



Strong and Hard Women: An ethnography of female bodybuilding (Routledge Advances in Ethnography)

Tanya Bunsell

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Females with large muscles evoke strong reactions from men and women, often involving disgust, discomfort, anger and threat. The controversial nature of female bodybuilding has caused a significant rupture on feminist ground. Whilst proponents claim that female bodybuilding is a way of empowering and liberating women, others see it as a form of corporeal entrapment. This book investigates the controversy. Do women who pump iron resist physical restrictions of imposed femininity, or are they engaged in an ultimately oppressive quest for 'perfect bodies'?

In an original two year ethnographic study based in the South of England, Tanya Bunsell immersed herself into the world of female bodybuilders. By mapping these extraordinary women's lives, the research illuminates the pivotal spaces and essential lived experiences that make up the female bodybuilder. Whilst the women appear to be embarking on an 'empowering' radical body project for themselves, the consequences of their activity remains culturally ambivalent. This research exposes the 'Janus-faced' nature of female bodybuilding, exploring the ways in which the women negotiate, accommodate and resist pressures to engage in more orthodox and feminine activities and appearances.

This book will be of interest to academics and students in the fields of gender studies, the sociology of sport, the body and research methodology.

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