. Either way, the spectrum is not a convincing argument that bodybuilding is not a sport. Further, if a defender of Aranyosi's spectrum did judge our chosen example of Olympic gymnastics as not sport, they could not do so haphazardly. For all intents and purposes of whether something is a sport within society and

culture, Olympic gymnastics is a sport; therefore, the burden of proof that it is not an example of sport falls on our opponent, rather than us.

4. CONCLUSION

Modern bodybuilding as a competitive discipline was initially practiced by early weightlifters. Since its inception, bodybuilding required not only the same training dedication as other lifting disciplines, but also a focus on the skillful demonstration of poses to highlight muscular features. While clearly originating from a sport, whether bodybuilding itself is a sport or an artform is controversial. We addressed this controversy by engaging with the so far most prominent argument against bodybuilding as sport, presented by Aranyosi. We argued against this skeptical stance, showing by Aranyosi's own standards, that bodybuilding should either be considered a sport (categorical argument, spectrum argument, modified version of spectrum argument) or at least that his arguments provide insufficient justification to claim bodybuilding is not sport (basic spectrum argument). Consequently, everyone subscribing to his, or less requiring standards, should either consider bodybuilding a sport or admit they cannot make a persuasive case as to whether bodybuilding is a sport or not.

REFERENCES

Alwan, N., S. L. Moss, K. J. Elliott-Sale, I. G. Davies, and K. A. Enright. 2019. Enright Narrative Review on Female Physique Athletes: The Physiological and Psychological Implications of

Weight Management Practices. *International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism* 29 (6): 682-689. Doi: 10.1123/ijsnem.2019-0037.

Aranyosi, I. 2018. Body, skill, and look: is bodybuilding a sport?. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17 (2): 401-410. Doi: 10.1007/s11097-017-9513-3.

Chapman, D. L. 1994. *Sandow the magnificent: Eugen Sandow and the beginnings of bodybuilding*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Society of Sports Nutrition 19 (1): 505-528. Doi: 10.1080/15502783.2022.2108333. Cervin, G., C, Nicolas, S. Dufraisse, A. Bohuon, and G. Quin. 2017. Gymnastics' centre of gravity: the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique, its governance and the Cold War, 1956-1976. *Sport in History* 37(3): 309-331. Doi: [10.1080/17460263.2017.1363081](https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2017.1363081)

Dietz, C., and B. Peterson. 2012. *Triphasic training: A systematic approach to elite speed and explosive strength performance*. Hudson, WI, USA: Dietz Sport Enterprise.

Fair, J. D. 1999. *Muscle town USA: Bob Hoffman and the manly culture of York Barbell*. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press.

Fair, J. D. 2015. *Mr. America: The tragic history of a bodybuilding icon*. Texas: University of Texas Press.

FIDE (FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE GYMNASTIQUE). 2022. "Technical Regulations 2022". Accessed 15 February 2023. https://www.gymnastics.sport/publicdir/rules/files/en_2022%20Technical%20Regulations.pdf

Gallagher, S. 1986. Lived Body and Environment. *Research in Phenomenology*, 16: 139-170. Doi: 10.1163/156916486X00103

George, B., G. Charles (directors). 1977. *Pumping Iron* (Movie). White Mountain Films (Production). Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0076578/>

Heffernan, C. 2022. State of the Field: Physical Culture. *History* 107 (374): 143-162. Doi: [10.1111/1468-229X.13258](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13258).

IFBB (International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation). 2019. "IFBB RULES SECTION 4: WOMEN'S FITNESS. 2019 EDITION". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://ifbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Women-Fitness-Rules-2019.pdf>

IFBB (International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation). 2021a. "IFBB RULES SECTION 2: MEN'S BODYBUILDING, 2021 EDITION". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://ifbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Mens-Bodybuilding-Rules-2021.pdf>

IFBB (International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation). 2021b. "IFBB RULES SECTION 2: MEN'S BODYBUILDING, 2021 EDITION". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://ifbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Mens-Bodybuilding-Rules-2021.pdf>

IFBB (International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation). 2021c. "IFBB RULES SECTION 16: MEN'S CLASSIC PHYSIQUE, 2021 EDITION". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://ifbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Mens-Classic-Physique-2021.pdf>

IFBB (International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation). 2021d. "IFBB RULES SECTION 9: MEN'S PHYSIQUE & MUSCULAR MEN'S PHYSIQUE 2021 EDITION". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://ifbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Mens-Physique-2021.pdf>

IFBB (International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation). 2021e. "IFBB RULES SECTION 5: MEN FITNESS, 2021 EDITION". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://ifbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Mens-Fitness-Rules-2021-F.....pdf>

IFBB (International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation). 2023. IFBB RULES SECTION 7: WOMEN'S BIKINI, UPDATED JANUARY 2023. Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://ifbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Women-Bikini-Rules-2023-ok.pdf>

Liokaftos, D. 2017. Professional bodybuilding and the business of 'extreme' bodies: the Mr Olympia competition in the context of Las Vegas's leisure industries. *Sport in History* 34 (2): 173-194. Doi: [10.1080/17460263.2014.923731](https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2014.923731).

Merleau-Ponty, M. [1945] 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

McBride, F. 1975. Toward a non-definition of sport. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 2(1): 4-11. Doi: [10.1080/00948705.1975.10654092](https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1975.10654092).

Morgan, W. J. 1977. Some Aristotelian notes on the attempt to define sport. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 4 (1): 15-35. Doi: [10.1080/00948705.1977.10654125](https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1977.10654125).

Oranchuk D. J., A. G. Storey, A. R. Nelson, J. B. Cronin. 2019. Isometric training and long-term adaptations: Effects of muscle length, intensity, and intent: A systematic review. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports* 29 (4): 484-503. Doi: [10.1111/sms.13375](https://doi.org/10.1111/sms.13375).

Probert, A., F. Palmer, and S. Leberman. 2007. The Fine Line: An insight into 'risky' practices of male and female competitive bodybuilders. *Annals of leisure research*: 10 (3-4): 272-290. Doi: [10.1080/11745398.2007.9686767](https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2007.9686767).

Saldo, M. 1914. *How to pose*. London, England: Ewart. <https://archive.org/details/howtoposebymontesaldo>.

USAWA (United States All-Round Weightlifting Association). 2018. "ALFRED MONTE WOOLASTON – AKA MONTE SALDO". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://usawa.com/alfred-monte-woolaston-aka-monte-saldo/>

Webster, P. D. 1992. Monte Saldo, *Iron Game History* 2 (1): 17 - 19. <https://starkcenter.org/igh/igh-v2/igh-v2-n1/igh0201g.pdf>.

WNBF (World Natural Bodybuilding Federation). 2020a. "FIGURE DIVISION JUDGING CRITERIA". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://www.worldnaturalbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Judging-Criteria-Figure-2020.pdf>

WNBF (World Natural Bodybuilding Federation). 2020b. "BODYBUILDING DIVISION JUDGING CRITERIA". Accessed 15 February 2023. <https://www.worldnaturalbb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Judging-Criteria-Men-Bodybuilding-2020.pdf>

Woycke, J. 2016. *Esprit de Corps: A History of North American Bodybuilding*. London, Ontario: History eBook Collection Western University. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/historybooks/2>